

# Active Ageing:

## WHAT IT MEANS AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

IT'S A TERM THAT MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. HERE'S WHAT THREE SENIOR CARE PROFESSIONALS HAVE TO SAY.

BY NERISSA MCNAUGHTON

**A**lberta's senior population is booming. As of March 2020, seniors were the province's fastest growing demographic with 640,000 over the age of 65.

Within the next two decades, that number is expected to double. Today's seniors are healthier than ever and living longer. Study after study points to the benefits of being active. What does this mean for our ageing population?

Three experts in senior care weigh in.

Dawn Harsch, RN, BScN, MBA is the founder, owner and operator of ExquisiCare where home/family style living is offered in three local facilities. ExquisiCare provides long-term care under a very special model; each home is located in a residential community and the seniors integrate, as much as possible, in the community. Each has their own bathroom and bedroom and can participate in meals served at a family-style table. For Harsch, this model allows the senior to best maintain their sense of normalcy and independence while getting the assistance they may need with the Acts of Daily Living (ADLs: ambulating, feeding, dressing, hygiene, continence, toileting).

"The benefit to our model is connecting seniors to existing communities," explains Harsch. "When we were building our Cameron Heights location, I got a call from the president of the community league. I thought they were calling to complain but it was the exact opposite! They called to say



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“HEALTH LEADERS AND INNOVATORS ARE SAYING THAT THEY LOVE THE MODEL AND SEE INTEGRATING SENIORS IN THE COMMUNITY AS A WAY FOR THOSE SENIORS TO REMAIN ACTIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY, SAYS HARSCH. “TO ME, ACTIVE ADULT LIVING IS CONTINUING TO VALUE SENIORS, THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS, THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND THEIR HISTORY.”

how happy they were to be welcoming us to Cameron Heights. They wanted to offer us a garden plot. They saw benefits to having seniors in their community for the younger people and children to be able to see and talk to the seniors and learn from them.”

This integrative model has attracted interest across Alberta and in Ontario.

“Health leaders and innovators are saying that they love the model and see integrating seniors in the community as a way for those seniors to remain active members of society, says Harsch. “To me, active adult living is continuing to value seniors, their contributions, their knowledge and their history.”

While some seniors move to facilities for long-term assistance, others age in place at home. For Tamra Thiessen, co-founder and owner/operator of Serving Hands Senior Care, active living is closely tied to physical mobility.

Thiessen opened the business after seeing her father-in-law struggle with Parkinson’s and dementia.

“We saw the impact on the family, and especially on my mother-in-law. This, along with the experience we went through when my dad had a quadruple bypass as a senior, and my mom’s struggle with depression

for many years, inspired us to want to walk beside families so they could have family time instead of mainly being a caregiver. We created Serving Hands to help share the load,” says Thiessen of the company she co-founded with her husband Allen in 2016.

Serving Hands’ in-home care includes personal care (shower assists, daily medicine, etc.), companionship (playing games, watching TV together, etc.), light housekeeping, laundry,



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linen changes, meal prep, and assistance with shopping. In addition to these, the team helps its clients remain active by taking them for outdoor walks and (pre-COVID) taking them to the Tri Leisure Centre during the winter for indoor walks on the track.

“A big part of why we work to keep them active is to have seniors stay safe at home with their partners and pets for as long as possible. They can lose a lot of their independence when they move into a facility.” Thiessen continues, “When we think of active seniors, in our context, we try to keep them physically active as long and as safely possible. This is so they can maintain their mobility because when they lose mobility, they lose even more independence and freedom.”

“One of the challenges with COVID is that lots of places are closed,” says Thiessen, but that doesn’t stop them from helping their clients stay active. “Some of the ways we work within the COVID restrictions is by using different tools, like the Cubii®, and assisting seniors in doing simple movements like sit-to-stand and range-of-motion exercises in their own homes. The Cubii® is like a little pedal bike that you can put on the floor to work your legs, or on a table to work the arms. This helps to keep the blood flowing and muscles moving.”

Thiessen is pleased to see that most seniors take their fitness and wellbeing seriously and do their best to stay healthy, mobile and strong. However, age does mean having to adapt when needed.

“There are things that happen, and you have to live with the outcome,” she cautions. “Sometimes a fall cannot be avoided; if you need tools like a walker to get around safely, use the walker. Another good and valuable thing is to ask for help. Let your family love you. We rob people of blessings when we need help but do not ask. Just as you love your children, let your children love you.”

