



Enabling Housing Choice North Project

Guidebook Module 9

Housing For Seniors in Rural Communities

June 2026



LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to acknowledge our connection with the ancestral peoples who have been on this land for millennia.

RDN's physical office is located on lands traditionally known as amiskwachiwaskahikan (A Miss Gwa Che Wuss Sky Gun) - aka Beaver Hills House, or Edmonton, the historical land of Treaty 6 Territory, which is also within the Metis Nation District 9.

We acknowledge and confirm our commitment and responsibility to foster better relationships with Indigenous peoples, and to improve our own understanding of the unique and diverse cultures of local First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we gather on.

RDN is committed to connecting our programming to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as benchmarks for our reconciliation journey.

It is our sincere hope that the information provided in this guide will help communities address their own unique and diverse housing needs, and provide greater housing security and inclusion for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both in the community and the surrounding area.





PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to thank the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF) for their funding and support in this research project.

We also want to acknowledge the 4 northern Alberta communities that participated in this research: (alphabetically) Big Lakes County, Town of Fairview, Lac Cardinal Country and the Town of Peace River. These communities embraced the EHC team's mandate and research process, enabling them to collect practical and compelling information about current housing issues, barriers and opportunities in their community.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the housing stakeholders who participated in the various community engagement exercises that were conducted for this project. We appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to sharing your insights, identifying challenges, highlighting opportunities, and suggesting ways to improve housing diversity in your community. Your contributions have played a vital role in shaping the understanding of the current housing landscape and guiding the research towards meaningful solutions. Your generosity and willingness to collaborate have been instrumental in our goal to facilitate a more inclusive and diverse housing environment, both in your community and across Alberta.

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MODULE 9: ENABLING SENIORS HOUSING & AGING IN PLACE IN RURAL ALBERTA COMMUNITIES

MODULE 9 OF 9

INTRODUCTION

Rural Alberta communities are experiencing significant demographic change. Many municipalities are seeing a growing proportion of older adults who wish to remain in their communities as they age. At the same time, limited housing diversity, constrained development capacity, aging infrastructure, workforce shortages, and geographic isolation can make it difficult for seniors to remain safely and independently in their homes and communities.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to provide rural municipalities with practical guidance for enabling seniors housing that supports aging in place. It is intended for municipal planners, elected officials, economic development staff, housing organizations, and community partners working to expand housing options for older adults.



1.1 WHY AGING IN PLACE MATTERS

Aging in place refers to the ability for older adults to remain safely, independently, and comfortably in their homes and communities regardless of age, income, or level of ability.

For many rural Albertans, remaining in their community is closely tied to:

- Social **connection** and **family** support;
 - Community **identity** and belonging;
 - Proximity to health **services** and **supports**;
 - **Access** to familiar places, organizations, and faith communities; and
 - Maintaining **independence** and **quality of life**.
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Many rural communities lack a sufficient **range of housing options** to support residents as their needs change over time. Seniors may be forced to leave their communities due to:

- Large single-detached homes that are difficult to maintain;
 - Limited rental housing;
 - Inaccessible housing design;
 - Lack of supportive or assisted living options;
 - Transportation barriers; or
 - Limited home care and support services.
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When seniors leave a community because appropriate housing is unavailable, municipalities can experience:

- Population decline;
- Reduced community participation and volunteer capacity;
- Loss of local spending and economic activity;
- Increased pressure on families and caregivers; and
- Reduced housing turnover opportunities for younger households.

1.2 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SENIOR HOUSING IN RURAL ALBERTA

Rural Alberta communities are experiencing a growing need for seniors housing as populations age and more residents seek opportunities to remain in their communities as they grow older. The **challenges** and **opportunities** outlined below reflect common themes identified across rural municipalities, listing key considerations for how municipalities can support aging in place and expanding housing options for seniors.

