

Shoneugh Edwards



Housing for Seniors: Today's Options

“Move” can be like a four-letter word to us. Even if we are moving on to something “bigger and better,” we often dread the thought of leaving the familiarity and comfort of the place we call home.

As we age, most of us will be able to remain in our home of choice. Many of us will be faced with the task of finding new accommodations through a change in income, illness, or mental or physical capacity—to suit our changing needs.

For the family and professional advisors, concern about the ongoing care and safety of the senior is paramount.

Housing for seniors comes in many shapes, sizes, and price ranges. Information abounds on facilities and options. Educating yourself about the types of housing available is the first step to ensuring a smooth move that will lead to a safe and healthy tenancy.

The list below provides an overview of some of the most common types of housing for seniors.

Not-for-Profit Rental Housing for Seniors who Require a Subsidy

In this type of housing, seniors continue to live independently. They may arrange privately to have services such as Meals on Wheels and home support delivered directly. Seniors may also receive services provided by the local health authority. Seniors who choose to live in market rental housing may qualify for a SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) subsidy. For more information on SAFER, please visit www.bchousing.org.

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Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is a combination of onsite hospitality services. Nursing and other health-related services may be delivered by the local health authority or privately, as they would be to other individuals living independently in the community.

Assisted Living

Assisted living is housing with a range of personal services including meals, housekeeping services, laundry services, social and recreational

opportunities, and 24-hour emergency response systems. Assisted living may be delivered privately or publicly.

Residential Care

Residential care provides care and supervision 24/7 for individuals who can no longer be supported in their own homes. For publicly funded beds, admission is on a priority placement basis.

For more information about eligibility for publicly funded assisted living or residential care, contact your local health authority or Seniors Services Society at 604 520-6621.

Once you have determined the type of housing and services required, thorough research of available housing options is recommended. Fortunately, this process has been made relatively simple for anyone wishing to reside within British Columbia.

The Seniors Services Society produces and maintains a comprehensive database of senior-appropriate housing. Your local health authority can also assist with determining service needs and access, available online at www.seniorshousing.bc.ca or in hard copy at most public libraries. Facilities such as supportive housing, assisted living, and residential care will be keen to give you a tour and explain the benefits of making their facility “home.”

Most of us (over 96 percent, according to *Stats Can*) will continue to live independently as we age. Of that percentage, most people will continue to live in the place they currently call home. Some seniors will choose to move—to downsize, to be closer to their children, to reduce home maintenance, or after the death of a spouse or a change in finances.

When Moving to an Apartment . . .

Prospective tenants find that these proactive steps and communications lead to a more stable tenancy.

- The tenancy can get off to a really good start if the senior and/or his or her support person take the time to research the apartment.
- Complete an agreement for checking in.
- Complete a providers' intake form—which includes your contact information, emergency contacts, and your physician's contact numbers.



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- As part of the move-in process, the tenant and, if possible, a friend or family member, should attend an orientation to the building. If the landlord does not offer an orientation, you should request it. That is being proactive.

The orientation should include a review of all the rules, regulations, and expectations of living in the building. This is a critical step, should there be any problems in the future that may require the home to act as an advocate for the senior. With all rules and expectations clearly articulated, both parties are well educated on the process, if a concern should arise.

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Even with careful planning, problems do arise, such as loss of memory precipitated by misuse of drugs or alcohol, undiagnosed dementia, delirium, or falls. All capable adults have the right to live at risk as long as they are not endangering others.

When health and safety are jeopardized, however, whose responsibility is it? Indeed, who is responsible for the senior who is hoarding, unable to drive his or her scooter without causing damage, or constantly disrupting other residents?

Many providers feel they have no responsibility to the senior and quickly want to pass off the problem or start the eviction process. Although no statutes exist demanding that providers take responsibility for these tenants, there seems an inherent moral and social obligation for them to do so.

Planning at the outset of the tenancy can help ensure the process is viable, likely profitable, and generally rewarding for everyone. If all parties work together and communicate

effectively, the number of seniors displaced due to possible unsafe and unhealthy living situations can be alleviated.

Such a relationship also helps ensure that if and when the time comes for the senior to move to a higher level of care or support, the move can be as smooth as possible.

Moving can be a difficult transition for even the most capable of us. For seniors forced by circumstance to make a change, the adjustment can be troubling and dramatic. Careful research, planning, and communications will ensure that safe, healthy, and affordable housing is not only attainable but also maintainable.

The Seniors Services Society has partnered with the Canadian Centre for Elder Law Studies in a project funded by the Law Foundation of BC, entitled "Aging with Challenges." As a result of this project, housing providers, tenants, and their supporters will have new tools and resources to create new "Housing Stability."

This tool will be available shortly at: www.ccels.ca and www.seniorshousing.bc.ca.

Useful Resources

Seniors Services Society:
www.seniorshousing.bc.ca

Assisted Living Registrar:
www.health.gov.bc.ca/assisted

Tenant Rights Action Coalition:
www.tenants.bc.ca

BC Housing:
www.bchousing.org

BCRCA:
www.bcra.ca ▲

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