

# NATURALLY OCCURRING RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES (NORCs) WORKING TOGETHER FOR AGING IN PLACE

## What's a NORC?

Today, older Canadians represent the fastest growing segment of the population, and most live in major urban centres. We want to age in place, and remain living independently in our homes for as long as possible. The vast majority of older adults dread the prospect of living in institutional settings, such as long-term care homes, and there is not enough long-term care capacity anyway. For those not yet needing long-term care, the high cost of private retirement residences is out of reach for many.

These trends have given rise to naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) that house a considerable density of older adults. Most commonly these are high-rises or apartment complexes – whether rental, condominium, or co-op. However, they could also easily be long-established single-family neighbourhoods.

## Where many of us live or will live

In close to 2,000 Ontario rental apartments, condos and co-ops, at least 30 % of the residents are older adults. Over 200,000 older Ontarians live in these NORCs, more than the population of Ontario's long-term care and retirement homes combined. In downtown Toronto, there are almost 500 high-rise apartment and condo buildings where at least 40 % of the residents are seniors. In Ottawa, one in five seniors live in high-rises. In addition, many lower-density neighbourhoods contain a high proportion of older adult households.

## Enter the University Health Network (UHN)

Although created as a combination of many hospitals and health institutions, the UHN created an off-shoot, called Open Lab, for the purpose of exploring non-institutional ways to improve health care and prevent illness and injury.

In 2020, OpenLab published *Vertical Aging: The Future of Aging in Place in Urban Canada*. The Report explored several ways in which, by recognizing the NORC concept, health services could be better organized and delivered, and seniors' activities and quality of life could be enhanced as they age. A small UHN staff team – the NORC Innovation Centre - was created (with no government funding) to support and continue to explore NORC-based aging-in-place initiatives. (The OASIS program in Kingston and the PACE program in Burlington do similar work)

## NORC-Based Home care services

In April 2024, the NORC Innovation Centre published **A Home Care Model for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in Ontario**. It found that over a third of NORC buildings in Ontario have four or more home care agencies coming in to serve different clients in the same building on any given day!!

This overlap results in less service, and less reliable service for the money, whether publicly supported or privately paid. So, the report recommends a transition to:

- One lead home care agency per NORC
- With PSWs designated to support multiple clients within the same NORC
- Who are able to work a full-time or part-time shift with minimal travel, and
- Provide client visits of varying duration and frequency based on need
- With day-to-day care scheduling and coordination by the NORC's lead home care agency

Transitioning to such a model in NORC buildings or neighbourhoods would not require significant new funding; it would simply represent a more efficient way to organize and deliver services where natural population densities already exist. A pilot project along these lines is underway in Waterloo Region.



Pro cooking tip: If you mix some olive oil in with your kale and stir, it makes it easier to scrape into your compost bucket.

Multi-tasking = doing something else until you remember what it was you were doing in the first place

