

2018-19

ANNUAL REPORT

of the Office of the Seniors Advocate



OFFICE OF THE
SENIORS ADVOCATE
BRITISH COLUMBIA



OFFICE OF THE
SENIORS ADVOCATE
BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 2019

The Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
PO Box 9050 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Dix,

It is my pleasure to present the 2018/19 Annual Report of the Office of the Seniors Advocate in accordance with section 4(4) of the *Seniors Advocate Act*.

The document is the fifth annual report from the Office of the Seniors Advocate and reports on the period of April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019.

Sincerely,

Isobel Mackenzie
Seniors Advocate
Province of British Columbia

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENIORS ADVOCATE



The past year has been a busy one for the Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) with thousands of seniors and their families contacting our office for information and referral. It has also been a year that has seen some welcomed additional resources for seniors including increases to the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER), increased commitment to Adult Day Programs, and continued increases in the funding for care that is provided in B.C.'s 297 publicly funded long-term care homes and in the home care sector, to name a few.

The OSA continues its commitment to outreach and engagement with B.C. seniors and their families; this past year we visited 41 B.C. communities and engaged in over 165 meetings with stakeholders. The overwhelming support for the work of the OSA is a testament to the active and engaged citizens in every corner of the province who care deeply about the well-being of seniors in their community.

We continue to monitor services to seniors, and over this past year we reported on health care, housing, transportation, income supports, and elder abuse.

We also released two major reports. The first, on transportation, highlighted the challenges that seniors face when they are no longer able to drive and cannot access traditional public transit. The second examined the patterns of hospital transfers for residents who reside in long-term care homes.

Throughout the past year the work of the OSA has been supported by a phenomenal Council of Advisors who are my eyes and ears for seniors issues across the province.

In addition, my office continues to be inspired by the support we receive from B.C.'s health authorities, service providers, and government ministries that provide my office with data, information, and feedback about seniors services to use for our systemic reviews and reports.

In 2018/19, the OSA worked directly with service providers and policy makers on issues of importance to seniors and their families including: the need to proclaim Part 3 of the *Health Care Consent and Admission to Care Facility Act*; the ability of seniors to have more choice in their care home; the need to reduce the costs of public home support; and regulations to address the gap of tenancy protection for those residing in registered assisted living.

We will continue these projects and more in the upcoming year as part of our mandate to address systemic issues and to find ways to improve the quality of life for seniors in B.C.



Isobel Mackenzie

**Seniors Advocate
Province of British Columbia**



SENIORS ADVOCATE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

INDEPENDENCE

The Seniors Advocate works with seniors and key stakeholders (governments, community agencies, private organizations, and advocacy groups) to identify and understand systemic issues, while retaining the ability to make independent recommendations for change.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY - SENIORS ADVOCATE ACT

- Identify work priorities, develop plans, and hire employees and outside experts
- Gather information from service providers
- Make independent recommendations to government and service providers
- Report to the public on any matter arising from the fulfillment of responsibilities
- Appoint a Council of Advisors

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Accountable to the people of B.C. through a mandate prescribed in legislation
- Must report to the minister responsible for seniors (currently the Minister of Health) at least once each year on the activities of the office
- Duty to advise the minister, public officials, and other service providers about systemic challenges facing seniors and the need for changes to address those challenges

SCOPE

- “Senior” is a B.C. resident aged 65 or older, or less than 65 but receiving seniors services
- Provide information and referral services to seniors, their caregivers and their families
- Identify and analyze systemic challenges faced by seniors and their families
- Monitor seniors services related to health care, personal care, housing, transportation, and income support
- Focus on systemic issues and connect individuals to the appropriate body to resolve their individual issues

REPORTING

- Report to the public on any matter related to the fulfillment of responsibilities
- Provide annual report to the minister
- Regular communication with government and service providers for ongoing redress of issues
- The minister may require the Advocate to report to the minister on specific matters

COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Through a variety of outreach activities, the Office of the Seniors Advocate hears from thousands of seniors, their families, stakeholders, and service providers each year. These engagement opportunities are a critical component of the OSA's work to become aware of and understand the systemic issues facing B.C.'s seniors.

In 2018/19, the Seniors Advocate was invited to speak to 46 community groups and organizations on topics such as seniors services, residential care, home support, caregiver support, housing, and transportation issues. The audiences ranged from community organizations to attendees at academic conferences.

Community
Presentations
46

Stakeholder
Meetings
169

The Seniors Advocate regularly liaises with stakeholders representing the five areas of the OSA's mandate to further develop an understanding of the issues and challenges faced by seniors in British Columbia. In 2018/19, stakeholder groups included the Gerontological Nurses Association of BC, Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, BC Nurse Practitioner Association, Federation of Community Social Services, Memorial Society of British Columbia, and the Canadian Bar Association.

In 2018/19, the Seniors Advocate visited 41 communities across B.C. touching all five health authorities. As the experiences of seniors vary widely depending on where they live, the Seniors Advocate continues to prioritize visiting as many communities in B.C. as possible.

Communities
Visited
41

Senior Population in B.C. by Health Authority, 2018



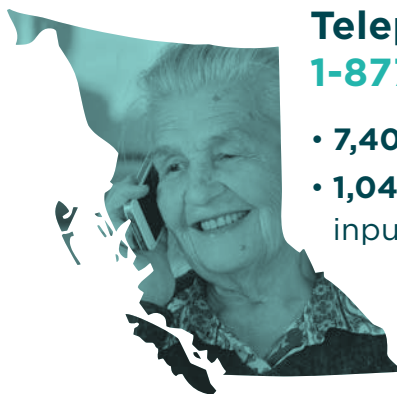
INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

Information and referral responsibilities are set out under section 3 of the *Seniors Advocate Act*. Under section 3(2), the Seniors Advocate is responsible for promoting awareness of systemic challenges faced by seniors and of the resources available. Under section 3(3), the Seniors Advocate is responsible for connecting individuals with specific complaints to appropriate individuals or agencies having jurisdiction to resolve those complaints. While the key mandate of the Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) is to focus on systemic issues in B.C. that impact many seniors, information and referral play a critical and complementary role in the identification and dissemination of information on systemic challenges facing seniors.

