



ASCHA

ALBERTA SENIORS & COMMUNITY  
HOUSING ASSOCIATION

CREATING COMMON  
TERMINOLOGY  
FOR SENIORS HOUSING  
OPTIONS IN ALBERTA.





## THE CHALLENGE

### Cutting the Clutter in Seniors Housing Terminology

ASCHA embarked on a multi-year initiative, which began in 2017, to better understand the frustration reported by Albertans when trying to navigate seniors housing options in their local communities. The main source of their frustrations, beyond such things as availability, cost, eligibility requirements and accessibility, rested with the multitude of confusing terms used to categorize and describe seniors

**The main source of their frustrations rested with the multitude of confusing terms used to categorize and describe seniors housing.**

housing. The various levels of services and supports offered are described in various ways, using words or phrases that are not familiar outside of the sector itself. Terminology and labels are very specific to government programs, levels of care within the health system, and euphemistic language used by marketing experts. To further complicate the issue, the same living environment is labeled differently depending on the information source, or its geographic location. There is a long history of term inconsistency, and it is part of the reason why Alberta's seniors housing offerings appear so complex in comparison to other jurisdictions.



# THE INSIGHTS

## Recap 2018 “Common Terminology Report: What We Heard”

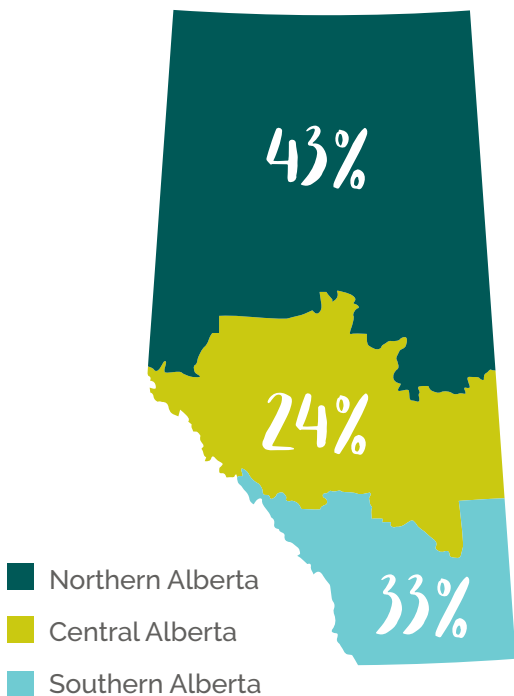
In 2018, ASCHA released a report entitled “Common Terminology Report: What We Heard.” This report compiled the findings gathered from the collective feedback of over 1,000 Albertans who responded to a public survey. The study asked Albertans, of various ages, from across the province, to define various terms used by the seniors housing sector, government and the continuing care system. This study revealed that there was no real consensus in how seniors housing options were understood by both the public, those employed by the sector, or those living in seniors housing. Albertans would use the same terms to describe very different housing

scenarios (for example, “independent living” could be used for a senior’s apartment with no services by one person, or a setting with full health care services on site by another person). The lack of common terminology, of even simple navigational categories to describe seniors housing options, is causing unmet expectations and a growing demand for a single, navigational framework to prevent confusion.

