

## Seniors and Housing: Where Do You Want to Be?

---

Since 2005, the Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance (ASHRA) has been working on the topic of seniors housing. This is an exciting research project that was designed to build a detailed picture of the housing needs of aging Atlantic Canadians, and to match that profile with options in housing choices, support services, and policies that can meet those needs.

In 2007, ASHRA researchers asked over 1,700 seniors from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island about their current housing situation and future plans for housing. Not surprisingly, findings from the survey show that seniors want to age in place, both in their own homes, and in their current communities.

Just as these findings suggest, as we grow older, the thought of moving becomes less appealing. We become comfortable with our homes, our communities, and the people within them. But as each year passes, the probability of having to move increases. Most often, seniors move because of health problems and the need to adapt to changing levels of mobility.

While seniors in Atlantic Canada overwhelmingly indicate that they want to age in place, this also means that they are most likely not thinking about alternatives to staying in their own homes. This is a concern in light of the fact that failing to plan ahead can make moving difficult for seniors and their families.

Thinking about and planning for the future is important because it can help to preserve a sense of independence and control, and increases the likelihood that seniors will end up where they want to be. If you are a senior yourself, or a service provider involved in the care and support of seniors, here are some important questions to ask when you, or the individuals you support, are ready to start thinking about future housing plans:

### **What if I want to stay?**

- *Can I afford it?* – Almost half of Atlantic Canadian seniors report an income of less than \$30,000 per year, and a significant percentage spend more than 30% of their income on shelter costs.
- *What changes will I have to make to my living space?* – Over 30% of seniors have modified their dwelling in some way to improve accessibility.
- *What programs and services can assist me?* - Over half of Atlantic Canadian seniors surveyed are unaware of programs that are available to provide financial assistance to seniors with low income to help them rehabilitate, restore, or repair their dwellings.
- *Do I have a network of family and friends to help me?* – The number one source of assistance for seniors who need help around the home is family members.
- *What happens if my health deteriorates?* - Going up and down stairs and doing household chores are the greatest challenges reported by Atlantic Canadian seniors with health problems.

### **What if I have to move?**

- *Where do I want to be?* – When asked where they would want to go if they had to move, 74% of seniors said they wanted to stay within the same community as they currently live.
- *What are the options in my community?* – Popular choices include senior citizens' housing, apartments, and smaller single-family homes.
- *Are there other housing possibilities?* – “Garden Suites,” or small, self-contained houses that are placed on the same lot of a home of a close family member, are one new option for seniors in some areas.
- *What support services are available?* – Help with seasonal yard work, repairs around the house, and assistance with heavy cleaning are the most commonly used services among Atlantic Canadian seniors.

Asking and thinking about these questions now will help preserve a sense of independence and control over one's life in the years to come. Where do you want to be?

For more information about the Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance (ASHRA), visit [www.ashra.ca](http://www.ashra.ca) or contact Project Coordinator Yvonne daSilva at (902) 457-6561.