

INDEPENDENT LIVING

DEFINITIONS

The definition of "Independent Living" includes:

- a. Living by yourself or with a partner in your own house or apartment.
- b. Living alone or with a partner in a rented home or apartment.
- c. Living alone or with a partner in a seniors' residence which, might or might not, provide cleaning and meal services.

The vast majority of us seniors want to live independently for as long as possible in our long-established homes. This means that we want to make in housing and care choices based on needs and preferences at all stages of our senior years, regardless of our ability to pay. These choices reflect a sense of dignity and self worth and keep us happier and healthier. We are able to continue to participate as members of the community and as full citizens. Equally important is the fact that we can exercise patriarchal and matriarchal responsibilities for as long as possible.

Happiness for us seniors involves precious memories of the family home, a place where sons, daughters and grandchildren are welcome. Here we feel safe and comfortable knowing our neighbours and our neighbourhood. Because the family home, or primary residence, is so important, COSCO supports public policies and programs which make it possible for us seniors to stay there as long as we wish to. These include a universal homecare and home-support program, an accessible public transportation system, an affordable safe home maintenance, design and construction program, preventive and curative health services free of ageism, and programs which also allow us to cope with some chronic conditions.

Reports from other jurisdictions indicate that public universal programs of homecare and home-support, which extend the period of time seniors can live independently and maintain their quality of life, are not only very cost effective in reducing intake into residential care but also decrease overall healthcare costs, especially capital costs.

Let me enlarge on the programs necessary to afford seniors the choice of living independently as long as possible.

1. Transportation. In urban areas the availability of public transport is important and a program like an expanded Handidart for seniors and the disabled can meet this need. However in rural areas there is no public transit, the issue for seniors being able to continue to drive a motor car is important. We in COSCO are working with the BCAA offering Mature Safe Driving programs, which enable seniors to drive safely and maintain their driving privileges. Over protection by family members leads to often premature suspension of driving privileges.
2. The provision of Home Care and Home Support are also important issues in seniors' quest to continue to live independently. Presently there is a separation of these two programs. Home Care is bundled to the medical envelope and Home Support is in the non-medical envelope, both programs are not universal programs. What is needed is a seven

days a week, twenty hour hours a day universal Homecare / Home-support program. Such combined universal program is in effect in Denmark. It has not only improved the quality of life of seniors' but extended their time of living independently. It has also reduced the intake into residential care to the point where the Danes had not to build a new residential care-facility in the last ten years. It should be noted that this universal program has actually reduced healthcare costs in Denmark.

3. Income plays also a role in seniors being able to live independently. This problem usually arises with GIS recipients when one of the spouses passes on. The income is cut in half but the cost of rent and utilities remains the same. The rent support programs are not sufficient to overcome the shortfall in income. The result in most instances is the moving into substandard housing away from familiar surroundings, change to a high carbon diet, and earlier moves into residential care facilities. The answer is very clear, income and rent supplements for low income seniors must be increased.
4. Social exclusion limits seniors' ability to live independently. Programs of visitations, adult daycare, day-excursions are a way to overcome Social exclusion.
5. There many more components which can contribute to a senior living independently. What is important to understand from a policy perspective is that the public purse has a choice, it can either spent on bricks and mortars or it can spend on services. As far as senior's quality of life is concerned we prefer the expenditure on services, not only is spending on services more cost effective but it frees up some resource to improve the quality of residential care.