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## Putting Our Seniors First Requires a Diverse Continuing Care Industry

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**EDMONTON** – The Alberta Government has been working on developing a strategy for seniors-care projects. Two recent media articles (“NDP finalizing plan for public care of seniors” and “Let’s put our seniors first”, both from The Calgary Herald) infer that the yet to be released strategy will involve only public providers, namely Alberta Health Services (AHS) and its two subsidiaries—Carewest in Calgary and Capital Care in Edmonton.

Members of the Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA), the recognized voice of Continuing Care in Alberta, are strong advocates 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, innovative 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.

In the development of a new program for seniors-care projects, the focus 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 Resident and Family Experience surveys. The 2016 *Supportive Living Family Experience Survey Report* and the *Supportive Living Resident Experience Survey Report* measured the experience of residents and families with the quality of care and services received at supportive living facilities in Alberta. Conducted by the HQCA, in collaboration with Alberta Health and AHS, the results of the surveys provided positive feedback, with 94% of family respondents and 90.5% of resident respondents saying they would recommend their home to someone looking for supportive living. As with previous surveys, the 2016 surveys highlighted that ownership type has absolutely no influence on resident or family experience.

All Continuing Care providers, regardless of ownership type, are held to the exact same standards and accountabilities set by government. In fact, many conduct their own surveys in addition to the HQCA research, as delivering safe, quality care and service improvements are the focus for all organizations caring for Alberta’s seniors and those requiring Continuing Care. More and more though, with aging infrastructure, decades-old regulations and policies, and mounting costs of operation, care providers have to be more innovative in ensuring this is possible. Respondents’ satisfaction comes as a result of cultures of caring having been fostered. As one survey respondent stated, “The (facility) is a real home, not because of the building but because of the staff. There is a culture of love that I believe flows down from the management to the vast majority of the staff.”

Historically, more than 60% of Alberta’s Continuing Care services have been provided by non-profit, faith-based and private care providers. These providers work tirelessly to provide a comfortable home to thousands of Albertans on a daily basis and make significant financial investments into Continuing Care operations, contributing operational efficiency, innovation, and creativity that help lead to a sustainable industry. Through previous collaborative partnerships between non-profit, faith-based and private providers and the Alberta

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 private organizations selected through a comprehensive review process to build and operate new care centres in communities throughout Alberta. In 2014-15, successful proponents of the ASLI 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 this program, with one previously announced project for Calgary potentially costing upwards of \$655,000 per unit.

Given Alberta's current 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 private providers alongside their public counterparts. Government, AHS, and care providers must work together on investing in our province's Continuing Care industry, as was recently done in British Columbia and in other jurisdictions, so that Albertans receive the quality care and services in the safe and comfortable environments they so deserve. Working together, a truly world-class Continuing Care system is possible.

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**About ACCA** The Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA) is the recognized voice of Continuing Care in Alberta. We are champions for quality of care, quality of life and enhanced wellness for all Albertans requiring Continuing Care; this is Our Mission. Representing owners and operators of home care, supportive living (SL) and long term care (LTC), whether private, non-profit and/or faith based, our diversity allows us to better understand and communicate the issues that impact people in the Continuing Care System. [www.ab-cca.ca](http://www.ab-cca.ca)