
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

Seniors to shape advocate's role as part of action plan

VICTORIA – B.C. seniors, families and stakeholders are being invited to help shape the implementation of a comprehensive action plan – including the establishment of an advocate – to ensure a more accessible, transparent and accountable approach to seniors' care.

"Today, we are announcing concrete actions to improve the lives of seniors, their families and their caregivers," said Health Minister Michael de Jong. "Over the past decade, our focus has been on expanding the range of care options for seniors to meet increased demand for the fastest growing segment of our population. Now is the time to expand our efforts in ways that help seniors and their families navigate the system, easily access information about care options, and have a clear and simple way to have any concerns addressed."

'Improving the Care of B.C. Seniors: An Action Plan' addresses concerns expressed publicly and directly to the Health Minister and the ministry by families and care providers. The direction of the action plan was also informed by the findings and recommendations in the comprehensive report on seniors' care by B.C. ombudsperson Kim Carter. The minister and ministry staff have reviewed Carter's report and met directly with her on numerous occasions about the need for improvements in channels of communication and the quality of care.

Through the action plan, stakeholders – including seniors and their families – will be consulted on specific items. Consultation initiatives include determining the role of the seniors' advocate and developing a strategy to address the abuse of seniors.

"Seniors are an important sector of our community and it is critical we plan to meet the needs of this growing population," said Ron Cantelon, Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors to the Minister of Health. "The focus of the action plan is not only on the system of care but also compliments initiatives that support healthy aging to improve the quality of life for all B.C. seniors and help them remain independent for as long as possible."

The action plan will support healthy aging to improve the quality of life for B.C. seniors to help them remain independent for as long as possible. The Province is providing \$15 million to the United Way of the Lower Mainland, to expand the availability of non-medical home support services in up to 65 communities across the province over the next three years. This will build on five pilots already underway that offer seniors access to a range of support services, such as transportation, housekeeping, home repair, yard maintenance, friendly visiting, and information and referral.

“We applaud government for expanding non-medical home support for seniors,” said Michael McKnight, president and CEO, United Way of the Lower Mainland. “The five pilots are making a significant difference to seniors who want to stay in their homes longer and require some simple services to help them do so. They make a lot of sense and are the right thing to do.”

The Province is also providing \$1.4 million to the BC Association of Community Response Networks to support prevention and education activities in collaboration with local stakeholders to end abuse and neglect of older adults in B.C.

“Providing support to community response networks that work at the grass-roots level makes a difference in the lives of older adults who may be abused or neglected,” said Sherry Baker, executive director, BC Association of Community Response Networks. “With the \$1.4 million in funding from government, we will be able to further strengthen the support for our collaborative work to promote safety and security for older adults.”

Actions include:

- Ensuring concerns and complaints are responded to and resolved in a timely manner through the establishment of the Office of the Seniors’ Advocate, and a separate toll-free phone line for seniors and families to launch June 2012.
- Improved access to information for seniors and their families so they can make better care choices. This includes online access to facility reports, easier access to assessments of seniors’ health needs and information on policies around eligibility, charges and hardship waivers – all by September 2012.
- Piloting a new risk assessment tool for residential facilities to provide a more accurate indication of potential risks to quality and safety, as well as establishing enforcement processes that ensure compliance.
- Protection and safety of seniors through the development of a provincial elder abuse prevention, identification and response plan by December 2012, which will include consultations with key stakeholders starting in February 2012.
- Meeting the support needs of seniors in their community so they age in place by expanding non-medical home support from five communities to up to 65 communities over three years, initiating opportunities for new housing and care options, providing provincewide, after-hours access to palliative tele-nursing beginning April 2012 and better integration beginning April 2012 of primary and community care for seniors.

“British Columbia has an opportunity to lead the country in meeting the challenge of responding to the needs of our aging population,” added de Jong. “We are committed to a fair, equitable system that is clear, helpful and beneficial for seniors.”

Health authorities expect to spend over \$2.5 billion on home and community care this year for seniors – an increase of 60 per cent from 2001.

'Improving Care for B.C. Seniors: An Action Plan' is available online at: www.seniorsbc.ca.

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Facts on seniors' care in British Columbia

Population aging is a success story – the fact that British Columbians are living longer and that the province has a growing senior population is something to be celebrated. But the shift in demographics requires society and all levels of government to adapt and plan ahead.

