



Members of:



Submission to National Housing Strategy from Alberta Seniors Communities & Housing Association, BC Seniors Living Association, Ontario Retirement Communities Association, and Regroupement Québécois des Résidence Pour Aînes

October, 2016

On behalf of four provincial organizations representing the senior's housing sector across Canada, we are pleased to respond to your request for feedback related to the development of a National Housing Strategy.

Our organizations: Alberta Seniors Communities & Housing Association (ASCHA), BC Seniors Living Association (BCSLA), Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA), and Regroupement Québécois des Résidence Pour Aînes (RQRA), represent members that employ over 78,000 Canadians, and our member residences are home to more than 220,000 Canadian seniors. In 2009, we formed the Canadian Alliance for Seniors Living (CASL), which gives us the opportunity to collaborate within the context of a national organization.

In response to the request for submissions, we met last month in British Columbia to discuss contributions to the National Housing Strategy. One of our members also participated in the Seniors Housing session on September 7, 2016 in Ottawa. Our meetings revealed the following two issues:

- First, we share core beliefs that underpin the federal government's commitment to a National Housing Strategy, including: that *all* Canadians deserve access to housing that meets their needs; that the full spectrum of needs must be addressed, from people who are homeless to those who rent from the private market or own their own homes, and that everyone has a part to play, including the private sector.
- Second, our group has the perspective, experience, knowledge and willingness to contribute to the development of the National Housing Strategy - and related federal agendas – in ways that bring value to the process, national discussion and positive outcomes.

Therefore, we have prepared this initial submission to the National Housing Strategy. We believe that it will help to address three elements missing from the current debate:

1. The need to develop a National Housing Strategy with a greater emphasis on the needs of seniors and the increasing housing and support demands associated with our aging society;
2. The opportunity and imperative – supported by a growing body of global evidence – to empower seniors and place their changing housing, social, support, wellness and health care needs at the center of decision-making, planning and programming;
3. The opportunity to maximize synergies between at least three national dialogues launched by the federal government over the past year related to housing, innovation and health care.

In all of these areas, we welcome the opportunity to participate in additional conversations and to help facilitate and/or implement plans in partnership with federal, provincial, municipal and other partners.

The attached document elaborates on the three elements identified above. Please do not hesitate to contact us via Roy Brooke at Roy@BrookeandAssociates.com or 250.896.3023 to discuss any aspect of this submission. Responses to this submission can also be sent to Mr. Brooke.

Yours,



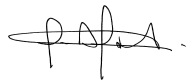
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Submission to National Housing Strategy

Introduction

The National Housing Strategy represents an historic opportunity to address the housing needs of aging Canadians in a holistic, national fashion. We have been encouraged by the dialogue to date and appreciate the opportunity to have participated in the September 7, 2016 consultation on senior's housing. Based on the latter, as well as our internal discussions, we believe that three vital elements must be added to the current debate:

1. The need to develop a National Housing Strategy with far more emphasis on the needs of seniors and the increasing demands associated with our aging society;
2. The opportunity and imperative – supported by a growing body of global evidence – to empower seniors and place their changing housing, social, support, wellness and health care needs at the center of decision-making, planning and programming;
3. An integrated policy approach that maximizes synergies between the three national dialogues launched by the federal government over the past year for housing, innovation and health.

An overall need for a stronger focus on seniors within the National Housing Strategy

We believe that the importance of addressing the unique needs of seniors – particularly those related to housing - cannot be overstated. As is well-documented, Canada and many other countries are in the midst of a dramatic demographic shift. Seniors are the fastest growing segment of the population. Overall, the numbers of seniors in Canada is expected to double over the next two decades so that by then, one in four Canadians will be older than 65 years of age.

The relevance and longevity of the National Housing Strategy will depend in part on the extent to which it can adequately enable the creativity and innovation required to meet the diverse needs of this population, now and in the future. Stated differently, the National Housing Strategy represents a unique opportunity to begin to address what will be a defining public policy issue for the foreseeable future.

