

Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM)

Response to Saskatchewan Government Announcement re: Long Term Care Beds

What basis for new spaces?

On July 28th, Ministers Hindley and Reiter announced the addition of nearly 250 specialized long-term care beds, to support the needs of residents with dementia, mental health needs and complex behavioural needs; to be followed by the addition of more than 350 standard long-term care beds.

SSM supports the need for new facilities to care for the elderly who require 24 hour care, especially to replace the Pioneer Village facility that cannot meet acceptable standards of care for frail elderly residents.

However, plans “to meet the needs of seniors and build capacity for the future” will not be met by building more facilities with the standard hospital model long term care “beds”. Saskatchewan’s population of people 65+ is projected to grow from 15% (Statistics Canada 2016 census) to at least 23% by 2038. Medical advances mean that significant growth will be in the 80+ population. Relying on the current hospital-like long term care would be extremely expensive. Plus, investing primarily in this model ignores the real needs and desires of Saskatchewan’s aging population.

A plethora of reports in Canada (including Saskatchewan-focused research conducted by SSM, published in 2019) indicate that older people want to live healthy lives of high quality in the midst of familiar physical and social surroundings well into their 80’s and beyond.

“The argument that Canada needs primarily to expand the capacity of long term care facilities misses the mark in several ways. It is based on the current policy of ‘warehousing’ seniors, among whom there is little demand for such homes. Rather the problem is a scarcity of alternatives from which seniors can choose, coupled with chronic underfunding of preferred alternatives such as home care and community services.” *The Ageing Well Report*, Queen’s University School of Policy Studies 2020.

National and international examples of the financial costs of investing in seniors’ preferred alternatives of home and community supports show that investment in these alternatives is approximately one-third the cost of LTC facilities and hospitals.

We are at an extremely important moment in Saskatchewan. What kind of support and care do we, the taxpayers, want for our grandparents, our neighbours and our aging selves? We need to look beyond the immediate problem of substandard LTC and realize that the current model is not the right one from either a life satisfaction or financial perspective.

Who needs to collaborate on creating a new model that fits for Saskatchewan? Civil servants, politicians, health care professionals, community leaders **and older adults themselves** all need to contribute meaningfully to create a system where support and care for seniors is available in all Saskatchewan communities. While the two Ministries and the SHA have been talking together, there is no evidence that older adults’ voices are being asked for or heard. Those voices are essential.

SSM, with its member organizations, stands ready to provide vision and leadership.

Having a ‘bed’ is no longer good enough! The time for change is now.