

December 8, 2005 – Prince George, British Columbia Summary of Presentations

The following information was received with great interest by the Council. This information will be integrated with input from the public, presentations at subsequent meetings, and background readings and research on the various topics, as the Council begins to develop recommendations for its final report.

The information presented here does not necessarily reflect the position of the Government of British Columbia or the Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues.

Council members were informed by briefings on two related themes during their December 8 session in Prince George:

- Transportation
- Making connections: seniors' information and services

Transportation

The Council heard four presentations on *transportation* – each presentation delivered by a different resource person. The speakers included:

- Steve Segal, Custom Program Coordinator, [BC Transit](#)
- Clive Rock, Director of Strategic Planning, [Translink](#)
- Frank Blues, Manager of Transportation, [City of Prince George](#)
- Allan Lamb, Executive Director, [BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation](#)

All four speakers agreed that seniors have some very specific transportation needs – especially those older than 80 who frequently are unable to pass the tests required to retain their driver's licence, and must suddenly adjust to losing the option of driving their own car.

Generally speaking, increased age correlates with an increase in mobility problems. Several of the speakers pointed out that adequate transportation is an important factor in access to medical care as well as to remain socially engaged.

Other highlights from the briefings on transportation included:

- Although the HandyDART service is not designed exclusively for seniors, 70 per cent of users are senior citizens. Most HandyDART trips are used to access medical services.
- The relative lack of public transit in remote communities is especially difficult for seniors.
- Over the next 30 years
 - overall demand for HandyDART is expected to triple
 - the population of seniors in the suburbs will grow considerably – but not enough to justify growth in transit service to relatively sparsely populated suburban communities. As a consequence, many suburban seniors will increasingly experience mobility problems.
- BC Transit has a relatively new program – Travel training – that coaches people how to use public transit to increase their independence.
- BCAA has developed a program to help older drivers correct deteriorating skills in an effort to extend their ability to drive safely and retain their licence.
- In most areas of British Columbia harsh winter conditions create additional mobility challenges for seniors who are already experiencing problems with balance and strength.
- Seniors living in remote areas have great difficulty in getting transportation. Some depend on taxis and often must wait long times for rides. Public transit is not always the best solution in rural areas and other possible services include volunteer driver programs.

Making connections: seniors' information and services

The Council heard four presentations on the theme of *Making Connections: Seniors' information and services*, each presentation delivered by a different resource person. The speakers included:

- Lori Halls, BC HealthGuide Program, [BC Ministry of Health](#)
- Bob D'Auray, President, [Prince George Council of Seniors](#)
- Bill Harlan, President & CEO, [British Columbia Knowledge Network](#)
- Jack Vickery, Vickery Consulting, [BC 211 Initiative](#)

Both Government and the volunteer sector are developing new ways to provide seniors with increased access to information about community services, healthy living and health problems.

- The Ministry of health updated its BC HealthGuide to include a special, enhanced section on seniors. This is distributed in local communities through Pharmacists, and is part of a multi-track ministry effort that also includes a newsletter and a web site.
- The Knowledge Network provides a very targeted pipeline to BC seniors – more than a third of all British Columbians watch the network at least once a week, and in prime time 70 per cent of its audience is over the age of 60.
 - Knowledge Network management appear enthusiastic about the prospect of working with partners to develop programming that raises awareness about topics that are of interest to seniors.
 - Knowledge Network is also enthusiastic about working with programming partners to develop collateral material – print, DVD, or web – to support senior-oriented messages: e.g. 10-minute recent program on falls-prevention was also widely distributed to locations that serve seniors.
- A coalition of social agencies, with some support from the BC government, is developing support and funding for a provincial “211” number which will provide information about a wide range of community services and facilities.
- In Prince George a variety of seniors' organization have formed an umbrella coalition – the Prince George Council of Seniors – that enables them to share information with each other and with their respective members, and to work together on community issues and public policy concerns where they have common interests.
- With more seniors staying in communities such as Prince George, there is increasing pressure on infrastructure for seniors.
- Seniors outreach program has more demand than availability of volunteers. Combines a social function with practical assistance in providing services.