We were pleased to see the beginning of a dialogue on the unique housing needs of seniors within the context of the National Housing Strategy during the September 7, 2016 consultation in Ottawa. However, far more attention needs to be given to the topic and to this demographic within the context of the National Housing Strategy. This emphasis should include both identifying seniors as a specific group whose needs must be addressed, and a greater, sustained engagement of organizations representing the seniors housing sector as part of a more coordinated seniors' strategy.

The need to apply more innovative seniors-centered approaches

The housing needs of seniors vary as a function of individual preferences and needs, including those related to home supports, health care and remaining active and engaged in the community. There is a continuum of housing options for seniors ranging from staying in ones' own home, to congregate living that offers communal hospitality services, to assisted/supportive living that provides higher degrees of support, to complex care and memory care that address more complex medical aspects of aging. Seniors overwhelmingly prefer to live in home-like, non-medical, settings for as long as possible and many provincial governments are already moving in this direction.

Our organizations believe that seniors themselves should be empowered to have the final say regarding their housing and related care provision, a view supported by an increasingly robust body of research and norms. Unfortunately, the reality in Canada is often different. Housing, support and care options, policies and practices are often too complex to understand readily and challenging for seniors and their families to navigate. Housing, support and care services are now organized more around an inconsistent set of governmental, regulatory and organizational imperatives instead of the real needs and wants of seniors and their families. This limits the options available to seniors. Specific challenges arising from this situation in Canada can include:

- Seniors moving into complex care or nursing-home type settings when less medical and more home-like residential settings would be more appropriate;
- Higher public costs, given that premature moves to complex medical care is substantially more expensive than other options;
- Seniors relocating to distant communities due to a lack of local options; this can be a substantial challenge in rural and/or remote areas;
- A heavy medical orientation to seniors care in some provinces that results in seniors staying in their own homes longer than would otherwise be beneficial;
- Seniors being isolated in large single family homes for too long;
- Elderly couples being separated in their final years due to a lack of supportive housing options;
- Unrealized efficiencies in the delivery of home care services when seniors are not sufficiently enticed to live in congregate living settings where services can be delivered efficiently and at lower cost; and,
- Continued pressure on housing market prices where there are limited incentives, or even disincentives, for seniors to leave homes that are too large for their needs.

Collectively, these and similar well-documented issues point to a need for a shift in how senior's housing is addressed in Canada, from one that is driven primarily by top-down, supply-side solutions, to one that is more bottom-up and backed by solid evidence on what seniors actually need and want to remain active, healthy participants in society. Ideally, the focus

would be on wellness and having the right housing and supports in the right place at the right time. The National Housing Strategy is a unique opportunity to initiate this shift in a coherent, coordinated way at all levels and ensure equitable outcomes irrespective of where the senior resides.

Towards senior-centered approaches

Therefore, our common view is that the best way to encourage diverse housing options that meet the varied needs of aging Canadians, both now and in the future, is to put seniors at the center of decision-making through a framework that redirects control for senior's housing (and associated supports and care) to seniors themselves, in a measured and responsible way. A federal framework could provide for new approaches and/or scale up existing, proven innovations such as self-directed care. Importantly, a senior-centered approach could unleash innovation on the part of both public and private providers in meeting the housing and other needs of seniors by responding to demand, and the National Housing Strategy is an opportunity to do so in a holistic, system-wide manner. By contrast, *status quo* approaches of transferring funding through a patchwork of governmental and non-governmental organizations that often operate in silos will continue to fall short of meeting the needs of many seniors, and will not meet future housing demands in the face of the demographic shift.

Canada can draw inspiration and ideas for change from numerous international examples. For example, France, Germany and recently Australia, have implemented self-directed models of care delivery, while addressing quality control through an array of mechanisms. The Rotman School of Management notes that several jurisdictions are putting in place cash or in-kind personal budgets that allow seniors greater flexibility in the type of care, supports and housing that they receive. Such models should be explored, adapted and piloted in Canada. The National Housing Strategy is an ideal mechanism to launch this effort and to ensure that it is executed consistently. More specifically, as part of the commitment in the National Housing Strategy to innovate and leverage new resources, self-directed housing funding models could be piloted and/or replicated in one or more provinces. A corresponding initiative to find innovative ways for seniors and their families to navigate complex housing, supports and care systems would be important.

