

ACTION FOR SENIORS CHARRETTE REPORT

Conclusions and action recommendations to increase housing and supports for low-income seniors in downtown Toronto

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Action for Seniors Charrette

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES



Charrette speakers and organizers (L-R): David Crombie, Councillor Pam McConnell, Ken Gass, Patty Gail Peaker, Vivienne Muhling, Sean Gadon

A: INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of March 21, 2013, the Performing Arts Lodges Toronto (PAL) convened a diverse and eager group of participants to discuss the needs of low-income seniors in downtown Toronto. Understanding the need for immediate action on seniors housing, health and support issues, PAL initiated discussion with its resident performers, seniors organizations, government officials, nonprofit agencies, architects and others.

Working with the City of Toronto's Affordable Housing Office, the PAL Action for Seniors Charrette drew more than 60 participants, including Ward 28 Toronto Centre-Rosedale Councillor Pam McConnell, and former mayor David Crombie.

The charrette and this report is a call to action. These issues are urgent. Seniors cannot wait.

B. OPENING PLENARY

Participants were provided with information about housing and supports for low-income seniors in Toronto, including:

- Percent of seniors in the Toronto population in 2011: **26%**
- Projected percent of seniors in the Toronto population in 2031: **33%**
- Number of seniors on the social housing waiting list: **22,398**
- Median wait time for a long term care home bed in 2009: **112 days**
- Number of long term care beds that have left downtown Toronto: **571**
- Percent of Ontarians living in long-term care homes that could be maintained at home with appropriate supports: **37%**



Former Toronto mayor David Crombie delivers opening remarks

In the opening remarks, David Crombie spoke about the urgency of these issues. He said governments are falling behind in the provision of housing, health and support services for an aging population of Torontonians. He congratulated PAL on shining a light on the lack of support and other services.

Councillor Pam McConnell described the importance of a strong sense of neighbourhood and community in Ward 28. She said the charrette reflected the diversity of her community with people from different walks of life, from residents to service providers to government.

The PAL Action for Seniors Charrette was an example of how to build and strengthen connections among key players from different sectors, and to generate commitment to action by working together, Councillor McConnell said.

C. CHARRETTE WORKSHOP SUMMARIES



Councillor Pam McConnell addresses charrette participants

Four interactive workshops focused on a specific topic area: visioning a seniors friendly system; developing designs for aging in place; long term care in your community; and community partnerships and capacity building. Each workshop was attended by 10-15 participants, who brought their conclusions and recommendations back to the larger group.

The workshops provided a safe space for seniors to open up about issues that tend to be avoided. This seniors-led approach prompted frank discussions about issues such as aging and dying in place, the need and desire for end of life care in familiar surroundings and that aging is part of the life cycle.

Section D of the report provides the common themes that emerge from the charrette workshops.

“A Model That Works”

Workshop participants identified PAL Toronto as a small utopia: good bricks and mortar, affordable and Rent Geared to Income units, and a great community. PAL Toronto is an example of the power of community. For the over 215 people who live at PAL Toronto, of key importance is identity and community as Performing Artists, and the strong desire to care for their own.

On a day to day basis, PAL Toronto is working to support its residents to remain in their vibrant community. Dixon Hall Supportive Housing Program provides services to many residents living at PAL Toronto (e.g., personal support, essential homemaking, emergency response, and care coordination). PAL Toronto also has a Health Services Coordinator 4 days a week, which provides education, health services, advocacy and a point of contact for residents. There is also a high amount of volunteerism that keeps residents strong, healthy and active.

Participants suggest that the PAL Toronto model is relatively low cost and could be replicated elsewhere. However, as the need for supports to age in place grows, it becomes a question of how to meet advancing needs without losing the integral aspects of community.

WORKSHOP 1: VISIONING A SENIOR FRIENDLY SYSTEM

Facilitated by: Ken Gass, PAL Toronto President

Visualized by: Edison Javier Duenas

Chayo, SKETCH

Workshop highlights:

- The fundamental importance of easy, one-stop and universal access to information and services
- The need to create a seamless system of access to services for seniors. To achieve this, providers and governments need to envision the customer differently and take a seniors perspective
- Push for more resources through advocacy and education
- Push for a system with surge capacity, to keep people in their community and out of expensive hospital care
- Seniors want to be useful, want to contribute
- It is important for seniors to maintain connections to their community
- A “really good front door” is a necessity, such as an Office of Seniors, to provide information, compassion and caring.



