

2022-2023

ANNUAL REPORT

of the Office of the Seniors Advocate



OFFICE OF THE
SENIORS ADVOCATE
BRITISH COLUMBIA



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SENIORS ADVOCATE
BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2023

The Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health
PO Box 9050 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Dix,

It is my pleasure to present the 2022/23 Annual Report of the Office of the Seniors Advocate in accordance with Section 4(4) of the *Seniors Advocate Act*.

This is the ninth annual report from the Office of the Seniors Advocate and reports on the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023.

Sincerely,

Isobel Mackenzie
Seniors Advocate
Province of British Columbia

Message from the Seniors Advocate



The past year has been a busy one for the Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) with thousands of seniors and their loved ones continuing to contact our office for information and referral, along with the release of two systemic reviews on important issues that impact the health and well-being of B.C. seniors.

The 2022/23 Annual Report covers the third and what we hope is the final full year of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are now seeing a return to inquiries related to accessing primary care, health and community care, housing and government income supports, as calls related to navigating COVID-19 related issues recede.

My office continues its commitment to outreach and engagement with seniors, their loved ones and the community at large. Events began to return to pre-COVID levels, although some events remained virtual to better address the logistics of assembling people from vast distances.

Our ongoing work such as the Monitoring Report and Long-Term Care Directory continued, and the directory was expanded this year to include information about publicly subsidized assisted living. Two major systemic reviews were released this year related to the impact of rising costs and challenges facing low-income seniors who depend on government pensions and a second review of the province's home support services.

In addition to our completed reports, the office began a review of assisted living and a second funding review of the long-term care sector. The most significant initiative launched in the past year is our survey of quality of life in long-term care. This mammoth undertaking has mobilized over 700 volunteers to survey over 25,000 residents living in nearly 300 long-term care homes in B.C. The survey results, along with the two reports will be released in the coming year.

The Office of the Seniors Advocate continues to be supported by the dedicated staff who have performed exceedingly well under the pressures of working during the pandemic.


Overall, the office provides good value for the public as we work within a small budget despite increased demands on the office.

In addition to the staff of the OSA, the work of this office would not be possible without the support of staff in several ministries, most notably the Ministry of Health and other service providers such as health authorities and community agencies.

On a personal note, I have announced that I will be stepping down as Seniors Advocate for the province of B.C. on March 31, 2024, which marks the tenth anniversary of my appointment.

It has been an honour and privilege to serve as BC Seniors Advocate and my continued thanks to everyone who continues to demonstrate that British Columbians care very deeply about the seniors in their communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isobel Mackenzie', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Isobel Mackenzie
Seniors Advocate
Province of British Columbia

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1 About the Office

The Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) was created in 2014 under the authority of the *Seniors Advocate Act*. The OSA's mandated to address issues related to seniors aged 65 and older in the areas of health care, housing, transportation, income, and personal care. The Seniors Advocate focuses on overall systemic issues, while also connecting people to organizations that can help resolve their individual needs.

Through the OSA, the Seniors Advocate fulfills the legislative duties, responsibilities and authorities outlined under the Act by:

- monitoring seniors' services
- identifying and analyzing systemic issues affecting seniors' well-being
- making independent recommendations to government and service providers
- collaborating with persons delivering seniors' services to improve efficiency and effectiveness of services
- promoting awareness of resources available to seniors and connecting seniors with the information and services they need

Under the Act, the Seniors Advocate also has a duty to advise, in an independent manner, the Minister responsible for seniors, public officials, and persons who deliver seniors' services. Areas in which the Seniors Advocate can provide advice include systemic challenges faced by seniors, policies and practices respecting those challenges, and the changes needed to address those issues.

To fulfill our legislated mandate, the office focuses on four main areas of activity:

- outreach and engagement with seniors and families, stakeholders and government agencies
- information and referral – through a partnership with BC211, the information and referral line is available 24/7
- annual monitoring on services provided to B.C. seniors
- reviewing and reporting on systemic issues

The Seniors Advocate is also supported in her role by a diverse Council of Advisors comprised of seniors from all areas of the province who provide valuable insight into the key issues affecting B.C. seniors.

2 Outreach and Community Engagement

Through a variety of outreach activities, the OSA hears from thousands of seniors, their families, stakeholders and service providers each year. These engagement opportunities are a critical component for the office to further understand systemic issues and challenges facing B.C.'s seniors and the people who provide services and support for them.

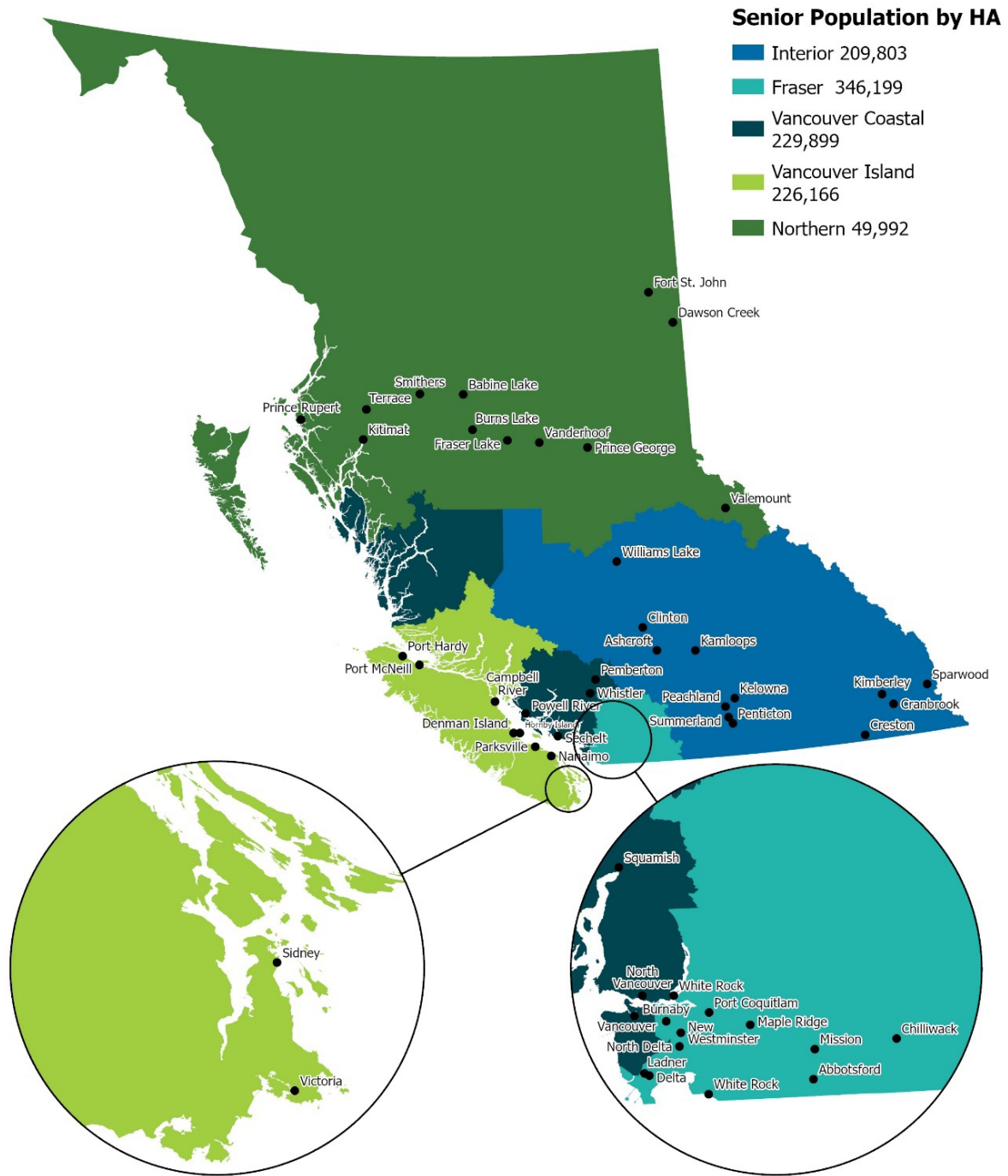
In 2022/23, the Seniors Advocate resumed community visits and townhalls across B.C. and participated in 88 public engagement opportunities including 72 in-person presentations. In addition to continuous engagement with stakeholders, the Seniors Advocate met with counterparts in Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick as well as federal government officials and national advocates to address the multifaceted issues and similar challenges seniors face across Canada.

