



# Seniors Housing

COMING OF AGE | CHANGING PERSPECTIVES









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*A Way Forward to Creating Vibrant, Affordable,  
and Sustainable Communities for Seniors.*

Canada is undergoing a profound demographic shift. The latest census data from 2021 reveals that seniors aged 85 and older constitute the fastest-growing age group in the country. To effectively support this growing demographic, there is an urgent need for affordable and accessible housing options tailored to their needs.

As the nation grapples with the challenges posed by the housing crisis, organizations like Alberta-based GEF Seniors Housing emerge as a vital link between the needs of seniors and dignified and sustainable housing solutions—and appropriate supports enabling seniors to maintain their independence as long as possible.





GEF's Sakaw Terrace opened in 2019 and fulfills a growing need for affordable seniors housing, allowing seniors to age in place in their own communities.



With a rich history spanning over six decades, GEF has evolved to meet the changing needs of seniors, embracing a client-centered approach that prioritizes dignity, well-being, and community engagement.

“We believe every senior deserves a home that meets their housing needs and enhances their well-being, regardless of their level of income,” says Shanika Donalds, Director of Housing and Client Services for GEF Seniors Housing.

“For 65 years, we have continued working with the broader community as an active partner in the important work of providing quality social housing for seniors in Edmonton and its surrounding communities, in accordance with our Mission, Vision, and Values.”

## THE CHALLENGE OF SENIOR HOUSING IN ALBERTA

Seniors’ housing in Canada is complex and the sector is faced with a number of systemic challenges and vulnerabilities. GEF’s approach is not just to housing, but the support systems seniors need to thrive.

GEF is the largest social housing provider for seniors in Alberta. Currently, they provide nearly 3,800 low to moderate-income seniors with access to affordable, well-maintained, and secure housing across 41 buildings located in the City of Edmonton.

In 2023, almost 2,000 seniors applied for housing with GEF, reflecting the increasing demand for affordable housing for this demographic. Eighty-two



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percent of GEF’s clients were between 71 and 100 years of age. The average annual income for all their clients was \$26,120.

That same year, GEF received 768 referrals to its Community Support Program. This initiative facilitates access to appropriate and timely supports and services that help clients maintain their housing and leads to an improved quality of life. The program acts as preventative measure to housing insecurity and contributes to longer-term financial savings for GEF.

## **OLDER AND WISER**

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In 2024, GEF Seniors Housing is reaching its own

senior-status, marking 65 years of operations. The wisdom accrued through decades of experience and knowledge have resulted in numerous significant milestones for the not-for-profit organization. These include the growth of seniors’ communities operated from just four to over forty. Throughout this time, GEF has remained dedicated to providing safe, affordable, and high-quality housing to thousands of seniors, while empowering seniors to live life on their terms, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Moreover, GEF has prioritized maintaining full occupancy in its housing units, recognizing the pressing demand for such accommodation in the community.





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Congratulations to GEF Seniors Housing  
on celebrating their 65th Anniversary!





*GEF then and now: (Top photos) Two of the original four Lodges operated by GEF in the 1960s - McQueen and Rosslyn . (Bottom photo): Ottewell Terrace, which opened in 2015, is one of five Affordable Apartment buildings owned by GEF.*







GEF employees place immense value on fostering meaningful relationships between clients and staff, believing in promoting interactions built on trust, and aiming to positively contribute to everyone's life journey.

GEF is the only social housing provider in Alberta to take proactive steps towards sustainability by developing and implementing its Sustainability Framework, further solidifying its commitment to serving seniors and the community at large.

## **SERVING A VARIETY OF NEEDS**

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Since its inception in 1959 as the Greater Edmonton Foundation - a registered charity- GEF has been dedicated to providing not just shelter, but vibrant

communities where seniors can age with dignity and purpose.

GEF's four original buildings were named Elmwood, McQueen, Rosslyn, and Belvedere. These Lodges were intended to bridge the gap between independent living and nursing homes and provided housekeeping, meals, and recreation programming, but no health or personal care.

Today, GEF Seniors Housing operates 29 Seniors Self-Contained (SSC) Apartments, 11 Lodges, and five Affordable Apartment buildings:

- Seniors Self-Contained (SSC) Apartments provide independent living for functionally independent seniors, offering choices and encouraging





*Lodge resident Sharon S. and her cat Chloe.*

each tenant to live independently as a part of a community. Rent is calculated at 30% of annual income (income threshold applies).

