

FREDERICTON – Seniors who don't suffer from dementia and Alzheimer's are being unfairly denied a subsidy for some special care homes, says a group that took its message to the legislature.

The Moncton-area proponents of the petition say a change in the definitions used by the Department of Social Development means some seniors are finding themselves denied a subsidy to cover the surcharges at some special care homes that offer the 3B level of service for those in the early stages of dementia.

"Our current government is discriminating on the basis of medical diagnoses of the elderly," said Amy Klassen, owner-operator of McNair Manor in Moncton.

The recent change in regulations means that the more than 400 special care homes in New Brunswick are now operating under much stricter criteria for accepting residents.

Mark Mattison was among those on hand to see the petition presented by Liberal MLA Chris Collins Friday. He said his mother, Pauline Mattison, was facing a wait of up to two years in hospital for a placement when he and his siblings made the decision to pay for her care.

Pauline Mattison was confirmed to have mild dementia and arrangements had been made to place her in a special care home, with a government subsidy, when the home and family were informed that the new rules mean dementia has to be advanced, with symptoms such as wandering.

Mark Mattison is vowing to make the

matter an issue during this September's election campaign. He estimates there are over 1,000 people in the same situation in New Brunswick.

"The Department of Social Development discouraged us from going to the specialized care home industry saying my mother would not fit in with dementia patients," he said.

Mark Mattison said the objections dissipated when the family offered to foot the bill, which is costing the family \$4,650 a month.

"It's put enormous pressure on our family. My dad's an 85-year-old senior living at home, my siblings and I have all had to cash in retirement accounts to make this happen and as time goes in, and my father is literally in a situation where he is going to have to sell the house."

The Department of Social Development states that financial assistance to "eligible residents" of special care homes is provided at the per diem rate of \$121.17 per day or \$3,685.59 per month.

Some home operators chose to charge an additional surcharge over and above the \$3,685.59 per month and this surcharge, if applied by the operator, is the responsibility of the resident and their family to cover.

The absence of an Alzheimer's diagnosis excludes many seniors from level 3B special care home subsidy, Klassen said. That, she said, increases the nursing home wait-list and the cost to the taxpayer.

"If you have the Alzheimer's diagnosis, you benefit. If you don't you don't get the financial assistance in care homes."

The group delivered a 1,200-signature petition in the legislature Friday,

claiming some nursing home residents in need of 3B-level care are being discriminated against.

Level 3B clients do not require full-time nursing care. They are medically stable, but they require additional supervision and help due to physical frailty or dementia.

While level 3 and 4 clients are in nursing homes, level 3B beds are in enhanced special care homes.

The province says there are currently 72 eligible individuals with dementia or Alzheimer's, most of them in hospital, awaiting placement in a 3B special care home. At the same time, some special care homes that assess a surcharge for residents are facing vacancies.

"Certainly we're working with the Moncton team and with the industry as well to make sure that their beds will be filled," Social Development Minister Madeleine Dubé said Friday.

"Some clients in the Moncton area are waiting to go in the specialized care.

Dubé said the province has been working to create more beds across the province.

Collins said the province knew about this concern before making a dementia or Alzheimer's diagnosis the requirement.

"They just proceeded with it without tweaking the policy or without making the necessary changes to fairly reflect what is actually happening with senior care," the Liberal MLA said.

"It's very disturbing the effect this is having on families," Collins said.

Jan Seely, president of the New Brunswick Special Care Home Association, said she was unaware of Friday's petition.