The OSA continued to receive many media requests with both provincial and national journalists turning to the Seniors Advocate for commentary and insight on issues related to older people, such as long-term care, assisted living, rental housing, extreme heat, home and community care, and income and affordability.

2.1 OFFICE OF THE SENIORS ADVOCATE UPDATES

The OSA newsletter is a monthly publication that includes information about the activities of the office and the Seniors Advocate, current events, provincial and national news, recent provincial and federal government announcements and recent research papers related to seniors. These updates are emailed to contacts and stakeholders and posted on our website. The OSA continues to improve its website to help seniors and their families more easily access information to help them make informed decisions.

Communities Visited in 2022/23

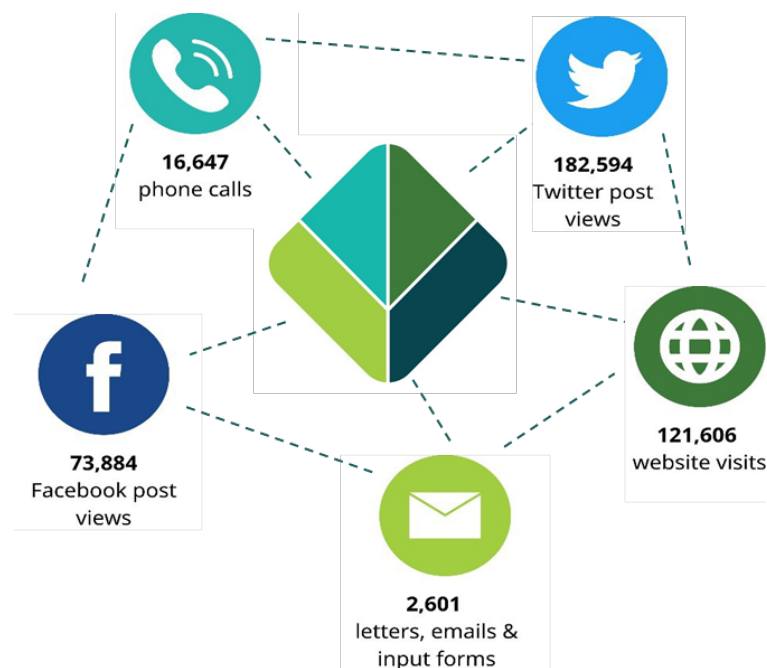


3 Information and Referral

The OSA provides thousands of seniors with information regarding the supports and services available to them. We operate a 24-hour toll-free information and referral phone line and a website that provides direct links to the BC Seniors Guide, our reports and publications and the Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Directory. In addition to providing information to seniors, the OSA receives information from seniors through telephone calls, emails, the website and public engagements. The feedback from seniors on the issues that matter to them is integral to the work of the OSA.

3.1 METHODS OF CONTACT

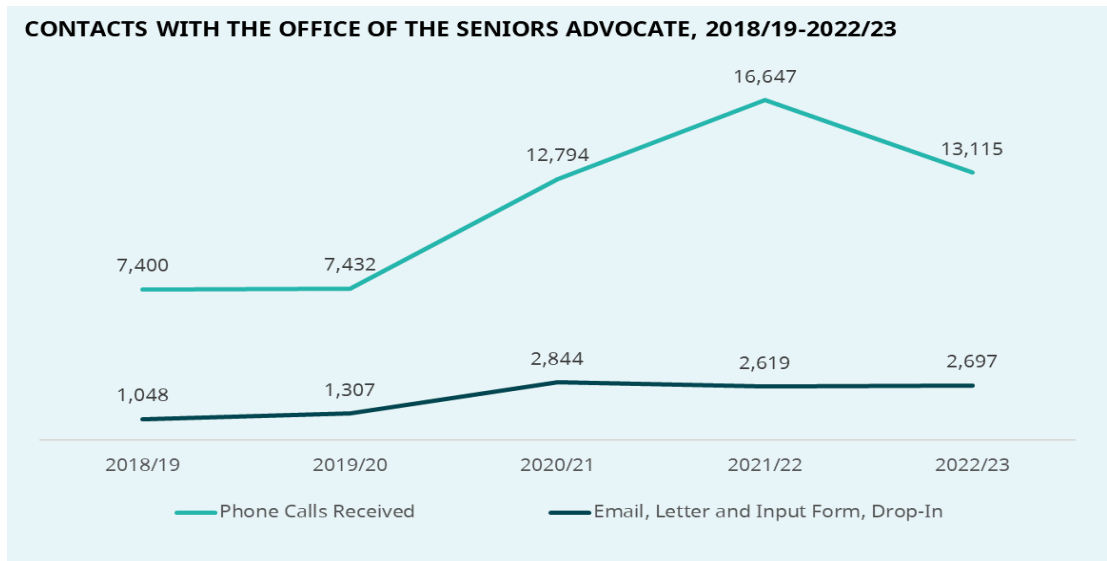
The OSA records all contacts with our office by every method of communication. We track and monitor information about each contact, the area of concern, and our response and follow-up. This information helps identify the systemic issues that are important to B.C. seniors and highlights possible areas for future research. In addition to phone calls, letters, emails and our website form, the public can also pose questions to our office using social media.



