

Aging Well in British Columbia: Report on Progress



July 2007



Message from the Minister



The Province of British Columbia established the Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues (Council) in 2005, to provide government with recommendations on how B.C. can best meet the needs of our

growing seniors' population. We asked the Council to consider how to support seniors' independence, health and continuing contributions to society.

The Aging Well in British Columbia report reflects the broad range of experience of both the Council members and the input they received from hundreds of British Columbians from across the province.

The recommendations in that report provide a useful framework for our province to consider over the next number of years, and as the Minister responsible for Seniors' Issues, I am pleased to provide the ***Aging Well in BC: Report on Progress***.

We have already made significant progress in addressing some of the recommendations made by the Council, and are undertaking a comprehensive review of the entire report.

The Council called on government to be a catalyst for change, and we are doing just that. Government will lead, but the responsibility for adapting to an aging population is shared across society – from the business and non-profit sectors to the media to the individual, we all have a role to play.

Building the best system of support in Canada for seniors is one of your government's top priorities, and I look forward to keeping older persons, their families, and all citizens of the province informed on our progress in addressing the important issues raised in the Aging Well in British Columbia report.

Honourable Ida Chong, FCGA
*Minister of Community Services and
Minister Responsible for Seniors' and
Women's Issues*

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Introduction

British Columbia's population is becoming significantly older, and the demographic and social changes that are beginning to affect our province will forever alter how our communities look and feel. There are many more older people, we are living longer and we are more active and healthier than ever before.

It is time for a new view of aging and of the role of older people in our province.

- Aging Well in British Columbia, November 2006

British Columbia is in the midst of a massive demographic shift, with a significant increase in the number of older people in our province. Within 10 years there will be more seniors than school-age children, and in 25 years, almost one in four British Columbians will be over 65.

Recognizing the transformational force of an aging population, the Province established the 18-member Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues in October 2005, chaired by Dr. Patricia Baird.

With members from different geographic regions of B.C. and from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the Council was asked to provide recommendations to government in two key areas:

1. How to support seniors' independence and health
2. How to support seniors' continuing contributions to society

The Council spent more than a year meeting with seniors, community organizations, aging experts, health professionals and business leaders throughout the province.

It heard 100 presentations and received written input from more than 200 individuals and organizations as part of its work.

On December 1, 2006, the Council submitted its report to government, entitled "Aging Well in British Columbia".

The report outlined a framework for action to support older people in B.C. over the coming decades, with recommendations across a broad range of areas.

The **Aging Well in BC: Report on Progress** describes early accomplishments that address the recommendations from the Council, and outlines government's commitment to support our aging population over the coming decades.

As part of the New Relationship with First Nations and Aboriginal People, the Province is committed to working with First Nations communities and Aboriginal people to close the socio-economic gaps. This was an area in which the Council called for concerted action.

This report also highlights examples of action in this area.

Early Accomplishments

Since the Aging Well in British Columbia report was submitted to the Premier in December 2006, the Government of British Columbia has made significant progress in addressing three of the recommendations in the report.

→ Protecting human rights and ending mandatory retirement

Older people contribute a wealth of skills and experience to this province, and government is committed to removing barriers to their active participation in society and the workforce.

That's why we introduced the ***Human Rights Code (Mandatory Retirement Elimination) Amendment Act***, which implements a key recommendation from the Premier's Council. This legislation, which received Royal Assent on May 31, 2007, will protect those over age 65 against age discrimination in employment, thereby abolishing mandatory retirement in BC. These changes will allow older British Columbians to make the choice of whether to retire or continue working.

The legislation also extends protection against age discrimination to adults 65 and over in tenancy, and adds age as a protected ground in the provision of short-term accommodation, services and facilities commonly available to the public.

With an estimated one million job openings over the next decade in B.C., and only 650,000 students graduating during this time, it is in everyone's interest to give skilled and experienced older people the choice to remain in the workforce, while at the same time eliminating age discrimination.

This legislation is an important step towards promoting the full participation of older people in society. The legislation will come into effect on January 1, 2008.

→ Enhancing healthy living initiatives for older adults

The Council noted that how we live today affects our health tomorrow, and the Government of British Columbia is committed to making B.C. a model for healthy living and physical fitness, including our older population.

ActNow BC is a partnership-based health and wellness initiative that promotes healthy living choices for all British Columbians and has established seniors as a priority area. The "Every Move is a Good Move" campaign will include a focus on physical activity and nutrition for seniors.