Benefits of doing so could accrue to: seniors, by empowering them to get the housing and care they need and want; the public purse, in terms of ensuring that more seniors are able to stay longer in home-like rather than pricier medical settings; and, in terms of unleashing innovation on the part of housing providers - both for-profit and not-for-profit - in meeting seniors' needs in a competitive yet managed manner.

Integration and innovation

An important step towards meeting the needs of seniors in a holistic, systemic fashion, one that is entirely within the federal government's purview, is to identify opportunities to integrate the National Housing Strategy with related federal agendas. As examples:

- *Health Care Accord and Home Care Funding.* The federal government has committed to negotiate a new Health Accord with provinces and territories, including an immediate commitment to invest \$3 billion over the next four years, to deliver more and better home care services for all Canadians. There are compelling opportunities to link home care funding and the National Housing Strategy. It is demonstrably more efficient and effective to deliver home care to seniors living in congregate living settings than for home care workers to travel extensively to seniors scattered in individual dwellings. Furthermore, there is evidence that seniors receive better care when they maintain contact with a small group of the same home care providers located near or within their congregate living communities than being cared for by a constantly changing array of providers. An opportunity to explore, therefore, is how to structure upcoming home care funding in a way that maximizes the use of home care in congregate living settings and/or provide home care credits directly to seniors, consistent with the case for developing more seniors-centered approaches. Benefits of doing so could include stretching available resources and meeting the objective of better home care services.
- *Canada's Innovation Agenda.* The federal innovation agenda contains themes that complement those raised here. For example, placing seniors at the center of decision-making and enabling others to meet their needs will support the development of both business and social entrepreneurship capacity and expertise that is valuable both in Canada and as a knowledge-based export. This would support the “Entrepreneurial and Creative Society” outcome area within the Innovation Agenda. Furthermore, piloting new approaches or scaling up existing pilots is consistent with the Innovation Agenda objective of improving government services to businesses and is an area where the private sector has unique strengths and value-added.

Finally, it is important to note the growing body of research related to seniors, housing, and social science. We would be pleased to participate in discussions on how to reconcile and make best use of the findings to support integrated, evidence-based approaches.

Conclusions and proposed next steps

A senior-centric model would, we believe, unleash innovation across a spectrum of providers, both for profit and not-for profit, and provide much-needed solutions to the pressing housing needs of Canadian seniors. We would add that the private sector is distinguished by its ability and willingness to take risks, adopt new approaches and invest its own capital, giving it a particular relevance in meeting the challenges noted above. Furthermore, each signatory has experience running for-profit and not-for profit facilities in diverse communities across the country, including in rural and remote communities. We are confident in our ability to continue to innovate to meet the needs of seniors, and believe that this makes us valuable collaborators in federal processes. As near-term steps we propose that the federal government:

- Identify practical and synergistic linkages between current national housing, innovation, and health policy reviews;
- Continue and expand dialogue on senior's housing, building on what was launched on September 7-8 2016 in Ottawa, in view of the vital need for greater prominence of senior's issues within the National Housing Strategy;
- Articulate within national housing, health and innovation strategies the vital importance and anticipated benefits of a senior-centric approach, and elements of a framework that could enable it;
- Identify short-term pilots and evidence-based, collaborative approaches that could be undertaken within the context of current national housing, health and innovation policy reviews; and,
- Create opportunities within the upcoming federal budget for public-private partnerships to support additional and more appropriate seniors housing to provide greater choices for seniors in Canada.

The signatories to this document are ready to collaborate with governments and all other seniors housing and health care stakeholders to provide ongoing support, advice, research and experience in these proposed near-term steps and others that follow.