3.1.1 DIRECT CONTACTS WITH THE OFFICE OF THE SENIORS ADVOCATE

Members of the public have several avenues to access the OSA directly – including telephone, email, website form, social media and mail. The toll-free information and referral phone line allows for 24-hour access. The OSA website features an input form that provides a space for the public to inform the OSA of issues that impact many seniors, and to submit ideas, solutions and comments related to these matters.

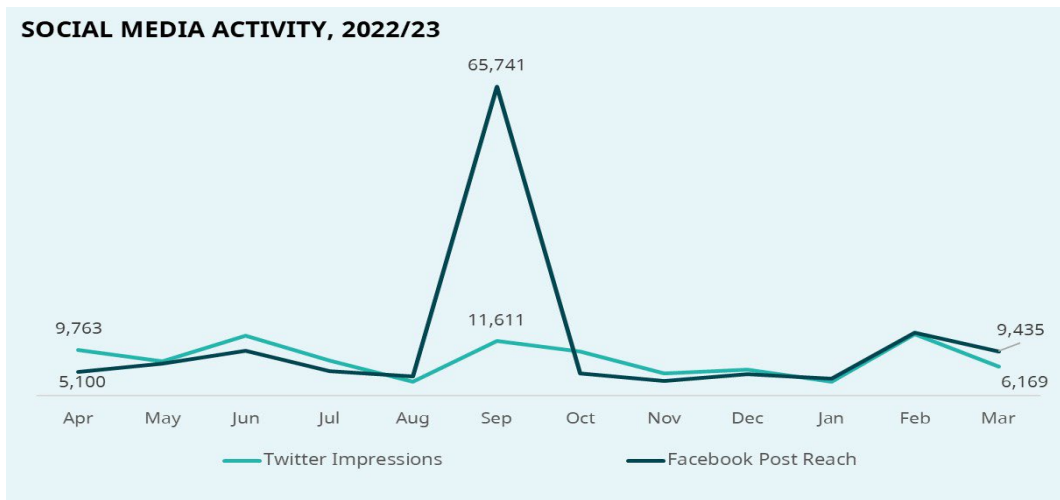
Staff responding to phone calls and correspondence have a wide variety of knowledge and experience. Some are health professionals with many years of experience working with seniors, community-based programs and the health care system, while others have extensive experience with government programs and front-line customer service. All are dedicated to supporting seniors, their families and the general public with important information and referrals to services and programs that can help them resolve their issues.



The number of phone calls grew rapidly since 2019/20 and peaked during the pandemic year in 2020/21. In September 2022, the OSA released the report BC Seniors: Falling Further Behind to address the income and affordability gaps of B.C. seniors resulting in many people contacting our office to share their experience and perspectives.

3.1.2 SOCIAL MEDIA

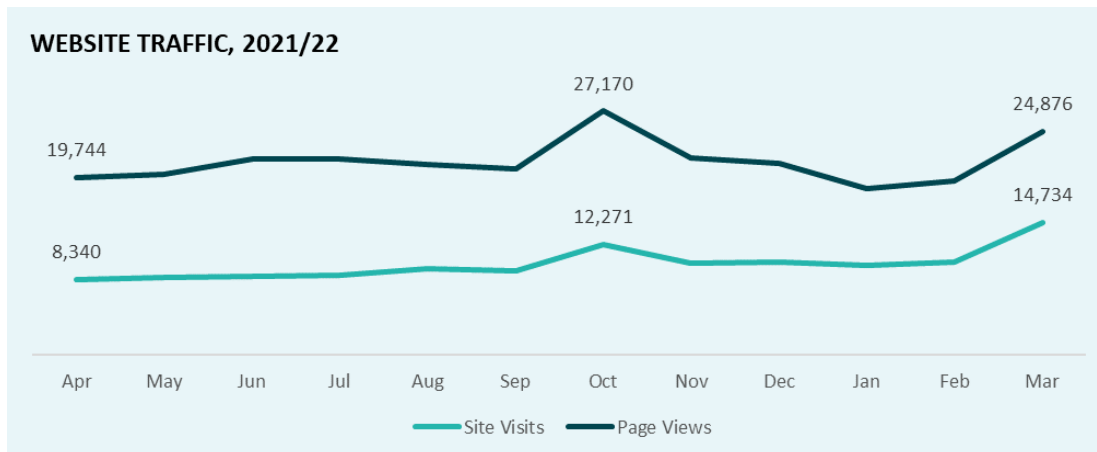
In 2022/23, the OSA has been actively interacting and engaging with the public about current events and relevant topics. Tweets were shown to users 93,996 times. On Facebook, our posts reached 135,727 people throughout the year, an 84% jump over 2021/22. OSA’s Facebook views were significantly higher in September 2022 which coincides with the volunteer recruiting campaign for OSA’s provincial Long-Term Care Survey, together with the release of the spotlight report BC Seniors: Falling Further Behind.



3.1.3 WEBSITE

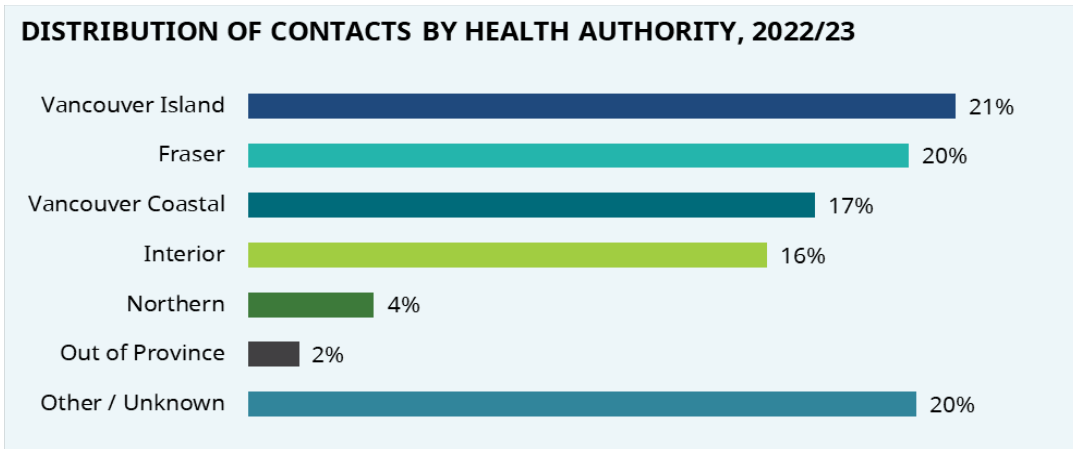
The traffic of the OSA website continued to surge in 2022/23, with 161,934 website visits, an increase of 30% from the previous year. Activities included 4,418 searches of the expanded Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Directory and over 14,000 file downloads. The Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Directory Summary Report, Monitoring Seniors Services Report, and BC Seniors: Falling Further Behind were the most downloaded reports of the year.