METHODS OF CONTACT WITH THE OSA

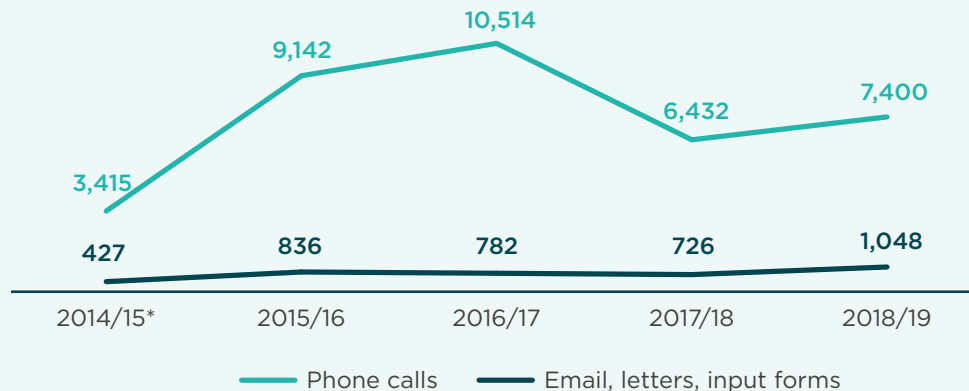
Members of the public have several avenues of access to the Office of the Seniors Advocate, including telephone, email, an online input form, and surface mail. The toll-free information and referral phone line is answered from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday. Staff responding to the phone and to correspondence have a wide variety of knowledge and experience. Some are health professionals with many years of experience working with seniors, community-based programs and the health care system while others have extensive experience with government programs and front-line customer service.

All are dedicated to supporting seniors, their families and the general public with meaningful information and referrals to services and programs that can assist them in resolving their issues.



Telephone line:
1-877-952-3181

- **7,400** phone calls
- **1,048** letters, emails & input forms received

CONTACTS WITH THE OFFICE OF THE SENIORS ADVOCATE 2014/15–2018/19

Note: 2014/15 is partial year from September 2014 to March 2015

In 2016/17, the OSA launched two major surveys: HandyDART Survey and Residential Care Survey. This resulted in many calls and letters to the OSA from seniors and their families requesting information or giving feedback about the surveys.

The OSA website, www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca, features an “input form” that provides a space for the public to alert the OSA of issues that impact many seniors, and to submit ideas, solutions and comments related to these matters. This method provides an opportunity for thoughtful input on issues of importance to seniors.

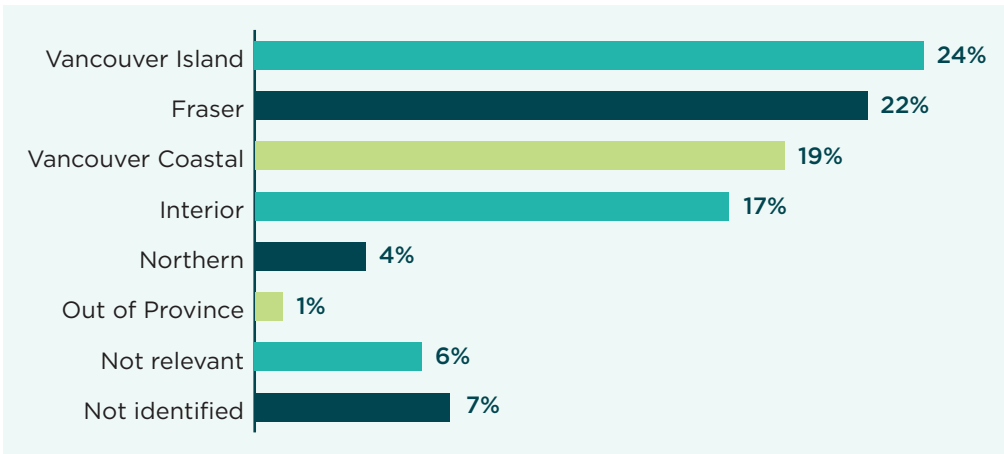
In 2018/19, issues raised on input forms included the following:

- The need for more affordable housing for seniors
- More housing options for seniors with mobility issues and other special needs
- The cost of the Driver’s Medical Examination Report (DMER)
- Cancellation of the Greyhound bus service
- Caregivers needing more respite care
- Elderly spouses caring for a partner needing more hours of home support to assist them in providing care
- Staffing concerns in long-term care facilities
- Concerns about the quality and lack of variety of food in long-term care facilities
- Long wait time for admission to long-term care facilities
- Lack of government funding for hearing aids, dental care and eye glasses for low-income seniors



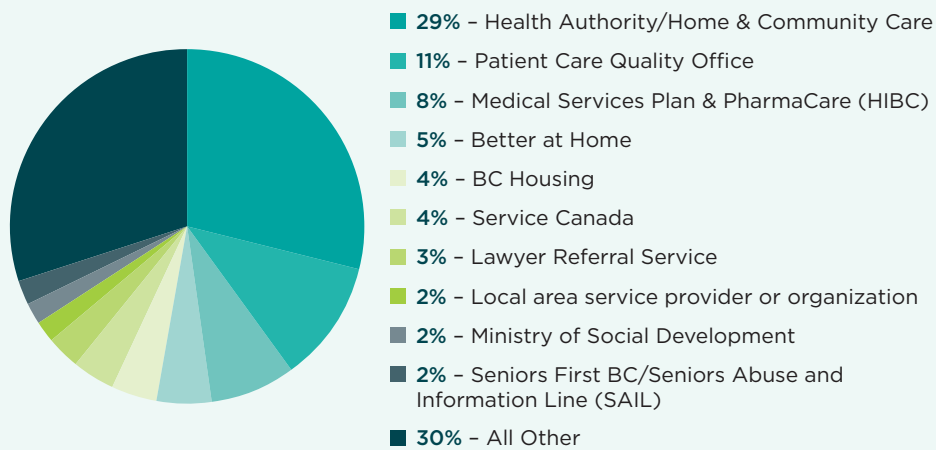
All contacts, by any method of communication are documented. We track and monitor information about these contacts, the area of concern, and our response and follow-up. This information helps us to identify the systemic issues and concerns that are important to B.C. seniors. This also highlights possible areas for the OSA to research and explore further.

Wherever possible, the location of the contact is captured and sorted geographically by health authority. There was little variation in the distribution by health authority between 2014/15 and 2018/19 with the highest percentage of contacts initiated from within the Vancouver Island Health Authority in each year.



CONTACTS MADE WITH OSA BY HEALTH AUTHORITY IN 2018/19

Many of the people contacting our office, particularly those contacting us by telephone, raise issues that result in a referral to another agency or service that can provide further help. The Office of the Seniors Advocate provided 2,423 referrals in 2018/19. The pie chart on the next page highlights our most frequent referrals.

TOP 10 AGENCIES AND SERVICES REFERRED TO IN 2018/19

Between 67% and 73% of referrals were to the same top 10 agencies and services each year between 2014/15 and 2018/19.

