

Office of the Seniors Advocate Monthly Update

March 2021

Spring brings hope, growth, and renewal. Here at the Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA), we are feeling optimistic as our vaccination program unfolds and outbreaks decline. In the spirit of new beginnings, this month we are relaunching our OSA Monthly Update and Research Rounds together as one publication. It will land in your mailbox the first week of each month with information about OSA activity, new initiatives to help seniors, and senior-related research. We hope you enjoy our Monthly Update and find the content valuable.

Vaccination Update

The COVID-19 vaccine has been offered to all residents and staff at long-term care (LTC) and assisted living facilities across the province. The immunization program has gone well, and we are pleased to report that province-wide, 90% of residents and over 80% of staff have received their first vaccines. Evidence of the effectiveness of the vaccine is apparent with a dramatic decrease in outbreaks.

When we look at long-term care, assisted living, and independent living residences together, outbreaks have dropped 82% since the peak. The next phase of priority vaccinations is community-dwelling seniors aged eighty and older.

For vaccination program details, click here

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/vaccine/seniors>

COVID-19 Update

Between January 13 and March 3, newly diagnosed cases of COVID-19 decreased 98% among long-term care (LTC) residents and staff. On January 13 there were 245 new cases compared to the weeks of both February 24 and March 3 when there were only four new cases each week.

Click here to view the Weekly Count of new COVID-19 cases in LTC chart and links to additional information <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/newsletter/nl0321-covid-19-update/>

Fraud Prevention

March is Fraud Prevention Month, and with reported cases of fraud going up, seniors are encouraged to increase their awareness of current scams and learn how to protect themselves.

Every year, people of all ages, including youth and seniors, fall victim to fraud. Last year, 34% of Canadians reported being targeted by scammers in part because fraudsters are increasingly using sophisticated methods for targeting their victims. According to the Government of British Columbia website, between March 2020 and January 2021 Canadians lost over \$7M lost to fraud.

Click here for fraud prevention resources <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/current-issues/fraud-prevention-resources/>

Safe Seniors Strong Communities - bc211

This program, an enhancement of the Better at Home Program, has enrolled over

- 24,149 seniors and 13,018 volunteers through the pandemic period and has delivered:
- 328,866 wellness visits and needs assessments
- 65,941 grocery deliveries
- 218,930 meals prepared or packaged and delivered
- 1,681 prescriptions picked up and delivered
- 8,268 transportation services
- 1621 laundry services
- 125,450 other services (ad-hoc requests such as assistance with IT, online shopping)

File Your Taxes on Time to Receive Benefits

The deadline of April 30, 2021, to file taxes is nearing. There is no indication that this deadline will be extended. Seniors on a low-income and those in receipt of the Guaranteed Income Supplement or allowance benefits under the Old Age Security Program must file their taxes by April 30 to ensure their benefits are renewed.

Click here to find FREE tax clinics and learn about health-care-related expenses you can claim <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/income-supports/>

Benefits for Seniors Supplement Recipients Significantly Increased During COVID

In response to the pandemic, the B.C. government increased the \$49 Senior's Supplement to \$300 per month. On January 21, 2021, the Supplement was reduced to \$150 a month. To compensate for the decrease, all eligible seniors are entitled to a one-time tax-free \$500 B.C. Recovery Benefit. Seniors receiving the B.C. Senior's Supplement will automatically receive the B.C. Recovery Benefit if they have not already received the benefit. No application is necessary.

Click here for more information

<http://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2021/03/Seniors-Advocate-Letter-to-BC-Senior-Supplement-Recipients-FINAL.pdf>

Preventing Renovictions, Extending Rent Freeze to Benefit Tenants

In B.C., 20% of seniors are renters. Proposed legislative changes will provide these seniors more security by extending the current rent freeze to December 31, 2021. The changes will also cap future rent increases to inflation, stop illegal renovictions, and make the dispute resolution process better for tenants and landlords.

Click here to learn more <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AG0026-000360>

Recent Announcements From the B.C. Government Impacting Seniors

Click on the highlighted links below to learn more about each news item.

March 6, 2021

'Tech buddies' keep seniors connected during the pandemic

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021SDPR0018-000399>

March 2, 2021

Property tax grant program streamlined for quicker service

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021FIN0016-000359>

March 1, 2021

Canada, B.C. invest in BC Transit bus shelters throughout province

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021TRAN0015-000356>

February 26, 2021

Construction underway at Dogwood Lodge long-term care home

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0042-000343>

February 26, 2021

Unique housing project underway for seniors, dementia care patients

https://archive.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/news_releases_2020-2024/2021AG0024-000341.htm

February 25, 2021

New affordable homes open in Salmon Arm

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AG0023-000331>

February 24, 2021

Faster connectivity coming to 100+ communities

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021CITZ0014-000314>

February 18, 2021

Surgical services expanding at Cariboo Memorial Hospital

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0037-000286>

February 17, 2021

Changes to allow emailed documents between landlords and tenants

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AG0014-000284>

February 17, 2021

New homes coming for people in Sooke

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AG0014-000281>

February 5, 2021

New affordable homes open for Indigenous peoples in Cranbrook

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AG0015-000207>

February 2, 2021

COVID-19 ICBC customer rebates to average \$190

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021PREM0008-000191>

February 2, 2021

New Nanaimo ICU breaks ground to improve care

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021HLTH0027-000189>

February 1, 2021

New affordable homes coming for people in southern Interior

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021AG0006-000179>

February 1, 2021

Service BC welcomes Health Insurance BC to provincial contact centre

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2021CITZ0006-000173>

National News

Keeping couples together in care

Nova Scotia recently passed the *Life Partners in Long-term Care Act*. This will allow spouses, common-law and domestic partners to be placed together at the

highest care level required. For example, if one spouse needs nursing-home care and one requires residential care, the couple would be placed in a nursing home.