The ***ActNow BC Road to Health Community Tour***, launched July 1, 2007, provides British Columbians of all ages with fun ways to learn about healthy living and accessing sport and recreation activities in their own communities.

The tour welcomes the participation of older British Columbians and includes a special Hearts at Work focus that will allow adults and seniors to receive a professional assessment of their current health status. The assessment will include measuring blood pressure and cholesterol and the establishment of goals towards healthier living.

In support of ActNow BC, the Ministry of Health is developing an ***Active Aging Plan for BC***. The plan takes a collaborative approach to communities, organizations, health authorities, local governments and individuals working together to promote active aging.

Early Accomplishments

A Provincial Symposium and regional Active Aging forums are being scheduled throughout BC to share promising practices, celebrate successes from local communities and encourage further collaborative action on active aging.

The Ministry of Health is also creating **Healthy Eating for Seniors**, a handbook which will be available free to B.C. seniors in late 2007. This handbook will be an invaluable resource on healthy eating, with recipes, menu plans, and stories and tips from seniors about healthy eating, with nutritional content to meet the specific needs of BC seniors. A cultural adaptation is underway to produce Chinese- and Punjabi-language handbooks on healthy eating for older adults.

In addition, a series of one to two-minute vignettes on **Healthy Eating and Physical Activity** are being developed to provide engaging and informative health

education for B.C. seniors, on topics such as healthy weights, practical ways to eat more fruit and vegetables, and the importance of daily physical activity.

In recognition of B.C.'s diverse population, the multiculturalism and immigration Branch of the Ministry of Attorney General has been working with community partners to help address multicultural and immigrant barriers to better health outcomes. In October 2007, the ministry and its partners will launch a healthy living initiative for youth, seniors and other members of B.C.'s multicultural and immigrant communities.

This initiative supports ActNow BC, and will encourage community-based recreational activities and better health outcomes for these communities.

➔ Make it easier for people to get around

Accessible transportation is essential to the participation and independence of older people.

The Province recognizes this need, as well as the important role that public transit can play in helping us reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and has made significant new investments in service expansions in 2007.

We have recently provided \$52.5 million in **Public Transit Infrastructure Program** funding to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, an investment aimed at reducing traffic congestion and pollution and increasing ridership on public transit.

This is key to building vibrant, connected communities that are environmentally sustainable, which will benefit all of us in the province, including seniors.

Did You Know?

That while just over half of adults age 18-64 are overweight or obese, more than two-thirds of seniors age 65+ are overweight or obese.

Physical activity levels begin to drop sharply for seniors after age 70.

Strength training can reverse the aging process.

That chronic diseases experienced by seniors, like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers, are preventable through healthy behaviours like healthy eating and physical activity.

Encouraging healthy lifestyles among seniors can prevent, reduce or even reverse frailty and poor health in old age resulting in a better quality of life.

Early Accomplishments

Budget 2007 provides additional funding for BC Transit for high priority expanded services in 25 communities, as well as additional funding to expand service and purchase required **handyDART** minibuses and vans, which are essential for older people with mobility limitations.

Budget 2007 also provides additional funding for **small town and rural transit** service expansions and new systems, in partnership with local government funding, community funding partners and passenger revenue.

About 65 per cent of all seniors in this province are still active licensed drivers, and we need to make sure they have the tools they need to stay safe on the road.

That's why the Ministry of Community Services continues to support the **British Columbia Automobile Association (BCAA) Traffic Safety Foundation's Mature Drivers Program**, which teaches mature drivers, their friends and family members how to assess seniors' driving habits, develop better driving strategies and make appropriate decisions about their mobility and transportation needs.

Did You Know?

Small town and rural transit expansions are planned in the Columbia Valley and the Elk Valley and new start-ups in five areas: Golden & Area, Merritt, Mount Waddington, Salt Spring Island and Thompson Nicola West.

handyDART and paratransit expansion is planned in seven communities in order to meet demand and reduce pre-booking wait times: Central Fraser Valley (Abbotsford and Mission), Cowichan Valley, Kamloops, Kelowna, North Okanagan, Vernon and Victoria.

Additional funding for the Mature Drivers Program in 2007 means the program can expand into new areas of the province, offering more free workshops to more senior drivers. Since April 2005, more than 3,000 participants have benefited from the program in 24 communities throughout B.C.