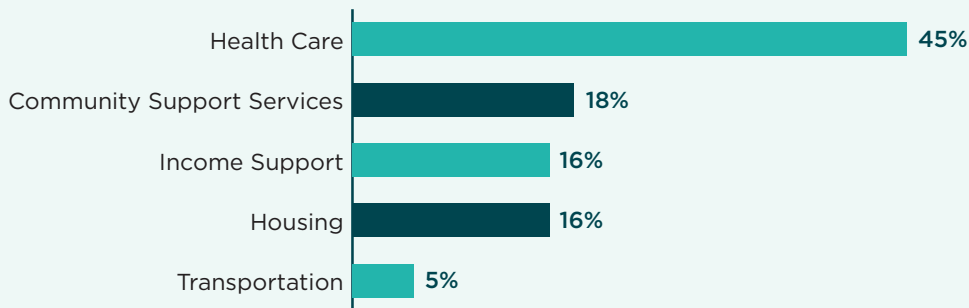
REASONS FOR CONTACTING THE OFFICE OF THE SENIORS ADVOCATE

We continue to receive many requests for the latest edition of the *BC Seniors' Guide*, which was released in 2016. On average, we received almost 100 requests each month from seniors, their families and organizations that distribute the guide from their offices. In 2018/19, 34,848 *BC Seniors' Guides* were sent out to individuals and organizations. The *BC Seniors' Guide* is now available in English and six other languages: French, Punjabi, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, and Vietnamese.

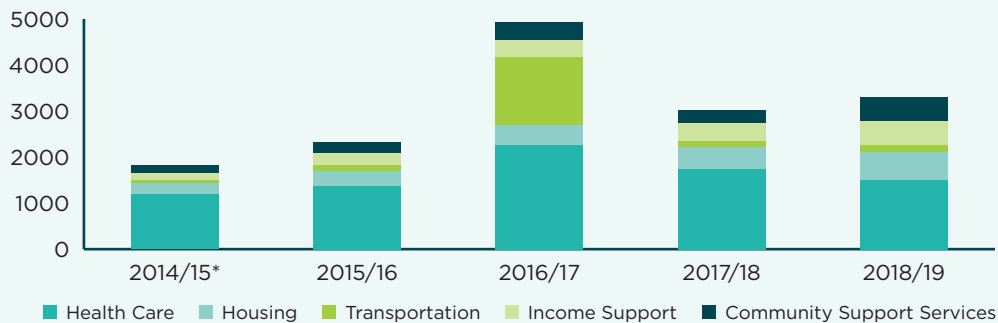
We heard from seniors and their families with questions or concerns about changes in existing programs or new government initiatives. Some of the issues included:

- The new *Speculation and Vacancy Tax* for home owners in designated areas of B.C.;
- The T5007 tax form issued to low income seniors who received an annual bus pass through the Bus Pass for Seniors Program;
- The allowable 4.5% rent increase that was announced for 2019 but was later reduced to a 2.5% increase;
- Changes in the PharmaCare program where the deductible was eliminated for families with an annual family income of less than \$30,000 (for people born after 1939); and
- Improvements in the rent subsidy provided by the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters Program (SAFER).

CONTACTS BY SERVICE AREA 2018/19



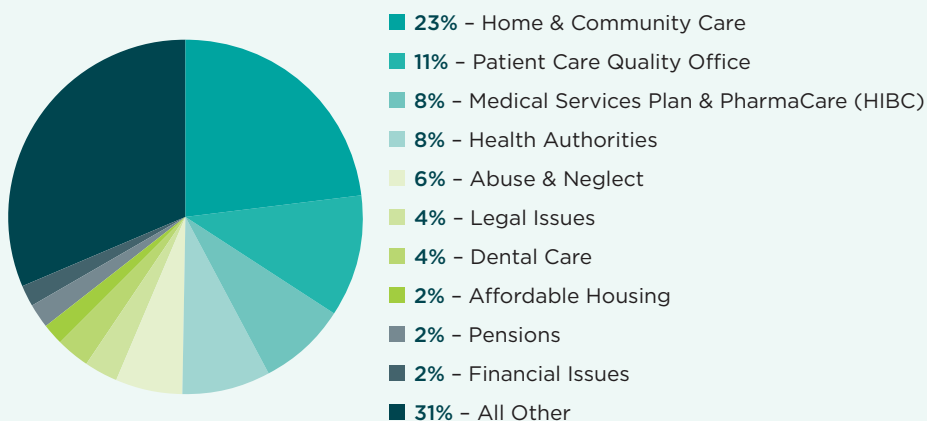
CONTACTS BY SERVICE AREA 2014/15 - 2018/19



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CONTACTS BY TOP 10 SERVICE AREAS OR THEMES 2018/19



Excluding general information and publication requests, home & community care, Medical Services Plan & PharmaCare, health authority services, and abuse & neglect were among the top themes identified each year for all types of contact with this office. Increased questions about public transportation was an anomaly in 2016/17 due to the HandyDART survey.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED

Individuals contacted the OSA to inform us of systemic challenges facing seniors in relation to health care, housing, transportation, income support and community support.

Health Care

- Inability to find a family doctor or concerns that their family doctor would soon be retiring, and no doctors were accepting new patients in their community.
- Seniors using walk-in clinics in place of family doctors, who expressed concerns that they could not make an appointment or could do this only if they arrived and checked in with the clinic. This was difficult for seniors with mobility issues who would have to leave and come back later.
- Lack of respite care, adult day programs, and long-term care beds, especially in small communities and rural areas
- The long-term care placement process - long wait times for admission and then more waiting to be transferred to their preferred facility
- Various aspects of the care provided in long-term care facilities including food quality, exercise and recreational therapy, personal care, palliative care, staffing levels, staff training, and the need for respectful, dignified care
- Financial concerns associated with long-term care placement:
 - How to ensure the spouse left at home when a senior is admitted to long-term care has enough money to continue to live in their home; and
 - Seniors who moved to private-pay long-term care as a temporary measure while waiting for a subsidized bed who are now running out of money and need to be admitted to a subsidized bed.
- Concerns about PharmaCare coverage including necessary medications not covered, high deductibles, and the cost of the shingles, pneumonia and whooping cough vaccines
- Lack of funding for dental care, dentures, eyeglasses, hearing aids, mobility aids, and medical equipment for seniors

- The hospital discharge process, particularly if people are sent home before they are ready to be discharged or they lack a comprehensive plan for their care at home
- Family members who feel they can no longer care for a loved one at home because they require 24-hour care and are unsafe at home (e.g. the senior is up through the night and wandering throughout the day)
- The inadequacy of home support hours, short visits, lack of continuity of workers, workers who can't communicate clearly in English, inadequate training of home support workers, and changes in workers schedules without informing the client or family
- The need for different types of dementia care, more dementia training for front line staff, and the use of new technologies in providing comprehensive dementia care





We frequently hear from families who live far away from their parents and want to know what services are available for an elderly parent to help them stay at home for as long as possible.