**The study revealed there was no real consensus in how seniors housing options were understood...**

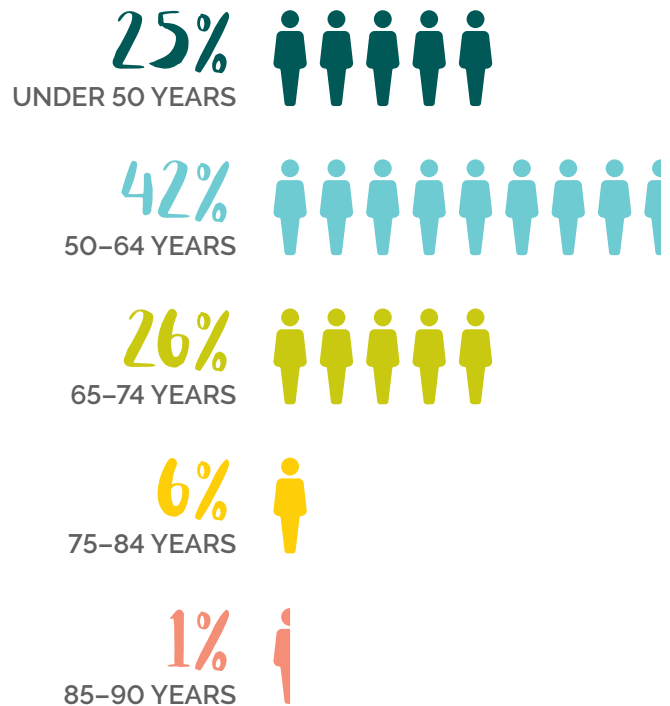
### ALBERTA RESPONDENTS BY REGION

The breakdown of respondents’ geographical location is as follows:



### AGE OF RESPONDENTS

The ages of respondents were also collected and are reflected as follows:



# THE DIRECTION

## Stakeholders & Focus Group

After the release of the “Common Terminology Report: What We Heard,” ASCHA met with various stakeholder groups, seniors housing organizations, government departments, Alberta Health Services and community resource organizations to review the findings of the study.



Albertans want the seniors housing sector to “cut the clutter” when it comes to how seniors housing options are defined and marketed.



Through collaborative efforts, it was suggested that a series of focus groups be developed for the purpose of reviewing the experience of seniors looking at their seniors housing and support options, identifying sector-wide challenges and public concerns, which terms are found to be the most confusing, and what tools might assist people better as they search for information.



# STEPS FORWARD

A wide range of perspectives were collected in the focus groups, which were held in early 2019. Participants ranged from senior policy advisors, researchers, community outreach workers, front-line staff, legislative advisors, senior housing operators and administrative officers, as well as family members of seniors and seniors themselves.

## WHAT THEY FOUND

### Language

All participants in the 2019 focus groups agreed that language in the sector needs to be simplified, and rather than creating additional terminology, a system needs to be created to clarify and streamline existing language to make it easier to navigate and understand.

**...a system needs to be created to clarify and streamline existing language to make it easier to navigate and understand.**

### User Experience

All participants agreed that the current user experience is confusing and must be changed. Multiple groups of people navigate the same system to have different needs met, and Albertans often have a different understanding of what terms such as “independent living,” “supportive living,” “continuing care,” “accessible housing,” “affordable housing,” and “home care” mean.

### Barrier to Entry

The focus groups also identified that there are presently too many points of entry for learning about the housing and support options available to seniors, and there is not enough clarity on where a person might begin to get the right information. There are few tools that help those who are seeking seniors housing to navigate the system or obtain information from a Provincial source, especially tools that respect the choice and autonomy an individual has over their own lifestyle and support needs. Much of the language used is defined by provincial legislation or programs, however, it is unclear what provisions are included in each living arrangement.

For example, a senior might be able to walk around, so a family member might view them as “independent,” but because they have some cognitive challenges, may require help with meals, which means they would not necessarily have their needs met in a seniors housing environment that is accommodation only with no services/supports.



71% OF ALBERTANS SAY WE NEED TO CLARIFY, REDUCE & SIMPLIFY SENIORS HOUSING TERMS.

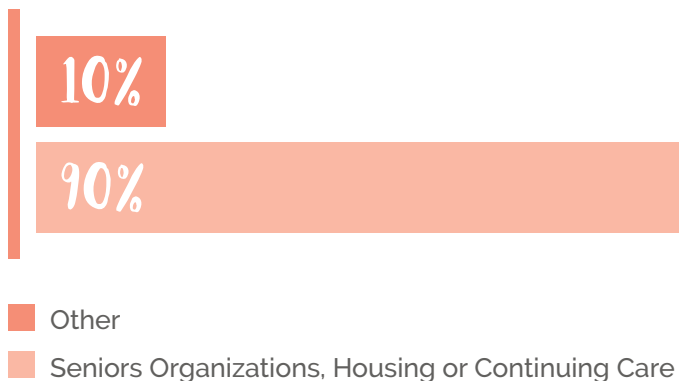
## THE RESULTS

Participants within the focus groups also identified that they could not agree on what terms meant, even though over 90% were representatives from various seniors-serving organizations, or worked within the seniors housing or continuing care system in some way.