Christenson Communities provides independent and supportive living across Alberta. For Christenson Communities, the opportunity to be social plays a big part in active senior living.

Greg Christenson, president and co-owner, Christenson Group of Companies, notes, “We recognize the importance

of community and having the option and resources for a social outlet, which is why our communities include a combination of the following amenities: large bright common spaces, party/social rooms, theatres, sewing/craft rooms, fitness rooms, a woodworking shop, salons, communal dining rooms.”

Christenson Communities encourages active aging, living well and lifelong learning through scheduled and non-scheduled activities such as culinary arts, music therapy, dance, yoga, cardio, balance training, strength training, games night, movie nights, wellness seminars, quilting/knitting clubs, happy hours, morning coffee talks, educational seminars, and a wide variety of other social events.

“Our team works diligently at developing ongoing social outlets, activities and programs to provide our residents with engagement in our communities,” says Christenson. “Several programs have continued but have moved to digital versions. Other recreational activities have been adjusted to ensure we are practising physical distancing. Some of the more recent programs have been made possible through a private channel where residents can log in and view live streamed events, shows and activities.”

Streaming and distanced entertainment includes in-suite exercise classes, courtyard concerts/balcony bashes, social distanced dance parties and birthday celebrations, hallway bingo and tea at a distance.

There have also been surprise deliveries to the door of our residents’ suites, virtual church services, scheduled one-on-one assistance with video calls with family, virtual singalongs, brain teasers and word game sessions, digital crib tournaments, virtual spiritual stories, special occasion celebrations and more.

Aging is a part of life and when we are active throughout our lives, our physical and mental health are better as we head into our latter years. To be an active senior, one must remain connected to your community, prioritize fitness and mobility, and ensure social interactions are maintained – even if at a distance. With providers like ExquisiCare, Serving Hands Senior Care, and Christenson Communities, there are options and assistance for happy, healthy senior years. **B**



## Christenson Communities Discusses Private Care and the COVID-19 Response Model in Alberta

While no one disputes the current need for lockdowns, particularly those targeted on protecting seniors and those with comorbidities, Christenson Communities feels lockdowns cannot be the only strategy and points out that prevention, mental health, and reducing depression are also of high importance and need attention during these times. Long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) beds definitely need heightened protocols, but independent living seniors, adult condominiums, and rental apartments must also balance quality of life alongside medical models of protection.

Suggestions around using empty hotels and using publicly funded private surgeries for isolation are common and sensible options.

“I just want to bring to everyone’s attention that a better alternative is available: using vacant purpose-built seniors’ apartments, ultimately reducing pressure on hospitals. We

need to use all available resources, both staff and buildings, with a balanced COVID-19 and quality-of-life strategy and outcomes as our common priority. We all need to work together,” says Greg Christenson, president, co-owner, Christenson Group of Companies