George called the Office of the Seniors Advocate to inquire about services for his 90-year-old mother. She lives on Vancouver Island while George lives in the Interior of British Columbia. He told us his mother was in good health and had been managing at home without any services but now she needs a walker to get around. She recently told him she was having difficulty doing her weekly housecleaning and that she doesn't feel safe getting in and out of the bathtub by herself anymore. She also decided to stop driving. Since George did not live nearby he was concerned and her health and safety, and access to transportation.

The OSA provided George with contact information for the Island Health Home and Community Care Program. We explained that a home and community care case manager would complete an assessment to determine what services his mother would require. We shared information about the Better at Home Program that provides light housekeeping services, and contact information for HandyDART, a service that provides transportation for seniors who can't access public transit. We also provided a copy of the BC Seniors Guide that is available online and in print format from our office.

Housing

- Speculation tax - concerns about completing the form correctly to receive an exemption
- Lack of affordable housing for low-income seniors; long waits (e.g. two or three years) for subsidized housing
- Concerns about the allowable annual rent increase which was slated to be 4.5% for 2019 but was later reduced to 2.5% by the government
- SAFER grants not keeping up with rising rents in some areas of the province, although SAFER was increased in September 2018
- Seniors at risk of becoming homeless because they are being evicted:
 - From their apartments where they have lived for many years because the building is being torn down or redeveloped as condominiums; and
 - From their manufactured home parks because the land is being redeveloped to make way for short-term seasonal recreation vehicles. Often, their modular home is too old to be safely moved from their recreation trailer park where they have lived for many years.
- Low vacancy rate in many parts of British Columbia and/or high rents for available suites
- Tenancy issues and disputes with landlords around increased rents, lack of appropriate maintenance, and lack of respectful communication
- Seniors on a limited fixed income having difficulty affording regular maintenance, necessary repairs and the cost of unexpected emergencies for their homes
- Concerns about the impact of foreign ownership of seniors housing and care facilities
- The need for different models of housing for aging baby boomers
- Social isolation for seniors living in the community; need for more choices in seniors housing options including the ability to live independently while at the same time being part of a supportive community
- Significant physical and emotional impact on seniors when they must move to a new location/facility

We often hear from seniors about housing and tenancy issues. Appropriate, accessible and affordable housing is essential for seniors to be able to live independently in the community for as long as possible.

Helen is an 87-year-old woman who uses a wheelchair. She lives in a small community on the third floor of an independent-living apartment building. There is one elevator in the building and the building manager informed the tenants that the elevator was being replaced and would not be functioning for several weeks. They suggested that anyone who needed the elevator to access their suite should plan to stay with family or go on a holiday. No assistance was offered to them for finding alternate housing or to compensate them for the disruption.

Helen phoned the Office of the Seniors Advocate to ask what rights the tenants had in this situation and said there were several seniors who live on the upper floors who use wheelchairs or walkers. They didn't have housing options available to them that would accommodate a walker or a wheelchair and were worried about where they would live and how they would manage while the elevator was out of service.

The staff at the Office of the Seniors Advocate reviewed the situation and informed Helen that there are protections for tenants under the Residential Tenancy Act. We sent her a copy of the Act highlighting the appropriate section and provided her with the contact information for the Residential Tenancy Branch who could provide further information.



Transportation

- The lack of bus service between communities when Greyhound Bus Lines stopped servicing western Canada
- Seniors being unable to access free ferries on Monday to Thursday on routes where you pay for a return ferry on the first day of travel, regardless of when you make your return trip
- The cost for the Driver's Medical Examination Report (DMER) and the fact there is no standardized fee
- Concerns around the fairness of the DMER being a requirement for all individuals who are 80 years of age or older, regardless of driving record
- Concerns about HandyDART and local volunteer transportation programs for seniors including limited hours of operation, lack of flexibility, lack of access (primarily in rural areas), and the cost for low-income seniors to access these services

Income Supports

- Concerns that the new T5007 tax form, issued to low-income seniors who received an annual bus pass through the Bus Pass for Seniors Program, might impact their SAFER grant and their Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)
- Questions about the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security (OAS), GIS, and the BC Seniors Supplement
- Concerns about the long processing time for various programs like OAS and GIS.
- Seniors on GIS and Seniors Supplement not receiving enough income to meet their expenses, resulting in seniors paying a large percentage of their income on rent, and concerns about becoming homeless
- Low income seniors, already struggling to pay their bills, are unable to accommodate unanticipated changes in their expenses like rent increases or high hydro bills
- Questions about Disability Tax credits and Disability Pensions for seniors
- Financial impact on the senior left at home if their spouse passes away or is admitted to a long-term care facility

Community Supports

- Seniors seeking local advocates to attend meetings with them to help resolve legal, health care or tenancy issues
- Seniors requesting help filling out application forms for pensions, CPP, disability, and complaint/appeal processes
- Concerns about seniors experiencing elder abuse, neglect, and self-neglect, and resources available to help them
- Seniors being the victims of phone scams
- Seniors wanting to remain in their homes but needing help with housekeeping and general repairs. Programs such as the Better at Home may not be available in small and rural communities, or have long waiting lists in larger urban areas



We are hearing more frequently from families who want to move an elderly parent to B.C. from another province so that they can participate more fully in caring for and supporting their loved one as they age.

Maria called our office to discuss the process for bringing her 92-year-old mother to Metro Vancouver from a small city in western Ontario where she lives in a long-term care facility. Maria was just about to retire. Although she would have more time for her mom, she could no longer afford to travel to Ontario several times a year to assist her.

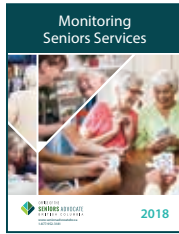
The Office of the Seniors Advocate supported Maria through the complex process to transition her mom to B.C. Maria's biggest concern was that her mom would have to wait three months after moving to the province to be eligible for Medical Services Plan (MSP) coverage. Although there is reciprocity between provinces for hospital and physician care, this does not cover residential care or community-based services. Maria's mother could not be assessed for long-term care until she was registered with MSP.

OSA staff assisted Maria with accessing and understanding the Provincial Waiver of Residency Requirement policy. We advised her of the benefits of getting established with a case manager for her mom very early in the process. Soon after her mom arrived in B.C., she was assessed by a case manager. The Home and Community Care program provided support and therapy services to assist Maria and her mom while she waited for long-term care. Maria's mom was admitted to a long-term care facility four months after she arrived in B.C.