Investments like these in public transit and the Mature Driver's Program will help British Columbia seniors to live more independent lives, and ensure they remain vital, contributing members of their communities.

Building on Success

The Aging Well in British Columbia report presents a long-term vision to help the province prepare for an aging population, and a substantial amount of work is required to address the entire suite of recommendations. Successfully adapting to an aging population will require the commitment of all levels of governments, other institutions, communities, and individual British Columbians.

Fortunately, there many initiatives already underway that provide a solid foundation on which to build. Some of these programs and partnerships are well established in supporting older British Columbians, while some newer initiatives have been launched to address emerging priorities for the province, and directly link to ideas in the Aging Well in British Columbia report. The Province will build on the excellent results from these various initiatives and partnerships.

➔ *Providing Information for a Diverse Seniors' Population*

British Columbia's diverse and growing population of older persons is a vital asset to our communities and our province as volunteers, caregivers, teachers, workers and mentors. The Province wants to make sure seniors and their families get the information they need, in ways that are easy to access.

The *BC Seniors' Guide* contains helpful information on programs and benefits available to seniors in BC, and has recently been enhanced to be available online in English, French, Chinese and Punjabi. As a complement to the Guide, the *BC Seniors' Line* is a toll free telephone line providing a one-stop source of information for government services, including health services.

As well, the new *Personal Supports Information Line* means that British Columbians with physical challenges, including seniors, can now dial a toll free

Did You Know?

The BC Seniors' Line has translation services available in over 130 languages upon request. To contact the BC Seniors' Line, call the toll free number at **1 800 465-4911** or **250 952-1742** in Victoria.

number from anywhere in the province to access information on how to obtain equipment and assistive devices. To contact the Personal Supports Information Line call 1-888-818-1211 or 1-800-661-8773 (TTY).

Government has also recently announced \$43 million for the new *WelcomeBC* initiative, which will help immigrants moving to B.C. access existing and expanded services under one umbrella so they are better able to adapt to life in their new communities. This will include improved information and outreach services.

➔ *Helping Seniors Make Ends Meet*

The B.C. Government is committed to building the best system of support in Canada for seniors, and is working to support low income seniors to help make ends meet.

The *Senior's Supplement* is a monthly payment to low-income seniors who are receiving federal Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement or federal allowances. If the income level of an eligible senior falls below a level guaranteed by the province, the Senior's Supplement is provided to make up the difference. It is paid automatically to those who are eligible – seniors do not need to apply.

Building on Success

The ***Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters Program (SAFER)*** provides monthly payments to eligible residents of British Columbia who are 60 years or over and who pay rent for their homes. About 15,000 seniors receive subsidies each month.

The ***Property Tax Deferment Program*** is available to seniors who want to defer their property taxes until their home is sold. To ensure this program benefits even more older British Columbians, government has lowered the age of eligibility from 60 to 55.

Improvements to SAFER

The government has recently doubled its funding for rent assistance under the SAFER program, and expanded eligibility criteria to include older persons who pay pad rental fees for owner-occupied manufactured homes. The Canadian residency requirement for eligibility was also amended from ten years to one year.

Government has also extended eligibility for the ***Home Owner Grant*** to lower-income seniors, regardless of their home's assessed value.

The ***Bus Pass Program*** for older persons with low incomes and people with disabilities is offered in 44 BC communities, and benefits more than 60,000 per year. Older persons also benefit from fare discounts on BC Ferries and BC Transit.

→ ***Reshaping Our Communities***

The way we build our communities has a significant impact on our health and well-being. The Province is working to support healthy, accessible communities, and has launched a number of innovative programs to help local governments achieve this goal.

The ***LocalMotion*** program supports options for healthy, active living by giving local governments funds to build and improve walkways, trails and cycling paths, providing safer, healthier transportation options, reducing greenhouse gases, and encouraging all British Columbians to get out and be more active. ***BC Spirit Squares*** is a legacy program of BC2008, providing \$20 million for accessible, public celebration squares for residents and visitors to enjoy, each reflecting the province's history, rich culture and diversity.

The ***Green Cities Awards*** program is providing \$500,000 in each of the next five years to recognize communities that make use of innovative best practices in urban design, built on sustainability principles such as walkability, accessibility, and environmental benefits. Programs such as these will help create integrated, accessible communities, where older people can maintain their social networks and age in place.

Did You Know?