We also received more hits and views at the beginning of 2022/23 coinciding with the amendment of the Old Age Security Act by the federal government which included a one-time payment for seniors affected by the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) during the pandemic. Site access was also high during March 2023 when the OSA posted a recruitment campaign seeking applications for new members of its Council of Advisors.



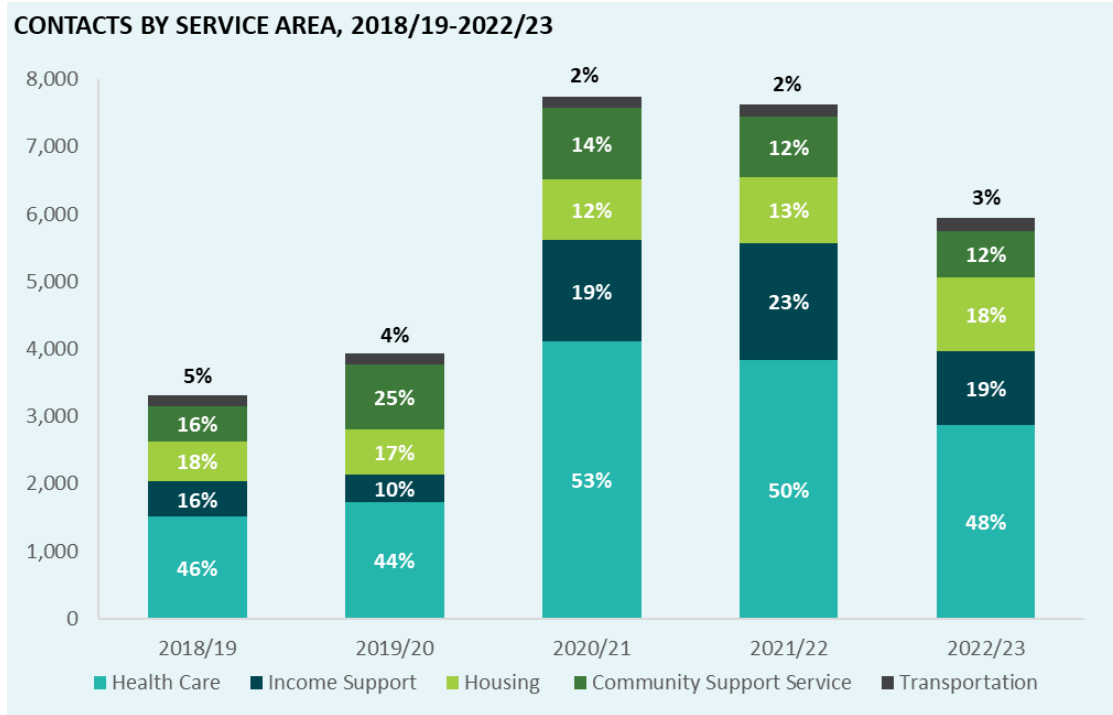
3.2 DISTRIBUTION OF CONTACTS

Wherever possible, the geographic location of the person contacting our office is captured and recorded by health authority. The variation in the distribution by health authority over the past five years was small, with Vancouver Island and Fraser Health Authority being the primary hubs for people contacting the OSA each year.



3.3 REASONS FOR CONTACTING THE OSA

In addition to geographic location, the OSA also tracks why people contact us. The most consistently generated questions are once again related to health care, followed by those relevant to government income support programs, housing, community support services and transportation. The ranking remained the same as the previous year.



We continue to receive many requests for the latest edition of the BC Seniors’ Guide, which was initially released in 2016. In 2022/23, the OSA distributed 31,426 copies - 64% English version, 13% Chinese, and 5% Punjabi and Farsi.

Common enquiries to the OSA in 2022/23 included:

- assistance navigating the health care system and accessing home and community care
- increasing cost of living for rental housing, groceries and other items
- access to Primary Care Physicians and Nurse Practitioners
- assistance with government financial supports available for low-income seniors

- assistance with issues around home support including financial barriers to access and staffing shortages
- acute care admissions and concerns around discharge planning
- increased difficulty accessing online registrations and support for seniors who do not have access to the technology or skills to navigate online processes
- information about Power of Attorney and representation agreements; and
- assistance for seniors experiencing abuse, neglect or self-neglect, including financial scams

3.4 REFERRALS TO SERVICES

Many people contacting our office, particularly those by telephone, were referred to another agency or service that could provide further assistance. The OSA provided 7,775 referrals in 2022/23, about the same level as last year. Most referrals were directed to local area service providers or organizations (9.5%), a health authority or Home and Community Care programs (8.2%), followed by referrals made to Seniors First BC/Seniors Abuse and Information Line (SAIL) which replaced the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction as one of the top three referred agencies.

TOP 10 AGENCIES AND SERVICES REFERRED TO - 2022/23

1. Local Area service provider or organization
2. Health Authority/Home and Community Care
3. Seniors First BC/Seniors Abuse and Information Line (SAIL)
4. Patient Care Quality Office
5. Service Canada
6. Better at Home
7. Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
8. Ceridian Cares
9. HIBC – MSP and PharmaCare
10. BC Housing

3.5 SYSTEMIC ISSUES IDENTIFIED

People contact the OSA to inform us of challenges facing seniors related to health care, housing, transportation, income supports and community support. Listed here is a summary of issues that were frequently reported.