- Lodges provide supportive living for functionally independent seniors, as well as support services: meals, housekeeping, linen service, and activity and wellness programming. Residents enjoy meals and snacks prepared by certified Red Seal Chefs, who work with the residents and Registered Dietitians to provide delicious meals that meets their health and nutritional needs. Non-medical staff are on-site 24 hours a day, providing peace of mind knowing someone is always on hand to deal with any building-related emergencies or concerns at the Lodge. Rent is calculated at 30% of annual income plus a monthly fee for the support services.

- Affordable Apartments provide apartment housing for seniors, where rent is at a minimum 10-15% below the average market rates. These tenants maintain an independent lifestyle, while still having the benefits of living within a GEF community.

## **A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SENIOR WELL-BEING**

Beyond mere shelter, GEF Seniors Housing embodies a holistic approach to seniors' well-being, rooted in its Quality of Life Philosophy. Central to this philosophy is the belief that every senior deserves a home that meets their housing needs and enhances their well-being. By offering housing options that promote autonomy, social connection, and community engagement, GEF fosters a sense





*Dori T. (on the right) enjoys "an incredible sense of community" at her GEF Seniors Self-Contained (SSC) Apartment building."*

of belonging and purpose among its residents, enriching their quality of life and contributing to positive health outcomes.

Dori T. is just one of many seniors who have experienced the friendly, compassionate, and practical support GEF provides. "I have experienced something wonderful and beyond what I anticipated, with GEF and its approach to senior housing. Living here has opened my eyes to something I wouldn't have imagined was actually happening in a seniors apartment building...in a good way!"

Dori calls her apartment a "lovely place" where she observes and enjoys "an incredible sense of community where many residents are part of co-creating something beautiful, notably making a

positive difference in one another's lives, making the best of their senior days. I'm listening to their journeys, and many have shared they wouldn't ever want to leave here because of it. In today's world this is amazing!"

"This all adds up to a great living environment I'm so privileged to be a part of at this season of my life," says Dori. "Thank you to our awesome management team and GEF for this opportunity that's been a life-changing gift for me!"

Lodge resident, Sharon S., who lives with her cat Chloe, says "Chloe has been a huge part of my life since she was just a kitten. Being able to bring her with me was the best thing that happened to us."



## GEF SENIORS HOUSING IN ACTION

Allan L. was living in a property where there were multiple concerns for his safety, prompting the intervention of the Residential Inspection Safety Compliance Team (RISC) through the Problem Property Initiative at the City of Edmonton. Through collaborative efforts with the Community Safety Liaison and the Homelessness Prevention Coordinator from the City of Edmonton, Allan was connected with Sage Seniors Association to complete a housing application for GEF Seniors Housing.

Accompanied by the Community Safety Liaison, Allan attended his interview, and with the help of GEF staff, Allan was approved for a bachelor unit at a GEF apartment building. The team then coordinated with Bissell Centre's Outreach Housing Team to move Allan into his new bachelor apartment with new furniture and some financial support to ensure a successful transition.



*Allan L. enjoys the comfort and security of his GEF apartment unit.*

## ALIGNING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

GEF Seniors Housing recognizes the importance of collaboration and partnership in addressing the multifaceted challenges of senior housing. By working closely with community-based agencies, government entities, and local stakeholders, GEF amplifies its impact and ensures that seniors receive the support and resources they need to thrive. Through strategic alliances and shared vision, GEF endeavors to alleviate homelessness, enhance social inclusion, and create vibrant and sustainable communities for seniors across the province.





Shanika Donalds  
Director of Housing  
and Client Services

## CHARTING THE COURSE FOR THE FUTURE

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As GEF Seniors Housing celebrates 65 years of service and embarks on a new chapter of its journey, it unveils a bold vision for the future. With the release of its new five-year Strategic Plan, GEF charts a course towards creating vibrant, affordable, and sustainable communities for seniors in Alberta. By leveraging sustainable operations, fostering community engagement, and embracing innovation, GEF aims to redefine the landscape of seniors social housing for generations to come.

Says Donalds: “2024 is a significant year for GEF for many reasons especially since it marks the release of our new five-year Strategic Plan. Together with our Sustainability Framework, refreshed Vision, Mission, Values and Quality of Life philosophy, GEF is not only celebrating 65 years, but coming of age at the right time to continue our journey to create vibrant, affordable communities for seniors just when they are needed most.”

For more information, please visit: [www.gef.org](http://www.gef.org)





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