Demographics

- Canadian Institute for Health Information data show the average health-care cost for people over 65 years old is nearly four times greater than for people aged 15 to 64. It is almost eight times greater for people over 80 years old. According to their 2011 National Expenditure report, per capita spending for those aged 15 to 64 was \$2,398, for those aged 65 to 69 was \$6,073, for those aged 70 to 74 was \$8,406, for those aged 75 to 79 was \$11,483 and for those aged 80 and older it was \$18,906.
- Almost one-sixth of B.C.'s population is over 65 years old. The number of seniors is doubling from 676,000 to an estimated 1,324,000 over the next 20 years.
- B.C. has one of the highest life expectancies in the world at 81.7 years.
- In 2010-11, seniors accounted for 54 per cent of the \$16.15 billion in total health-care expenditures, including physician visits, inpatient and day surgery, PharmaCare, home and community care and residential care.

Housing and Home Support

- More than 90 per cent of seniors live at home –the preference of most seniors.
- In 2001, the primary choices were residential care and care at home. Today, assisted living and supportive housing with home support are an important part of the new housing mix.
- As of September 2011, B.C. has 31,051 residential care, assisted living and group home beds – a 22 per cent increase since 2001 (approximately 6,000 new beds).
- In the last 10 years, B.C. has also renovated and upgraded more than 13,000 residential care beds to meet modern standards.
- Effective Feb. 1, 2012, residential care clients will have one of the highest minimum retained income amounts in Canada at \$325 per month.
- In 2001, median wait times for access to residential care were up to one year. Today, the average is 45 days.
- Health authority spending on home health services is expected to increase by almost 86 per cent since 2001 – from \$404 million to almost \$754 million in 2011-12.
- There are 23 per cent more clients receiving home-care professional services (nursing and community rehabilitation) than in 2001.
- Approximately 71 per cent of all home support recipients pay absolutely nothing at all.

- In 2009, B.C. enacted the Residents' Bill of Rights, setting out clear commitments to care and the rights of seniors living in residential care facilities.
- The B.C. Care Aide and Community Health Worker Registry became operational on Jan. 29, 2010, to protect vulnerable British Columbians and support caregivers.

Improving Care and Quality of Life for Seniors

- Most seniors are active, healthy and live independently in their own communities.
- In September 2011, B.C. launched Age-friendly BC, a grant and recognition program to help local governments create environments that allow seniors to enjoy good health and active participation in their community. In February 2012, age-friendly grants were announced for 52 BC communities.
- Since 2007, the Ministry of Health has supported B.C. communities by providing tools to help them respond to an aging population. Throughout the province, 86 local governments from Alert Bay to West Vancouver have taken action to make their communities age-friendly. Examples of age-friendly community changes include widening sidewalks, installing benches, maximizing green space, or making programs and services more accessible to the older population.
- B.C. businesses now have access to a comprehensive guide that provides information on how to create a business environment that is safe and comfortable for seniors. Creating an Age-friendly Business in B.C. is a collaborative release between the Ministry of Health and the BC Chamber of Commerce.
- The Province has a number of initiatives in place for seniors to learn about fall prevention, the biggest cause of injury among B.C. seniors. In June 2011, a multimedia training resource was introduced for physicians and other health professionals to educate seniors about how to prevent falls and reduce their risk for injury.
- The long-term health of B.C. seniors is being supported with the launch of the \$68.7-million Healthy Families BC strategy in May 2011. As the most comprehensive health-promotion program in the country, Healthy Families BC is helping British Columbians, including seniors, make the healthier choice the easier choice by offering supports to help them manage their own health and reduce chronic disease.
- In 2008, the Province provided \$1.8 million to 18 communities throughout B.C. to establish Seniors' Community Parks to help older adults stay mobile, physically active and healthy in their communities.
- To help seniors stay in their own homes, the Province partnered in 2009 with United Way of the Lower Mainland to develop and implement Community Action for Seniors' Independence (CASI) pilot projects in five communities around the province. CASI gives seniors access to a range of non-medical home support services such as transportation, housekeeping, home repair, yard maintenance, friendly visiting, and information and referral to help them remain independent.
- Information sources include the SeniorsBC e-Newsletter, senior-focused publications like the BC Seniors Guide and websites like: www.seniorsbc.ca

Looking Forward

- ‘Improving Care for B.C. Seniors: An Action Plan’ outlines steps that will make it easier for seniors and their families to access and understand the system, and steps to strengthen protection for vulnerable seniors.
- The actions will help the system shift from an acute-based model that deals with illness to a community care model of health care, focused on healthy living, managing chronic conditions, and providing appropriate care in the appropriate setting, at the appropriate time.

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