3.5.1 HEALTH CARE

- Access to home health and home support services including limited hours of care and inconsistent scheduling
- Decreased physician availability and access to a family doctor
- Assistance with understanding hospital discharge planning
- Increased expectation of individuals to pay for private long-term care while waiting for subsidized long-term care
- Cost of non-insured services such as glasses, dentures, hearing aids and other medical assistive devices

3.5.2 HOUSING

- Increasing costs of supplies for home renovations, adaptations, maintenance, and repairs to remain living at home
- Timely access to long-term care and assisted living
- Lack of affordable housing and long waitlists
- Sufficient income to meeting increased rent and utility costs
- Legislation governing independent living vs long-term care and assisted living

3.5.3 INCOME SUPPORTS

- Assistance in understanding eligibility for the B.C. Senior's Supplement (BCSS)
- Income related concerns arising from the loss of a spouse
- Financial hardship due to involuntary separation of a spouse due to admission to long-term care
- Accessibility of Canada Revenue Agency and Service Canada in-person or by telephone

3.5.4 COMMUNITY CARE

- Decreased support and assistance from caregivers and families in long-term care
- Waitlists to access Better at Home programs in urban areas
- Assistance to access to community services in rural areas
- Uncertainty regarding continuity of service from non-profit organizations that are dependent on annual government funding



4 Monitoring Seniors Services in B.C.

4.1 MONITORING SENIORS SERVICES REPORT



The Monitoring Seniors Services Report highlights where seniors' needs are being met and where improvements are most needed. With a growing seniors population, the focus on key services falling under the Advocate's legislated mandate becomes more significant. Access to health care and personal supports, appropriate housing and transportation, sufficient income, and protection from abuse and neglect are key to the health and wellbeing of seniors.

The eighth annual edition of the report was released in December 2022 for the 2021/22 fiscal year. The 2021/22 Monitoring Seniors Services Report covers the second full year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The extent of the pandemic's impact on the lives of seniors started to fade when some of the measures or policies for COVID-19 were gradually removed. For example, adult day programs suspensions and visitor restrictions in long-term care have been lifted and social and recreational support for residents have resumed in many communities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a severe workforce challenge in the health care system, preventing a full recovery of seniors' services.

HEALTH CARE

- Over the last five years, the number of clients receiving professional home care services (nurses, physiotherapists, etc.) increased by 16% with 18% more visits and a 2% increase in the average visits per client.
- The number of clients receiving home support (considered non-professional home care) and hours have increased 10% and 5% respectively in the last five years, while the rate of home support clients per 1,000 of target population and the average hours per client have decreased 6% and 5% respectively over the same timeframe.
- Over the last five years, the waitlist for admission into subsidized assisted living residence decreased by 2% and the personal care hours assigned to each unit decreased by 1.1%, while acuity of assisted living residents increased.
- In the past five years, publicly funded long-term care beds increased by 2.5%, while the number of people waiting to be admitted has more than doubled with an average wait time of 196 days (up by 42% over 5 years).

- Over the last five years, the hospitalization rate per 1,000 seniors (65+) has fallen 6% while the alternate level of care (ALC) days for seniors increased by 2% and the average length of stay in ALC increased across all health authorities except for Fraser Health.
- The surgical cases completed for seniors (65+) increased by 17% in the past five years with a 26% decrease in the median wait time and a 2% decrease in the surgical wait list over the same timeframe.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

- The New Horizons for Seniors Program approved 398 new community-based projects in B.C. with total funding of \$8.4 million – a 60% increase in approved projects and a 78% increase in funding over the last five years.
- First Link® dementia support served 13,000 unique clients in 413 communities, which is 22% more clients and more than quadrupled the number of communities served compared to five years ago.
- The Better at Home program served 13,000 seniors who received 245,000 services – a 10% increase in active clients and a 37% increase in the number of services provided over the last five years.
- Safe Seniors, Strong Communities served over 6,000 seniors with 282,000 services.

HOUSING

- There was an 80% increase in the number of Home Owner Grants claimed by seniors, and a 50% decrease in the number of new users of the Property Tax Deferral Program over the past five years.
- The average monthly subsidy provided by Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters increased 3% from five years ago but fell 2% last year to \$195, compared to the 19% increase in the average one-bedroom rent in B.C. over the past five years.
- Over the past five years, the rate of seniors subsidized housing (SSH) units per 1,000 target population (55+) decreased 5%. The waitlist for SSH increased 50% with a median wait time of two years.
- BC Rebate for Accessible Home Adaptations approved 389 applications with an average value \$12,682 in approved adaptations.

TRANSPORTATION

- 79% (814,010) of seniors maintained an active driver's license, 19% more than five years ago and slightly higher than the seniors population growth (17%).
- Age-based Driver's Medical Examination Reports (DMERS) were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the number of driver fitness cases opened in 2021 for seniors aged 80 or older being less than a tenth of the number opened in past years. About half of them were referred for an enhanced road assessment (ERA).
- Over the past five years, the number of active HandyDart clients decreased 13% for BC Transit and 1% for Translink. The rides provided over the same timeframe decreased, by 60% for BC Transit and 44% for Translink.

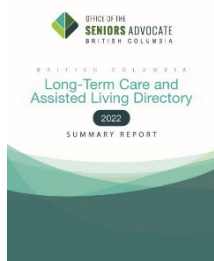
INCOME SUPPORTS

- As of December 2022, low-income single seniors in B.C. could receive up to \$1,808.68 per month (65 to 74 years) or up to \$ 1,877.23 per month (aged 75 plus) in federal and provincial income supports, a 7% and 12% increase over the same time the previous year.
- The maximum Canada Pension Plan benefit was \$1,253.59 per month with an average amount at \$727.61, a 4% and 2% increase respectively from last year.
- \$1.5 billion was spent on prescription medications for seniors with 69% of them paid for by seniors or covered by third-party insurers. The Fair PharmaCare program pays 100% of costs for B.C. residents with incomes up to \$13,750, and people with higher incomes pay for medications up to family maximum amounts based on net income levels.

SAFETY AND PROTECTION

- Calls to the Seniors Abuse and Information Line (6,422) increased by 31% from last year and 34% of the calls were related to abuse (30% increase).
- In 2021, Designated Agencies responded to 1,639 (3% increase) suspected cases of abuse for seniors aged 65 or older, and 708 (7% decrease) cases were confirmed.
- Referrals involving seniors (65+) reported to the Public Guardian and Trustee (1,235) increased by 12% from the previous year and 46% of them proceeded to investigation.
- In 2021, violent offences and property offences against seniors reported to RCMP increased by 5% and 3% respectively from 2020.
- Physical abuse cases against seniors reported to the Vancouver Police Department decreased 8% while financial abuse cases increased by 4% from last year.

4.2 LONG-TERM CARE AND ASSISTED LIVING DIRECTORY



In 2022, the B.C. Long-Term Care Directory expanded to include publicly subsidized assisted living residences, and it is now referred to as the 'British Columbia Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Directory'. The directory provides information on publicly subsidized long-term care facilities and assisted living residences in B.C. It has been a highly sought-after resource since its initial publication in March 2016.

