

Creating a Seniors' Advocate for British Columbia

A Stronger Voice for BC Seniors

SUMMARY

In *Improving Care for B.C. Seniors: An Action Plan* (February 2012), the Province committed to establishing an Office of the Seniors Advocate to support a more accessible, transparent and accountable approach to addressing the issues and interests of seniors in British Columbia. Seniors, families and stakeholders are invited to share their ideas on the role and function of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate. The organizational structure for the Office will not be included in this consultation process. Once the role and functions are finalized, the most appropriate structure will be determined.

The following options are presented for consideration on the role and scope of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate. The options have been created based upon key themes identified from similar roles nationally and internationally and focus on adding value to the current system and supporting collaboration with existing bodies and services, while promoting and protecting the interests of seniors in B.C.

Purpose of the Seniors' Advocate

The proposed broad purpose of the Office of the Seniors' Advocate *could* be to promote and protect the interests of seniors while influencing positive systemic change for the benefit of all seniors living in B.C.

Role of the Seniors' Advocate

As seniors represent a sizable percentage of the population the initial mandate *could* focus on seniors who are seeking or receiving health care supports and services, including consumer issues related to these services.

Key Functions of the Seniors' Advocate

Advocacy offices often fulfill a number of roles for the clients they serve. The following represent key functions that the Seniors' Advocate *could* perform across a number of important areas, focusing on "system level" changes that would benefit the larger population of seniors.

1. Advocacy Services

- Identify trends and issues relating to gaps in services
- Commission and conduct research into areas impacting seniors
- Providing policy advice to government about services for seniors
- Propose legislative changes where necessary
- Conduct systemic reviews, produce special reports and policy statements
- Encourage and promote best practice in the treatment of seniors in B.C.

2. Information and Advice

- Maintain an inventory of available information on services and programs for seniors
- Provide seniors with information on how to contact appropriate organizations and agencies to address their issues
- Offer information, advice and guidance about services and resources available

3. Receiving and Referring Concerns and Complaints

- Support the senior and their family by referring their concern or complaint to the appropriate existing body and ensuring it is heard
- Support seniors and/or people raising concerns about suspected elder abuse to have their concerns addressed by the most appropriate body
- For concerns and complaints not addressed by an existing body the Seniors' Advocate could:
 - Assist capable seniors and families to resolve the issue themselves.
 - Assist and support vulnerable seniors to seek resolution

4. Public Awareness and Communication

- Promote the awareness of the role of the Seniors' Advocate
- Coordinate public education efforts in collaboration with other agencies and organizations
- Promote a positive image of aging and encourage participation of seniors
- Respond to inquiries from the public

5. Collaboration and Engagement

- Work with voluntary and community advocacy groups to help identify key issues of concern to seniors
- Proactively seek the opinions and priorities of seniors making sure that their views are heard and understood about issues that affect them
- Work collaboratively with voluntary and community advocacy groups to build trusting relationships between agencies and further strengthen overall advocacy for seniors in B.C.

We want to hear from you.

1. How could an Office of the Seniors' Advocate help seniors in British Columbia?
2. What should be the priority focus for the Seniors' Advocate? Should the Office focus initially on health care supports and services, including consumer issues related to those services?
3. Should there be an age range to access the Office of the Seniors' Advocate?
4. What could be the role of the Seniors' Advocate in elder abuse prevention and response?
5. How can the Seniors' Advocate work with existing bodies and organizations currently engaged in similar work?
6. How can the Seniors' Advocate best engage seniors to ensure that their voice is heard?

Please send written input to:

**Seniors Action Plan
Ministry of Health
PO Box 9825, STN PROV GOV
Victoria, BC V8W 9W4**

**The deadline for written
submissions is July 31, 2012.**

Or by email: SeniorsAdvocate@gov.bc.ca