Maria now visits her mom daily and has organized some friendly visitors to take her for walks in the courtyard and provide some additional socialization. Maria is relieved to have her mother nearby so that she can see her whenever she wants and support her needs as she ages. Maria says her mom is the happiest she has been in the last eight years and they are enjoying their special times together.

MONITORING B.C. SENIORS SERVICES

MONITORING SENIORS SERVICES REPORT



The fourth annual *Monitoring Seniors Services* report was released in January 2019. The report provides the status of key seniors services in the province, highlighting where seniors needs are being met and where improvements are most needed.

HEALTH CARE

- The number of people waiting for subsidized assisted living and long-term care both increased by 7% over last year. In 2017/18, 71% of seniors were admitted to long-term care within 30 days.
- The number of people waiting for Adult Day Programs increased by 23%, yet the number of clients attending decreased by 3% over last year.
- The number of home support clients decreased by 1.4% over the last year but the average hours of care per client increased by 2%.

HOUSING

- There was a 27% increase in new users of the Tax Deferral Program, which is available to older adults (55+) who are homeowners. There was a total of \$209 million of property taxes deferred.
- In September 2018, the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program was updated with increased maximum allowable incomes and rents depending on the geographic location. There was a 7% increase in the number of seniors receiving a SAFER subsidy.
- The number of subsidized housing units decreased 4% in 2017/18 while the number of people waiting at the end of the year increased 7%.

TRANSPORTATION

- In 2017, 78% of seniors maintained an active driver's licence. This was a 5% increase while the population aged 65+ grew by 4%.
- In 2017, there were 65,800 driver fitness cases opened for those aged 80+ of which fewer than 2% were subsequently referred for a DriveAble assessment. As of March 2018, the DriveAble assessment has been replaced by the Enhanced Road Assessment (ERA) allowing seniors to complete the assessment in their own vehicle.
- The number of active handyDART clients decreased 3% in 2017 with a 0.6% increase in ride requests, a 0.7% increase in rides provided, and a 2% decrease in unfilled rides.

INCOME SUPPORTS

- Between October and December 2018, low income seniors could receive up to \$1,547.57 per month in federal and provincial income supports, 2.5% more than the same time last year.
- In 2017, 34% of seniors received some level of MSP premium assistance and 4% were exempt from paying premiums. In 2018, the basic MSP premium was reduced by 50%.

ELDER ABUSE

- The Public Guardian and Trustee responded to 1,540 referrals about abuse and neglect in 2017/18, a 6% decrease from the previous year.
- The Seniors Abuse and Information Line (SAIL) received 1,546 calls related to abuse in 2017, a 2% decrease from the previous year.



BRITISH COLUMBIA LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES QUICK FACTS DIRECTORY



The B.C. Long-Term Care Quick Facts Directory has been a highly sought-after resource since its initial publication in March 2016. To ensure the information within the directory remains current and relevant, our office spent much of the fall updating information on beds, room configurations, funding for direct care hours, licensing complaints and inspections, resident profile indicators, and care services indicators. This year, new information about contracted services and per diem funding rates were added.

The updated online directory was released in November 2018. This release included an enhanced search capability to allow for a more user-friendly experience to search for information within the directory. To aid in the process of providing accurate information on long-term care options, the OSA will continue to update the directory annually and seek out the most useful information to provide to seniors and their caregivers.

Quick Facts Directory Summary Findings

FACILITY

- The Quick Facts Directory contains information on 293 publicly subsidized long-term care facilities in B.C.
- 111 facilities are operated directly by a health authority
- 182 facilities are operated by a contractor with funding from a health authority

RESIDENT PROFILE

- The average age of a resident was 85 years.
- 29% of residents had severe cognitive impairment, 51% had mild to moderate impairment and 20% had no impairment.
- 30% of residents are dependent on staff for their activities of daily living
- Almost half of residents had a low sense of social engagement.

SERVICES

- Care homes are funded at an average of 3.13 care hours per resident per day.
- The average per diem rate in contracted facilities was \$211.92 per bed per day. This data is not available for health authority-operated facilities.
- The average funded raw food cost was \$7.73 and ranged from \$5.39 to \$20.10 per day.
- 12% of residents received physical therapy, 29% received recreation therapy and 7% received occupational therapy.

REPORTING

The Office of the Seniors Advocate produces reports on systemic issues affecting seniors in British Columbia. These reports are produced and disseminated to the public. The Seniors Advocate often speaks directly to the public about her findings through media and news releases, and in her many presentations to seniors groups across the province.

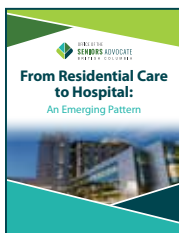
The reports highlight issues of concern for seniors and make recommendations to government and service providers for system improvements. All reports are posted on the OSA website and can be found under *Reports and Publications* at www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca. Brief highlights of the reports published in 2018/19 are presented below.

SENIORS AT HOME AND IN LONG-TERM CARE



This report examined the most recent data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) on seniors living in long term care and receiving public home care. The data are based on the InterRAI- HC and InterRAI 2.0 assessments that report on the physical, cognitive, and psycho-social status those receiving services as well as a number of other markers, such as diagnosis, medications and access to various supports and therapies. The population of BC was compared to other jurisdictions in Canada and highlighted that in BC we have the oldest population receiving home care, however in many measures our long term population is less frail.

HOSPITAL TRANSFERS



From Residential Care to Hospital: An Emerging Pattern was released in August 2018. This report compared hospitalization rates between residents in contracted residential care facilities and those in publicly owned and operated facilities. The research methodology was robust and included data from the National Ambulatory Care Reporting System, the Discharge Abstract Database, the Continuing Care Reporting System, and included more than 55,000 episodes of care and 358,470 Minimum Data Set assessment records. The report demonstrated that, compared to care homes operated directly by the

health authority, residents who live in a care home that is operated by a contracted provider are:

- 32% more likely to be sent to the emergency department;
- 34% more likely to be hospitalized; and
- to have a 32% longer length of stay in hospital.

The report highlighted the financial impact of these potentially avoidable hospitalizations, and the impact to seniors of hospital-acquired infections, deconditioning, and confusion resulting from being in an unfamiliar place. Reducing hospitalizations for seniors is a goal that is gaining increasing attention and for good reason: it benefits both the senior and the taxpayer.

TRANSPORTATION REPORT



Seniors Transportation: Affordable, Appropriate and Available was released in May 2018. This report is the first from the Seniors Advocate to focus on the issues facing seniors around transportation. Seniors use various modes of transportation including driving, travelling with friends and family, using public transit, walking, and using HandyDART, taxis and volunteer drivers.

