

Media Release

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Losing the Focus on Choice, Not Ground

Alberta Seniors Communities & Housing Association Responds to Problems in Parkland Institute's Report

Once again, the Parkland Institute has released a report painting a dismal picture of elder care in Alberta. This is no surprise, as previous reports released by the Parkland Institute specifically target private residential care providers and blame shifts from institutionalized care to residential models as the root of an "elder care crisis." The main point the report drives home is the fact that public institutions spend more on staffing than private institutions (59% in public residences as opposed to 48% in private institutions). In his report "Losing Ground, Alberta's Residential Elder Care Crisis," David Campanella argues for public control and higher wages for workers, rather than funding for services overall. This report misses the fact that healthcare is only one of the social determinants of a resident's well-being.

The assertion that private providers offer inadequate care is also an agenda-focused statement, and ill informed. All providers, regardless of sector, must comply with the same standards and regulations in order to be licensed to provide care. The Health Quality Council of Alberta (HQCA) released two reports last year that addressed continuing care in Alberta from the perspective of residents and their families. In these reports, it was concluded that "facility ownership (whether a facility is owned by Alberta Health Services, or a private or voluntary organization) did not have any influence on resident and family experiences." In addition, nearly 90% of residents responded that they are satisfied with their residence, and generally enjoy living in their seniors' community. These findings, taken directly from the residents themselves, are in strict contrast to the "crisis" Campanella seems intent on selling to his readership.

The report seems to lose focus on a core principle – that seniors should be empowered to have choice in where they live, so that their wishes and needs can be met. As James Nibourg, Vice President – Central Region for ASCHA states, "Although I sit on a Board for a public housing body, when choosing a place for my mom, my siblings and I were focused on what provider could best meet her needs at the time, in her community of choice. As there was not a public provider in her community that could meet her needs, she chose a private provider. She receives great care and loves it there!" There are far more stories like this than what the Parkland Institute Report would have the public believe.

"We do have a need for long term care spaces in certain communities across Alberta, and it is true that additional funding is needed in continuing care," explains ASCHA President, Raymond Swonek. "That being said, it is not a matter of funding one sector over another, it is appropriately funding the assessed needs of the individual. We need more spaces regardless of which sector steps to the plate to provide them. The focus should be on partnerships and responding to demand. That is in keeping with best practices seen internationally."

"Our concern is for the residents. When seniors and their families see reports such as this, it only serves to create fear and perpetuate the myth that seniors housing is not an appropriate lifestyle alternative for Albertans in need of accommodation and support services," ASCHA Executive Director, Irene Martin-Lindsay explains. "We then have seniors delaying their move into such communities, until they are in crisis. When they are in crisis, they have far less options and decisions are usually made for them."

There is no "losing ground" in residential options for seniors, but rather a loss of focus it would seem in Mr. Campanella's report. Seniors should be empowered to have choice and a life of purpose, wherein they are honoured, valued and respected.

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