Drawing of workshop conversation: Edison Javier Duenas, SKETCH

“I am a low-income senior, and I fell in the bathroom late at night. My neighbour had to call 911. I didn’t need an ambulance, I just needed someone to help me get up. Urgent care is only available Monday to Friday 9-5, not on Sunday at 2 a.m.!”

WORKSHOP 2: DEVELOPING DESIGNS FOR AGING IN PLACE

Facilitated by: Charles Rosenberg
Hilditch Architect

Workshop highlights:

- Many residents are in transition or require higher levels of care to remain in their homes instead of moving into institutions
- A lot of things are being done right at PAL: shared spaces, accessible entranceway, security, etc. Making kitchens and bathrooms safer for tenants should be a priority.
- Residents need space in their building for short-term health needs, such as when someone becomes ill or is recovering from illness or surgery
- There are institutional barriers and need for greater funding
- More support services are required but without transforming PAL into a nursing home
- Residents envision centralized space that contributes to wellness. Perhaps this could be a beautifully designed communal space with nursing/medical assistance, personal support workers and short term health care supports. These services could be shared with surrounding seniors' housing
- It's time to move forward and develop designs that will support residents and engage the community. It's essential to dream big, jump in and do it



Charrette workshop discussion. Photo: Ashleigh Dalton

“I am a low-income senior recovering from day surgery. I am not able to leave the hospital because I don’t have the support needed to go home. I want space in my building where I can recover.”

WORKSHOP 3: LONG TERM CARE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Facilitated by: Mary Hoare
Rekai Centre

Workshop highlights:

- People want to age in place, stay independent in their homes
- There are gaps to be filled to help seniors stay safe and secure in their home
- Seniors want to know what options are available before care is needed
- Hospitals push people out to long-term care. Long-term care homes should be seen as a last resort
- There needs to be a continuum of options for care, for people to transition back to their home from 'intense' or convalescent care or in recovery from short-term medical issues
- New models of innovative partnerships and pilot projects are needed
- It is important to look at how funding and services can be more responsive, including streamlining, integrating and building partnerships
- 24/7 integrated seniors information about services is urgently needed



“I am a low-income senior and there are some tasks that I have trouble with, such as chopping vegetables and taking out the garbage. I need just a little more help.”

WORKSHOP 4:

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Facilitated by: Carmen Benoit

Aasif Khakoo

David Reycraft

Norman Shao

Dixon Hall

Workshop highlights:

- The goal is to work as a community to care for the vulnerable and allow people to live out their lives in familiar surroundings
- Health needs shouldn't mean an automatic severing of community
- Dixon Hall provides 24/7 supportive services at PAL with funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Toronto Central LHIN, which has enabled frail seniors to stay in their own apartment homes as long as possible
- Without the right services and supports, finding options for appropriate and responsive care can be stressful for the individual and their support network
- Seniors are looking for community partnerships to get action and promote results
- Given that the local and provincial governments are exploring seniors issues, it's an opportune time to build upon existing work and best practices
- It is important to bring community stakeholders together now to work with sense of urgency

