

Friday, August 24, 2018

Response to Ottawa Citizen

Re: [“Bruce: Help retirement homes keep their clients out of hospital”](#)

I read with interest Dr. Bruce’s opinion piece “Help retirement homes keep their clients out of hospital.”

As CEO of the Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA) it is important to provide some additional information and context to ensure greater clarity around what retirement communities are, and what they are, by law, allowed to do.

Because our members are honoured to have over 55,000 seniors call their retirement communities “home.” It is a privilege and something we take very seriously.

The author makes a good point, some residents do choose to move into retirement communities because they have had a life change, it might be a health issue, but it could also be the death of a spouse, or it could be loneliness.

In fact, a 2018 poll conducted by DART Insight and Communications for ORCA clearly shows that 91 per cent of Canadians agreed that they do not want to be socially isolated in their later years. Additionally, 94 per cent of Canadians agreed that social isolation is associated with higher health risks.

We also know people thrive in congregate living settings – and retirement communities are a great example of this type of setting.

As education for your readers, and for context to the author’s opinion, retirement communities are regulated under the Retirement Homes Act. The Act states that there are 13 care services a retirement residence can be licensed for and offer in a home, but more importantly for the public to know - they are not always offered in every home.

Retirement residences range in the service levels they offer, from independent living, where only a few services like provision of a meal and housekeeping may be offered, up to assisted living or memory care, where additional care services like skin and wound care, continence care, assistance with feeding and more may be offered.

These examples are not exhaustive, but the idea is that it is not a one size fits all model. It is a model designed for seniors to choose a community that works best for them, and to tailor their experience to what they want and need it to be.

What is offered depends on the resident population, what the home is licensed to provide, the training received by staff and the needs of the seniors in that home.

It is also important to note that the author is correct - we do need to innovate.

ORCA is very aware that the system needs help, which is why we have been advocating for a Senior Services Benefit.

A Senior Services Benefit is a kind of monthly allowance sent directly to the senior to help pay for housing and care needs. It is flexible support designed to alleviate financial pressures placed on seniors, while empowering them to stay in the community among friends and peers longer where they can thrive.

There is an increasingly robust body of evidence to support the benefits of this kind of self-directed care model and Ontario can draw from several practical examples right here in Canada and across the world.

Knowing that 96 per cent of families worry less if their loved one has supports to keep them safe and well, a Senior Services Benefit could be a tremendous step in the right direction for Ontarians.

Food for thought.

Laurie Johnston, CEO, ORCA

