



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

Editorial

TIME FOR ACTION ON SUPPORTED AND ASSISTED LIVING OPTIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS IN ONTARIO

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My husband and I are both in our late 70's now and fortunately still in relative good health. But we know what the stats are about how [health challenges can increase](#) as we approach and hopefully pass 80. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease as well as the onset of dementia are all issues with which many older adults, especially those in their 80's, wrestle on a daily basis.

We won't mention not remembering what you came into the kitchen for, or looking for your glasses as they perch comfortably on your head, or starting to find stairs a challenge, and wishing someone would come along and shovel your walk, cut your grass, or help with gardening. Aches and pains become an everyday occurrence that most live with relying on our favorite liniments to help us function.

Most of us will need some help as we get older. Home care and some help from family and/or friends may be enough to meet our needs. But what if we have a fall, or a health emergency? That may be a worry for a lot of us who dread ending up in hospital for any reason.

Older Adults Do Not Want to be Institutionalized

Neither my husband nor I want to end up in a long-term care institution – a sentiment shared by SSAO members. So, like many others, we are looking around for residential alternatives to institutions – housing possibilities as we get older and may have to deal with increased frailty.

The problem is that the Ontario government has invested billions into building long term care-institutions where we don't want to go, and where fewer and fewer want to work, with not nearly enough investment in residential assisted living options like the ones in [Halton Region](#) and [Kenora](#). Those communities have older adults' apartments with multi-services built in.

Older adults, especially those who have worked hard and managed to buy and live in their own homes for decades, need viable residential options and the ability to downsize. They want smaller, accessible, more manageable spaces where they can get the help they may need as they get older, companionship, and a sense of community, while maintaining their autonomy and independence.

Older adults with dementia and complex health conditions, or health issues that are likely to get worse as they age, are at even more risk for institutionalization. They and their families need residential options with 24/7 care that is respectful, humane, and located in their own communities.

Municipalities, Developers, Regions and the Ontario Government Need to Step Up

It is time for municipalities and regions to exert their influence in [creating actual age-friendly](#) communities, not facsimiles of them for PR purposes.

Leaning on developers to build accessible bungalows and low-rise condos and apartments with space for health and human services and social activities would help a lot of older adults.

[Garden style apartments](#) for those who can't perhaps manage a large house and garden anymore, but don't want to give up gardening or having access to nature. Garden apartments are generally low-rise apartment buildings of no more than three storeys, located on large plots of landscaped land that provide residents with access to green spaces and walkable trails. They are generally affordable and pet friendly.

Beautiful, livable communities like [Village by the Arboretum](#) in Guelph should be available in every community.

Time to Listen to Your Elders

It is time for the Ontario government to finally listen to older adults - [96% of whom want to age in place](#) or at least in their home communities, and fund assisted living residences with integrated care built in across the province - especially in areas with high wait lists for long-term care institutions.

We know what residential options prevent institutionalization. [Denmark has not built a traditional institution since 1988](#) by shifting to care in the community. There is no reason why a province like Ontario and a country like Canada cannot have a [system of personal support services and supported housing options similar to what Denmark has.](#)

SSAO is Taking the Message Directly to Government

This is why SSAO's Provincial Policy Panel is meeting with the Ministry of Long Term Care this month to make the case for that Ministry to fund alternative residential options by redirecting existing funds from institutions to community-based assisted living residences and small neighborhood homes. Specifically we are asking that government start funding:

- Non-profit or municipally operated [small, fully staffed, neighborhood homes](#) for up to six people who require 24 hour assistance that our Research and Writing Team recently did a [Zoom session](#) on.

- Non-profit operated [assisted living residences](#) with [PACE Wellness Hubs](#) or [Hub and Spoke](#) programs built in for people who would like the personal services that come with expensive retirement homes, but can't afford the price tag. Deputy Mayor Paul Sharman of Burlington who heads Halton Housing, recently did [a Zoom session](#) for SSAO on PACE. Ray Applebaum former CEO of Peel Senior Link also did a [Zoom session for SSAO on the Hub and Spoke Model](#). For more on expanding the Community Wellness Hub model please see this webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGHtsQCAclw>
- Behavioural support in small community homes, staffed 24/7 so that elders with dementia do not end up in locked wards in institutions – the worst possible place for them.
- Compassionate end of life care delivered by specially trained staff in [residential hospices](#) located in every community so that people do not have to die in cold, impersonal hospital rooms but still have access to effective pain control and symptom management.

Time to Fund Service Coordinators in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

The SSAO Provincial NORC Policy and Implementation Panel will be meeting with Ontario Health at Home in early April to discuss funding for service coordinator/community connector/resource coordinators for naturally occurring retirement communities.

These professionals can not only assist residents of NORCs with service navigation and coordination of community services matched to their needs, they can also help residents to organize social and information events to promote friendships, social support, and expand residents' knowledge about issues affecting them

It is Our Turn

Older adults in Ontario are smart and know what they need. SSAO's task is to now help the Ontario government, municipalities, and regions to respond with the solutions we are proposing.

We have all contributed for decades to our families, our communities, our workplaces, and in some cases, in defense of this country. Many still are contributing. We have been taxpayers and law-abiding citizens.

Now it is our turn. We are not asking for more money. We are asking that the Ontario government re-allocate the [funds that have not been spent in having missed its target to build more long-term care beds](#). We do not want to go there. Many staff do not want to work there.

It is time to bring Ontario's long-term care system into the 21st Century and abandon a policy of mass institutionalization of older adults with disabilities in favor of supporting them to live in comfort in their own homes and communities.

Dr. Patricia Spindel is the Chair of Seniors for Social Action Ontario, a Past President of Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities, a co-founder of the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, a former professor at the University of Guelph-Humber, and a former Associate Dean of Health Sciences at Humber College.

SSAO welcomes comments on its editorials at – seniorsactionontario@gmail.com