

NEWS RELEASE

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Affordability, access to services and rising rates of abuse and neglect of concern for B.C. seniors

VICTORIA – The rising population and residual effects from the pandemic are putting increasing pressure on services for seniors across B.C. as highlighted in the 2023 Monitoring Seniors Services report released today by the Office of the BC Seniors Advocate.

Important services for seniors such as home support, long-term care, subsidized housing and HandyDart rides are harder to access and there are also rising levels of abuse, neglect and criminal activity impacting older people reported by Designated Agencies, the RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department over the last five years.

“The provincial government has significantly increased funding in many seniors services, but this has been offset by rising costs and increasing demand from a growing seniors population,” stated BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie. “The result is reductions in the rate of some services like home support and increases in wait times for others such as long-term care.”

The report highlights the current seniors’ population 65+ of 1,083,695 has grown 15% over the past five years and has shifted from 16.6% of the overall B.C. population 10 years ago to 20% today. Over half of the seniors’ population is relatively young (65-74) and only 11% or 121,917 are 85 and older.

“Most seniors are healthy and mobile into their 80s and this health data has been relatively stable over the past five years. We see the impact of COVID-19 when we look at causes of death and the rate of death per 10,000 of the population, but cancer, heart disease and stroke remain the primary causes of death for 50% of seniors,” continued Mackenzie.

The report highlights the number of completed surgeries in four of the top five surgeries for seniors increased and more seniors are accessing influenza vaccinations, but also noted are decreasing rates of home support clients and the average hours of care per client; continuing increases in the waitlists for publicly subsidized assisted living and long-term care; decreasing Adult Day Program hours provided; and a rising proportion of long-term care residents taking antipsychotic medications without a diagnosis of psychosis. Particularly troubling are the increasing number of calls to police and agencies reporting suspected physical abuse of seniors as well as instances of neglect, self-neglect and financial abuse.

“Affordability is an urgent issue for many seniors, particularly those who rent or are required to pay for their home support services. We continue to see 50% of seniors with an income below minimum wage, and while government pensions are indexed to inflation, the amounts are low. A senior with no workplace pension or RSP who receives only their Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Canada Pension Plan payments will have an average income of less than \$24,000 a year and this is the reality for almost a third of B.C. seniors,” said Mackenzie.

Trends over five years:

- The life expectancy at 65 years in B.C. is 21.8 years compared to 22.1 years in 2018.
- The top five causes of death are: cancer (24%); heart disease (19%); cerebrovascular diseases (6%); COVID-19 (6%) and respiratory diseases (4%).
- 26% of Emergency Department visits are patients 65+ but there are proportionately 5% fewer seniors visiting the emergency department compared to five years ago.
- The average wait time for a long-term care bed went up 54% to 209 days compared to 2019, and the number of seniors on the waitlist has increased 136% to 5,175 over the same period.
- The rate of publicly funded long term care beds per 1,000 population age 75+ has fallen 12%.
- The waitlist for publicly subsidized assisted living units increased 21% while the rate of units per 1,000 seniors (75+) decreased 12%.
- The rate of home support clients per 1,000 seniors (75+) decreased 7% and the average hours per client decreased 4% while the number of home support clients increased 10%.
- New users of the Property Tax Deferment (PTD) program fell 13% compared to 2018/19. Overall, there are 76,847 users of the PTD, a 20% increase over five years.
- Over the past five years the number of seniors receiving the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) subsidy (23,506) decreased 3% and the average subsidy fell by 8% despite a 12% increase in monthly rents for SAFER clients. Overall, the rate of seniors receiving SAFER has dropped 14%.
- There has been a 59% increase in the waitlist for BC Housing Seniors Subsidized Housing, the average wait time has increased 11% and 17% of applicants have been waiting more than five years.
- 80% of seniors maintain an active driver's licence - 19% more than five years ago.
- The number of rides provided by HandyDart has decreased by 27% for TransLink and 43% for BC Transit since 2018/19.
- There is a 114% increase in the number of abuse, neglect and self-neglect cases reported to the Designated Agencies over the last five years.
- BC RCMP has seen a 55% increase in the number of violent offences reported for people 65 and older over the last 5 years.
- Vancouver Police reported a 53% increase in cases of financial abuse against seniors over the last five years.

“Overall, the outlook for B.C. seniors is mixed with the good news being that we’re living longer, healthier lives and are generally mobile and independent into our 80s. The more concerning aspects of aging in British Columbia is the reduced accessibility for many services, costs that are rising beyond the ability of most seniors to pay, and the disproportionate increases in reports of abuse, neglect and criminal activity affecting seniors. Addressing these issues will cause financial pressures on government to intensify over the next decade as the seniors age cohort shifts to 85+ and their reliance on public services grows dramatically,” said Mackenzie.

The 2023 Monitoring Seniors Services Report highlights the performance and trends of a wide range of supports and services for B.C. seniors. The report's year-over-year comparisons examine improvement and gaps in the areas of health care, community supports, housing, transportation, income support and the safety and protection of seniors. For the first time, the report includes information on the waitlists and availability of seniors' subsidized housing.

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:

- 2023 Monitoring Seniors Services Report:
<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/monitoring-seniors-services/>

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