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December 8, 2021

B.C. Seniors Advocate Calls for Increased Awareness and Better Co-ordination to Combat the Rising Prevalence of Seniors Abuse and Neglect

VICTORIA – Today, Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie released the results of a systemic review of seniors’ abuse and neglect in British Columbia in a report titled *Hidden and Invisible*. The report examined current legislative protections, assessed reporting practices, reviewed five years of existing data, consulted with 144 stakeholders in 25 communities throughout B.C., and surveyed over 1500 British Columbians.

The review highlights that reports of abuse and neglect of people 65 and over have increased significantly in the past five years with:

- 49% increase in report of abuse, neglect and self-neglect to health authorities (Designated Agencies)
- 69% increase in reports of victims of violent crime to the RCMP
- 87% increase in reports of physical abuse to the Vancouver Police
- 49% increase of financial abuse to the Vancouver Police
- 30% increase in reports of abuse to bc211

“Reported cases of seniors abuse and neglect have risen significantly over the past five years. This tells us that the problem is growing. As the population continues to age, we must ensure our systems for identifying, reporting and reducing seniors abuse and neglect are strong,” stated Mackenzie.

The report indicates that 28% of British Columbians report witnessing seniors abuse and neglect, but less than half reported the abuse, mostly because they did not know who to call.

“We know that British Columbians care about seniors and want to do the right thing, but they are lacking the information and tools they need to ensure quick and effective reporting of the abuse, neglect and self-neglect of our vulnerable seniors,” stated Mackenzie.

The report highlights a fragmented system, with many options for a person to report a concern of seniors’ abuse, neglect or self-neglect. The fragmented system includes seven Designated Agencies with legislated responsibility to respond to protection concerns for vulnerable adults, the police, the Public Guardian and Trustee, the Seniors Abuse and Information Line, and BC211.

“When we look at the current system, we find there are ten or more numbers, that are not well known, that people might call to report an abuse concern. We need to move to a coordinated system similar to what we have for reporting child protection concerns. A system with one phone number that is well known province wide, that people can call if they are concerned a senior is being neglected, abused or is suffering from self-neglect,” stated Mackenzie.

The report also highlighted the need for a centralized tracking and reporting system to better understand patterns and trends over time that will help identify successful intervention strategies.

“We need a much better understanding of the full extent of seniors abuse and neglect in B.C., and to achieve this we need better data. We cannot effectively fix a problem until it is properly analyzed,” commented Mackenzie.

In addition to the immediate actions needed to improve awareness and reporting of seniors’ abuse, neglect and self-neglect, the report recommends a comprehensive review of the *Adult Guardianship Act*. “There was significant work done in the 1990s to protect vulnerable adults, but we know much more now than we did then. And it is time to apply our learning to update the Act to meet the needs of our growing seniors population,” concluded Mackenzie.

The report includes five recommendations:

1. Establish provincial standards of practice, policies, and front-line training to respond to seniors’ abuse and neglect
2. Create province-wide public awareness initiatives and training on seniors’ abuse and neglect
3. Develop a central, single point of contact to report calls of concern of seniors’ abuse and neglect
4. Ensure consistent data collection, methods, and definitions to record, track and monitor abuse and neglect cases
5. Undertake a full comprehensive review of the *Adult Guardianship Act*

The complete report is available at <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/hidden-and-invisible-report/>.

Media contact:

Gabrielle Parent
osa.comms@gov.bc.ca
236-478-2026