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Op-ed submitted by the Ontario Association of Councils on Aging

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Ontario's More Homes Built Faster Act does not address the special housing needs of older adults.

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The debate on housing that unfolded this summer has been fierce — with good reason: Canada's housing crisis has reached catastrophic proportions, and it is only getting worse. Ontario is taking action through its Bill 23, which is about to receive Royal Assent, but it fails to address the special housing needs of many older adults.

Few would deny that housing options for older adults need to be expanded. As individuals age, preferences based on finances, personal needs, proximity to services can change and greater options need to be available. Bill 23 addresses only building attainable housing, not affordable and not the supportive housing many older adults need.

There are several housing options summarized below that would help better meet the needs of many older adults and make a dent in the broader housing crisis. Better housing options for older adults are a valuable investment that supports aging in place, and possibly prevent or postpone the need for more expensive options, such as congregate living, long-term care homes or other health care services.

The Ontario Association of Councils on Aging (OACA), reflecting the perspective of thousands of older adults across the province, supports the government objective of developing an overarching housing strategy that increases attainable housing options across the province; however, we suggest that Bill 23 does not address the special needs of older adults. It does not ensure housing with universal design for current and future accessibility or design communities that are walkable, accessible, and compliant with progressive community planning principles.

Housing is a social determinant of health and as such, any housing bill needs to provide for affordable supportive alternatives. There is a moral imperative of responding justly to the needs of older people as a means of mitigating the unequal aging of low-income elders. CMHC

produced a paper in April 2022 that indicated there would be an increase in evictions to older adults, that is indeed the case and older adults, often in the 70-80 age group, are homeless across Ontario. It is more expensive, and more traumatic, to make people homeless than try to rehouse them.

91% of older adults wish to age in place and in their communities. The Ontario Association of Councils on Aging strongly believes that more options need to be developed and delivered for those with low income. There is a need to expand options for older adults such as the following:

- More supportive housing, which are housing programs coordinated through Home and Community Care Support Services. Supportive housing provides on-site personal support services for seniors living as tenants in designated residential buildings that are designed to help people live independently in their own apartments.
- Co- housing and home share are other innovative solutions that need to be promoted, since participants (sometimes intergenerational) can share costs and increase social connections.
- As well there is a need to increase non-market rental housing opportunities for new providers such as non-profits/public and for profit and to return rent controls on all units. Other options include expanding rent supplements and rent banks to deal with an increasing eviction rate among older adults, expanding Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, making all supplements portable, and expanding eligibility to include vulnerable older adults with complex issues, and those in need of palliative care.

October 1 is the International Day to celebrate older adults. Let us create transformative housing options for them that will enable aging in place.

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