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Letter to the Editor: Reflecting on Father Time for Father's Day

EDMONTON – According to history, the modern version of Father's Day as we know it is owing to a loving daughter named Sonora Louise Smart Dodd who had great affection for her father, a Civil War veteran. Having lost her mother during childbirth, Ms. Dodd, along with her five siblings, was raised solely by her father with great love. So cherished was her relationship, Ms. Dodd campaigned vigorously to have a national day of celebration in honour of fathers which was supported by President Coolidge in 1924 to “establish more intimate relations between fathers and their children and to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations.”

The campaign, however, dragged on for over four decades until President Nixon finally established the third Sunday of June as a permanent day of observance of fathers. Ms. Dodd was honored for her contribution at the World's Fair in 1974 at the age of 92.

Ms. Dodd's prolonged struggle is not unlike that of our province's Continuing Care industry. With decades-old legislation, compounded by a lack of funding (Alberta's Continuing Care industry is funded 21% below the National Average while Acute Care is funded 35% above), to say that care providers have had to be innovative in their provision of quality care, and in doing more with less, is an understatement. Ms. Dodd's only grandchild, Barbara Hillerman, described her grandmother as “knowing how to get things done”, and this is true of our care providers too.

Given the increasingly complex needs of seniors and vulnerable adults in Alberta, the fact that “the majority of facilities have not shown any significant improvement or decline” when measuring the experience of family members of residents living in long-term care in our province since 2010 is testament to just how creative providers have had to be. This is according to the Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) *Supportive Living Family Experience Survey Report* and the *Supportive Living Resident Experience Survey Report* which highlight the voices and experiences of residents and family members with the province's continuing care system.

Like the results of these surveys, the results of the HQCA 2014/2015 *Long Term Care Family Experience Survey* also indicate that “in general, no one model type (Alberta Health Services, private or voluntary) was better or worse than the others across all key measures of family experience measured”. All care providers, whether public, private or voluntary, are held to the same standards and regulations.

Historically, more than 60% of Alberta's continuing care has been provided by non-profit, faith-based and private care providers. Care providers are often pillars of their communities, offering employees exceptional pay and benefits, and a comfortable home to thousands of seniors and persons requiring continuing care. They make significant investments into continuing care operations and offer operational efficiency and creativity that help lead to a sustainable industry.

The fact is that all continuing care operators struggle against rising costs, from food to cleaning supplies. The total cost to deliver hospitality services (including capital), as of July 1, 2015 is \$2,339 while the current accommodation fee paid by residents is \$1,893, the second lowest fees in Canada. The trend is unsustainable.

Modern approaches and solutions are needed to avoid the negative consequences of such things as fewer staff, aging infrastructure, and dwindling access to resources. Given our swelling senior population, now more than ever a sustainable vision is required with a better quality of life for all Albertans the ultimate goal, whether that care is provided through home care, supportive living or long term care.

So, on this Father's Day, as we think back to Ms. Dodd's long campaign to have the role of the Father acknowledged, we hug and honour our fathers and our grandfathers and the figures in our lives who play the important fatherly role. We must also, however, give pause for reflection on the other Father in all our lives: Father Time.

Tammy Leach
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ACCA represents a unique alliance of providers in Alberta's Continuing Care sector. Member organizations employ over 16,000 Albertans and care for more than 46,000 seniors and persons requiring continuing care. Our Members provide care and services for nearly 14,000 long term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) individuals and over 5.3 million hours of Home Care to Albertans. www.ab-cca.ca We champion for quality of care, quality of life and enhanced wellness for Albertans requiring continuing care.