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Meaningful Commitment to Our Seniors Requires a Diverse Continuing Care Industry

EDMONTON – The Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA), the recognized voice of Continuing Care in Alberta, welcomes Minister of Health Sarah Hoffman’s recent assertion that “we definitely have a need for more long-term care and supportive living options throughout the province”, in an interview given with James Wood of the Calgary Herald July 20. As champions for a robust quality Continuing Care system, we welcome the Government’s plans to make seniors’ care a priority.

However, the focus for a further commitment to increasing long term care spaces likely to be made in the 2019 provincial election campaign, as stated in this same interview, must be on ensuring our seniors and those in need receive the highest quality care possible, and not on ownership type. To do so would be to the detriment of truly person-centred care, as well as to the pockets of Alberta taxpayers when real efficiencies are to be had with a mix of public and private care options.

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. Further, according to Health Quality Council of Alberta surveys measuring the experience of residents and families with the quality of care received at supportive living facilities, ownership type plays no influence.

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 are the recent investments announced in the media by Government to open new public Continuing Care spaces with 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. By investing in a diverse Continuing Care industry, the "backlog in the number of spaces in the right communities" acknowledged by Minister Hoffman, will be greatly alleviated. The right care, in the right way, when and where it is needed, is possible.

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