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For immediate release

## **Alberta Budget: Long Awaited Strategy for Seniors-Care Programs Largely Absent**

**EDMONTON** – The Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA) agrees with Honourable Minister Joe Ceci’s assertion in the 2018 – 2019 Alberta Budget, released March 22, 2018, that “more needs to be done to improve existing facilities, build new ones and help seniors and families with this most basic need – a warm safe place to call home”. However, it is unclear exactly how the government looks to achieve this and succeed on supporting Alberta’s seniors who represent a mounting proportion of our population with increasingly complex needs. To the disappointment of those who provide quality continuing care services, the long-awaited new strategy the Alberta Government has been working on for seniors care projects was mostly absent from this Budget.

“When some tangible cost comparisons are done, it is clear: any strategy going forward will need to rely on the expertise, innovation, and creativity of the non-profit, faith-based and private organizations, alongside their publicly funded peers, to ensure Albertans continue to receive appropriate quality continuing care services, when and where they need them,” said ACCA CEO Tammy Leach.

Reflected in this Budget are previously announced publicly funded and operated continuing care projects; namely, a 200 bed long term care home in Calgary at a cost of \$131M (\$655,000/bed) and a 144 bed home in Fort McMurray at a cost of \$110M (\$764,000/bed). Under the former Alberta Supportive Living Initiative (ASLI), 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 throughout Alberta. In 2014-2015, successful ASLI proponents were awarded an average of \$65,000/bed to build 2,458 new continuing care spaces, all constructed to meet or exceed the relevant provincial building standards. Had this Government committed to a similar program, the same \$241M committed to build the 344 beds mentioned above could have potentially resulted in the ability to construct upwards of 3,700 new continuing care beds.

Alberta’s Continuing Care providers do welcome the Government’s expansion of home care with an increase of \$112M in home care spending. However, while sound, their stated key strategies of developing a targeted approach for funding new continuing care spaces and upgrading or replacing existing facilities, as well as enhancing care for persons with dementia, requires a clear strategy and necessary investment. The top concern of residents and family members, when asked about their satisfaction with supportive living and long term care homes in Alberta, is on staffing levels/availability. There simply are not enough front-line workers to meet care needs. Direct care hours and staffing levels need Government’s investment. The lack of a firm commitment of an increase in continuing care funding should be cause for alarm for the many clients, residents and their families who continue to express concerns about staffing levels and availability. “Alberta could have followed the lead of our neighbours to the west. BC Budget 2018 announced a total of \$548 million in new funding over three years to improve services for seniors across the continuum, including investments in home and community care, residential care and assisted living, acknowledging that seniors are a top priority,” said Leach.

Much has been said about the 2018-2019 Budget’s reliance on the uncertain Trans Mountain Pipeline to bring Alberta’s books back to black. What is certain is that our senior population is increasing. Their unique care needs are becoming increasingly complex. Also certain is that the funding estimate for Continuing Care does very little to address the growing challenges of an outdated system that no longer meets the needs of today’s seniors, let alone tomorrow’s. Also certain is that it is going to require working together, involving strategic partnerships with willing and committed care providers of all types, to bolster and enhance the continuing care system in Alberta.

“We are available and eager to contribute our knowledge and expertise in collaboration with the Government towards a strategy that achieves positive outcomes for Albertans. However, given the lack of monetary investments, Alberta’s Continuing Care system, whether through Home Care, Supportive Living or Long Term Care, will struggle,” Leach said.

***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 and long term care, 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.*

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