

Edmonton

Province announces panel to review seniors' lodge program

Recommendations from review to be made public, says Seniors Minister Jason Nixon

[Madeleine Cummings](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 18, 2024 4:19 PM MST | Last Updated: January 18



Jason Nixon, minister of seniors, community and social services, says the results of a panel review of the seniors' lodge program will be made public. (Nathan Gross/CBC)

The Alberta government has announced the members of a new panel tasked with reviewing a program that houses thousands of low-income seniors.

Jason Nixon, minister of seniors, community and social services, has appointed 11 people to the Seniors Lodge Review Panel.

They include Brandon Lundy, the MLA for Leduc-Beaumont, representatives from the Alberta Seniors and Community Housing Association (ASCHA), Alberta Municipalities, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, and leaders from non-profit housing providers.

Nixon said the cost of the review will be covered by the ministry's current budget.

The panel's recommendations will be made public.

"Ultimately we'll be coming forward with a plan to be able to implement what we hear and be very clear on where we're headed with the lodge program," Nixon told a news conference in Edmonton on Thursday.

Last week, CBC News reported on [the increase of vacant units in some seniors' lodges](#), which is an issue particularly in central Alberta.

According to tender documents from a request for proposals related to the review, part of its goal is understanding why units are sitting vacant.

More than half of seniors' lodges are in rural Alberta, where population growth has been slower than in urban and suburban areas.

- [Alberta reviewing seniors' lodge program as vacancies threaten future of some buildings](#)
- [Provincial parties clash over how best to improve Alberta's affordable housing stock](#)

"I am a rural Albertan and my seniors deserve just as much as urban seniors to have a chance to be able to live in and age gracefully in the communities that they built," Nixon said.

"The reality is, though, that we do have to have a serious conversation about how we use rural senior-lodge infrastructure that already exists and how we build rural senior lodges in the future to fit with the demographics that we are seeing," he said.

Don Gnatiuk, board chair of the non-profit GEF Seniors Housing, said he's excited about the review.

"It gives us an opportunity to share what we're seeing," he said.

He said seniors' expectations are changing and they want more than simple housing.



Ottewell Place Lodge is one of GEF Seniors Housing's seniors' lodges in Edmonton. (Nathan Gross/CBC)

Gnatiuk said his organization is not struggling to fill units and is constantly thinking about expansion opportunities.

Donna Shanks and her husband, Bill, moved into GEF's Ottewell Place Lodge in Edmonton five months ago, willing to take any double room that became available.

"The affordability was a factor for us because we did qualify for the subsidized housing," Donna said.

Bill said larger rooms would be nice but he and his wife have been enjoying life in the lodge so far.

The [2015 review of the program](#) found many older, smaller lodge rooms were remaining vacant, leading to revenue losses.



Donna and Bill Shanks, who live in Ottewell Place Lodge, say affordability was a key reason they moved into the building. (Nathan Gross/CBC)

ASCHA and Alberta Municipalities told CBC News the province should provide more funding for the lodge program.

Janis Irwin, the NDP's housing critic, said the review is overdue and the province needs more affordable housing units for seniors.

"Increasing supply is the best way out of this housing crisis and to do that we need more accountability from the government on setting clear targets and making those reports available to Albertans," she said in a statement.

According to tender documents for the seniors' lodge review, one-third of households living in affordable housing units or on waitlists for them in Alberta are senior households.

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