

# New website tracks nursing home beds

Online resource helps find which subsidized and private beds vacant

**KIM PEMBERTON**

A new online resource that tracks the availability of nursing home beds in British Columbia shows more than 150 beds remain empty despite ongoing waiting lists for seniors.

The website called MyCareFinder.ca, created by the B.C. Care Providers Association, not only shows the association's 160 members' facilities in the private sector but also the government-subsidized beds.

In B.C., about one-third of all extended care beds are owned and operated by the government and the remainder by contracted operators. The association represents about 60 per cent of these contracted providers and many of them also provide subsidized beds.

Users of the site can click on any community on the map to read which facilities have spaces available: both subsidized and privately paid. Other information is provided such as which languages are spoken at the extended care home and bedroom configurations — whether they are single rooms, semi-private or multi-person rooms of four or more.

"I'm really proud of this project," said the association's CEO Daniel Fontaine, who came up with the idea more than a year ago after talking to Vancouver Sun reporter Jeff Lee, who was telling him how difficult it was trying to find an independent living facility for his mother.

"It's one resource people can use over multiple other resources, but it's unique because it's the first time you can go neighbourhood to neighbourhood to visually see where all the government care homes are and where our care homes are," said Fontaine.

"So if you are at Surrey Memorial Hospital waiting in an acute care bed for a nursing home bed, you can find out what care homes are available and have that discussion with the local representative (from the health authority). It's very empowering to know the existing capacity."

He said the health authority in any of the province's five regions makes the decision on who is placed in a subsidized bed. Anyone seeking one of these beds must take the first available bed offered or go



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to the bottom of the waiting list.

He said depending on the region, the wait can be anywhere from 27 to 230 days. Waiting lists tend to be shorter in Metro Vancouver, he said, but longer in some rural communities.

Fontaine said there is not a significant number of subsidized beds listed as available on the website, but there are more than 150 ready to go in the private sector. He expects this number will rise when the website is next updated, which is done monthly.

He said the association's mem-

bers have 1,800 beds and a number of those could be purchased by the health authority for seniors for between \$175 to \$300 a day. In comparison, the average cost of an acute care setting is \$1,800 a day, he said.

"It is something the Ministry of Health is urging health authorities to give consideration to because of the aging population, and we should be doing everything possible to avoid seniors going to acute care settings," he said. "It's not adding new financial dollars to the system but reallocating existing dollars."

Fontaine noted the Fraser Health Authority is one of the first to recognize the cost savings and is closing 80 acute care beds and moving those dollars out to the community.

"For every acute care bed they close, they create nine beds in the community," he said.

Fontaine said the new online database is "enlightening," as users will be able to compare facilities and what they have to offer. He gave the example of Summerland, where two nursing homes exist across the street from one another.

The recently built Summerland Seniors Village has 105 private rooms, of which 32 unsubsidized rooms are vacant. But at the Dr. Andrew Pavilion, which is an older government-owned and operated facility, there are 50 subsidized beds and no vacancies. There are only four private rooms, five are semi-private and eight are multi-person rooms of four or more.

Fontaine said if he was looking for a bed for a loved one in Summerland, this information would allow him to question why the health authority would have seniors living four or more to a room when just across the street there are vacant private rooms.

He said the website also has a link to the health authorities explaining how to access subsidized care.

[kpemberton@postmedia.com](mailto:kpemberton@postmedia.com)



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