The OSA works with various stakeholders to ensure the information remains current and relevant. The eighth edition, released in October 2022, includes basic information for assisted living residences, additional quality indicators, and First Nations territory information for long-term care homes. The data reflects the second full year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2.1 LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

FACILITY CHARACTERISTICS

- The directory contains information on 294 publicly subsidized long-term care facilities in B.C. with 27,702 publicly subsidized beds.
- 109 facilities (8,925 beds) are operated directly by health authorities and 185 (18,777 beds) are operated by a contractor with funding from health authorities.
- 90% of rooms are single-occupancy rooms, 7% are double-occupancy, and 3% are multi-bedrooms (three or more beds).

RESIDENT PROFILE

- The average age of residents in long-term care is 83 years old.
- 32% of residents are totally dependent on staff for their activities of daily living (ADL 5+), such as bathing, dressing, and getting out of bed.
- 28% of residents have severe cognitive impairment (CPS 4+).
- 49% of residents are assessed as "low" on the social engagement scale (ISE 0-2).

SERVICES

- On average, facilities were funded for 3.39 direct care hours per bed per day, a 0.6% increase over 2020/21; 84% of facilities met the 3.36 guideline last year.
- The average per diem rate in contracted facilities was \$248.70 per bed per day, a 2.4% increase over 2020/21.
- The average actual raw food cost increased 3% to \$9.15 per resident per day, with a range across all facilities from \$5.89 to \$20.08.
- Residents receiving physical therapy (11%) and recreational therapy (30%) increased from 10% and 28% respectively in 2020/21; occupational therapy stays at 6% for three consecutive years.
- 90% of residents and 43% of health care workers were vaccinated against influenza; 93% of residents were fully vaccinated (plus first booster dose) for COVID-19.

4.2.2 ASSISTED LIVING RESIDENCES

RESIDENCE CHARACTERISTICS

- The directory contains information on 132 publicly subsidized assisted living sites in B.C. with 4,299 publicly subsidized units.
- 6 residences (173 units) are operated directly by health authorities and 126 residences (4,126 units) by a for-profit or not-for-profit contractor with funding from health authorities.

RESIDENT PROFILE

- The average age of residents in publicly subsidized assisted living varies among health authorities, ranging from 77 (Interior Health) to 85 (Northern Health).
- For all health authorities, over half of the residents are female, ranging from 64% (Northern Health) to 70% (Fraser Health).

SERVICES

- On average, the wait time for admission into a publicly subsidized assisted living residence varied from 81 days (Vancouver Coastal Health) to 488 days (Northern Health).
- On average, the length of stay for a publicly subsidized assisted living resident are between 2.5 years (Northern Health) and 3.6 years (Vancouver Coastal Health).
- The average actual food cost is \$8.44 per unit per day, with a range across all residences from \$4.87 to \$22.39.
- 93% of assisted living residents were fully vaccinated (plus first booster dose) for COVID-19.

5 Initiatives and Progress to Date

5.1 COVID-19 RESPONSE

5.1.1 SAFE SENIORS, STRONG COMMUNITIES AND BETTER AT HOME



Partnering with the United Way of British Columbia (UWBC), the Safe Seniors, Strong Communities (SSSC) program began during the pandemic, matching people who need non-medical essentials with local volunteers. Seniors could receive volunteer help with grocery shopping, meal prep, prescription drop-off, as well as a friendly check-in calls or virtual visits. The

Better at Home program, also coordinated by UWBC, is now providing the volunteer services provided by SSSC and offers both volunteer and paid home and community support services for seniors throughout B.C. Better at Home helps seniors with simple non-medical, day-to-day tasks such as transportation, light yard work and housekeeping, snow removal and minor home repairs so older people can continue to live independently in their own homes and remain connected to their communities.



5.1.2 COVID-19 BOOSTERS

The Office of the Seniors Advocate reminded seniors and their families to register for their fourth dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The waning protection of the vaccine is based on age, overall health and the ability of a person to mount an antibody response; this places adults aged 70 or older in the community and those in long-term care and assisted living at greater risk. COVID-19 rapid antigen tests were also distributed to people aged 18+ at B.C. pharmacies. The Seniors Advocate urged young people to protect seniors in their lives by taking a rapid test before visits.

5.1.3 ESSENTIAL VISITOR FOR LONG-TERM CARE RESIDENTS

Most visiting restrictions were lifted at long-term care facilities and people who met the visitation requirements were permitted to visit their loved ones. Visitors were asked to provide proof of vaccination and a negative rapid antigen test, taken at home up to 48 hours before the visit, or on arrival at the facility. The Seniors Advocate reminded visitors to review each facility's restrictions before their visit. The office continues to advocate for right of long-term care residents to choose an essential visitor.

5.1.4 MONITORING COVID-19 CASES AND OUTBREAKS IN LONG-TERM CARE AND ASSISTED LIVING

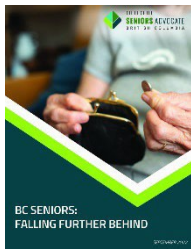
Information about COVID-19 cases and outbreaks in long-term care and assisted living are posted on the OSA website, including links to the BC Centre for Disease Control reports. This information includes cases, hospitalizations, critical care admissions, recoveries, testing, deaths and vaccination administration.



5.2 SYSTEMIC REVIEWS

The Office of the Seniors Advocate prepares reports based on our systemic reviews of major issues affecting seniors in British Columbia. Reports are posted on the OSA website and can be found under Reports and Publications at www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca. Brief highlights of the systemic reviews completed in 2022/23 are presented below as well as other work underway that will be released in 2023/24.

5.2.1 BC SENIORS: FALLING FURTHER BEHIND



This review examines the impact of rising costs on B.C. seniors who depend on government pensions and reviews the incomes and expenses of seniors across a broad socio-economic landscape. The review also assesses the effectiveness of government supports, services and subsidies and includes findings from a spring 2022 survey of low-income seniors and feedback from consultations with 82 community agencies.

The report highlights that pension incomes are not keeping up with rising costs and seniors cannot afford the essentials. Most seniors do not have a private benefits plan and must pay out-of-pocket for the total cost of dental care, hearing aids, vision care and other necessary health care expenses because the provincial government does not fund them. This report makes ten recommendations to address the issues of affordability to help improve the lives of B.C. seniors

5.2.2 WE MUST DO BETTER: HOME SUPPORT SERVICES FOR B.C. SENIORS



This is the second review of the province's publicly funded home support services that finds the program is not keeping pace with the needs of a growing seniors population. The service needs fundamental restructuring and remains unaffordable to a large number of seniors. The report examines a five-year trend in home support funding, hours of care, client acuity, affordability and caregiver distress.

Findings reveal that client complexity and frailty is rising, care hours are not growing to meet this need, and more of the care is being shifted to family caregivers. This review includes results from the OSA’s second province-wide survey of seniors who receive home support and their caregivers. The report includes five recommendations to improve the program so seniors can age in the comfort of their own home.