One recommendation in the report focused on the importance of creating more pedestrian-friendly communities using grants, tax incentives, rebates and other tools in local government. These pedestrian-friendly developments need to also include support for mobility-challenged pedestrians in the commercial hubs where shops and services are located.

Many seniors are concerned about costs associated with having a physician complete the assessment form for those seeking to renew their driver's licence. The Seniors Advocate recommended that the Province examine the possibility of other health care professionals conducting the assessment.

Another key recommendation was made to recognize the significant support family and friends provide by driving their family members, friends or neighbours to medical appointments. The report suggested that, just as tax deductions are allowed for those who use their personal vehicles for business, government could examine the possibility of a similar tax relief program for someone who acts as the primary driver for a senior who is no longer in possession of a current driver's licence and qualifies for HandyDART and/or the Federal Disability Tax Credit.

INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC SENIORS ISSUES

MEETING WITH FEDERAL MINISTER OF SENIORS AND OTHER SENIORS ADVOCATES

The BC Seniors Advocate, along with the three other provincial seniors advocates from Alberta, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador, met with the Honourable Filomena Tassi, Federal Minister of Seniors, on January 31st, 2019.

They provided the minister with a pan-Canadian perspective on the issues that seniors face across the nation. They also discussed the current work of her ministry; in particular what she had been hearing from her National Seniors Council.

RIDE-HAILING SUBMISSION

In 2018, the Seniors Advocate presented a submission to the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Inquiry into Ride-Hailing. Her submission was based on the background work for the Transportation Report and from the more than 120 stakeholders across the province who shared their perspective of transportation challenges experienced by seniors. The report highlights that aging baby boomers will outlive their driving years by an average of 7-10 years but will continue to be active and involved in their communities as they age, often long after they have stopped driving. Ninety per cent of B.C. seniors aged 65-69 hold an active driver's license, and this decreases to 35% for seniors aged 85 and older, meaning most of our oldest seniors are relying on alternative forms of transportation.

It is important to note that at age 85 and older, 72% of B.C. seniors are still living independently. By 2040, there could be as many as half a million B.C. seniors that have retired from driving, or are non-drivers, who will be looking for alternative transportation options for a wide-range of trips, from doctor's appointments to visiting family and friends.

Lack of access to affordable and appropriate transportation options is a major risk factor for social isolation, especially for the 29% of seniors aged 85 or older who live alone and the 15% of senior households that live on less than \$20,000 annually. Accessible and affordable transportation supports seniors to remain living independently and continue to take part in their communities. The Seniors Advocate recommendations for ride-hailing were three-fold:

- Develop an insurance product suitable for part-time vehicle-for-hire work;
- Develop provincial safety standards for all commercial or ride-hailing vehicle drivers, vehicles, and activities; and
- Implement regulatory incentives and requirements which help ensure ride-hailing options will capture the range of transportation services required to allow independent travellers or passengers that require substantial assistance and/or accompaniment to successfully complete their trip.





SUBMISSION TO SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The Seniors Advocate presented to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services on October 9, 2018 as part of the 2019 pre-budget consultation process. The presentation and subsequent submission focused on the Home Support Client Contribution. The Seniors Advocate highlighted the cost to the client which may deter some seniors from accessing the service, serving instead as a financial incentive to move to long-term care.

T5007 TAX FORM

In February 2019, approximately 60,000 B.C. seniors who receive the Seniors Bus Pass were issued a T5007 tax form for the first time. The T5007 showed the \$597 net cost of the bus pass as a non-taxable benefit. Several concerned seniors contacted OSA worried this change would result in them no longer being eligible for, and/or not receiving the full amount of, several important income, housing and health benefits. We are continuing to work with the Ministry of Finance and other relevant ministries to ensure the T5007 is for information purposes only and will not affect the income and benefits received by our most vulnerable seniors.

PROGRESS TO DATE

MANUFACTURED HOME PARKS - LEGISLATION AMENDMENT

Effective June 6, 2018, amendments to the *Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act* came into force that provide stronger protections for tenants facing eviction due to redevelopment. Tenants of mobile home parks are now entitled to, among other rights, 12 months of advance notice from the landlord and \$20,000 in compensation payable by the landlord.

These amendments are in line with a previous recommendation made in OSA's housing report (*Seniors Housing in BC: Affordable, Appropriate, 2015*), that "the Provincial Government consult with the B.C. Manufactured Home Owners, the Manufactured Home Park Owners Alliance of British Columbia and regional manufactured home owners associations to revise the *Manufactured Home Act* so that fair and equitable compensation is provided to manufactured home owners who are required to leave their home due to sale or development of the property."



EXPANDED SUPPORT FOR RESPITE CARE AND ADULT DAY PROGRAMS

On June 18, 2018, the provincial government announced they were investing \$75 million to expand respite care and adult day programs to help both seniors and their loved ones. The number of respite beds will be increased, and overnight care at home will be made more accessible. As well, the number of adult day program spaces will be increased, and the hours of operation will be expanded to provide services on evenings and weekends. Regional health authorities are also developing plans to meet localized needs of family-and-friend caregivers and seniors in their regions.

INVESTMENT IN LONG-TERM CARE

An additional \$48 million in funding was allocated to health authorities in 2018/19 to help increase hours of direct care.

CUT TO ANNUAL ALLOWABLE RENT INCREASE

In September 2018, the provincial government cut the annual allowable rent increase by 2%, limiting it to inflation. This meant that effective January 1, 2019, the annual allowable rent increase was 2.5%. The previous formula allowed annual rent increases of 2% plus inflation which meant that without the cut, the allowable rent increase would have been 4.5%. This rent relief was particularly beneficial to the many senior renters on fixed incomes.

CHANGES TO PHARMACARE FOR SENIORS 2019

Changes to Pharmacare deductibles and family maximum amounts came into effect January 1, 2019. These changes affect all those who qualify for Fair Pharmacare (Regular Assistance families) and have resulted in all families (including singles and couples with or without dependents) earning up to a \$45,000 per year having lower deductibles or annual family maximums. In addition, for families on Enhanced Assistance (those with at least one family member born before 1940), there is no deductible for family maximum if the household income is up to \$14,000, and no deductible up to an income of \$33,000.



CHANGES IN THE SAFER SUPPLEMENT

As announced in the 2018 provincial budget, low income seniors will benefit from an increase to the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program. The province has committed to a \$116 million increase over three years.

Changes that took effect in September 2018 included:

1. An increase in the monthly income ceiling to qualify for SAFER for seniors living in all areas of the province except Metro Vancouver where income ceilings stayed the same; and
2. An increase in the maximum rent ceilings in all areas of the province.

These changes resulted in some seniors receiving a higher SAFER subsidy beginning in September 2018. Letters were sent to all impacted clients by the end of August the same year.

