

NEWS RELEASE

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Advocate calls on Province to address increasing shortfall in long-term care bed supply B.C. urgently needs a plan as seniors' population increases

VICTORIA – A new systemic review released today shows B.C. is not prepared to care for the most vulnerable seniors today or in the future due to the ongoing, increasing shortage of long-term care beds.

“Our province is at the beginning of a massive increase in the seniors’ population and we are not ready to help people age with the care, supports and services they need to stay safe and healthy,” said Dan Levitt, BC Seniors Advocate. “We need to plan and invest in more publicly-subsidized long-term care beds and assisted living units, home support services, respite for caregivers and increase rigour and transparency in the waiting and placement processes to better support families.”

Over the past ten years, the waitlist for long-term care in B.C. has ballooned. Between 2016 and 2025, the number of people waiting to be admitted to long-term care rose from 2,381 to 7,212, an increase of 200%. The provincial average wait time has grown by 98% over the past eight years, from 146 days in 2018, the first year data was collected, to 290 days in 2025.

“Most people are willing to care for an ageing loved one at home, but they need clear information about how the long-term care placement process works, as well as better supports inside the home to ensure the senior is well cared for and the caregiver can avoid burnout,” said Levitt. “Currently, caregivers tell our office that many community-based services can be unreliable and costly. This must change if we want to help people age in place and reduce demand on the long-term care system.”

Over time, the long-term care system has gone from 77 beds per 1,000 people (75+) a decade ago to 58 beds today, and this will drop to 41 beds by 2035/36 if beds are built and replaced at the current rate. The Ministry of Health’s current ten-year bed expansion plan aims to increase the number of new beds by 10% (2,935 beds) from 2025 to 2030; no additional beds are planned after 2030. Today, there is a 2,000-bed shortfall and that gap widens and grows over 700% to meet the ministry’s projected future long-term care demand of 16,000 beds by 2035/36.

The BC Seniors Advocate made six recommendations in his report 'From Shortfall to Crisis: Growing Demand for Long-Term Care Beds in B.C.' aimed at meeting current and future demand for long-term care:

1. Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Infrastructure, extend and update the Long-Term Care Bed Expansion Plan to increase the supply of new long-term care beds with funding commitments beyond 2030/31 to increase capacity, meet growing demand and reduce wait times.
2. The Ministry of Health improve access to community-based supports to help seniors remain at home longer and reduce the demand for long-term care by:
 - a. Eliminating the financial barrier to accessing the provincial home support program;
 - b. Increasing the availability of adult day programs; and
 - c. Increasing the availability of respite care.
3. The Ministry of Health strengthen the navigation of the long-term care system by establishing a consistent and transparent process, and expand access to essential supports for seniors and families waiting for publicly-subsidized long-term care. Improving supports for seniors and their families should include eliminating the home support assessed client contribution cost for people waiting for long-term care.
4. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the ministries of Housing and Infrastructure, develop a comprehensive plan to expand access to a broader range of publicly-subsidized seniors' housing options.
5. The Ministry of Health must act with urgency to conduct a comprehensive review of health authority waitlist management practices and develop wait time targets.
6. The Ministry of Health develop a detailed action plan outlining how it will address the findings and recommendations of this report, including clear timelines and deliverables with annual updates. This plan must be submitted to the BC Seniors Advocate by October 1, 2025, the International Day of Older Persons.

"We've known since the 1950s that B.C.'s seniors' population would grow significantly – now is the time to act with urgency to build the long-term care beds needed to meet government's stated target by 2035/36," said Levitt. "A decade ago, we saw the warning signs of a critical shortage of family doctors and affordable housing and we failed to act. We now have a 10-year runway to avoid repeating that mistake and address the projected shortfall in long-term care. I want government to take decisive action today to get this right for seniors and their families."

Quick Link: Report - <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/from-shortfall-to-crisis-growing-demand-for-long-term-care-beds-in-b-c/>

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, via email at info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca, Canada Post and the OSA web site <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/>.

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