5.2.3 SECOND PROVINCE-WIDE LONG-TERM CARE RESIDENT SURVEY – 2023

In May 2022, the Office of the Seniors Advocate launched the second survey of the experiences of residents living in every publicly subsidized long-term care home in B.C. The first survey was conducted in 2016/17 and was the most extensive study of residents’ quality of life in Canada. The survey examines topics such as food, safety, comfort, respect and responsiveness of staff, personal relationships, medications and activities. Residents are interviewed in person and their family members are invited to participate online, by phone or paper. A report is planned for Fall 2023.



5.2.4 REVIEW OF ASSISTED LIVING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA - 2023

Assisted living has been part of the seniors' continuum of care in B.C. for almost 20 years. It was introduced as an alternative level of care for seniors where they could live independently in their own suites, come together for meals, and receive a range of services on site. Assisted living is regulated by the Community Care and Assisted Living Act (CCALA) and associated regulations. Prior to 2019, a number of concerns were raised about the limitations the legislation had on eligibility, services and flexibility for residents. Since then, several legislative changes have occurred to offer more flexibility, choices and protections for older adults. The OSA launched a systemic review of the current state of assisted living to assess the trends, challenges and gaps in how services are delivered in B.C. A report is planned for Spring 2023.

5.2.5 A FUNDING REVIEW OF THE LONG-TERM CARE SECTOR

This second funding review of the long-term care sector in B.C. follows the first review completed in 2020 which focused on contracted operators. The review found a funding and monitoring system that lacked accountability, openness and transparency and marked differences in spending between contracted providers who are private operators, and others who are not-for-profit care societies. The second review will examine whether the current funding and financial reporting practices have improved to ensure that public investments in the long-term care sector are resident-focused, fair and equitable with sufficient staff to meet resident needs; it will also include health authority owned and operated facilities as well as private and not-for-profit operators. A final report is planned for the fall 2023.

5.3 SUBMISSIONS & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

5.3.1 INDIGO SURVIVORS PROJECT – ELDER ABUSE IN THE LGBTQ2SA+ COMMUNITY

In February 2023, the Seniors Advocate was asked to contribute a forward for an upcoming book on the lived experiences of elder abuse written by survivors from the LGBTQ2SA+ community. Narratives written by trans women, gay men and lesbians recounting their lived experiences of financial abuse, physical and sexual abuse, homophobic abuse and neglect within partner relationships, long-term care, home care and religious organizations. The narratives were collected through the Indigo Project, an innovative partnership between researchers from Simon Fraser University and QMUNITY, a non-profit organization that works to improve queer, trans and Two-Spirit lives. Queer and trans elders have been described as the ‘silent generation’ since they have lived through times when their sexual and gender identities were criminalized and pathologized.

5.3.2 FIRST MEETING OF CANADA’S THREE SENIORS ADVOCATES

In February 2023, British Columbia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors’ Advocates identified key issues to improve the aging process for Canadian seniors during a first in-person meeting in Ottawa which included a series of discussion with organizations and federal officials including Minister of Seniors Kamal Khera. Discussion between the advocates and the minister centred on how the federal government would ensure support for new national standards for long-term care and that these standards apply to all publicly funded long-term care homes in Canada. In addition, the advocates spoke of the need for better supports to enable seniors to age well in their own homes, the importance of age-friendly communities and met with the National Seniors Council to discuss their work on the federal Age Well at Home initiative.

5.3.3 DEATH REVIEW PANEL ON HEAT RELATED DEATHS

In April 2022, the British Columbia Coroners Service (BCSS) convened a panel to review the deaths of 619 persons who died following an

unprecedented heat event from record high temperatures. Many of these were vulnerable seniors with compromised health. The Seniors Advocate participated in the death review panel that identified three key areas of focus to prevent loss of life in future extreme heat events in B.C.: coordinated heat alert and response systems, identification and support of vulnerable populations, and implementation of prevention and longer-term risk mitigation strategies.

5.3.4 PRESENTATION AT THE BC ASSOCIATION ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP CENTRES ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON SENIORS ABUSE

Seniors can be more vulnerable to abuse due to frailty and dependence on others. While most seniors will not experience abuse, we know that many do, and it often goes unreported. According to the OSA's 2021 systemic review on seniors abuse and neglect, we found that reports of abuse and neglect of seniors (65+) have increased significantly in the last five years. In July 2022, the Seniors Advocate spoke to Elders and members of the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres about the systemic challenges in B.C.'s current seniors abuse and neglect system and explored how Elders can protect their financial, physical and emotional well-being.

5.3.5 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE FEDERAL HOUSING ADVOCATE

The Office of the Federal Housing Advocate helps promote and protect the right to housing in Canada, including the right to adequate housing. The goal of the Advocate's work is to drive change on key systemic housing issues and make recommendations to improve Canada's housing laws, policies and programs to enable people and families in Canada to have access to adequate, affordable and safe housing. In August 2022, the Seniors Advocate met with Marie-Josée Houle, Canada's first Federal Housing Advocate appointed in February 2022, to discuss the implementation of the right to adequate housing and issues impacting seniors' housing in B.C.

5.3.6 FORUM OF FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL (FPT) MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR SENIORS

The Forum of Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors launched consultations to better understand the social and

economic impacts of ageism in Canada. In October 2022, the Seniors Advocate participated in an FPT-led provincial roundtable consultation to discuss systemic ageism and its impact on the rights and autonomy of seniors during the pandemic.

5.3.7 COALITION OF CANADIANS AGAINST AGEISM

In November 2023, the Seniors Advocate participated in the formal launch of the Coalition of Canadians Against Ageism in Toronto. The goal of the coalition is to combat ageism, focus on strengthening and protecting the human rights of older adults, as well as encourage the Canadian government and the United Nations to support the recommendations from the World Health Organization’s Global Report on Ageism. In follow up, the Seniors Advocate attended the 13th Session of the United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing in New York, which focused on seniors’ rights to health and access to health services and social inclusion.



5.4 ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE SENIORS ADVOCATE

The responsibilities of the Seniors Advocate, as defined in the Seniors Advocate Act, include analyzing issues she has identified as important to the well-being of seniors and advocating for their interests. There are several areas of concern that the Advocate continues to champion including: public accountability in long-term care, improving supports for low-income seniors, improvements in home and community care; services for seniors living in rural areas; and seniors and ageism. Improvements were seen in each of these issues this year.

