

Improving Care for B.C. Seniors: An Action Plan



Introduction

British Columbia's health system is one of our most valued social programs. Good health is a fundamental building block of a happy and productive life and virtually all of us will access some level of health care or health service during our lives.

Seniors are an important and valuable part of B.C.'s population. Although most of us will remain active and healthy as we age, some of us may experience a significant health issue, loss of independence or isolation. When this happens, there are a range of home and community care services available to help you maintain your highest possible quality of life.

Over the past 10 years, the Ministry of Health and health authorities have invested significant resources in expanding the range of health services available to people in their own homes, and upgrading and building new residential care facilities and assisted living residences. However, we have heard from many of you that the system as a whole is unnecessarily complex. It can be frustrating for you and your family to find the services you need, to understand the policies that impact you, or to have your concerns heard and responded to in a timely and respectful manner. We have all been concerned by recent cases where seniors have not received the quality of care they required and suffered as a result.

The Ministry of Health is taking immediate action to provide you and your family with the information you need to access services in a timely and informed way, to ensure consistent and fair delivery of care, and to protect vulnerable seniors from abuse and neglect. We are committed to work together with you, your caregivers and community health care providers to support you in your health care choices – from prevention through to end of life.

As we take concrete action over the next year to address the most pressing issues, we will also engage in dialogue with you, your care providers and other stakeholders about the changes we need to make to ensure B.C.'s home and community care services are responsive to the changing needs and expectations of our aging population. We will compare B.C.'s current system with other jurisdictions in Canada and the rest of the world to identify opportunities for innovation. Together, we will create a sustainable system of seniors' home and community care that will benefit all British Columbians for years to come.

Ombudsperson's Report

The Office of the Ombudsperson's report on seniors' care in British Columbia, *The Best of Care: Getting it Right for Seniors in British Columbia (Part 2)*, provides a comprehensive review of a number of services in the system of home and community care across the province. The report examines home support, assisted living and residential care services currently provided to seniors and includes 143 findings and makes 176 recommendations to the Ministry of Health and health authorities on issues of administrative fairness, including adequacy of information, program accessibility, standards of care, and monitoring and enforcement of the standards.

The ministry continues to be committed to improving the home and community care system to address the needs of B.C.'s seniors who require these services. This plan outlines numerous actions focused on addressing many of the ombudsperson's findings and recommendations. The actions identify changes that can be made across the system, resulting in sustainable and lasting improvements that will better serve seniors across the province.

The complete ombudsperson's report can be found at: www.ombudsman.bc.ca



Actions for Improving Home and Community Care Services for B.C. Seniors

The goal of these actions is to establish an improved provincewide system of seniors' care by:

- Appointing an advocate to assist and protect seniors receiving public and private community and health care services and ensure complaints are resolved.
- Expanding non-medical home support to help seniors stay at home longer.
- Providing clear policies and measurable standards for home support, home health, assisted living and residential care services.
- Ensuring that provincial inspection, quality assurance programs, enforcement and staff training in residential facilities align with standards.
- Strengthening protections from abuse and neglect, including improved protections for those who report care concerns or complaints.
- Increasing transparency and accountability through public reporting of the quality of care in publicly funded care facilities, such as patient and family satisfaction, and the incidence of falls. Privately funded facilities will have an opportunity to participate.
- Improving system flexibility and sustainability.



Action Theme 1: Concerns and Complaints

It is important that you and your family are able to raise your concerns and complaints about home and community care, have them taken seriously, and have them handled in a respectful and timely fashion.

- Consultation over the next four to six months will provide seniors, caregivers, service providers and other organizations with the opportunity to have direct input into the future role of a seniors' advocate.
- As of June 1, 2012, a single provincial phone line will allow you and your family to report concerns about your care. You will be provided with direct support and timely follow-up through to resolution.
- The Province will establish an Office of the Seniors' Advocate.

Sandra lives in Ft. St. John and talks with her 91 year old mother, who lives in Abbotsford, by phone regularly. She is concerned because her mother has become confused and doesn't seem to be following her usual routines for dressing, meals and medications. She is not sure her mother is managing safely on her own.

When she called the health authority office, she was told that they had not received any request for assistance from her mother. She met with similar frustration when her mother's family physician was unable to provide information on her mother's health due to doctor-patient confidentiality.

Sandra wants to be sure that someone is checking on her mother's well being, but doesn't know who to ask for help.

Sandra will be able to call the provincial phone line and speak with someone who will connect her with a care manager in home and community care services. The case manager will set up a home visit with her mother, develop a care plan if needed and let Sandra know the outcome of the assessment. The provincial phone line lead will follow up with Sandra to make sure she has received the assistance and information she requested.

Concerns and Complaints

Action Theme 2: Information

It is important that you and your family can easily access and understand all of the information you need to make informed choices about your care.

- Advance care planning information and tools to help you prepare for your future health care needs will be available online and through your local health authority by April 2012.
- Enhancements to www.SeniorsBC.ca by September 2012 will provide you with easier access to information on home and community health care programs and other services.
- Online access to detailed residential care facility inspection reports and assisted living residence investigation reports will be in place by September 2012 to help you and your family choose a care facility.
- More online information about your care and support options, how to access health care services, eligibility criteria for publicly subsidized services, wait times, urgency criteria, patient charges and hardship waivers by September 2012.
- Information provided in October 2012 to assist you and your family to understand and live with dementia, including support provided by the Alzheimer Society's First Link program.
- Updated BC Seniors' Guide will be published by December 2012.

Action Theme 3: Standards and Quality Management

It is important that consistent provincewide standards are established for all of your residential care services, protected by inspection and enforcement.