It was recommended by the focus groups that categories be created to describe groupings of seniors housing options, and that these be tested with the general public.

### FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS

Sectors focus group respondents represented:



# THE RESULTS

## PROPOSED CATEGORIES

After extensive consultations with various seniors-serving organizations/agencies, stakeholders, and subject-matter experts about how to simplify the way we describe seniors housing options in Alberta, three distinct categories of seniors housing options were developed and tested for public feedback. These proposed categories were explained as a starting point to begin conversations about seniors housing options, so that resource providers, housing providers, health care providers and communities could better

respond to public inquiries. The intent of the proposed categories was to group together seniors housing types, and rather than using unique terms for each individual option or housing program, allowing for synonyms and the diverse ways people term options to still exist, but be better categorized. Categories help to narrow down what seniors and their families are looking for, so as to not direct people to housing with higher levels of service needs, or less service needs than the person requires.

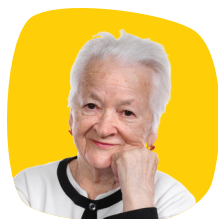
The three categories were worded and tested as follows:



SENIORS HOUSING -  
ACCOMMODATION ONLY



SENIORS HOUSING  
WITH SERVICE OPTIONS



SENIORS HOUSING WITH SERVICE  
OPTIONS AND HEALTH SUPPORTS



# THE SURVEY

## How We Applied These Categories

Definitions were not provided, so that respondents could question the wording or ask for further clarification in the comments they provided. This was done so that nuances could be identified in individual responses, and comments could reveal common themes to help discern if there was a general understanding of each category, and what services/ supports would be offered in each setting.

Various types of living environments would fall under these categories, so it was important to measure if people understood the differences between housing that was accommodation only, housing with service options (housekeeping, meals, etc.), and housing that offered health supports. The categories were informed by feedback from the 2017 Study, where respondents revealed that specific “labels” used by the sector (e.g. independent living, supportive living, designated supportive living, assisted living, lodge) were less important than indicating what types of services and supports (if any) were offered.

**Respondents revealed that specific “labels” used by the sector were less important than indicating the types of services and supports.**

The 2018 report revealed an overall preference for a smaller handful of terms (80%), and that there is more public confusion when layers of healthcare are discussed (63% of respondents in 2018 did not understand the currently defined levels of health supports).



**80%** PREFER A SMALLER HANDFUL OF TERMS

**63%** DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE LEVELS OF HEALTH SUPPORTS





## SURVEY DESCRIPTION

A public survey was developed to test the public's thoughts on the proposed categories. The survey platform chosen was Cvent, as it offers reporting capabilities and assigns a unique identifier to each respondent.

The 7 question survey was published on ASCHA's social media accounts through a campaign called #CutTheClutter. A marketing and communications strategy was implemented to ensure that the study was promoted across the province, and strengthened with stakeholder and public support. The survey was also published on ASCHA's website, sent to housing providers to encourage their residents and community members to respond, circulated throughout other associations and agencies, and marketed through online advertising.

## SURVEY TARGETS

Specific demographics were not collected for this survey, beyond ensuring that respondents were from Alberta. Social media advertising targeted three distinct age cohorts:

### 35-55:

Possible family members navigating housing and support options for their loved ones

### 55-65:

Albertans considering their future housing and support needs

### 65+:

Albertans currently looking at housing and support options, or who may already have had experience with seniors housing and navigating the system

# THE RESULTS

## QUESTIONS WE ASKED

The introduction to the survey provided respondents with background on why the study was being conducted, and explained that the proposed categories were meant as navigational tools to “cut the clutter” associated with various terms and definitions of seniors housing options.