5.4.1 RESIDENT AND FAMILY COUNCILS IN LONG-TERM CARE

The Office of the Seniors Advocate has heard from many residents and their families about the importance of having a place to bring their voices, concerns and ideas to enhance the quality of life of people in long-term care. In November 2022, the provincial government announced strengthening support and oversight of resident and family councils in long-term care homes and encouraging long-term care homes without a council to establish one. The Ministry of Health will lead a provincial committee with representation from regional networks to focus on provincial-level issues. These changes will give residents of long-term care a much stronger voice in shaping their quality of life and addresses recommendations made by the OSA in the “Staying Apart to Stay Safe” report from 2020.

5.4.2 NATIONAL STANDARDS IN LONG-TERM CARE

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted long-standing issues in Canada’s long-term care sector. In January 2023, new national standards in long-term care, drafted by the Health Standards Organization (HSO) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA group), were released and provide guidance on delivering safe, reliable and high-quality long-term care services. The new standards provide guidance on promoting good governance, upholding resident-centred care, enabling quality of life for residents, ensuring high-quality and safe care, fostering a healthy and competent workforce, and promoting a culture of quality improvement and learning in care homes. The new standards recommend that residents get at least four hours of direct care daily. Currently, the standard in B.C. is 3.36 hours of care per resident each day. The Seniors

Advocate welcomes the new standards and will continue to monitor public accountability in the long-term care sector.

5.4.3 USE OF ANTIPSYCHOTICS IN LONG-TERM CARE

The use of antipsychotics without a diagnosis has steadily increased in long-term care in B.C., particularly during the pandemic. Antipsychotic medications are sometimes used to manage difficult behaviours associated with dementia. Data from the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) show that approximately 28% of long-term care residents in B.C. were given antipsychotics without a diagnosis of psychosis compared to the national rate at 24%. B.C. rates are consistently higher than in some other provinces, including Alberta and Ontario. The Seniors Advocate continues to monitor this issue as an indicator of quality of care.

5.4.4 SUPPORT FOR SENIORS WITH LOW INCOMES

The Seniors Advocate continues to hear from older people who are concerned about their income security as they age. The rising costs of living for housing, food and other essentials are particularly challenging for seniors living on fixed incomes. It is proving increasingly difficult for low-income seniors to afford healthy meals and a growing number are turning to food banks for help. The Seniors Advocate continues to raise awareness about the economic situation faced by low to moderate income seniors and their challenges affording necessities such as medications, mobility aids, dental/vision/hearing care and personal care supports as they get older.

5.4.5 AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR SENIORS

The Seniors Advocate continues to hear from seniors about concerns with access to affordable, safe housing. While this is a concern for many British Columbians, it is particularly challenging for seniors with low to moderate incomes who cannot afford the rising costs of rent, home maintenance and home adaptations. The BC Housing Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) and Seniors Subsidized Housing programs are not keeping pace with inflation and a growing seniors population. The provincial government continues its commitment in Budget 2023 in creating more affordable housing options for seniors, including strengthening service and supports at the Residential Tenancy Branch

and adopting 55+ age restriction bylaws to promote seniors housing. The Seniors Advocate will continue to monitor the provincial government's 'Homes for People' action plan and investment of affordable housing for seniors.

5.4.6 HOME SUPPORT CLIENT FEES

Home support is often a lifeline that keeps seniors from moving into long-term care. The provincial home support program provides assistance with bathing and daily personal care and help with more complex tasks such as catheter care, oxygen therapy and management of medications. One of the most significant challenges of the home support program in B.C. is the cost of the assessed fees that clients must pay which can be a significant financial barrier for many seniors. Most provinces do not charge for home support, and B.C. is the most expensive. The OSA's second review of the home support services, 'We Must Do Better' calls on the provincial government to eliminate or drastically reduce the home support fees for seniors.

5.4.7 SENIORS LIVING IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The Seniors Advocate continues to hear concerns from seniors who live in rural and remote communities in B.C. Access to transportation continues to be a primary concern with limited options for public transportation, HandyDART or volunteer drivers. Lack of transportation impacts seniors' access to health care services, such as medical appointments, and other community supports.

Another challenge for seniors living in rural and remote communities is finding appropriate and affordable housing close to their home community. Seniors may need to move into independent living, assisted living or long-term care and this may mean moving to another community far away from family and friends. For those who choose to stay in their own homes, it is often difficult to access the programs and services they need to maintain their independence.

6 Council of Advisors

The Office of the Seniors Advocate has a Council of Advisors (COA) with members that are engaged and connected seniors from across the province with a wide range of educational, professional, and socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the council was not able to meet in person for their semi-annual conferences. However, these important meetings have resumed with the first being held in Richmond in September 2022. COA members provided valuable input in the early stages of the home support survey conducted by the OSA.

The COA is focused on re-engagement and renewal with several members retiring in 2023 and 2024. The COA Recruitment Committee began searching for new members in Spring 2023 and the successful candidates will fill vacancies in both 2023 and 2024.

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF ADVISORS

FRASER REGION	INTERIOR REGION	NORTHERN REGION
Alfred Woo Bong-Hwan Kim Jerry Gosling Royce Shook	Greg Howard Leo M. Campeau Sandy Zeznik	Bernice Magee Dawn Hemingway Margaret Sutton
VANCOUVER COASTAL REGION	VANCOUVER ISLAND REGION	
Barb Mikulec	Geraldine Hinton Joseph Forsyth	

7 2022/23 OSA Operating Budget

The OSA budget for 2022/23 was \$2.69 million with total expenditures of \$3.01 million. Expenditures focused on: consulting with seniors in their communities, conducting the second province-wide survey of the experiences of residents living in publicly subsidized long-term care homes, monitoring key services to seniors, systemic reviews and producing reports with recommendations to government and service providers to address issues and improve services.

As indicated in our 2021/22 Annual Report, professional services were expected to increase in line with the Seniors Advocate conducting the second landmark survey of residents living in every long-term care home in B.C. While there will be some additional professional services expenditures to cover the long-term care survey completion costs in 2023/24, overall professional services expenditures will be reduced in 2023/24. The additional expenses associated with the long-term care survey were disclosed proactively and approved in advance by the Ministry of Health.

EXPENSE TYPE	2022/23 BUDGET	2022/23 ACTUALS
Salaries	\$1,484,938	\$1,494,311
Employee Benefits	377,174	386,888
Travel	85,000	44,020
Legal Services	45,000	6,771
Professional Services	324,771	705,702 ¹
Information Services	40,000	33,386
Office, Business and Reporting Expenses	330,620	330,620
Advertising & Publications	0	4,196
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$2,687,503	\$3,005,894

1 - This reflects a one-time expenditure for professional services to coordinate the Long-Term-Care Survey.

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