- Over the next 12 months, improvements will be made to the care seniors receive in residential care through regular medication reviews, enhanced training for care providers and consistent medical oversight.
- Increase the focus of residential facility inspectors on high risk areas and ensure any necessary changes are made to maintain safety beginning in April 2012.
- Plan to standardize benefits and protections to all residential care clients, regardless of where care is received by January 2013.

Action Theme 4: Protection

It is important that strategies and measures are in place to provide you with protections from abuse and neglect.

- Ensure the protection and safety of seniors through consultation and the development of a provincial elder abuse prevention, identification and response strategy by December 2012.
- Invest in the operation and expansion of Community Response Networks across the province over the next three years, which support coordinated local actions and work jointly with other organizations to prevent and respond to elder abuse and neglect.

Standards and Quality Management

Henry suffered from Alzheimer's disease and diabetes. As his care needs increased, his family arranged to have him placed in a residential care facility. The family chose the facility based on information provided online and a visit. The facility had developed a care plan for him and members of his family visited regularly to stay involved in Henry's daily life.

Henry wandered away from the facility in winter and passed away after complications from pneumonia. An investigation into his death suggests that the emergency action taken by the facility was not adequate, the care plan was not being regularly adhered to, and that previous family concerns with Henry's safety and his care had not been addressed.

The family feels that this incident was preventable, and wonders what action could have been taken to ensure the facility was better equipped to meet their father's needs.

The licensing officer will immediately initiate an investigation to review the circumstances, put measures in place to keep the residents safe and establish regular monitoring of the facility based on provincial standards. These reports will be available for families to review online.

Rose lives in a small town, next door to her neighbour and good friend Charlotte. The two women are in their late 80s. Rose fell and broke her hip and had been receiving home health services. A few months ago, her daughter and son-in-law moved in to look after her. Since then, Charlotte has noticed a new car in the driveway and that the daughter has taken several extended trips while Rose is left alone unattended. Rose has become withdrawn and evasive when Charlotte asks her if she is comfortable with the situation at home. Charlotte is very concerned that something is wrong, but doesn't want to further alienate Rose. She doesn't know who to ask for help and what community resources exist for Rose.

With the new provincial elder abuse prevention strategy and additional resources for local Community Response Networks, there will be enhanced coordination, more public awareness and education, and community outreach to prevent and respond to abuse of older adults.

The networks will ensure that the appropriate community supports are offered, that Charlotte knows where to ask for help and that Rose gets the care she needs.

Protection

Action Theme 5: Flexible Services

It is important to have access to the majority of your care needs and support within your own community.

- Invest, in partnership with the United Way of the Lower Mainland, in the expansion of non-medical home support services in up to 65 communities across the province over the next three years, to help you age in place.
- Strengthen family physicians and home health teams providing end of life care through training beginning in April 2012.
- Provide provincewide after hours palliative tele-nursing support to caregivers and families in your home as of April 2012.
- Establish clinical guidelines by June 2012 for frail seniors in emergency and hospitals to improve care outcomes and establish follow up care and supports for a successful return home.
- Establish policies to provide flexibility in accommodating spouses with different care needs within assisted living and residential care residences by September 2012.
- Produce guidelines for dementia care to support caregivers and promote evidence based practice in all care settings by October 2012.
- Over the next two years, innovative approaches for home support services will be piloted in different communities across the province, providing greater choice and flexibility for you and your family.

Flexible Services

Richard and Betty have been married for 65 years, and have lived in the same community for the past 30 years. At 89, Richard has significant health issues that require care and assistance with basic activities (eating, dressing, etc). With his complex and declining health, Richard's care needs qualify for admission to a residential care facility. However, Betty is still active and fully independent and does not need residential care services. Although the couple recognize that they have very different needs at this stage in their life, they do not want to be separated. They wonder if there are other options to help them stay together.

New flexibility in housing and care options will allow Richard and Betty to stay together, including individualized health care supports in their own home, and greater flexibility for assisted living and residential care providers to accommodate spouses with different needs.

Action Theme 6: Modernization

It is important that our home and community care system is sustainable and continues to meet the needs of B.C. seniors.

Over the next two years, the Ministry of Health will work with seniors, health authorities, and care providers to modernize and renew B.C.'s home and community care system. This will include:

- A review of existing best practices of seniors' care across Canada and in other jurisdictions to help us design a system of care that best serves your needs.
- An independent review of the home and community care licensing and enforcement system for residential facilities to identify what changes are needed to ensure consistent standards of care are met across the province.
- Implementing the provincial elder abuse prevention, identification and response strategy.
- An independent review of the current patient care quality program to examine how your concerns and needs are being met and how you can best be served.
- Examining ways to improve the existing protections for patients and providers who report care concerns or complaints.



What We've Done

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. The action plan will continue to build on the changes and improvements that B.C. has introduced over the years to ensure continued support for you and your family.

Housing and Home Support

- 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 housing and care 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 authorities expect to spend over \$2.5 billion on home and community care in 2011/12 – an increase of 60 per cent from 2001.
- Health authorities expect to spend almost \$754 million on home health services in 2011/12 – an increase of almost 86 per cent since 2001.
- 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 January 29, 2010, to protect vulnerable British Columbians and support caregivers.

Improving Care and Quality of Life for Seniors

- In September 2011, the province 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, new age-friendly grants were announced for 52 B.C. communities.
- Since 2007, the Ministry of Health has supported B.C. communities by providing tools to help them respond to an aging population. Across 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 – a collaborative release between the Ministry of Health and the BC Chamber of Commerce.
- B.C. is recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in the field of fall prevention – the biggest cause of injury among B.C. seniors.
- The \$68.7 million Healthy Families BC strategy was launched 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.
- In 2009, the province partnered with the United Way of the Lower Mainland to develop and pilot the Community Action for Seniors' Independence (CASI) project in five communities around the province to help seniors stay in their own homes. 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.