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
• Smaller development markets; • Higher construction and servicing costs; • Limited private-sector development interest; • Aging housing stock; • Labour shortages; • Limited transit or mobility options; • Smaller municipal staffing capacity; and • Greater distance to health services.	• Strong social networks and community cohesion; • Availability of underutilized land or buildings; • Opportunities for adaptive reuse; • Local organizations and volunteer capacity; • Flexibility for innovative seniors housing models; and • Potential partnerships with regional service providers.

RESOURCES ON SENIORS HOUSING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

- [Housing Supply Needs & Challenges - Government of Canada](#)
- [Resources To Help Older Adults & Seniors Age in Place - Government of Alberta](#)

1.3 HOUSING TYPES THAT SUPPORT AGING IN PLACE

Supporting seniors to age in place requires a **range of housing options** that can accommodate changing needs, preferences, incomes, and levels of support throughout the aging process. The table below provides an overview of common seniors **housing types** and provides examples and particular features of each type.

Housing Type	Description	Examples/Features
Independent Housing	Allows older adults to live autonomously with minimal or no support services.	- secondary suites/ADU's - duplexes/triplexes - cottage clusters, - bungalows - seniors-oriented rental, barrier-free apartments
Adaptable and Accessible Housing	Improves safety and usability for people with mobility or cognitive challenges.	- step-free entrances - wider doorways - main-floor bed/bath - lever handles - non-slip floors - improved lighting.
Supportive Housing	Combines housing with services that help residents maintain independence.	- meal programs - housekeeping - health supports - transportation assistance - social programming - personal care.
Assisted Living and Continuing Care	Higher levels of medical or personal care for residents with significant needs.	- assisted living - designated supportive living - long-term care - memory care facilities.

1.4 MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND POLICY TOOLS

Municipalities have several tools available to enable seniors housing and remove barriers to development. Measures such as supportive land use policies, flexible zoning regulations, housing strategies, and accessibility-focused design standards are important tools to enable seniors to age in place in their community.

For example, **municipal planning documents** such as municipal development plans, land use bylaws and area structure plans can help establish the long-term vision for growth, land use, and community development. Integrating **aging-in-place objectives** into these plans can help ensure housing considerations are embedded throughout municipal decision-making.

MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS (MDP'S)

Municipal Development Plans can establish a clear policy direction supporting housing diversity and aging in place.

Potential policy directions related to aging in place/seniors housing include:

- Supporting a range of housing types for older adults;
- Encouraging compact and walkable development patterns;
- Prioritizing housing near services and amenities;
- Supporting accessible and adaptable design;
- Encouraging infill and redevelopment; and
- Identifying priority areas for seniors housing.

FURTHER RESOURCES ON AGE-FRIENDLY POLICY DIRECTIONS

- [Age-Friendly Communities – Government of Canada](#)
- [Age-Friendly Communities in Canada: Community Implementation Guide](#)
- [Age-Friendly Communities – Government of Alberta.](#)

LAND USE BYLAWS (LUB'S)

Land use regulations can either enable or constrain seniors housing. Municipalities should review whether existing regulations create unnecessary barriers for:

- Secondary suites;
- Small-scale multi-unit housing;
- Manufactured homes;
- Cluster housing;
- Group living arrangements;
- Supportive housing; and
- Mixed-use development.

AREA STRUCTURE PLANS (ASP'S)

Where growth or redevelopment is anticipated, municipalities can identify opportunities for:

- Seniors-oriented housing;
- Mixed-use village centres;
- Walkable neighbourhoods;
- Integrated services and amenities; and
- Shared community spaces.

COMMUNITY CLOSE-UP: TOWN OF PEACE RIVER'S WESTVIEW ASP

In Peace River, AB, the **Westview Area Structure Plan (ASP)** is a targeted municipal framework designed to establish an integrated seniors' living campus on the West Hill of Peace River. The core **objective** of the plan is to align local land use with aging demographics by grouping **diverse housing** types next to vital healthcare infrastructure.