Click here to read the act

https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/63rd_2nd/3rd_read/b240.htm

Government of Canada invests \$1.8M in strengthening pandemic preparedness in long-term care and retirement homes

Canada has had a higher reported national proportion of COVID-19 deaths for older adults living in long-term care than any other country worldwide, with more than 80% of total COVID-19 deaths occurring in LTC homes (Canadian Institute for Health Information, New analysis paints an international picture of COVID-19's long-term care impacts, June 25, 2020). In a news release issued December 4, 2020, the Government of Canada announced a \$1.8 million investment will strengthen pandemic preparedness in long-term care and retirement homes.

Click here to learn more <http://bit.ly/2PbI9cC>

Pandemic perspectives on long-term care: insights from Canadians in light of COVID-19

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) and the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) released the findings of an online national survey gauging the perspectives of 2,005 Canadians on how the second wave of the pandemic has impacted the state of Canada's long-term care (LTC) systems. The survey report, Pandemic Perspectives on Long-Term Care: Insights from Canadians in Light of COVID-19, shows the majority of all Canadians (86 per cent) surveyed - and 97 per cent of Canadians aged 65 years and older - are concerned about the current state of LTC in Canada.

Click here to read the report

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c2fa7b03917eed9b5a436d8/t/60428c8d3c118d6237a6ac11/1614974093703/English+NIA+CMA+Report.pdf>

No GST on masks and face shields

To make face masks and face shields more affordable, the Canadian government does not charge sales tax on these items.

Click here to learn more <http://bit.ly/2ZYUjI6>

Mental health

The federal government is investing \$43 million to increase support for Wellness Together Canada, an online portal that provides free mental health and substance use support.

Click here to visit the Wellness Together Canada website <https://ca.portal.gs/>

Recent Research

Family presence in long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic: call to action for policy, practice and research

Family presence in long-term care (LTC) homes is crucial for meeting the residents' health, psychosocial, and practical needs. Initially, during the COVID-19 pandemic, visitation restrictions essentially locked-out families as public health orders prioritized the prevention of harm from the spread of infection. This commentary describes family caregiving, reviews the impact of visitation restrictions on residents, families, and LTC staff, and provides a resident- and family-oriented perspective on policy implications that challenge the outdated notion that extreme restrictions to family presence protect resident health.

Click here to read the article <https://cgionline.ca/index.php/cgj/article/view/476>

Effects of COVID-19 outbreak on elder mistreatment and response in NYC: initial lessons

This article explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on victims of elder mistreatment and people at risk of victimization. The COVID-19 outbreak has also profoundly impacted the organizations from many sectors that typically respond to protect and serve victims of elder mistreatment. They examine the impact and describe creative solutions developed by these organizations and initial lessons learned in New York City to help inform other communities facing this pandemic and provide guidance for future crises.

Click here to read the article

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0733464820924853>

Severe food insecurity associated with mortality among lower-income Canadian adults approaching eligibility for public pensions: a population cohort study

The prevalence of food insecurity among adults over 65 in Canada is less than half of that among adults approaching 65, possibly due in part to the public pension universally disbursed from the age of 65. This study tells us that this is because food-insecure adults approaching retirement age were more likely to die before collecting public pensions that might attenuate their food insecurity. Policy implications for providing adequate assistance to working-age adults to ensure healthy ageing into retirement are discussed.

Click here to read the article <http://bit.ly/3sx5pAn>

Developing rural insights for building age-friendly communities

This paper seeks to address this gap of longer-term sustainable implementation of age-friendly initiatives by presenting rural insights from a multi-site case study in Ontario, Canada. It considers the influence of unique, rural community contexts that may differentially impact parameters of success and longer-term sustainability among rural age-friendly programs.

Click here to read the article

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5da87442cb7dea389b1d0007/t/5ff72464f208ca196018d009/1610032229996/McCrillis%2C+Skinner%2C+%26+Colibaba+%282020%29.pdf>

Associations between the built environment and physical activity among adults with low socio-economic status in Canada: a systematic review

This paper synthesizes the literature on the associations between the built environment and physical activity among adults with low socioeconomic status (SES) in Canada. Findings suggest that the neighbourhood built environment is associated with physical activity among adults with low SES in Canada. More rigorous study designs are needed to determine whether the built environment and physical activity are causally related to this vulnerable population

Click here to read the article <https://link.springer.com/article/10.17269/s41997-020-00364-9>

Factors that affect health information technology adoption by seniors: a systematic review

This article reviews health information technologies (HIT) as an opportunity to support seniors' healthcare needs and what factors affect the adoption of other HIT by older people in the community. Findings show a low level of HIT adoption among seniors. Seniors adopt HIT that is perceived as useful and require low effort commitment. Price was reported as an adoption barrier. Social influence, facilitating conditions, senior-friendly product design, self-efficacy, intrinsic technology quality, experience/training and technology anxiety may affect HIT adoption by seniors, although the evidence on these impacts remains weak and limited.

Click here to read the article

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/hsc.13011>

Outreach by the OSA

The Seniors Advocate continues to meet with seniors across the province by attending events and delivering presentations virtually.

Click here to see Events <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/events/>

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