



**For Immediate Release  
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**Residential care wait times, decreasing home support hours, improvements to HandyDART service highlighted in Office of the Seniors Advocate's new report**

**Victoria** – The Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) released its second annual *Monitoring Seniors' Services* report today. The report is a yearly update from the OSA on the status of key seniors' services in the province, highlighting where seniors' needs are being met and where improvements are most needed.

"This report gives an opportunity to start seeing year over year how we are doing in delivering seniors' services," said Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie. "It's encouraging to see where improvements are being met, but this report is also a valuable tool in highlighting where we could be doing better," Mackenzie added.

Among areas that highlight positive progress, the report notes that there has been an increase in the number of new users of the provincial government's Property Tax Deferment Program, a program that allows low-income seniors to live in their own homes. Data from the report also show that over 90% of seniors have GPs, and in terms of transportation services, the number of unfilled HandyDART ride requests decreased.

The report also outlines a number of areas of concern. There are more seniors waiting for Seniors' Subsidized Housing, while the number of units stayed relatively flat. Wait times for residential care have also increased and the number of residential care complaints has increased. In addition, although the Advocate has been calling for increases to the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) maximum rent that qualifies for a subsidy, this amount remains unchanged while there has been a decrease in vacancy and a concurrent increase in average rents.

The 70-page *Monitoring Seniors' Services* report focuses on 2015/16 data, highlighting key services in the Advocate's legislated mandate, which include transportation, health care, housing, income support, and personal care. Data were collected from service providers, health authorities, and government agencies.

"When we look at these data collectively, the story that starts to emerge is that there are obvious improvements that need to be made, particularly in the areas of home support, residential care, and independent housing for seniors; these are areas that we will continue to work on in 2017," said Mackenzie. The OSA will be releasing systemic reviews of home support and residential care in 2017. In addition, results of surveys of HandyDART services and a province-wide survey of 27,000 seniors living in residential care and their most frequent visitors will also be released.

The Office of the Seniors Advocate is an independent office of the provincial government with a mandate of monitoring seniors' services, issuing public reports focusing on systemic issues and providing information and referral to seniors and their families by calling 1.877.952.3181.

See below for highlights of the 2016 *Monitoring Seniors' Services* report. The full report can be viewed at [www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca](http://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca)

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## **Highlights - *Monitoring Seniors' Services* report 2016**

### **Health Care**

- 92% of seniors report having a regular physician.
- At the end of 2014/15, approximately 52,000 British Columbians were living with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or another dementia, leaving four out of five seniors aged 85 and over with no diagnosis of dementia.
- As of March 31, 2016, 12,672 active clients were registered with First Link, representing a 14% increase over the previous point-in-time measurement in August 2015.
- In 2015/16, on a provincial level, the average home support hours delivered per year per client decreased by approximately 2% from the previous year, while the number of clients increased by 2%.
- Average and median wait times for residential care grew longer in three of five regional health authorities. The proportion of residents admitted to residential care within 30 days decreased by 11% from the previous year.
- The number of residential care beds has increased 3.5% since 2012, while seniors aged 85 and older has increased 21% over the same time period.
- 74% of reported residential care beds are in single rooms.
- In 2015/16, 8,549 seniors were admitted to residential care facilities. This represents a decrease of 6% since 2014/15.

### **Housing**

- Since 2005, the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) maximum rent that qualifies for a subsidy has increased 9%, while rents have increased by 34%. There was an 8% increase in the number of individuals on SAFER (91% are 65 and older).
- The number of Seniors' Subsidized Housing units stayed relatively flat, while the number of people 55 and older waiting for a unit increased by 11%. The median and average wait times decreased slightly, but are still 1.3 years and 2.2 years, respectively.

- There was an increase of 16% in new users of the property tax deferral program.
- Since 2013, property tax/municipal charges increased by a cumulative 7% and hydro increased by 20%.

### **Transportation**

- In the past year, TransLink's unfulfilled HandyDART ride requests have decreased by 40%, while BC Transit's unfulfilled HandyDART ride requests have increased by 13%.
- 41,960 of regular HandyDART ride requests went unfulfilled in 2015, representing less than 2% of all ride requests.
- HandyDART complaints were down by 13% percent for TransLink, and up slightly (3%) for BC Transit.
- Between 2012 and 2014, there was a 10% increase in seniors with active driver's licences in British Columbia. The greatest increase in active drivers was observed in the 85 and older age group: 13%.
- In 2015, RoadSafetyBC opened 157,000 driver fitness cases, the majority of which involved a Driver Medical Examination Report (DMER) and of whom 40% (approximately 63,000 drivers) were aged 80 or older. Approximately 1,000 drivers of all ages were subsequently referred for a DriveABLE cognitive assessment.
- In 2015, 900 drivers aged 80 and over voluntarily surrendered their licences.

### **Income Supports**

- The maximum payment for CPP increased by nearly 3% over last year.
- The Senior's Supplement, a monthly top-up provided by the provincial government to low-income seniors remains at \$49.30, which, in 2016, is the same as it was in 1987.
- As of January 1, single seniors with an income of up to \$45,000 or senior couples with an income of up to \$51,000 may be eligible for some level of MSP Premium Assistance based on allowable deductions. In 2015, 271,242 seniors received some level of Premium Assistance.

### **Elder Abuse**

- The Public Guardian and Trustee responds to allegations and investigates cases of financial abuse, neglect, and self-neglect. Referrals increased slightly over last year by 7%
- The 211 Helpline received 243 calls, of which 70% of pertained to abuse.