



**For Immediate Release
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Seniors Advocate releases third annual *Monitoring Seniors' Services* Report

Victoria – The Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) released its third annual *Monitoring Seniors' Services* report today. The report looks at over 25 programs and services offered to seniors in B.C. and measures performance on a year over year basis.

“This is now the third year my office has published this report and we are seeing some very meaningful trends that can tell us whether we are heading in the right direction in delivering the supports and services that are key to assisting seniors to maintain independence and enjoy good health,” said B.C. Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie.

The report shows growth in the seniors' population is on track with projections as the number of people in the province over the age of 65 grew by 32,307 to a total of 18.4% of the population compared to 17.9% last year. With a B.C. total of 882,731 people age 65 and over, Vancouver Island Health Authority and Interior Health Authority continue to have the highest rate of seniors at 23% of their population while Northern Health continues to have the youngest population with only 14% of their population age 65 and older.

“The results for 2017 highlight several areas of concern for me,” said Mackenzie. “There is a continued decrease in home support service and adult day programs as well as an increasing lack of affordability for senior renters,” Mackenzie added. “These results should also be of concern to the government as lack of support in these areas will drive some seniors into residential care which is a more costly intervention and one that is least preferred by seniors. We know there are up to 15% of seniors living in residential care who could live in the community with proper supports.”

With 19% of senior households renting, the affordability gap continues to widen with rents for a one-bedroom apartment increasing 6.7% with no increase to the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) subsidy cap and basic retirement income rising by only 1.2%. In addition, the number of seniors' subsidized housing units continued to decrease and the waiting list increased 15.6%. “The economic reality for seniors who rent is the most dire,” said Mackenzie. “We know that seniors have the lowest median income of any age cohort over 25 and we know that the poverty rate for seniors increased by 24% since 2005, the largest increase of any age cohort. The ability of seniors, particularly those aged 80 and greater to move to less expensive neighbourhoods is very limited. Seniors must be located near transit and services given they will depend on these more and more as they age.”

The report also looks at trends in transportation services for seniors highlighting that for the first time in four years there has been an increase in HandyDART ride requests. There was a 5% increase in new clients and a 10% increase in the number of rides. “Transportation is very important and can be quite complicated for seniors, as they may have some mobility or vision challenges that no longer allow them to drive but they are still active and engaged in their community,” said Mackenzie. “HandyDART can mean the difference between being a total shut-in and able to get out 2 or 3 times a week.”

For the 81% of senior households that own their home, the number of new individuals claiming property tax deferral nearly doubled in the last year. “The popularity of the Property Tax Deferral Program demonstrates its value in helping those seniors who are homeowners to address the rising costs of

maintaining a home,” Mackenzie said.

As in past years, seniors show a high level of attachment to a family doctor and 2017 saw decreasing wait times for residential care after they increased last year. 2017 is the first year the *Monitoring Seniors’ Services* report has included data from police sources regarding reported crimes of abuse and theft against seniors. Both the Public Guardian and Trustee and the Seniors Abuse and Information Line (SAIL) reported increases in the number of abuse and neglect cases reported.

“Part of what this report highlights is the significant number of services that are available to assist seniors, ensuring they keep pace with demand and that they are easily accessible is equally important. Reviewing our performance on an annual basis is an important measure of our success,” concluded Mackenzie.

See below for highlights of the 2017 *Monitoring Seniors’ Services* report. The full report can be viewed at www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca

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Monitoring Seniors’ Services 2017 Highlights

- In 2015/16, 92% of seniors were attached to a GP or GP practice; this has remained relatively constant over the past three years.
- While the number of B.C. seniors with dementia has increased since last year, the rate of dementia has remained constant; 94% of seniors 65+ and 80% of seniors 85+ **do not have dementia**. The number of clients supported by the First Link program has increased 15%.
- The average home support hours delivered per client per year **decreased by 3%** from the previous year, while the number of **clients increased by 3.5%**. This trend of decreases in home support matched against increased client complexity continues to be of concern.
- There has been a 23.5% increase in the number of home care complaints over last year; this includes professional services such as nursing and physical therapy, as well as home support.
- On March 31, 2017, there were 1,245 clients waiting to access Adult Day Programs. The median wait time ranged between 38 and 195 days. Since 2015/16, there has been an 8% **decrease** in the number of funded Adult Day Program days offered and a 4% **decrease** in clients.
- While there has been a 1.5% increase in funded residential care beds since last year, the population aged 75+ increased by **3.5%**.
- Across the province, there was a 6% increase in complaints about residential care this year.
- The number of subsidized Assisted Living units remains relatively constant, up 2% from 2016.
- The number of seniors on the **waitlist** for both Assisted Living and Residential Care **decreased**. In 2016/17, 61% of seniors were admitted to residential care within 30 days, compared to 57% in 2015/16.

Housing

- 81% of households maintained by seniors are owned and 19% are rented. Approximately one-quarter of seniors that own their own home still maintain a mortgage.
- Since 2005, the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) maximum rent that qualifies for a subsidy has increased 9%, while rents have increased by 45% (7% in the last year alone).
- A higher rate of seniors aged 60 or older are now using SAFER, growing from 16.6 per 1,000 in 2014 to 18.4 per 1,000 in 2017. As well, there has been a 6% increase in the absolute number of SAFER recipients since 2016, while the target population has increased by only 4%.
- The number of Seniors' Subsidized Housing units continues to decrease. From 2013/14 to 2016/17, there was a decrease of almost 5%. The number of people 55 or older waiting for a unit increased nearly 16% in the last year alone.
- The median and average wait times for Seniors Subsidized Housing increased slightly from 1.3 to 1.4 years and 2.2 to 2.3 years, respectively, between 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- For older adults (55+) who are homeowners, there was a **94% increase** in the number of new Property Tax Deferrals with nearly \$162 million of property taxes deferred in total.

Transportation

- There was a **5% increase** in the number of new clients registered for HandyDART from last year, a 10% increase in ride requests, and a 10% increase in rides provided.
- There was an 8% increase in unaccommodated standby ride requests for HandyDART in Metro Vancouver.
- In 2016, 655,000, or 76%, of all seniors maintained an active driver's licence, a 4.5% increase since 2015. The population 65+ grew 4% over this same time period.
- In 2016, 65,810 driver fitness cases were opened for those aged 80 or older. Only 950 seniors (fewer than 2%), were subsequently referred for a DriveAble cognitive assessment.

Income Supports

- The maximum payment for CPP increased by 2% over last year.
- The Seniors Supplement, a monthly top-up provided by the provincial government to low income seniors remains at \$49.30. There has been no rate increase since 1987.
- As of January 1, 2018, 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 2016, 331,682 seniors received some level of Premium Assistance, a 12% increase over the previous year.

Elder Abuse

- The Public Guardian and Trustee responds to allegations and investigates cases of abuse, neglect, and self-neglect. In 2016/17, there were 1,638 referrals, a 3% increase over last year.

- The Seniors Abuse and Information line received 1,763 calls pertaining to abuse in 2016, a 21% increase compared to 2015.
- In 2016, 941 missing persons cases involving seniors were opened with the RCMP. In 897 (95%) cases, the senior was found. The RCMP is responsible for policing regions of the province covering 72% of the population. Also in 2016, the Vancouver Police Department handled 423 missing persons cases involving seniors, all of which were solved.
- In regions served by the RCMP, the number of 65+ victims of violent offences has decreased since 2009, while the number of 65+ victims of property offenses has increased by 36%.