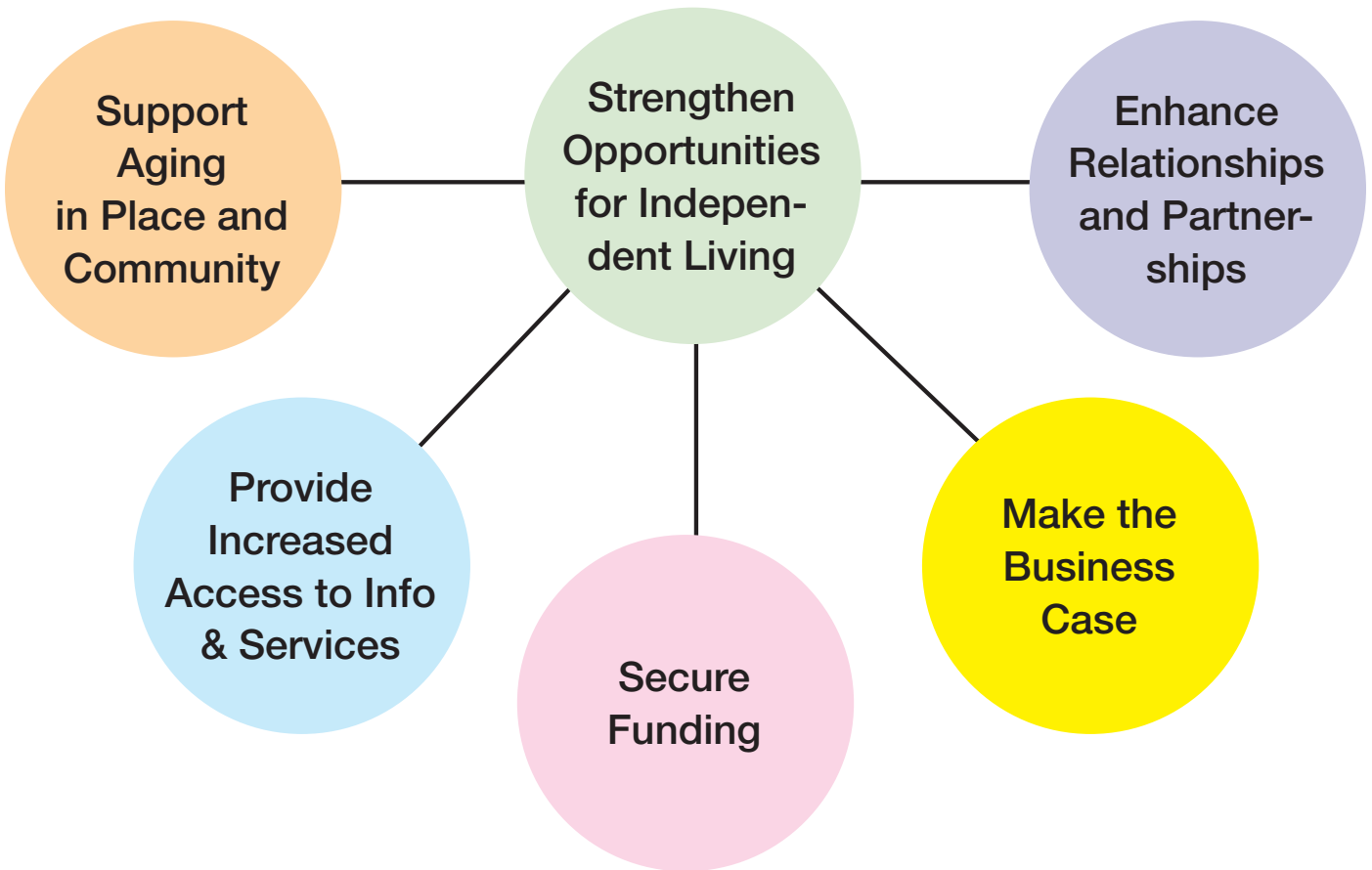
"I am a low-income senior and I have seen my friends and neighbours get sick and they have had to move far away to be able to get the services they need. I want to keep people in the community so that they don't have to go away."

D. KEY THEMES

The discussion from the workshops show that there are common themes running across all of the discussions. The key theme was how to strengthen opportunities for low-income seniors to live independently in their community.

Using this key theme and others from the workshops, a Roadmap to Guide Advocacy emerged:

ROADMAP TO INDEPENDENT LIVING:

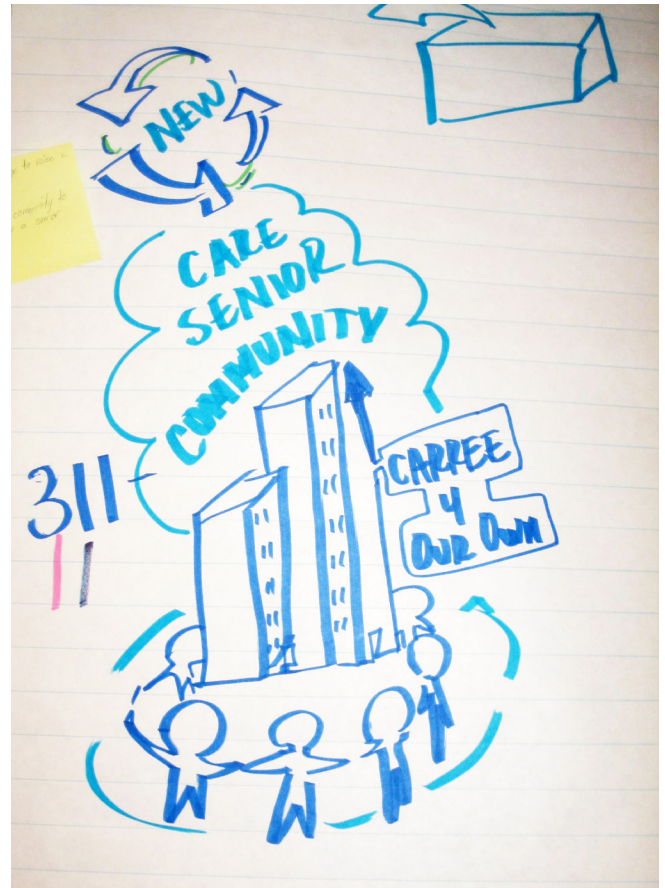


COMMON THEMES:

1. Strengthen Opportunities for Independent Living

The Action Charrette highlighted the priority for seniors, which is to age in place. The charrette generated ideas on how to support this theme with suggestions ranging from building modifications that increase accessibility for seniors and the disabled, to creating centralized spaces that contribute to wellness, to increasing the capacity of community agencies in the neighbourhood to provide supportive care for daily tasks.