27 communities across British Columbia are receiving \$18.9 million in provincial funding through the first round of the LocalMotion program, to build bicycle paths, trails and walkways, support community playgrounds and improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

LocalMotion is providing \$40 million, over four years, for capital projects that provide alternate transportation options, to improve physical fitness and safety, reduce air pollution and conserve energy.



Building on Success

B.C. is a partner in two ground-breaking projects to help our communities become more age friendly. The **World Health Organization Age-Friendly Cities Project** is an international initiative to develop age friendly city indicators and guidelines. Recognizing the geographic diversity of our province, we are also participating in the **Canadian Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities Project**, in partnership with nine other provinces within Canada.

Saanich was chosen to participate in the age friendly cities project, and Alert Bay and Lumby in the rural and remote project. The City Guidelines will be released to coincide with the 2007 International Day of Older Persons, October 1, 2007, while the Rural and Remote Guidelines will be released later in the fall. These guidelines will be valuable tools for communities to begin to evaluate and enhance their public spaces and amenities. Making communities age-friendly is one of the most effective strategies to support healthy and active aging.

→ **Transforming Work**

The elimination of mandatory retirement gives older people the choice to keep working after 65. This is important, but we need to go further to support older people who want to continue to share their skills and experience in the workplace.

As our population and workforce ages, flexible work arrangements for older workers will become increasingly important, as will the need for modernized rules for retirement savings.

WorkBC is an innovative new labour market strategy, which includes an action plan for how government, working with business and industry, will address skills shortages and long-term labour market challenges.

One of the five strategic areas of focus is to “Keep the workforce we have in B.C.”, which acknowledges the valuable contribution of older workers, and outlines government action to encourage their continued participation in the economy, and raising awareness of the benefits older workers bring to workplaces.

With more people choosing to work until later in life, rules around Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and Registered Retirement Income Funds (RRIFs) must be changed to make it easier for people to continue saving for retirement without penalties for remaining in the labour market.

The Province has lobbied the federal government to begin to make changes in this area.

Did You Know?

The Government of British Columbia is the province's largest employer, with more than 30,000 employees in the BC Public Service. The Province recognizes the changing work environment, and is a leader in making its workplaces more flexible for all employees, including older workers. To see the BC Corporate Human Resource Plan, please visit www.bcpublicservice.ca/HRplan



Where ideas work

Building on Success

In the *2007 Federal Budget*, the federal government increased the conversion age for RRSPs to 71 from 69. The budget also committed to encourage older workers to stay in the labour market by permitting phased retirement. These are important steps that reflect the changing nature of work and retirement.

→ *Providing Housing Choices for a Diverse Seniors' Population*

The provincial *Budget 2007* is dedicated to housing, and delivers a comprehensive range of new supports for British Columbians to help address the housing challenges created by a growing economy. This includes more options for seniors.

Budget 2007 advances the Province's housing strategy *Housing Matters BC*, which includes providing priority housing assistance for seniors with low income, accessibility requirements or those who require support services.

The demand for *supportive housing* continues to increase as the population ages, and *Budget 2007* provides \$45 million, over four years, to upgrade/ convert up to 750 social housing units to supportive housing units, primarily for older persons with lower incomes.

This builds on the success of the *Independent Living BC* program, which offers a middle option between home care and residential

Did You Know?

The Government of British Columbia is committed to providing more than 4,000 affordable assisted living apartments for B.C. seniors and persons with disabilities. To date, more than 3,900 have been allocated across the province. The Province's budget for shelters and affordable housing is \$328 million – nearly triple what it was in 2001.

care for those who need some assistance, but don't want or need 24-hour professional nursing care.

→ *Supporting Aboriginal Health*

On average, Aboriginal people in B.C. face a shorter lifespan than other British Columbians, and the Province is working to close the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in B.C. This was an area where the Premier's Council called for concerted action.

In April 2007, government appointed Dr. Evan Adams as its first-ever *Aboriginal Health Physician Advisor*, and committed \$9.5 million to support First Nations health. ActNow BC has also committed \$6 million to help improve the health of Aboriginal people through the *National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health*, BC Initiatives division, at the University of Northern British Columbia. This centre will develop key partnerships that will build an ActNow BC program for Aboriginal communities throughout the province.

Government also provided \$250,000 in 2006/07 to increase the number of Aboriginal nurses and improve nursing services in Aboriginal communities, as part of the *Aboriginal Nursing Strategies*.

