



NEWS RELEASE

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Advocate report reinforces need to scale up seniors' services in B.C.

VICTORIA - The newly-released 2022 *Monitoring Seniors Services* report shows wait times for four of the top five surgeries have fallen over the past five years and access to preferred long-term care homes is continuing to improve. While some services, such as HandyDART, are beginning to rebound from the initial impacts of the pandemic, the overall, five-year trends show a number of services are struggling to meet the demands of a continually-growing seniors population in B.C.

The report provides an annual check-up on the state of B.C. seniors' services in the key areas of health care, housing, transportation, income supports, community services and safety. For the first time this year, the report includes new data on fatalities and surgical wait times.

"Overall, we are continuing to see the B.C. seniors population increase both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the population," said BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie. "The number of seniors in our province has grown by 17% in the last five years and 20% of B.C.'s population is now over the age of 65 - a 10% increase over the last five years."

Most of the growth is 'younger' seniors, people aged 65-74 who represent almost 60% of the seniors population in B.C. The number of seniors 85+, while growing in number, remained relatively stable over the past five years as a proportion of the total population.

"It is important to understand most of the seniors population in B.C. is relatively healthy. This tells us we have not yet begun to feel the real pressures that will come to many programs and services as the 'baby boomers' begin living into their 80s. We need to act now to ensure supports are there for them in the future," continued Mackenzie.

While the report highlights the progress made in surgical wait times and access to preferred long-term care homes, it also shows the need to improve access to home support, assisted living, and long-term care; provide more relief for seniors who rent through additional subsidized housing units; increase the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters subsidy; and a continuing increase in reports of seniors abuse and neglect.

Trends over five years:

- The main growth in the senior's population is in the 65-74 age cohort which grew 17% compared to a 10% growth in people 85+. Overall, while people 65+ increased as a proportion of the population, people 85+ continue to be 2% of the total population.
- The life expectancy at 65 years in British Columbia is 21.8 years; 23.3 years for females, 20.4 years for males and has remained relatively stable.
- Emergency department visits per 1,000 seniors (65+) has fallen 10% and hospitalization rates have fallen 6%.
- The rate of publicly-funded long term care beds per 1,000 of population age 75+ has fallen 12%.

- The proportion of long-term care residents taking antipsychotic medications without a diagnosis of psychosis increased 5% last year and is at its highest level in the past five years.
- 95% of seniors live independently in private dwellings, while only 5% of seniors live in assisted living or long-term care. A higher proportion of seniors live independently compared to five years ago.
- While the rate of home ownership among seniors has remained relatively stable at 80%, the rate of seniors with a mortgage is increasing and now represents 32% of senior homeowners.
- New users of the Property Tax Deferment program decreased, falling 23% from last year and 50% compared to 2017/18.
- The average rent for seniors using the Shelter Assistance for Elderly Renters subsidy increased 13% while their rent subsidy increased by 3%.
- There has been a consistent decrease in the average rent subsidy for SAFER clients over the past three years.
- The waiting list for Seniors Subsidized Housing has increased 50%.
- 79% (814,010) of seniors maintain an active driver's licence, a 3% increase from last year and 19% compared to five years ago.
- Overall, 93% of B.C. seniors receive Old Age Security, 29% receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and 7% receive the BC Seniors Supplement (BCSS). These percentages have remained relatively stable.
- Calls to Designated Agencies, the Seniors Abuse and Information Line and BC 211 reporting potential abuse and neglect of seniors (including self-neglect) have all increased as have reports to RCMP and Vancouver Police regarding property crime and physical harm to people age 65 and older.

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The Office of the Seniors Advocate is an independent office of the provincial government with a mandate of monitoring seniors' services and reporting on systemic issues affecting seniors. The office also provides information and referral to seniors and their caregivers by calling toll-free 1-877-952-3181, BC211, via email at info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca, Canada Post and the OSA web site <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/>.

Learn More:

- 2022 Monitoring Seniors Services Report:
<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/monitoring-seniors-services/>
- BC Seniors: Falling Further Behind Report (September 2022):
<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/falling-further-behind-income-and-affordability-gaps-of-b-c-seniors/>
- 2022 Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Directory:
<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/long-term-care-directory/>

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