“We want to be able to live independently until we die: in community, in language, in culture” - Charrette participant



Drawing of workshop conversation: Edison Javier Duenas, SKETCH

2. Support Aging in Place and Community

Seniors want to stay in their community as they age. There is a need for service providers and governments to expand the concept from aging at home to aging in community. Strategies and solutions that address the housing needs of low-income seniors in downtown Toronto must include ways to maintain community connections. A host of ideas emerged about how to facilitate aging in community, whether in the building or within a satellite in the neighbourhood. This includes potential opportunities for low-income rental units integrated into development sites in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood, or creating a continuum of options through long-term care beds and affordable housing integrated into the same building.

The average per diem cost for a hospital bed is \$842/day, for a long-term care bed is \$125/day, and for care at home is \$42/day. – NorthEast LHIN, 2011

3. Enhance Relationships and Partnerships

The issues facing PAL are not isolated to this one organization or this one building. Discussion centred on the importance of thinking in terms of communication, cooperation and partnerships among a multitude of players. This includes more interaction between community, private sector and government, better integration between government ministries such as health and housing, and increased connectivity between community agencies.

4. Provide Increased Access to Information and Services

A common theme throughout the charrette was the need for access to information and services. Information should be clear and concise, and available in places, methods and languages that seniors, including the most marginalized or vulnerable, can easily access. This may include more outreach, various forms of media, and more personalized services. A one-stop shop of 24/7 information about services for seniors is urgently needed, i.e. a 311 for seniors services. Centralized information, including an assessment and referral system, would allow for the coordination of all services available to seniors.

“It takes a community to care for our seniors and our vulnerable.” - Charrette participant

5. Make the Business Case

Tackling the issue of responsive solutions to housing and support services for low-income seniors makes economic sense. Having a continuum of care, including more support for assisted living at home or in seniors buildings will help people stay out of expensive hospital care, reduce hospital readmissions, lessen the need for long-term care, and ultimately be more affordable for governments.

6. Secure Funding

There are existing models that can shed light on a standard of good care. Charrette participants had dynamic discussions on funding, including pushing for more resources, ideas for a reallocation of funds to increase services such as supportive housing, day care, assisted care, convalescent care and caregiver relief, and the need for a review and streamlining of processes and services. There was excitement to jump in and take working models forward, such as through a test initiative or pilot project.

E. STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING OUR GOALS

The purpose of the Action for Seniors Charrette is to identify and advocate for solutions for seniors' housing and services in downtown Toronto. PAL and its partners have a strong commitment to keep working toward concrete solutions and have identified a 4-Point Action Plan:

ACTIONS:

1. Create a Seniors Action Committee

- i. A committed group of volunteers have signed up to be a part of a Seniors Action Committee. Led by PAL Toronto, this group consists of residents, affordable housing providers and service agencies that are committed to immediate action and follow up on the charrette.

2. Build a Resident-First Approach to Seniors Housing and Supports

- i. PAL wants to strengthen community partnerships through working together to create a seniors-led, resident-first campaign. PAL Toronto will bring other seniors and organizations into the conversation and act as a resource to help seniors across the country struggling with these issues.

3. Enhance Community and Housing Options

- i. PAL will explore and implement design modifications at the existing property to further support seniors' desire to age in place and in their community. This process will consist of brainstorming, creating a small functional plan, and calculations of square footage and cost to build.
- ii. PAL will look for opportunities to partner with private sector, non profits and service agencies to expand aging in place opportunities, including a PAL satellite secured through planning approval to locate in new condominium developments in partnership with the private sector.
- iii. PAL will seek to be permitted to pilot a resident-first innovation that will introduce creativity in service provision and cut across program and funding constraints.

4. Undertake Strategic Advocacy

- i. Disseminate the PAL Action for Seniors Charrette report to all participants, partners and stakeholders to stimulate further discussion and promote action and ongoing engagement.
- ii. Urge response, influence decision making, and increase the profile and priority of these issues by sending the PAL Action for Seniors Charrette report to decision makers at the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ontario Seniors Secretariat, and the Federal government's Homelessness initiatives. We will also feed our work and ideas into policy and program discussions, including the City of Toronto Seniors Strategy and the Ontario Seniors Strategy.
- iii. Continue to keep the issue on the political agenda with elected officials from all three orders of government and build public awareness.