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### THE THREE PROPOSED CATEGORIES WERE PRESENTED AND RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED THE FOLLOWING:

1. Do you find the three distinct categories of seniors housing options easy to understand?

Yes or No.

(Respondents could then provide comment).

2. If you were to begin a search for seniors housing options in your area, would these categories clarify what you were looking for?

Yes or No.

(Respondents could then provide comment).

3. Do you understand that seniors housing is distinct from long term care or facility living?

Yes or No.

(Respondents could then provide comment).

4. Do you have any thoughts or suggestions as we move forward with simplifying the language around seniors housing and making the navigation of options easier for Albertans?

(This was an open response question).

# THE RESULTS

## SURVEY RESPONSES

A total of 585 Albertans responded to the online survey, and while demographics were not collected, advertising for the survey did span across the province and targeted people aged 35 – 65+.

Of the 585 respondents, 510 (87%) agreed that the proposed categories were easier to understand. 496 of the respondents (85%) felt that the categories would help to clarify the type of housing and services they were looking for if they were navigating their options. 478 (82%) of the respondents indicated that they understood that seniors housing is distinct from long term care/facility living.

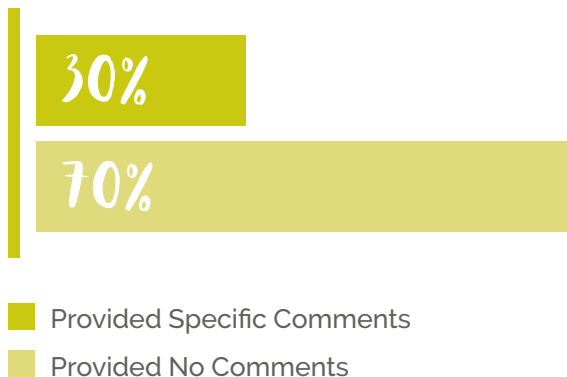
**82% of the respondents indicated that they understood that seniors housing is distinct from long term care/facility living.**

The percentages remained consistent (averaging around 80%) over the 9 months responses were collected, which is why the survey was closed at 585 responses. Collecting further responses would likely have not effected the ratio of yes to no responses. As well, trends in the comments received from respondents varied very little over time.

Of the 585 respondents, 174 provided specific comments (30%). 43 of those that provided comments did not feel the categories were easier to understand or that the categories would make navigation of options available easier. The summary of specific feedback are detailed in the following pages, and have been grouped according to the specific categories that were tested.

### RESPONDENT FEEDBACK

Percentage of respondents who provided feedback or comments to survey questions.



**85% FELT THAT THE CATEGORIES WOULD CLARIFY THE TYPES OF HOUSING.**



# SURVEY RESULTS

## SENIOR HOUSING - ACCOMMODATION ONLY

Of the 174 comments received on the proposed categories, there were no specific comments indicating confusion on what type of seniors housing would entail. Most respondents found this category self explanatory. There was some feedback that the sector should focus more on defining "affordable" housing within this category, and ensure this option is available. There were also some concerns about how "seniors housing" is defined. ASCHA was asked how "senior," was defined and how would this type of housing environment would be representative of non seniors who live in these settings.

MOST RESPONDENTS FOUND THIS CATEGORY SELF EXPLANATORY.

Based on the feedback received, this was the most easily-understood category that we tested.

## THE SCENARIO



**ROBERT BATRA**

Recently widowed, Robert Batra, 65, has decided to move. He now rents a one bedroom unit in a building specifically for seniors.



**CAROL HUGHES**

Carol, 72, lives alone in her own home. A worker comes once a week to help her with household chores that she is not comfortable with or able to do.



# SURVEY RESULTS

## SENIOR HOUSING WITH SERVICE OPTIONS

This was the category that received the greatest amount of specific feedback from respondents. While 131 of those that provided comments agreed that the proposed categories were easier to define, over 50% of these respondents asked for some clarification on what “service options” meant specifically. Many were aware that this category would likely include housekeeping services and meals, but asked if any health supports would be offered in this setting.

This is important to note, as participants in the focus groups felt the distinction was obvious between “housing with service options” and “housing with service options and health supports,” but public testing revealed that the distinction was not clear to some.

