

MPP touts new plan to help seniors 'age in confidence'?



By Brock Weir

Knocking on doors, visiting seniors' centres and adult communities, one thing was immediately clear to Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard: 'independence' tops the list of priorities for older people on the age spectrum.

As such, Mr. Ballard was at the Newmarket Seniors' Meeting Place on Friday to announce a range of new measures from the Provincial Government that will allow seniors to do just that: 'aging in place in confidence.'

The Aging in Confidence Action Plan is intended to 'empower people to make the choices that are right for them when it comes to their care, their independence and how they access government services' whether that is finding ways to keep up an active lifestyle or getting the support needed to live at home longer.

The plan offers a new one-stop website where seniors can find information about drug coverage, tax credits, powers of attorney and recreation programs, an annual high-dose flu shot targeted to protect seniors free of charge via the Ontario Universal Influenza Immunization Program, a \$15 million investment over two years in what are described as 'naturally occurring' retirement communities such as housing developments or apartment buildings with a high senior population, and 5,000 new long term care beds over the next four years.

'Today there are more than two million seniors in Ontario and our government values and respects the tremendous contributions our seniors have made to the Province and continue to make to the Province,' said Mr. Ballard. 'These are people who have given Ontario so much and really deserve to live life to its fullest and continue to contribute to Newmarket, Aurora and the economy and embracing new opportunities' but they have to be supported and we need to be able to share the benefit of their wisdom and their experiences with all of us.

'Fundamentally, the action plan reflects how Ontario seniors have told us they want to live their lives. That is why we spend a lot of time knocking on doors, sitting down with seniors across Ontario to try and understand from a seniors' perspective what is important to them. Independence tops the list.

'People want to live independently for as long as possible and this holds true for seniors in Newmarket and Aurora as well. They want to age at home or in a community setting. They want to have choices to get around on their own, be healthy and safe. They want the best quality of life possible' and rightly so. They see retirement not as an end but rather the start of a new adventure.' The program, he said, is a 'once in a generation investment' in long term care that will keep pace with the 'changing needs of an aging population.

'I have heard time and again that Newmarket and Aurora both need new long-term care beds and I will continue to strenuously request and demand of the Ministry of Health that as many of these beds make it to Newmarket and Aurora. I encourage the Central LHIN and York Region and other long-term care providers to begin plans to secure more licenses for our communities,' he said. It is also important to recognize that the needs of long-term care residents are becoming more complex, he said. As such, Ontario will increase the Provincial average of per day per resident long term care to four hours of direct care each day. Once fully phased in, he said it will ensure older Ontarians will have the highest quality of care.

?Another concern we had with residents and people taking care of family in long term care was the amount of care they received each day just wasn't enough and so we're upping that, when this is rolled out, to four hours a day,? said Mr. Ballard. ?It will still provide the flexibility for care plans to be tailored to each person but certainly will allow for more care for those who need it. It is going to mean an additional 15 million hours of nursing, personal support and therapeutic care for long term care residents across Ontario.

?Social connection is as important as independence. Research tells us that being connected to people and activities is vital to seniors' health and wellbeing and that is also why our plan highlights fighting social isolation and helping seniors remain active and involved. Under our plan, Aging with Confidence, Ontario's network of seniors' active living centres, of which this is one, will grow to more than 300 hubs across the Province. There will be more local projects to help seniors get out and about in the community, whether volunteering, learning or meeting new people. New programs will support physical health, mentoring, and engaging through the arts.

?The action plan also recognizes that while seniors overwhelmingly want to age safely and independently at home, some will require assistance to do so. Home care is a key consideration for many. That is why our plan supports a wide range of actions from home care hours to greater consistency of homecare to supporting care givers. It helps people with dementia and their families. It also supports more training for health care providers in caring for seniors.?