

Keep seniors at home longer: minister

Federal, territorial and provincial ministers meet to discuss seniors' issues

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With the number of seniors in the territory continuing to grow each year, the government is turning its focus to programs that can keep the elderly living in their homes as independently as possible for as long as they can.

"What we found was that seniors don't want to go into residential care," said Tom Beaulieu, minister of the Department of Health and Social Services, on Oct. 10, the last day of a two-day conference where provincial, territorial and federal ministers responsible for seniors gathered in Yellowknife. "A lot of the seniors are saying that they want to spend their last years in their own home communities, and in their own homes if possible. So, we're trying to respond to that.

"These are our respected elders across the territory, and we're trying to say if we can accommodate what they want, as opposed to always putting them in long-term care in a larger facility, then that's what we're trying to do."

Barb Hood, executive director of the NWT Seniors' Society, agrees with keeping seniors at home for as long as possible, as long as there are enough support systems in place within their community.

This will require resources to be re-allocated to home-care workers, mental health workers, wellness workers and others in the community who can support seniors.

"It's a shift in where the resources are going that would really support older adults staying in their homes," she said.

While no funding has been approved yet for increased community support persons, Beaulieu said he plans to push for this during the upcoming budget dialogue session in February.

He added that not only do seniors want to live at home in their home communities, keeping elders out of long-term care facilities for as long as possible saves money.

"When we move to prevent people from going into long-term care, each individual that we can hold back from going into long-term care saves us over \$100,000

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NWT RESIDENTS OVER THE AGE OF 60

- 2012: 4,616
- 2011: 4,431
- 2010: 4,142
- 2009: 3,894
- 2008: 3,698
- 2007: 3,448
- 2006: 3,245
- 2005: 3,079
- 2004: 2,935
- 2003: 2,777
- 2002: 2,667
- 2001: 2,530

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

annually," he said. "So, if we're able to hold 10 seniors back for 10 years, that's \$1 million a year. Over 10 years, that's \$10 million."

While mobility issues and not being able to maintain a home often drives seniors into long-term care facilities, many also make the move for protection against elder abuse



Laura Busch/NNSI photo

Alice Wong, federal minister of state for seniors, addresses a press conference in Yellowknife on Oct. 10 following a meeting of all provincial, territorial and federal ministers responsible for seniors, as Health and Social Services Minister Tom Beaulieu looks on.

and negative home environments, said Hood.

"There also needs to be the realization that in the North, some of the environments that older adults live in are not optimal because there are extended families that live at home, and sometimes older adults can be in a position where they can be abused," she said. "This is

another reason why we need to have the support of everyone in the community looking out for older residents."

These topics came up for discussion during last week's meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for seniors, as did financial planning, assistance for older workers, financial abuse and safety at home.

"We had tremendous discussions," said Beaulieu, who co-chaired the conference along with federal Minister of State for Seniors Alice Wong.

This was the first time the annual meeting, now in its 15th year, was held in . Next year's discussion will take place in Prince Edward Island