

# Older Adults Face HOUSING CRISIS

Clarence Hillier, 79, is originally from Fortune Bay where he worked on the boats most of his life. Now in retirement, he and his wife moved to the city to rent an apartment.

"I've worked hard my whole life and I don't depend on anybody for anything," says Hillier. "But you can't expect seniors to survive on the old age pension."

The Department of Health and Community Services reports this province has the most rapidly aging population in Canada. By the year 2016, almost 20 per cent of the population will be over 65.

"We need to look at independent living for seniors with assisted supports," says Rosemary Lester, Executive Director, Seniors Resource Centre. "We need people coming to the table from all areas."

Without intervention, the province will face a seniors housing crisis of epidemic proportions.

## Seniors Resource Centre

The Seniors Resource Centre is a non-profit organization promoting the independence and well being of older adults in Newfoundland and Labrador.

According to their 2006 Annual Report, financial, home support and housing were the most frequently requested services sought from their *Seniors Information Line*. The increase in requests for financial help is due in part to the hardship many seniors face in trying to heat their homes as energy costs rise.

## Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance

ASHRA is a group of older adult advocates, partners, and community organizations from all four Atlantic Provinces that are completing a comprehensive research project called *Projecting the Housing Needs of Aging Atlantic Canadians*.

The study will determine the existing and emergent housing needs and options for our region's aging population.



Members of the Senior Citizens Club on Bennett Avenue, St. John's, perform "Music and Friends."

## Services and Coordination Needed

In 2004, the Department of Health and Community Services created the new Division of Aging and Seniors to facilitate program and service coordination for older adults.

Meanwhile, eligible seniors are accessing provincial affordable housing programs wherever possible. The *Provincial Home Repair Program* (PHRP), administered by the NL Housing Corporation, assists homeowners with

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***— Clarence Hillier***

emergency and critical accessibility repair needs. Nevertheless the pool of resources allocated from NLHC is limited.

"Usually the situation is pretty dire by the time a senior's housing crisis is addressed," says Lester.

The provincial government also provides a *Rent Supplement Program* to assist older adults in the private rental market. The *Affordable Housing Program*— a federal/provincial cost-shared program—encourages the development of

affordable housing by offering forgivable loans to affordable rental developers.

## Abandoned in Poverty

More often than not, older adults struggle to maintain older family homes, even if they're not energy efficient or accessible. Most available affordable housing in the province is not accessible. And with most living on fixed incomes, older adults do not have the resources to renovate their homes.


Meanwhile, Clarence Hillier, shopping at the Salvation Army Thrift Store, says seniors are getting too little, too late.

"The pension just went up \$29 per month," says Hillier. "The poor here have just been getting poorer."

In response to the housing crisis, the provincial government has been gathering recommendations from stakeholders across Newfoundland and Labrador over the past year. Administered by Health and Community Services' Division of Aging and Seniors, the province's *Healthy Aging Strategy* will be unveiled this Spring. ■

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
**Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance:**  
[www.ashra.ca](http://www.ashra.ca)

**Seniors Resource Centre of NL:**  
[www.seniorsresource.ca](http://www.seniorsresource.ca) (709) 737-2333



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Congratulations to the St. John's Community Advisory Committee for their tireless efforts fighting homelessness.



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