

# Housing Options for an Aging Population

June 2008

A day-long meeting was held at the Royal Laurentian Golf Club on May 15 to discuss the issue of aging and living in the community. This event brought together about 100 people from across the territory of the MRC des Laurentides to listen to a series of presentations regarding forms of housing available, planned and recommended for seniors in the Laurentians who are losing autonomy. Jean Desnoyers, clinical-administrative coordinator of the PALV [*perte d'autonomie liée au vieillissement (loss of autonomy due to aging)*] programme at the CSSS des Sommets, led us through an explanation of the population trends and the criteria used to assess the loss of autonomy. He pointed out that the 65+ population is poorer and is growing more rapidly here than in other parts of Quebec and that, unusually, there are more elderly men than women in the territory. This is attributed to the trend of widowed women to migrate to where their children are while men stay put. Overall, there is a southward migration as the population ages.

Loss of autonomy is calculated using 5 broad measures: Domestic life (keeping house, preparing meals, doing laundry, shopping, budget management, using the phone, medication responsibility); Daily life (feeding oneself, personal hygiene, dressing, continence); Mobility (walking, doing stairs, use of a wheelchair, degree of social contact); Communications (hearing, use of the telephone); and Mental (memory, orientation, judgement, comprehension, behaviour).

There were a series of panels discussing housing options and solutions in different parts of the territory and the challenges faced to bring them to fruition. Among the biggest problems cited by the participants was the heavy bureaucratic and regulatory burden imposed by the government, which included the obligatory hiring of technical resource consultants to pilot the projects. In many cases it has taken more than six years to navigate the course from initial proposal to occupancy.

The best presentation of the day was by professor Daniel Gill who provided a vivid picture of the demographic future of our region. He pointed out that, with the aging population, the common pyramid of lots of young people and fewer old ones is being inverted as the baby-boom generation works its way through the system and much smaller cohorts follow. Single-family homes built for the huge generation that is now emptying its nests and moving into smaller, mostly multiple-unit buildings, will have a hard time selling those family homes in the future when there are fewer and fewer young families to take them up. The vision of smaller towns and even whole sections of some bigger ones becoming ghost towns is stark but we must take these trends into consideration in our planning. Even the provision of accommodations for seniors requires planning for the time after the huge baby-boom cohort moves on 40 years from now.

An official report on the conference, including copies of many of the papers presented, is available in French on the following websites: [www.cldlaurentides.org](http://www.cldlaurentides.org) and [www.csss-sommets.com](http://www.csss-sommets.com).

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