MSP PREMIUMS REDUCED

In January 2018, the B.C. government reduced Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums by 50%. This was a first step towards MSP premium elimination which will take effect January 1, 2020. Seniors will benefit the most from the elimination of MSP premiums as those 65 or older have disproportionately lower incomes.

SPECULATION AND VACANCY TAX

Many seniors contacted the OSA with concerns about the new *Speculation and Vacancy Tax (SVT)* declaration process. The OSA engaged with the Ministry of Finance to ensure as smooth a process as possible and the Ministry of Finance and the OSA committed to review learnings from the first year to find any opportunities for improving the process.

FAIR WORKPLACE LEGISLATION

The Seniors Advocate has identified issues related to staff turnover at long-term care homes. One of the contributing causes to staff turnover was the ability of an operator to re-tender contracts for care staff that could result in the layoff of all existing care staff with new staff hired by the new contractor. This is sometimes referred to colloquially as “contract flipping”.

In November 2018, the B.C. government introduced legislation that would ensure existing employees would be protected if contracts were re-tendered. This goes a long way to ensuring better continuity of care for seniors in long-term homes as there is one less opportunity for staff disruption and turnover.



2018/19 OSA OPERATING BUDGET

The budget for the Office of the Seniors Advocate's fifth year of operation was allocated at \$2.44 million. Expenditures focused on consulting with seniors in their own communities, monitoring key services to seniors, systemic reviews, and producing reports with recommendations to government and service-providers to address systemic issues and improve services to seniors. As expected, expenditures for professional services associated with conducting systemic reviews, reporting, and provincially-standardized surveys were reduced significantly from last year due to the completion of the work on the residential care survey and because no major province-wide surveys were initiated in 2018/19. Reduced expenditures for professional services, combined with significant cost savings in other areas, resulted in overall expenditures of \$1.57 million which was well below the \$2.44 million budget allocated.

In 2019/20, the Seniors Advocate will initiate planning for the next province-wide residential care survey which will result in increased expenditures for professional services.

STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURES

EXPENSE TYPE	2018/19 BUDGET	2018/19 ACTUALS
Salaries	\$1,175,000	\$1,097,639
Employee Benefits	291,400	285,321
Boards	0	1,600
Travel	85,000	39,475
Legal Services	45,000	8,014
Professional Services	324,771	17,442
Information Services	40,000	26,045
Office, Business and Reporting Expenses	474,000	94,002
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$2,435,171	\$1,569,538

COUNCIL OF ADVISORS

The Office of the Seniors Advocate has a thirty-member Council of Advisors (COA) that provides valuable insight into seniors' issues in B.C. This group of engaged and connected seniors represents each of the province's five health authority regions and comes from a wide range of educational, professional and socio-economic backgrounds. The COA serves as both a sounding board for the Seniors Advocate as well as a conduit to the Advocate for information and concerns from all regions of the province.

The council meets in person twice yearly and participates in facilitated discussion on a range of topics. Five COA sub-committees were formed in 2018/19, each focusing on areas of importance to seniors:

- Federal Advisory Committee
- Rural Issues Advisory Committee
- Disability Issues Advisory Committee
- Active Aging Advisory Committee
- Multicultural Issues Advisory Committee

Over the past year, council members have been engaged in their local communities and regions representing the Office of the Seniors Advocate at several events and presentations, including the Union of BC Municipalities Convention and various seniors health and wellness events.



COUNCIL OF ADVISORS BIOGRAPHIES

FRASER – seven representatives

<p>Mohammad Rafiq Surrey</p>	<p>Volunteer in community development and welfare organizations including Surrey Seniors Planning Table; seeks to reduce the intergenerational gap and develop inter-cultural communication between communities.</p>
<p>Janet Sie Ling Lee Burnaby</p>	<p>Immigrated to B.C. from China in 1963; hospital nurse for 30 years; volunteers with senior outreach for the Collingwood Community Centre; established a Chinese school in Vancouver in the 1980s.</p>
<p>Leslie Gaudette Langley</p>	<p>Epidemiologist and retired manager in Chronic Disease Division, Public Health Agency of Canada; senior analyst, Canadian Cancer Registry, Statistics Canada; member Langley Seniors Community Action Table; and supporter of Bard in the Valley and the Langley Players Drama Club.</p>
<p>ML (Mary-Lynn) Burke Delta</p>	<p>Volunteer, Delta Seniors Planning Team; helps seniors navigate B.C.'s health system for services and housing; spent 15 years with Vancouver Coastal Health managing volunteer programs for seniors; vice president of the Delta Housing Be Mine Society, creating affordable housing for people with varying abilities; columnist with the Delta Optimist and the North Delta Reporter writing mostly on seniors and housing issues.</p>
<p>John Barry Worsfold White Rock</p>	<p>Adjunct Professor in Department of Gerontology at Simon Fraser University; former clinical social worker in the field of psycho-geriatrics for Fraser Health Authority.</p>
<p>Vincent Kennedy Langley</p>	<p>Retired provincial government employee of 33 years; Deaf and Hard of Hearing Seniors Advocate with the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; assisted seniors in completing forms or accessing services, especially when English is not their first language; keeps seniors informed of changes in government policies and news.</p>
<p>Jerry Gosling Abbotsford</p>	<p>Transit operator, aiming to help seniors across the province improve their lifestyle when it comes to housing, public safety and healthy eating. Jerry is working to become better informed of senior's issues and to advocate for B.C. residents. He is the recipient of the Order of Abbotsford in recognition of volunteer service and community involvement.</p>

INTERIOR – six representatives

<p>Donald Caskey Grand Forks</p>	<p>Active community volunteer, B.C. Seniors' Games (B.C. 55+ Games) Society, the local Red Cross Health Equipment Loan Program (HELP), the local hospice and the Kettle Valley Food Cooperative.</p>
<p>Heather McDonald West Kelowna</p>	<p>Retired 2000 Coquitlam School Board; a member of Senior Citizens Service Association; Certified Senior Advocate 05/10/08; joined 2014 Westside Health Network Society, a non-profit organization as Vice President helping over 400 seniors on the westside. Taken courses as a senior peer advocate funded by Health Canada and Vancouver Foundation. Served on a committee with Kelowna Community Resources participating in a project for seniors transitioning from loss and retirement; September 2017 joined the Council of Advisors; volunteered for Red Cross, Salvation Army, Gospel Mission and Food Bank.</p>
<p>Walter Popoff Krestova, Slocan Valley</p>	<p>Director on the Regional District of Central Kootenay; vice chair, West Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital District; executive of the Slocan Valley Seniors Housing Society.</p>
<p>Linda Martin Passmore</p>	<p>Retired self-employed home care caregiver and president of the Passmore Seniors Branch #116; working to make a difference and be a voice and advocate for B.C.'s seniors. Past board member of Slocan Valley Seniors Housing Society for the Passmore Lodge; member of West Kootenay Seniors Transportation Committee; secretary-treasurer/grant writer of Bee Awareness Society, educating children about honey bees; volunteer and participant in the 55+ BC Games in Track and Field.</p>
<p>Greg Howard Kamloops</p>	<p>Retired educator with 43 years in public education; volunteer with Operation Red Nose, Rotary, B.C. Winter Games, and B.C. Career Education Society; caregiver for his father and in-laws and believes education is key to assisting seniors.</p>
<p>George Atamanenko 150 Mile House</p>	<p>Consultant in community, regional planner, and rancher; president of the Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin Board of Directors; chair of the Accessibility Advisory Committee; speaks English, Russian and Ukrainian, and is interested in the preservation of heritage and culture.</p>

