

Seniors housing 'crisis' to deepen

Aging population faces dearth of housing options

by Nick Pearce
Northern News Services
NWT

As seniors housing faces a "crisis," Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green called for 100 more units of independent seniors housing in Yellowknife during the legislative assembly Tuesday.

"We have a crisis of available and affordable housing for seniors," Green told MLAs. Over the next decade in Yellowknife, each year will add roughly 134 senior households, but the past term has seen little development of new units, she said. There are 60 people on the AVENS Court wait list, and 49 waiting for public housing.

And while those circumstances are concerning, Suzette Montreuil, executive director of NWT Senior's Society, said they aren't limited to Yellowknife. The city is one of three communities that a Government of NWT Senior's Planning Study identified as most in need, along with Hay River and Norman Wells.

Since 2004, the seniors population – that's residents aged 60 or older – has been the fastest growing segment of the population, spiking at 53 per cent and outstripping the rest of the territory's population growth of one per cent.



Suzette Montreuil, executive director of NWT Seniors Society, left, released a report in March showing the living costs for seniors in the North, particularly over the next decade, where affordability as NWT workers age. At right, Julie Green, MLA for Yellowknife Centre is calling for more 100 more housing units for seniors in Yellowknife to help address the challenge for aging people.

That burden will become increasingly apparent as demand grows for long-term care facilities grows in regional centres and Yellowknife.

"I share Ms. Green's concerns for Yellowknife, but it's other places as well," Montreuil told News/North.

In an interview, Green noted the government's steps forward on seniors housing, which has recently opened more facilities in communities, including a nineplex in

Fort McPherson. Some of the demand on Yellowknife's facilities could be because "there weren't other options available to seniors," Green said about previous housing limits in communities.

While plans for Yellowknife include possibly adding 72 beds in the Old Stanton hospital to alleviate need, Green said the problem will crest over the next 15 years. "If we don't only catch-up, but also plan for the future, we'll always end up with a waiting



NWSL file photos

list," she said.

Her proposal included updating a "pitiful" retrofitting budget to revamp the homes of aging residents, and building new units, which she said the Government has declined to do in Yellowknife.

"Help people who want to stay to stay, and help people who want to move to move."

Responding to Green's concerns in the legislative assembly, Housing Minister Alfred Moses said the government was working toward

AVENS to expand seniors units in the city – though that would be for next assembly, and Moses recently announced he won't seek re-election.

"(As a territory) one big part ... is going to be the community housing plans that we have been addressing and looking at the priorities that communities see are priorities that we need to address, and seniors are going to be part of that," he said.

With these developments

in mind, Montreuil said there remains 1,040 seniors housing, and 52 per cent of them are in core need.

That means there's questions around the adequacy and need for repairs – most of the aging buildings were constructed between 1961 and 1980. But core need also includes suitability, which means a ratio between beds and occupants, and also affordability: whether or not the homeowner spends less than 30 per cent of their income before tax on their living situation.

The affordability part becomes more acute on Inuvik, Hay River, Fort Smith and Yellowknife, where no single senior could rent at market without a gap in their income, a March NWT Senior's Society report stated. In Inuvik, it would be difficult for even a couple to meet the benchmark.

"You have a really growing population," said Montreuil. "And you have lots of problems with the adequacy of their homes, and then in addition, some of them start to develop health and mobility problems and the accessibility of the home needs to be revamped."

"It is a crisis now, it's going to become more (so)," she told News/North.



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
HOUSING CORPORATION

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has programs available on all levels of housing needs;

SENIORS AGING IN PLACE RETROFIT PROGRAM

This program provides a forgivable loan (over one year) to lower energy costs or for repairs so that seniors who own their homes can continue to live in their homes safely.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE FOR TERRITORIAL HOMEOWNERSHIP (PATH) PROGRAM

The PATH program provides homeownership assistance to you as an NWT resident if you are interested in buying your own home.

HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE FUND (HAF)

The Homelessness Assistance Fund (HAF) provides one-time emergency funding to you if you are experiencing a housing-related crisis within the NWT, and as a result are at risk of becoming homeless.

THE FUEL TANK REPLACEMENT INITIATIVE

The Fuel Tank Replacement initiative assists homeowners in covering the costs of replacing aging above ground fuel tanks that do not meet current standards or are in poor condition, through a one-time forgivable loan.

SECURING ASSISTANCE FOR EMERGENCIES (SAFE)

SAFE is emergency repair funding that is available year-round for situations like freeze-ups and furnace failures.

CONTRIBUTING ASSISTANCE FOR REPAIRS AND ENHANCEMENTS (CARE)

CARE assists existing homeowners in making necessary repairs to their home, in order to ensure a safe and healthy home.

INTERESTED?

You can find out more about our programs and how to apply on the NWTHC's webpage, nwthc.gov.nt.ca.

2019 Minister's Culture and Heritage Circle

**Monday, August 19
11:00 am**

Great Hall of the Legislative Assembly

The Honourable Caroline Cochrane, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, invites the public to attend the Minister's Culture and Heritage Circle ceremony.

The following individuals will be recognized:

- **Youth Category:** Corbin Sinclair, Fort Smith
- **Individual Category:** Karen Novak, Yellowknife
- **Elder Category:** Alfred Taneton, Déline
- **Group Category:** Northern Life Museum and Cultural Centre, Fort Smith
- **Minister's Choice:** Mildred Edwards, Aklavik

Government of
Northwest Territories