

“A Place to Call Home”



Nursing Home Design Standards Overview

BACKGROUND

With the province's rapidly aging population, nursing home beds are in greater demand. New Brunswickers are living longer. Those entering nursing homes today have greater needs than in the past. Increasingly, long-term care facilities must accommodate residents with severe cognitive and physical frailties who require a special focus on the physical environment for quality of life. At the same time, there is a societal shift away from the institutional setting to building new facilities that are more reflective of a home environment. Modern nursing homes of today are meant to be like a home away from home.

In conjunction with New Brunswick's long-term care strategy, *Be Independent Longer*, a new \$400 million capital renewal and replacement plan for nursing homes has been launched. This plan addresses the province's demographic trends, the need for more long-term care resources of increased quality, and modern design, space and safety standards for nursing homes. It calls for a new design and construction management model which will realize substantial savings in design and building costs, while also setting a standard for all new nursing home projects.

The Department of Social Development and the Department of Supply and Services are working together in a new partnership to implement this model for the construction of all new non-profit nursing homes in New Brunswick. As a result of this plan, 297 new nursing home beds will be created over the next five years. Set designs standards are essential to achieve the desired environments and meet the goals of the plan.

DESIGN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

To achieve the "home away from home" setting, design standards must first incorporate a "house" concept, while exercising a family-focused philosophy of care. The nursing home resident's right to choose and to have the autonomy to make decisions, maintain their dignity and well being is key to success. The overall environment of the home is to be therapeutic and supportive of the residents' optimal health. More privacy is encouraged. The day-to-day routine should seek to maximize the skills of residents and prevent the loss of their acquired abilities.

The design standards were completed following consultations with nursing home operators and a review of design standards from other jurisdictions. Input has also been received from the construction industry and departmental staff who have experience in construction projects. The standards will be reviewed as changes arrive in long-term care and in the construction field. As new nursing homes are built, a post-occupancy review process will evaluate how well a new facility supports quality resident care and staff work life and if adjustments or further improvements need to be made.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

One of the primary characteristics of a home-like setting is to a reduction in the number of residents living together. This is achieved by creating separate smaller home entities under the same roof of the nursing home, grouping no more than 20 to 25 residents together. These small homes are called *Resident Houses*. For optimal results, resident care is provided by assigning the same staff to the same resident housing units on a permanent basis. This allows for relationship building between and among residents, families and staff. The more familiar staff is with residents, the better they can understand each person and their individual needs. Smaller resident houses create shorter walking distances for residents, promoting mobility and autonomy. Shorter walking distance for staff allows for prompt and efficient care. In addition, the *Resident House* concept assists with resident orientation through the creation of familiar surroundings.

New nursing homes are to be energy efficient, durable, comfortable, bright, wheelchair accessible, and safe for both residents and staff. The design concept seeks to avoid long narrow corridors and incorporates rest areas whenever possible. The required travel distance for residents should always be at a minimum. Corridors should properly accommodate walkers, wheelchairs and electric wheelchairs. Resident bedrooms should be more spacious with larger washrooms to facilitate transfer needs. There should be a higher number of single bedrooms to allow for more privacy, improved sleep, reduced agitation and behaviour issues and improved infection control. Each *Resident House* will contain its own dining room, living rooms and activity areas. The layout of the houses will be obvious and unambiguous to residents. Spaces are to be simply designed so as not to confuse residents. A well-designed facility will be easy for residents to find their way about.

Most residents living in nursing homes are seniors and about 70 per cent suffer from Alzheimer's or dementia. A number of other disabled adults under the age of 65 also reside in these facilities. New facilities should meet the needs of different aged residents and incorporate a design for dementia clients. The creation of resident groups/houses with similar profiles can be achieved by allocating of one resident house with a specific purpose for a specific population.

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

A new physical environment designed to increase resident and family-focused care will demand changes in the workplace. Task-oriented staff may have difficulty adjusting to such changes away from an institutional-setting. Open discussions with staff during the facility's planning phases will help alert every one of the collective expectations and

changes. Such endeavours should include clinical and non-clinical support staff to build a total care team approach for residents. There must be a clear and demonstrated understanding of how the new facility will be efficiently managed and operated based on a resident and family-focused model.

The design of the *Resident Houses* must take into consideration staff requirements and staff ratios for a 24-hour period. Operational support services such as dietary, laundry and housekeeping services should be distributed throughout the *Resident Houses* to save steps for staff, improve accessibility of essential items and equipment and keep corridors free. The combination of caring staff, supportive family members, sensitive programming and a well designed environment provides residents with a good quality of life. Regular contact with and socialization from family members is to be encouraged for emotional and spiritual support for the residents.

GERONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Fear of Falling - Being afraid of falling may prevent the elderly from engaging in activities, therefore affecting their mood, mobility and social interactions with others. Inactivity can result in physical and behavioural problems. Proper lighting, handrails, frequent seating locations and clear wall contrasting, floor and ceiling surfaces are all elements that can assist in reducing such fear.

Visual Changes - Artificial and daylight lighting has a significant impact on the elderly and their ability to see properly. Use of indirect, non-glare reflecting fixtures for even illumination is essential for the elderly. A mix of lighting types is recommended for long term care settings. Glare from lighting increases agitation, confusion as well as risk for falls. The use of shaded light bulbs, curtain sheers, non-reflective paint finish as well as matte finishes on flooring surfaces can all assist in reducing glare. The use of colours in the warmer spectrum that older adults can see well with good contrast to differentiate their environment will also help to compensate for their visual impairment.

Hearing Loss - Background noise interferes with hearing aids and makes it difficult for the elderly with hearing impairments to function in group activity settings. Distracting background music or loud televisions, radios and other disruptive noises may confuse or upset residents. Likewise, staff should avoid calling out to each other in public or communal spaces. The use of public address systems for convenience must be discouraged and used only for emergency situations. Silent pagers should be considered as an alternate to traditional PA systems. The use of noisy service carts and equipment should be minimized to provide a calming environment for residents.

Air Quality – Scents help to stir memories about key activities and functions such as mealtimes and bathing. Pleasant aromas induce and support resident relaxation and well being such as flower garden fragrances or food aromas. Meanwhile, adequate ventilation systems will be needed to eliminate negative smells.

Room Temperature – Cool air should be avoided and a standard ambient temperature requirement should be respected to ensure seniors are comfortable in their rooms and common areas. Fresh air circulation is permitted, but drafts should be avoided. Air conditioning may be required in summer weather.