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## **Opinion: Partnerships are key to prepare for the “grey wave”**

The Alberta Continuing Care Association (ACCA) supports Keith Gerein’s March 22 article titled “Time to brace for grey wave,” which highlights Alberta’s swelling senior population and their increasingly complex needs, a topic that needs to be at the forefront of any conversation about healthcare in our province but has, for too long, been overlooked.

As the recognized voice of Continuing Care in Alberta, ACCA believes that modern approaches and solutions that make seniors’ care and those in need a priority are required now more than ever. A sustainable long-term vision with a better quality of life for all Albertans should be the goal. While commitments to build new long-term care spaces are welcome announcements being made in advance of the election from various parties, Albertans should also be asking who will be tasked with building and operating those facilities. The truly visionary strategy needed must also recognize the challenges of aging infrastructure, decades-old regulations, and mounting costs of operation facing all care providers.

The Health Quality Council of Alberta, a provincial agency that pursues opportunities to improve health and service quality for Albertans, conducts surveys that measure the experience of residents and families with the quality of care received at supportive living (SL) and long-term care (LTC) homes in Alberta. The surveys have consistently shown that ownership type has no influence on experience. Albertans heading to the polls may also be surprised to learn that all continuing care providers, whether non-profit, faith-based, or independent, are held to the exact same government set standards and accountabilities with a focus on delivering safe quality care and service improvements. Non-public continuing care operators have been providing quality continuing care and supports to Albertans for over a hundred years and at a lower cost than the public provider. Non-profit, faith-based and independent operators make significant financial investments into operations, contribute efficiencies and innovation which lends to more high quality choices for Albertans and a sustainable industry.

Given Alberta’s economic climate, collaborative partnerships between these willing and dedicated care providers, alongside their public counterparts, makes sense. Consider the Alberta Supportive Living Initiative (ASLI), a program set up by a 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 across the province. In 2014-2015, successful ASLI proponents were awarded an average of \$65,000 toward an average overall unit cost of \$250,000. Taxpayers asking for the best use of their dollars might be interested in knowing that recently announced public projects have unit costs to taxpayers of upwards of \$655,000.

We owe it to our loved ones to be prepared for the coming “grey wave”. Ensuring Albertans receive the quality care and services in the safe and comfortable environments they so deserve, which has included non-profit, faith-based and independent providers for decades, means riding that wave together.

***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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