

NEWS RELEASE

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Cross-ministry seniors plan must be a priority, says BC Seniors Advocate

VICTORIA – BC’s Seniors Advocate is urging the next provincial government to develop and implement a cross-ministry strategy and action plan to strengthen supports and services for seniors throughout the province.

“The Province needs a concrete plan with targets and performance measures that define how government will meet the needs of the growing seniors’ population in B.C.,” said BC Seniors Advocate Dan Levitt. “The recent flurry of announcements of new and replacement long-term care spaces and the updated poverty plan are encouraging, but seniors also need assurance that government is working to improve availability of seniors subsidized housing, access to health care, affordable transportation and home care, and better income supports.”

In the report *Ageing Matters: Listening to BC Seniors*, the BC Seniors Advocate recommended government, led by the Ministry of Health, develop a plan specific to seniors and called on the Province to demonstrate leadership and prioritize the needs of seniors. Government has not indicated that its acting on this recommendation.

“We have known for decades that the seniors’ population is growing and more and more people will require government services. Unfortunately, we are not keeping pace with this growth,” said Levitt. “In addition, new challenges are emerging that have disproportionate impacts on seniors such as a lack of affordable, appropriate housing, and the rising cost of living for necessities like food and medical supplies to support healthy ageing.”

In its 2023 *Monitoring Seniors Service* report, the Office of the Seniors Advocate reported the average wait time for a long-term care bed went up 54% to 209 days last year compared to 2019; the number of seniors on the waitlist increased 136% to 5,175 over the same period. The report also notes there was a 59% increase in the waitlist for seniors subsidized housing between 2019-2023, and of those, 17% of applicants have been waiting more than five years.

“Within 10 years, one in four British Columbians will be a senior. Government must act quickly to ensure the supports, services and programs are available to help older people age comfortably in their home communities in a manner of their choosing,” said Levitt. “I spoke with many local government representatives at the annual Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) conference yesterday who reinforced we are simply not keeping up with demand. Many local governments have endorsed resolutions specific to improving the lives of seniors in B.C. and want to ensure services are available and can be accessed when needed.”

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/>.

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