Tabby Johnson, performer and PAL Toronto Board member, sings at the charrette. Photo: Ashleigh Dalton

“Veteran performing artists and low-income seniors in general face many challenges as they age in place yet need access to increasing degrees of assistance. As a non-profit housing initiative we intend to spotlight innovative approaches that will allow people to live independently in their familiar communities.”

Ken Gass, PAL Toronto Board President

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Performing Arts Lodges Toronto (PAL) Future committee members, including Roseanne Figueira, Ken Gass, Dan Lyon, Vivienne Muhling, Patty Gail Peaker, Brad Priggen & Robert Underwood
- City of Toronto's Affordable Housing Office
- Artists: Edison Javier Duenas & Chayo, SKETCH
- Photos: Jose San Juan, City of Toronto
- Special thanks to Ashleigh Dalton for Charrette coordination and report preparation

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS (List represents individuals who signed in.)

Ron Alltree, <i>Old York Towers</i>	Isabelle Girard, <i>Centres d'Accueil Héritage</i>	Robert Peaker, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>
Andrea Austen, <i>City of Toronto Social Development, Finance & Administration</i>	Sue Graham-Nutter, <i>Rekai Centre</i>	Holly Penfound, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>
Joyce Barnes, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>	Gil Hardy, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>	Brad Priggen, <i>OPMG</i>
Carmen Benoit, <i>Dixon Hall</i>	Samya Hasan, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>	David Reycraft, <i>Dixon Hall</i>
Gerrard Boyd, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>	Mary Hoare, <i>Rekai Centre</i>	Kim Robinson, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>
Jill Burns, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>	Joyce Irvine, <i>Centres d'Accueil Héritage</i>	Charles Rosenberg, <i>Hilditch Architect</i>
Lorne Cappe, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>	Edison Javier Duenas, <i>SKETCH</i>	Sandi Ross, <i>ACTRA</i>
Webster Catherwood, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>	Tabby Johnson	John Sawyer, <i>Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing</i>
Dorothy Creaser, <i>City of Toronto Seniors Forum</i>	Aasif Khakoo, <i>Dixon Hall</i>	Norman Shao, <i>Dixon Hall</i>
David Crombie, <i>Former Mayor City of Toronto</i>	Allie Lehmann, <i>City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health</i>	Mohammad Siddiqui, <i>OPMG</i>
Ashleigh Dalton, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>	Kaarina Luoma, <i>Mid-Toronto Community Services</i>	Brian Smith, <i>City of Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration</i>
Richard D'Iorio, <i>Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing</i>	Dan Lyon, <i>PAL Future Committee</i>	Nicole Stewart, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>
Aggie Elliott	Teresa Martins, <i>Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)</i>	Anne Marie Stoneburgh, <i>George Brown College</i>
Bill Ferguson	Pam McConnell, <i>Councillor Ward 28 Toronto Centre-Rosedale</i>	Sheila Swerling-Puritt, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>
Rosanne Figueira, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto Supporting Cast</i>	Sheila Miller	Robert Underwood, <i>ACTRA Fraternal</i>
Sean Gadon, <i>City of Toronto Affordable Housing Office</i>	Vivienne Muhling, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>	Rudy Webb
Ken Gass, <i>PAL Future Committee</i>	Andrea Okazaki, <i>City of Toronto Long Term Care Homes & Services</i>	Bruce Weber
	Gérard Parent, <i>Centres d'Accueil Héritage</i>	Connie Yang, <i>Older Women's Network</i>
	Patty Gail Peaker, <i>Performing Arts Lodges Toronto</i>	Jania Zapotoski
		Ron Zammit, <i>ACTRA Fraternal</i>
		Chayo, <i>SKETCH</i>

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For more information about the Action for Seniors Charrette, please contact:



Ken Gass
Performing Arts Lodges Toronto
110 The Esplanade
Toronto, Ontario
M5E 1X9
www.paltoronto.org

Sean Gadon
Affordable Housing Office, City of Toronto
55 John Street, 7th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 3C6
www.toronto.ca/affordablehousing

For more information about the organizations who facilitated workshops at the Action for Seniors Charrette, please contact:

Dixon Hall
www.dixonhall.org

Hilditch Architect
www.hilditch-architect.com

Rekai Centre
www.rekaicentre.com

PAL Toronto
www.paltoronto.org