Some of the comments received also asked about affordability, and if the prices for “service options” were included in the rental rates, or if they had to be purchased separately.

The public suggested that different levels of “service options” should be defined. Ten respondents felt that, while the wording for this category is a helpful starting point, more communication and education will be necessary to provide the public with distinctions between service options and what they can expect to receive. Others did note that “service options” would vary from building to building, and this is to be expected.

50% OF RESPONDENTS NEEDED CLARITY ON WHAT 'SERVICE OPTIONS' MEANT.

## THE SCENARIO



### LI AND BRENDA

A couple in their late 60's, Li and Brenda live in a multi-story building for seniors where they receive housekeeping services and one meal a day.



HOUSEKEEPING AND  
A DAILY MEAL  
MAKES OUR LIVES  
EASIER.



# SURVEY RESULTS

## SENIOR HOUSING WITH SERVICE OPTIONS & HEALTH SUPPORTS

72 of the 174 respondents that provided comments/feedback on the proposed categories stated that this particular category required more clarity. Overall, there was agreement that this wording was easier to understand, but that “health supports” required further clarification. As mentioned above, some respondents did feel that the distinction between “seniors housing with service options” and “seniors housing with service options and health supports” could be seen as the same thing.

Some feedback received included defining what type of “health supports” would be available (e.g. Would healthcare be provided by health care aides, home care, or nurses? Would health supports be offered on-site? Would health supports be offered 24/7?).

Also, of the 585 respondents in total, 107 did not see the difference between seniors housing settings and long term care/facility living. Comments received indicated that the level of health care services offered in seniors housing and long term care need to be better defined and understood.

41% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THIS CATEGORY NEEDED MORE CLARITY.

## THE SCENARIO



EMILY KOWAL

Emily, 90, has been declining in health for the past three years. She requires assistance with her medications and personal care. She lives with other seniors.



JORDAN THOMPSON

Jordan, 25, lives in a rural community in a building for seniors. He receives medical help on-site for his disability as well as housekeeping services and meals.



I'VE BECOME A BIT  
**FORGETFUL**  
AND  
NEED **HELP WITH**  
**MEDICATIONS**  
& PERSONAL CARE.







## SURVEY RESULTS

### Other Considerations and Suggestions from the Public

While there were specific comments about the proposed categories, and suggestions were received, the public's main concern is how to access and afford housing options in Alberta. As this survey was targeted to specific age groups of Albertans from across the province through a social media campaign, respondents took the opportunity to lend their voices to advocate for more affordable housing options in their communities.

**Respondents indicated that more education and resources need to be available, in addition to a single trusted source of information directing the terminology...**

In addition, while these categories are helpful, they are only a first step in creating a better navigational pathway for those seeking seniors housing and support options. Respondents indicated that more

education and resources need to be available, in addition to a single trusted source of information directing the terminology, how seniors are assessed for housing and supports, and referred to various programs. Literature, infographics and a website would be helpful. There was also suggestions to standardize how seniors housing providers market their products and services to prevent confusion.

Finally, several respondents felt that living in a single family home and receiving services or health care supports was not adequately covered by any of the categories. While the survey aimed at testing language specifically for congregate seniors living environments, this is an interesting consideration to take forward so that distinctions between living in a non congregate setting and a congregate setting (4 or more unrelated persons living together under one roof) could be better defined.

80% OF ALBERTANS  
FELT THAT THE  
PROPOSED CATEGORIES  
ARE EASIER TO  
UNDERSTAND.

## CONCLUSION

The overall consensus was that these new categories will provide a starting point for individuals to navigate their housing and support options.

ASCHA will take the findings from this study to inform communication practices, working with communities, stakeholders, government and resource providers to implement better navigational tools and pathways based on these three distinct categories of seniors housing options. Further education, public awareness campaigns and visual media will be developed to assist in these efforts.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this study. Your thoughts, feedback and suggestions will improve the way we discuss seniors housing options in Alberta for the betterment of seniors and their support networks.



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