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Ministry of Health

B.C. launches elder abuse prevention strategy

VICTORIA – British Columbia today launched a strategy outlining short- and long-term measures to prevent, recognize and respond to elder abuse in British Columbia.

“Protecting seniors from all forms of abuse is a priority for myself and for our government,” said Minister of State for Seniors Ralph Sultan, “With this collaborative strategy, we hope to bring about a positive change where all British Columbians are involved in protecting seniors from abuse and creating a culture where older adults are respected in every way.”

Elder abuse may be physical or sexual, psychological or emotional, or financial. It can be at the hands of a spouse, an adult child or other family member, a caregiver, a service provider, or other person in a position of trust or situation of dependency. Abuse can take place in a senior’s home, a care facility and in the community.

Actions outlined in the strategy entitled Together to Reduce Elder Abuse – B.C.’s Strategy include:

- Expanding the Seniors Abuse and Information Line. Longer hours will make it easier for people to get information, advice, emotional support and assistance with respect to elder abuse by calling 604 437-1940 or toll free 1 866-437-1940.
- Providing information kits to help community groups, front-line service providers and individuals recognize elder abuse and encourage individuals to have the confidence to speak out or to ask for assistance.
- Establishing a multi-sector Council to Reduce Elder Abuse, responsible for galvanizing society to commit to taking action to prevent elder abuse.
- The council will be supported by an office, located within the Seniors’ Directorate in the Ministry of Health that will also be responsible for co-ordinating implementation of the strategy across government.
- Reviewing processes and staff training for informed consent to care, including moving into a residential care facility and use of restraints, to ensure that the rights of vulnerable adults are protected.
- Supporting training and awareness-building initiatives for health professionals and others to improve their ability to recognize abuse and to take appropriate action.

Areas for work on longer term actions are identified in the strategy and will be prioritized as the initial phases of the strategy are evaluated and renewed.

“Elder abuse is, unfortunately, happening all across Canada,” said Martha Jane Lewis, executive director, BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support. “Together to Reduce Elder Abuse – B.C.’s Strategy will provide extra supports for those who need help and create a culture change to help make elder abuse a thing of the past.”

The total cost committed to specifically supporting the strategy is just under \$1 million. This funding includes \$850,000 funded through the Provincial Health Services Authority to support the Seniors Abuse and Information Line, \$100,000 for information kits and \$37,500 to the National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly to support an elder abuse prevalence study.

The B.C. government last year provided \$1.4 million to the BC Association of Community Response Networks. This investment provided extra support for prevention and education activities, in collaboration with local stakeholders, to reduce elder abuse and neglect in B.C. There is currently Community Response Network activity in over 70 communities around the province and the number is growing.

“This collaborative strategy supports grassroots efforts to help educate, prevent and ultimately end elder abuse,” said Sherry Baker, executive director of the BC Association of Community Response Networks. “The BC Community Response Network applauds the provincial government’s commitment to make B.C. communities safer for their most vulnerable.”

Developing a strategy to prevent, identify and respond to elder abuse is a commitment in Improving Care for BC Seniors: An Action Plan and also supports B.C.’s 10-year mental health and substance use plan, Healthy Minds, Healthy People. It was also part of B.C.’s Family Agenda and was emphasized in the 2013 throne speech.

Protecting vulnerable seniors from elder abuse is a key component of B.C.’s Family Agenda for British Columbia. To learn more, visit: www.familiesfirstbc.ca

For more information on preventing elder abuse and Together to Reduce Elder Abuse – B.C.’s Strategy, please visit: www.seniorsbc.ca/elderabuse

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