



**Consultation with Seniors and Seniors Service
Providers**

Lethbridge

October 18, 2005

Summary of Concerns and Proposed Solutions by Category

Health Care

Participants' concerns were largely focused on Chinook Health Region's plan to reduce long term care beds and place clients/ patients in assisted living facilities. Most comments expressed concern surrounding the speed with which this plan is to be implemented and the fact that elderly are being moved from a situation that has legislation and regulations protecting their interests to an environment that lacks this protection.

They recommend development of standards of care for assisted living and that the provincial government ensure that adequate resources are made available to this type of elder care to address their needs.

Information for Seniors

Participants strongly criticized "1-800" type phone information lines used by governments to provide information to seniors. Most seniors just become lost and frustrated when trying to use this source of information.

They highly praised the work of the Seniors Information Officer and recommend that government maintain services with a "real person" contact whenever it concerns seniors.

Transportation

Participants report serious transportation difficulties for seniors, especially in the rural areas around the City of Lethbridge. A key factor in this rising problem is the drop off in volunteer drivers scared off by insurance concerns and skyrocketing liability insurance costs.

They propose that government develop a provincial insurance program that would cover volunteer drivers when they participate in such activities and thus encourage individuals to continue providing this service.

Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta

The Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta offered a consultation session as a part of the Regional Seniors Services Workshop held in Lethbridge on October 18, 2005.

The purpose of the consultation was to assist the Council in its continuing efforts to be well informed of seniors' Issues.

Summary Information

The following is a summary of the information generated during the group discussion and is arranged in the three areas discussed:

1. Services for seniors that are working well in Lethbridge and area?
2. What are the areas of concern/challenges related to services to seniors in Lethbridge and area?
3. What are some suggested solutions related to the concerns/challenges?

Services for Seniors Working Well in Lethbridge and Area

The following is an outline of the services identified by the participants as working well for the seniors in the area:

- Alberta Seniors Benefits and Special Needs programs. They are very necessary and not too complicated to access. The assistance from the Seniors Information Services Office is vital in accessing government programs and supports for people in long term care.
- Role of the Seniors Information Services Office should be expanded to provide better coverage/access to rural areas. Probably should be more than one person in the office available to assist service providers as well as seniors.
- Presentations are always well received; smaller communities like the contact. Lots of excellent information and instructions provided on the programs for seniors.
- FCSS offices and personnel work well in providing a link to most rural areas and the Lethbridge SISO.

- Most Alberta Government forms are easy to understand and use; user-friendly programs.
- Within Southern Alberta there are connections within communities and with one to another. People seem to look out for each other; help each other; and service providers share ideas.

Areas of Concern/Challenges Related to the Services for Seniors in Lethbridge and Area

- There are some areas that are not working well at all. The 1-800 Seniors Information line is a nightmare to use. Impossible for seniors to understand the operators; instructions are not clear; do not understand waiting for call to be answered. Not a well thought out idea when dealing with seniors.
- There needs to be a local number for the federal government Income Securities Program. The 1-800 concept is difficult for seniors.
- FOIP ties people up in a lot of red tape. You can go to the FOIP Commissioner for clarification; does not always work province to province. Too many restrictions on service providers and those assisting seniors.
- One very good thing is there appears to be more housing options in Southern Alberta.
- Transportation posing a problem especially in rural Alberta. This is an ongoing issue. Seniors who no longer drive for whatever reason are isolated. There are some costs involved in providing transportation. How do we access grants?
- FCSS Vulcan set up transportation services. It was not well received, did not meet the specific needs of seniors. People wanted more than the program could provide.
- Claresholm Transportation Society will provide trips to Calgary at \$60 per trip.
- Needs to be a provincial insurance program to cover volunteer drivers. Insurance costs and restriction are too much for individuals to manage. Towns should be able to provide blanket insurance for non-profits.
- Health issues are of concern for both passengers and volunteers (many are also seniors.)

- Task Force on Long Term care report – What is happening within Chinook Health Region? Within next 2 years 440 beds will be reduced to 120; leaving a shortfall of 200 beds minimum.
- There needs to be a better standard for determining who qualifies for long term care and who should go to assisted living. Costs involved in assisted living should be more closely monitored and assessed with more government assistance provided.
- Doctors are mandated to go into long term care regularly. There is nothing like that in place for assisted living. Going to assisted living is deemed to be a house call and most doctors do not do house calls.
- Some comments about the closure of nursing homes include
 - a. I hope my mother dies before she has to move
 - b. Who will look after little (whomever) with no family close by
 - c. Who will monitor the medications and take care of personal needs (costs)
- Community based aging in place is a good concept but needs to be done so that those requiring long term care have access to the care they need.
- Health sustainability – what is it? How will it affect the seniors in long-term care?
- There needs to be in place standards for determining level of care; need to have them the same province-wide; healthy people needs support as well and should have some assistance because they are healthy and don't need hospital, acute, long term care or assisted living.
- There is a social debt in the province and it is in the standards for all levels of care.
- People in executive positions are making decisions without any first hand knowledge or visits to long term care facilities. There is no name or face on the problem and therefore the decisions are not fairly made. (refers directly to decision within Chinook Health to close long term care and go to assisted living for all seniors regardless of level of care.)
- Assessments are being made on what beds they (CHR) want to fill first and not on the level of care required by the seniors.
- What is a health issue? What is a housing issue? Long term care is health based; assisted living is housing.

- There are 9 Health Regions and 9 different sets of rules. Totally unfair and not real smart.
- Health issues taking away senior's self-respect
- What can be done? Write letters to MLA, Task Force (on long term care), SACA, media. Keep pressure on the Health Authority and Government to find a solution that is honest, fair, reasonable, and affordable for seniors and families.
- Acute care admissions tend to be higher for those living in assisted living than long term care because the assisted living cannot always have the staff to provide the proper levels of care.
- DAL is not funded the same as long term care. There are many staff shortages.
- Chinook is closing long term care facilities in Lethbridge (2), Crowsnest Pass, Magrath, and Cardston. Other communities have not yet been announced but the fear is most if not all will lose their long term care beds.
- There needs to be both Federal and Provincial offices for seniors to go to for one-on-one assistance with programs. Needs to be a human contact. 1-800 numbers don't work for seniors.

Solutions that were offered after the Discussion

The following are some of the solutions that were presented in relation to the concern/challenges.

- It is a good idea to meet together as service providers to share ideas, learn changes and or new programs. Every community should have an FCSS office with dollars for seniors' programs and they should be uniform across the Province. Discussion groups are a good way to share ideas.
- On all levels we need to keep the human contact
- Streamline the application process for both Federal and Provincial government programs such as OAS & ASB sharing information. Or automatic enrollment based on Alberta Health & Wellness records.
- Health care prescription coverage should be streamlined. Doctors' offices should speak to medication concerns and offer some simple to follow instructions such as purchasing in 3-month supplies to lessen some costs. New drugs should receive approval more quickly.

- Phase out Health Care Insurance premiums for all Albertans.
- Universal guidelines for assessment for long-term care and assisted living. Have the guidelines readily available for people to read and keep them fairly simple to understand and follow.
- There needs to be legislated accountability and accounting for all levels of health care, assisted living facilities, and long term care facilities. Things need to be consistent.

Conclusion

The Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta wishes to thank the participants for their time and effort. The Council commends them on their dedication to the seniors of our province.

The content of this consultation as summarized in this document provides the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta with valuable insight and information concerning services for seniors in Lethbridge and area. The content of this document will assist the Council in developing its Annual Report and will be shared with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Copies will be provided to all consultation participants.