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Pledge for care home beds falters

'There is an absolute need for more beds right now'

DANIELLE DA SILVA

FEWER personal care home beds are available to aging Manitobans than when the Progressive Conservative government took office in 2016, putting a campaign pledge to add 1,200 new berths within eight years out of reach.

Access to information records released by the New Democratic Party show there were a total of 9,505 beds in use, or available for use, in Manitoba, as of March 31.

The number of licensed personal care homes in the province dropped by 193 between 2016 and early 2022, despite a promise by the Tories to make additions to meet demand from an aging population.

"It's not feasible," said Julie Turenne-Maynard, executive director of the Manitoba Association of Residential and Community Care Homes for the Elderly, said of the government's promise. "There is an absolute need for more beds right now."

When the Tories formed government in 2016, there were 9,698 licensed personal care home beds in Manitoba. That number continued to increase by an average of 13 per year until 2020.

In 2021, the number of available beds levelled out at 9,765. Following the closure of Parkview Place in downtown Winnipeg in April, the province lost 260 beds in the first three months of 2022.

Turenne-Maynard said three non-profit personal care home operators represented by MARCHE have submitted proposals to the government to add as many as 400 new beds, but cash constraints have slowed progress.

According to Turenne-Maynard, the province has not wavered from its position new personal care home construction be capped at a cost of \$133,000 per bed.

"It's impossible to build at that price, so that's where it gets stalled," she said



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MARCHE's Julie Turenne-Maynard says the decline in available beds has a cascading impact.

Monday. "With inflation in general, with COVID, it's costing way more to build now than it did back in 2016—and even in 2016, it was pretty unrealistic to build at that price."

She said the decline in available beds has a cascading impact in the community and the health system as people wait in hospital for a spot at a personal care home and as families take on the responsibility of caring for their loved one.

"There's a lot of pressure... to accept people who have been panelled in community into the personal care homes, to reduce the number of individuals that are in acute care that have been panelled and to flow them into personal care homes," Turenne-Maynard said.

A total of 506 licensed personal care home beds have been built in Manitoba since 2016, according to the province. Of those, 303 replaced out-of-date facilities or were added to address double occupancy.

As of June 28, there were 31 people in hospital in Winnipeg and another 280 in community waiting for a personal care home bed. Data for the rest of the province was not immediately available.

Over the past six years, increased attention has been given to personal care home alternatives, including aging-in-place, community and supportive care models, which tend to be more attractive than nursing homes, Long Term & Continuing Care Association of Manitoba executive director Jan Legeros said.

"The seniors strategy that the minister for seniors and long-term care (Scott Johnston) has launched is geared towards finding ways to help people stay at home longer with the care that they need brought to them in the home," Legeros said.

"If all of those things come to fruition, we might be in a much better place than if we go ahead and fulfill a very old campaign promise."

Personal care homes will always be required, Legeros said, but delaying admission is preferred and funding over and above what's needed for new beds could instead be directed toward improving the quality of life for residents at existing homes.

"We should be looking at how do we make the most of the resources that we currently have? How can we renovate and improve on what we have today?"

Beds added

- Tabor Home, 100-bed facility in Morden, opened in 2017;
- Holy Family Home marked opening of new 157-bed facility in Winnipeg in 2019;
- In August 2021, 79 new beds opened at Boyne Lodge in Carman as part of 105-bed expansion;
- Rest Haven Personal Care Home in Steinbach opened 143-bed expansion in May, though not all beds would be available for use this year, according to media reports.

— source: government of Manitoba

Johnston was not made available for an interview Monday.

In a prepared statement, a government spokesperson said strengthening health care is a top priority for the province, including the health and well-being of people living in personal care homes.

"Our government will continue to make improvements and staffing investments in the short and long term to ensure older Manitobans are supported and receive safe and person-centred services," the statement reads.

Meanwhile, Opposition health critic Uzoma Asagwara said the Tories have broken their campaign promise and Manitobans, including seniors shipped to hospitals outside their home health region to wait for a nursing home bed, are feeling the impact.

"(The PCs) have utterly failed to invest in ways that would ensure, that in a comprehensive manner, aging Manitobans can trust that the care that they need to live their life in whatever home setting that they choose to live in is there for them," Asagwara said.

danielle.dasilva@freepress.mb.ca