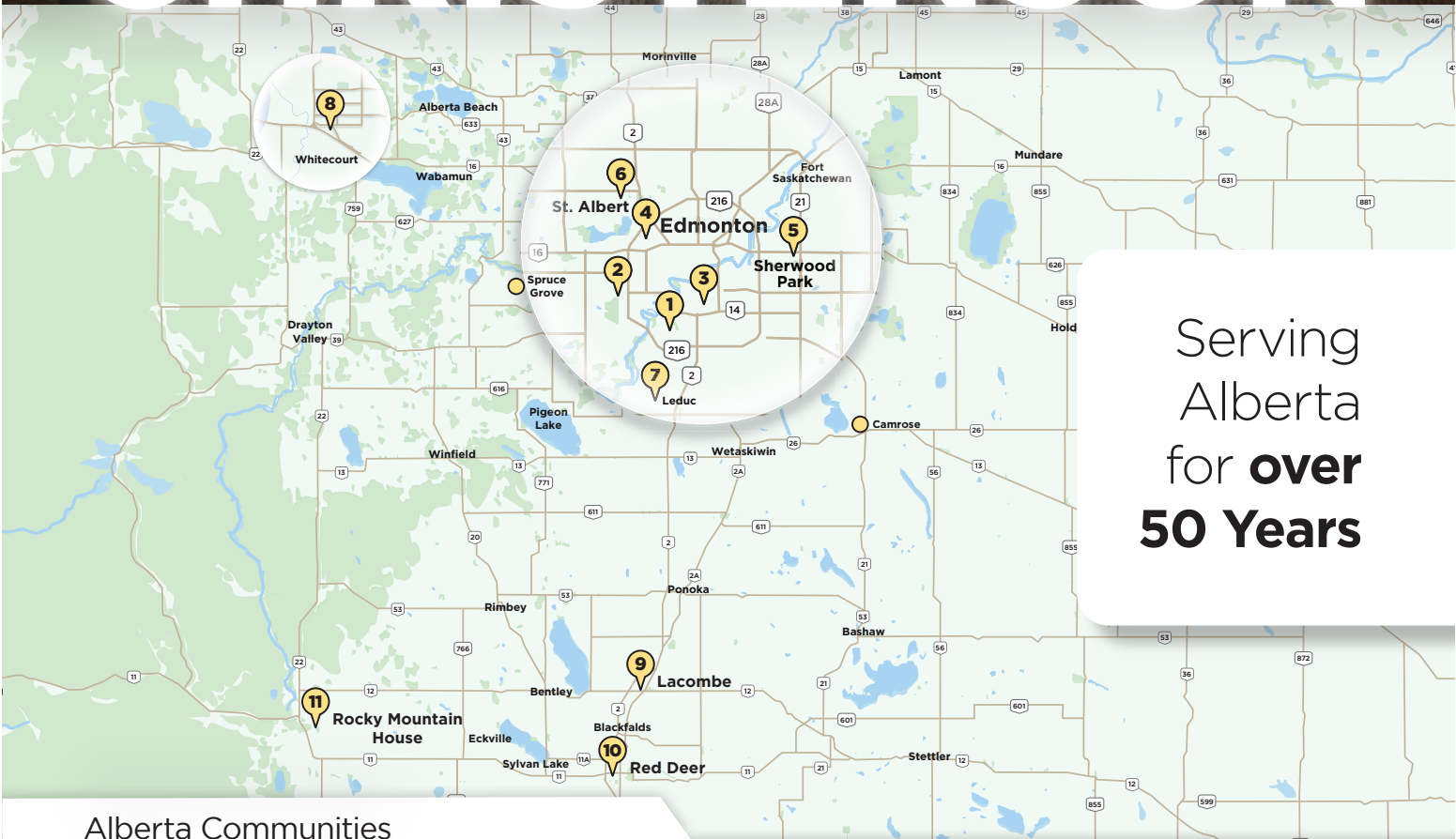
“Christenson Communities currently has over 150 new and nearly-new residential units designed for aging in place, in communities with attractive areas for isolation (and socialization when appropriate), on-site meals or in-suite kitchens, balconies or patios and 24-hour on-site care available,” continues Greg. “These buildings have fire sprinklers and two-hour concrete block fire walls to provide horizontal egress and staged evacuation from upper floors for persons with limited mobility. Many are B2 long-term care treatment occupancy, or B3-assisted living care occupancy in the Alberta Building and Fire Codes. These residential homes and communities have more space per resident, better ventilation and better ability to isolate when

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compared to many institutional long-term care facilities or acute care hospitals.”

Greg further notes, “Our communities experienced great results from March to October during the pandemic where no positive tests and no deaths were present among our 1,200 residents and 400+ professional staff. After October, cases and or symptoms have developed organically in some of our communities, although we do have communities across the province that have not seen a case to date.”

HE CONCLUDES, “ALBERTA NEEDS TO LEVERAGE ALL RESOURCES TO MEET THESE TYPES OF URGENT CHALLENGES, BOTH NOW, IN THE SHORT TERM, OVER THE LONGER TERM AND IN THE FUTURE, AS DEMAND FOR MORE CHOICE AND ALTERNATIVES IN SENIORS CARE IS GROWING.”

Christenson Communities has controlled and managed each case that has developed with the utmost attention to detail.

“We continue to navigate our way through these unprecedented times and move forward with confidence in our knowledgeable and skilled team,” confirms Greg. “We are following all guidelines under the provincial health authority and have implemented our own additional precautions in all of our communities. As a local company, deeply rooted and invested in the province, we continue to ensure our residents receive comfort, attentive care, and enhanced safety while maintaining a high quality of life. While eliminating and minimizing COVID-19 cases is something we strive for, our residents and their families take peace of mind in knowing that if and when cases are identified, our team is there to support and protect the residents and staff.”

He concludes, “Alberta needs to leverage all resources to meet these types of urgent challenges, both now, in the short term, over the longer term and in the future, as demand for more choice and alternatives in seniors care is growing. Residential models are proving to be both more appealing to seniors and their families, safer than institutional models and offer greater choice overall.”

The Christenson Communities pandemic response can be viewed at: <https://www.cdllhomes.com/covid19/response> **B**

PHOTO SOURCE: CDL