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Putting Our Seniors First Requires a Diverse Continuing Care Industry

EDMONTON – The Alberta Government has been working on developing a strategy for seniors-care projects. Recent media articles infer that the strategy will involve only public providers.

The Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA), the recognized voice of Continuing Care in Alberta, champions for a robust quality Continuing Care system comprised of multi-faceted care delivery models (Home Care, Supportive Living, and Long-Term Care) provided by experienced care providers. We welcome the Government’s plans to make seniors’ care a priority, something our members have been advocating for on behalf of seniors and all Albertans for years.

The focus of a new program for seniors-care projects should be on ensuring our seniors and those in need receive the highest quality care possible, and not on ownership type as evidenced by the results of recent Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) provincial Supportive Living Resident and Family Experience surveys. The 2016 surveys measured the experience of residents and families with the quality of care received at supportive living facilities in Alberta. Conducted by the HQCA, in collaboration with Alberta Health and AHS, the results of the surveys indicate 94% of family respondents and 90.5% of resident respondents would recommend their home to someone looking for supportive living. They highlighted that ownership type has no influence on resident or family experience.

All Continuing Care providers, regardless of ownership type, are held to the exact same government set standards and accountabilities with a focus on delivering safe quality care and service improvements. However, with aging infrastructure, decades-old regulations, and mounting costs of operation, they have had to be more innovative in ensuring this is possible. Respondents’ satisfaction comes as a result of cultures of caring having been fostered. Noted one respondent, “The (facility) is a real home, not because of the building but because of the staff. There is a culture of love that flows down from the management.”

Historically, more than 60% of Alberta’s Continuing Care services have been provided by non-profit, faith-based and independent providers. They work tirelessly to provide a comfortable home to thousands of Albertans and make significant financial investments into operations, contributing efficiencies that help lead to a sustainable industry. Through previous collaborative partnerships between these providers and the Government, Continuing Care bed capacity has increased with the costs of construction shared between operators and Government, as opposed to the entire cost of construction being fully paid for by public dollars.

The Alberta Supportive Living Initiative (ASLI) was a program set up by the former Government wherein the province provided up to a maximum of 50% of the construction costs to non-profit, faith-based and independent organizations selected through a comprehensive review process to build and operate new care centres throughout Alberta. In 2014-15, successful ASLI proponents were awarded an average of \$65,000 per unit—with many units constructed at costs much less than the 50% maximum contribution—to build 2,458 new Continuing Care spaces, all constructed to meet or exceed the relevant provincial building standards. Through the expertise, innovation and

creativity of these organizations, many of the projects have already opened or are nearing completion. Of concern is the recent investments announced in the media by Government to open new public Continuing Care spaces have a cost to taxpayers significantly higher than what has been achieved through ASLI, with one previously announced project for Calgary potentially costing upwards of \$655,000 per unit.

Given Alberta's economic climate, and with a swelling senior population with increasingly complex needs, it makes good business sense to continue having a Continuing Care system that provides safe, quality care and supports to Albertans through partnerships with willing, committed non-profit, faith-based and independent providers alongside their public counterparts. Government, AHS, and care providers must work together so that Albertans receive the quality care and services in the safe and comfortable environments they so deserve.

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