NORTHERN - three representatives

Linda Pierre
South Hazelton
Director, Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine and North West Regional Hospital District, representing First Nations and rural/remote communities; Instructor, Northwest Community College; Marriage Commissioner; interest in social justice, systemic change.

Bernice Magee
Burns Lake
Trained as a registered nurse; former photographer, realtor, and mayor and councillor of Burns Lake; current president of the Burns Lake and District Community Foundation, treasurer of the Burns Lake and District Seniors Society; secretary of the Lakes District Family Enhancement Society; membership chair of the Nechako Lakes Liberal Association; Terry Fox Run volunteer; and volunteer with the Emergency Social Services Reception Centre during wildfire season.

Dawn Hemingway
Prince George
Associate Professor and Chair of the School of Social Work at the University of Northern British Columbia; Immediate Past President of the BC Psychogeriatric Association, serves on Northern Health Authority's Elder Program Council, Provincial Director for Nidus Personal Planning Resource Centre and Registry; Prince George Better At Home Advisory Committee; Prince George Council of Seniors Advisory Committee; leadership team for the Stand Up for the North Committee.



VANCOUVER COASTAL – seven representatives

<p>Ihsan Malik Richmond</p>	<p>Director, 40-year member, Pakistan Canada Association, served as trustee, public relations director, secretary, and president; advocates for immigrant and refugee seniors' issues such as language barriers, transportation, housing and more; president of Metro Vancouver Cross Cultural Seniors Network Society for the last three years; chairman of trustees of Pakistan Canada Association for the last two years; recently elected on the steering committee of BC Health Coalition.</p>
<p>Robie Scholefield Vancouver</p>	<p>Former BC TEL (now TELUS) marketing manager. For many years, Robie has been a member and volunteered in many associations. He is dedicated to improving the quality of life for seniors and persons with disabilities.</p>
<p>Stuart Alcock Vancouver</p>	<p>President of the 411 Seniors Centre Society; experience in health care, constituency assistance, legal aid management, social work and child and youth care counselling.</p>
<p>Marnie Simon Pemberton</p>	<p>Former program head of the Perioperative nursing program at BC Institute of Technology; president of the Whistler Health Care Foundation for 15 years; director and Chair of the Pemberton Library Board for 8 years; member of the advisory committee to Vancouver Coastal Health for over five years representing the Sea to Sky corridor; currently a member of the fundraising committee for the Sea to Sky Hospice campaign. Marnie is a Rotarian and was president of the Pemberton Arts Council for the past four years.</p>
<p>Serge Haber Vancouver</p>	<p>Involved in Seniors Advisory Council for Greater Vancouver; founder and past president emeritus of the Jewish Seniors Alliance of Greater Vancouver; currently involved in outreach, research, advocacy and peer support programs for seniors in Greater Vancouver; contributed to improvements in handyDART system; attends regular meetings of COSCO, BC Health Coalition, and BC Coalition of People with Disabilities.</p>
<p>Barb Mikulec Vancouver</p>	<p>Retired teacher and director of the B.C. Retired Teachers Association; feels the top three issues facing seniors today are housing, healthcare and outliving their resources; takes part in Salish weaving, oil painting and Scottish country dancing; board member of the Kerrisdale Community Centre; committee member of the National Pensioners Federation, director of BC Forum, secretary of Metro Vancouver Cross Cultural Seniors Network, presbytery representative of the Ryerson United Church, involved with the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations of BC (COSCO).</p>
<p>Mohinder Grewal Richmond</p>	<p>Council of Senior Citizens Organizations of B.C.; former executive director, Sikh Professional Association of Canada; director, Vancouver Multicultural Society; president (twice), National Association of Canadians of Origins in India.</p>

VANCOUVER ISLAND – six representatives

<p>Geraldine Hinton Victoria</p>	<p>Former nurse clinician with a focus on teaching geriatric care to nursing students ; former organizational consultant to the Victoria Institute of Gerontology at the Fairfield Health Centre; retired executive director of the BC Government Office for Seniors: long history of service with St John Ambulance, developed a revolutionary program for seniors facing loneliness and poverty; awarded the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s Clyde and Lanny Slade Memorial Leadership Award; YM/YWCA Women of Distinction Lifetime Achievement Award; current member of Alzheimer Society of B.C., Government House Board of Trustees, and Veterans' Memorial Lodge at Broadmead, among many others.</p>
<p>Robert (Bob) McWhirter Salt Spring Island</p>	<p>Former teacher, school district administrator; board member, Greenwoods Eldercare Society; president, Gulf Islands Retired Teachers Association; president, Salt Spring Island Historical Society.</p>
<p>Bob Willis Nanoose Bay</p>	<p>Former air traffic controller; past president and chair of the Nomination Committee to the Nanaimo and Area Branch of the National Association of Federal Retirees; assists 2,000 members through committees, coordinating volunteers and member outreach.</p>
<p>Gladys Latty Courtenay</p>	<p>Retired former campus director and college instructor; says the COA gives seniors an opportunity to voice their concerns and get government's attention. Feels lack of money, healthcare, and loneliness are the top issues facing today's seniors.</p>
<p>Joseph Forsyth Parksville</p>	<p>Retired consultant on privacy issues and former Assistant Deputy Minister, Individual Rights and Citizenship in Alberta; experience in government with respect to senior's and women's issues, and human rights; wants B.C. seniors to obtain the supports needed to remain in their homes for as long as possible.</p>
<p>Valerie Thoem Sidney</p>	<p>Focus on accessibility and the implications of aging for people with disabilities; past member of BC Ferries Advisory on Accessibility; Disability Alliance of BC; and B.C. representative on Canada Pension Plan Board concerned with developing fair and equitable CPP provisions for individuals with a permanent disability.</p>

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