

## Home is where the heart is and where health care needs to be



Amy Porteous, Vice President, Public Affairs, Planning and Family Medicine at Bruyère Continuing Care urged delegates to vote for her motion on the development of an affordable and supportive housing strategy for seniors during the 2017 Great Canadian Healthcare Debate in Vancouver.



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Last June, at the National Health Leadership Conference's Great Canadian Healthcare Debate, health care leaders from across the country approved a resolution calling on the federal, provincial and territorial governments to unite to develop an affordable and supportive housing strategy focused on community living.

Skeptics may question whether Canada really needs another strategy, but it is clear that our current model of warehousing seniors in hospitals provides neither optimal clinical nor financially sustainable care. Add to that fact the reality that seniors much prefer to remain at home as long as they can get the health and personal support they need and it becomes clear that Canada's health care problem is really a housing and support problem.

So how do we build a strategy to address the issue in the next year? First, we need to recognize the importance of enhancing affordable community-based living that includes a continuum of options such as independent living, assisted living, congregate living, long-term care or retirement living and community supports on one site. The good news is that there are thriving seniors' communities across Canada that demonstrate this innovative approach..

Seniors are living within a continuum where they can get varying levels of care and services depending on need. Many of these communities allow people to remain autonomous for as long as possible and some even allow for couples requiring different levels of support to stay together on the same site. We need to examine these and other models that work and build upon them.

The Bruyère Village and the Perley and Rideau Veterans Health Centre in Ottawa and Christie Gardens in Toronto are examples of this model in action. These are not-for-profit organizations providing independent living, assisted living and long-term care on one site. Each site has affordable housing built within the model and include community support programs available onsite for tenants and for the surrounding community. The sites are economically sustainable and charge rent based on the ability to pay. We need to examine models that work and build upon them.

We can no longer do more of the same and expect to get a different result when it comes to health care in Canada. Government and health care leaders must study and learn from the models that exist now, get buy-in from all levels of government and sectors – specifically health and housing – and roll out a national framework to help facilitate affordable and supportive community living models.

For a national strategy to work, the Federal Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Families, Children and Social Development must first jointly develop an affordable and supportive housing strategy for seniors focused on community living. This strategy would need to be developed through studying the models that currently exist and then engagement of federal, provincial and municipal governments and the health and housing communities through the implementation of research and best practices. The strategy needs to be ready so it can be actioned by the provinces and municipalities, facilitated by the funding envelopes that have already been announced around affordable housing for seniors through the national housing strategy and the focus on home and community care.

A national, affordable and supportive housing strategy for seniors emphasizing quality of life in a community living model with appropriate supports will help address rising costs associated with aging and provide high-quality care for Canada's aging population. The evidence is clear. All that is required now is to craft the strategy. It really does take a village to care for our seniors. It's time we came together to build it.

Amy Porteous is Vice President, Public Affairs, Planning and Family Medicine at Bruyère Continuing Care.

*The [2018 Great Canadian Healthcare Debate](#) will occur in St. John's, NL on June 5, 2018. Healthcare leaders from across Canada will provide insight from the frontlines on progress achieved and potential next steps to address the top issues from the last three years: mental health, Indigenous health and seniors' health.*