These initiatives support the *First Nations Health Plan* released in November 2006, which sets into action government's commitments contained in the Transformative Change Accord to close the health gap between First Nations and other British Columbians.

→ *Providing Quality Health Care for Older British Columbians*

The provincial government is working to protect and improve health care for the future, to ensure British Columbians are supported in their efforts to maintain and improve their health.

Building on Success

We know that people's health care needs change as they get older, and that's why the frail elderly have been identified as a high priority population group by the Ministry of Health, BC's health authorities, and the British Columbia Medical Association (BCMA).

The recently launched **Primary Health Care Charter** incorporates a focus on function and quality of life for the frail elderly, including coordinated patient-centred team planning.

The Ministry of Health has partnered with health system stakeholders on several initiatives for improved care of the frail elderly, including a Seniors-At-Risk Initiative and the Dementia Service Framework.

The **Seniors-At-Risk Initiative** was developed with the Interior Health Authority, BCMA, clinicians, local politicians and community members, to help incorporate best practices in the care of the frail elderly into the daily clinical practice of family physicians, and to enhance the coordination and continuity of inpatient, outpatient, and long term care facilities and home care services.

This initiative was originally implemented in Trail, and similar collaboratives have been launched in Prince George, Fort St. John, and Prince Rupert.

The Ministry of Health completed the **Dementia Service Framework** in March 2007 in partnership with representatives from each provincial health authority, the Alzheimer Society of BC, clinical specialists, and researchers with expertise in dementia care.

This framework describes the optimal care that people with dementia should expect to receive, and provides recommendations

that allow health system stakeholders to define how they can contribute to improved services and better patient outcomes. The Ministry of Health has provided a \$1 million grant to the Alzheimer Society of BC to pilot the implementation of the Service Framework.

Did You Know?

In May 2007, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance provided the Canadian Red Cross with a one-time \$2 million grant for the volunteer-run, community-based **Medical Equipment Loan Service**.

In operation for over 50 years, this Service provides – at no charge – short term loans of wheelchairs, walkers, crutches and bathroom aids to help people who are recovering from illnesses, surgeries or injuries or are living with disabilities.

Older British Columbians are most likely to use the Service, which loaned approximately 100,000 items to 60,000 people throughout the province in 2006.

Over one million people in British Columbia live with one to three chronic diseases, and as the patient grows older it is not uncommon for the individual to have a combination of diseases.

To better support thoughtful treatment planning based on patient goals and improved care coordination, changes have been made to the Medical Services Plan to better enable GPs to reflect on the needs of their complex patients, develop collaborative treatment plans, and where needed, coordinate and/or become an active member of a broader care team.

A Roadmap for the Future

The Province of British Columbia appreciates the hard work of the Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues in developing the Aging Well in British Columbia report, which provides a long-term vision for how our province can prepare for an aging population.

We know that the challenges and opportunities that lay before us are immense, and the solutions will take time and require the cooperation of many partners. From different levels of government – to industry – to the individual, we all have an important role to play.

That's why the Province is thoroughly reviewing the Council's report and recommendations, which will help guide our planning over the coming years.

The Province is committed to building the best system of support for seniors in Canada and helping our older citizens to live healthy, active and independent lives. British Columbia is already doing excellent work on this front, and we now have the opportunity to collaborate and find other innovative solutions to help us prepare for the massive demographic changes that are coming.

For information about government services for seniors, call the BC Seniors' Line:

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| Toll free | 1 800 465-4911 |
| Greater Victoria | 250 952-1742 |

For information on any Province of British Columbia service or program, call Enquiry BC:

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| Toll free | 1 800 663-7867 |
| Greater Vancouver | 604 660-2421 |
| Greater Victoria | 250 387-6121 |
| Deaf/Hearing impaired toll free | 1 800 661-8773 |
| Deaf/Hearing impaired - Greater Vancouver | 604 775-0303 |

For more information on the following initiatives, please visit the websites:

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| ActNow BC | www.actnowbc.gov.bc.ca |
| WorkBC | www.workbc.ca |
| Housing Matters BC | www.bchousing.org/aboutus/Housing_Matters_BC |
| New Relationship with First Nations and Aboriginal People | www.gov.bc.ca/arr/newrelationship/default.html |
| LocalMotion, BC Spirit Squares and Green City Awards | www.gov.bc.ca/cserv |
| Aging Well in British Columbia report | www.gov.bc.ca/seniors |



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July 2007

Ministry of Community Services

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