As an example, the **ASP** focuses on supporting aging in place through some of the following considerations:

Land Use Zoning: Setting aside large parcels specifically for multi-family, senior-focused, and supportive living facilities.

Transportation & Walkability: Designing localized road networks and trail access tailored to individuals with limited mobility.

Commercial Proximity: Ensuring essential shopping and services are legally zoned directly next to residential boundaries.

Instead of isolated buildings, the **ASP** structures the Westview site as a **cohesive campus** managed in partnership with the **North Peace Housing Foundation** (NPHF). This master layout accommodates different stages of aging in one place:



Campus Model: It designates a 12-acre multi-density hub immediately adjacent to the Peace River Community Health Centre to ensure rapid access to medical services.

Housing Types: The zoning allows a continuum of care on a single site, moving from independent senior apartments (such as the North Peace Housing Foundation's Garden Court Apartments) to 24-hour supportive and memory care housing (operated by Points West Living).

Age-Friendly Design: It mandates specific urban design guidelines, including wider roadways for transit access, dedicated green spaces, and barrier-free pedestrian walkways.

RESOURCES ON TOWN OF PEACE RIVER'S WESTVIEW AREA STRUCTURE PLAN

- [Westview Area Structure Plan - Town of Peace River](#)
- [Town of Peace River Planning Framework - Town of Peace River](#)

1.5 PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION FOR SENIORS HOUSING

Developing seniors housing in rural communities requires strong **partnerships**, as no single organization can address the full range of housing, service, and support needs on its own. **Collaboration** between municipalities, health and social service providers, non-profit organizations, private developers, and community groups can help identify local priorities and overcome seniors housing barriers.

Below outlines **key municipal roles** - including regulator, facilitator, landowner, advocate, and community partner - to help clarify how municipalities can support and advance seniors housing initiatives in their communities.

GOVERNANCE & MUNICIPAL ROLES

REGULATOR

Municipalities establish planning policies, land use regulations, and development processes that shape housing outcomes.

FACILITATOR

Municipalities can acquire partners, support collaboration, and identify opportunities for housing initiatives.

LANDOWNER

Municipally owned land may support housing projects through partnerships, land leases, or strategic disposition.

ADVOCATE

Municipalities can advocate for regional health services, infrastructure investments, and provincial or federal funding.

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Municipalities may directly partner with seniors housing providers, developers, or other community organizations to advance projects.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS FOR SENIORS HOUSING:

Successful seniors housing projects often rely on **partnerships** between municipalities, regional partners, health and social service providers, private sector developers, and non-profit and community housing organizations. Such partnerships can allow communities to better understand local needs, share resources and expertise, and identify opportunities to support seniors in aging close to home.

Regional Collaboration

Neighbouring municipalities may benefit from shared approaches to:

- Housing needs assessments;
- Service delivery;
- Transportation;
- Development attraction; and
- Regional housing strategies.

Health and Social Service Providers:

Partnerships with health providers can support:

- Home care services;
- Assisted living supports;
- Community wellness programs; and
- Coordinated care planning.

Private Sector Developers

Municipalities can engage developers early to better understand:

- Market conditions;
- Development barriers;
- Feasibility constraints; and
- Opportunities for innovation.

Smaller-scale and phased projects may be more feasible in rural markets than large developments.

Non-Profit and Community Housing Organizations:

Non-profit organizations may provide:

- Housing development expertise;
- Property management;
- Access to grants and funding;
- Community programming; and
- Supportive services.

FURTHER RESOURCES ON PARTNERS FOR SENIORS HOUSING IN ALBERTA:

Alberta Seniors & Community Housing Association (ASCHA)

A major provincial sector organization representing approximately 80% of Alberta seniors and community housing providers. ASCHA works with municipalities, governments, developers, and operators across the housing continuum.

Seniors Housing Society of Alberta (SHSA)

A non-profit organization representing Alberta-based seniors housing operators and advocating on policy, funding, and housing strategies.



