



# Senior Healthcare Perspective

## “Aging in Place”

The membership of Alberta Seniors United Now (SUN) supports the concept of aging in place. We believe that an enhanced community support system supported by active treatment care and long term care, will reduce institutionalization and allow seniors to remain in their homes for a longer period of their life. As seniors age, their medical conditions can deteriorate to the point where institutional care is the only option. Community support must be furthered by a strong and effective institutional system.

Our membership is very concerned about the rate at which cut backs are being announced for institutional care. Our members are alarmed that access to active treatment care will become more difficult. Access to Long Term care is not available due to the current waiting lists. We are deeply concerned that waiting lists will continue to grow to the extent that seniors will be denied care when it is desperately needed. We are genuinely concerned over where our health care system is going and how it will get there.

We are also concerned regarding the process being followed to move seniors out of institutional care into community support care. It appears that the cart is before the horse. Finance seems to be the motive that is driving the shift to increasing assisted living facilities. The safety and continuing care of frail seniors appears to be a secondary consideration. We strongly recommend that safety and appropriate care for Alberta seniors health be the guiding factor when deciding what change will occur and over what period of time.

At present there are 800 long term care patients in active treatment hospitals, they are there because they have failed in the community and have no where else to go to receive the health care assistance they require. These individuals would prefer to reside in a more home like facility but cannot as these facilities do not have the capacity to receive them. These frail seniors therefore remain in an active treatment bed.

There is a serious problem in our active treatment hospitals that is adversely affecting seniors. The emergency wards are full. Patients remain on stretchers in hallways for hours. When they are finally moved to an emergency bed, they can wait for days before they are admitted to an active treatment bed. This is not an effective or humane way to provide emergency health care. It has serious negative health impacts on seniors and their families. Surely our health system can do better. Surely you would want a better system for your mother or father.

The Alberta Government has frozen Long Term care beds at 14,500 and has not delivered on their promise to build an additional 600 Long Term care beds. It is obvious to SUN, that this is a mistake as 800 long term care patients are waiting for these beds in active treatment hospitals. The cost differential is staggering as the daily cost difference between active treatment care and long term care is probably \$5000.00 per patient per day. This would add up to a staggering four million dollars per day. It is no wonder our health system is in financial distress.

Each day more and more seniors are requesting Home care support. It does not appear that home care funding and staffing is increasing therefore these seniors are slowly failing. It is evident that more funds are needed to be injected into home care to prevent further breakdown of seniors who in turn will further plug up our active treatment beds.

The development of Designated Assisted Living beds (DAL) in private assisted living facilities is a step in the right direction. This concept needs to be expanded upon. We need more DAL beds to meet future needs, more human resources to provide care and more funds to make it work. This would be a good investment for the future to ensure our current mess does not grow bigger. We also need to see a comprehensive plan that will give seniors confidence that this government does have a plan and one that will work for seniors and our communities.

SUN is not opposed to these DAL beds being operated by private entrepreneurs. We only ask that they be funded from the Alberta Health Care system, that there be standards in place and that these standards be enforced.

It is SUN's recommendation that DAL beds need to be expanded with appropriate support services and designated funding. We suggest you use the expanded capacity to first meet the needs of seniors in the community who require expanded health support. This will slow the trend of seniors failing then going to active treatment care for daily health support. Patients who are able can then be moved from long term care to DAL beds and then the seniors in active treatment hospital care can be relocated. It seems logical to stop or delay the movement of seniors into active treatment as other levels of service are full and inadequate to meet the current need. Your problem is large and will not be resolved overnight. You need a comprehensive plan.

SUN further suggests that to keep seniors in their private homes longer, this government needs to assist low income seniors with the rising cost of maintaining a home. Your plan needs to be comprehensive and include all factors that cause seniors to fail. Financial issues are part of the reason seniors health fails.

Our suggestions are:

- ❖ A principal residence program be implemented
- ❖ A property tax deferment plan to be implemented
- ❖ Pharmaceutical Plan Premiums be cancelled

Seniors need this government to stop looking at us as "rich" or at worse, as a cash cow. You will not balance your health care deficit on the backs of seniors. Further taxing of seniors will not work as there are not enough senior resources available to fund a one billion dollar health care deficit.

Include seniors in your planning process and work with us, not against us. After all, this province was built and sustained by those elderly seniors that now need your support. It is your privilege to manage our legacy.