

Seniors

Seniors are valued, secure, and supported to live the lives they want.

HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

Seniors in British Columbia are a very diverse group. While some are among the wealthiest residents, having greatly benefited from housing wealth, many others are on fixed incomes and struggling with the cost of living crisis. In 2023, 9.7% of food bank clients were over 65 years old.

We must ensure that seniors receive the support they need to live as they choose. Those who wish to remain in their homes should have access to services that assist with daily living. On average, a long-term care bed costs taxpayers \$27,740 more per year than two hours of daily home support. Correcting this imbalance by reimagining how we care for seniors will not only help with spending, it will also promote independence and quality of life for our senior community.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

British Columbia has an aging population and, unfortunately, insufficient consideration has been given to how this will affect our workforce, healthcare system and long-term care services.

Certain groups of seniors require additional support, including Indigenous peoples, racialized individuals, renters, those in long-term care, people lacking transportation and those with complex medical needs. Rural seniors face specific challenges, including limited access to medical assistance, difficulties in finding suitable accommodation and lower average incomes.

The distribution of seniors is uneven across the province, with many choosing to retire in temperate climates and small villages on Vancouver Island.

There is a growing demand for long-term care homes, with an average waiting time of 178 days for a publicly subsidized long-term care bed—a 166% increase over the past five years. Current growth in long-term care capacity is not projected to meet the rising demand in BC. The Seniors Advocate report, “Billions More Reasons to Care,” found that for-profit care homes have doubled their profits in the past six years while failing to provide hundreds of thousands of essential care hours.

POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Provide greater financial support to low-income seniors who rent, ensuring affordability and housing security.

- We will increase the thresholds for SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) to provide greater monthly rental assistance for low-income seniors. The thresholds will be raised to \$45,000 for single individuals and \$50,000 for couples, ensuring more seniors qualify for support.
- We will apply vacancy control to assisted living, including the additional fees for services, to protect seniors from rent increases and extra charges.

Ensure seniors have access to comprehensive care, both in-home and in care facilities.

- We will improve access to respite care and day programs, ensuring that at-home care services are available for both medical care and assistance with daily tasks to support seniors and their caregivers.
- We will increase the number of publicly funded long-term care beds by 10% each year to meet the growing demand for senior care services.

Improve transparency and accountability in publicly funded care homes to ensure that funds are spent directly on senior care.

- Enact the recommendations of the Seniors Advocate’s report “Billions More Reasons to Care” by ensuring that funding for direct care is spent on direct care and not on operational or administrative costs.
- Enhance the accuracy and transparency of monitoring and reporting for publicly funded care homes, with a focus on compliance and the allocation of resources for non-direct care tasks.
- Define ‘profit’ and adopt a standardized approach to assessing costs like mortgages, head office allocations, management fees, subcontracting, executive compensation, and the financing of other businesses.

- Make the revenues and expenditures for publicly subsidized care homes publicly available, ensuring accountability and transparency in the use of public funds.

Implement strategies to support the unique needs of seniors living in rural areas.

- Develop and implement a Rural Seniors Housing Strategy to address the housing needs of seniors in rural communities.
- Develop and implement a Rural Health Human Resource Strategy to ensure adequate staffing and services for rural seniors.
- Develop and implement a Rural Seniors Home and Community Care Strategy to ensure accessible, high-quality home care for rural seniors.

- Develop and implement a Provincial Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Plan focused on achieving equity in care services across the province.
- Develop and implement a Provincial Rural Transportation Strategy to improve transportation access for rural seniors.
- Improve and promote the Provincial Travel Assistance Program and Hope Air to support rural seniors in traveling to medical appointments and other critical services.

ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA

85,000 

people in British Columbia are currently living with dementia, a number that is expected to grow to almost a quarter-million by 2050.

After the age of 65, the risk of dementia doubles every five years, and almost one-in-four people over the age of 85 have been diagnosed.

Stress from racism and colonization is known to impact brain health and increase the likelihood of dementia; by 2050, there will be an increase in people with dementia who are Indigenous by 273 percent, of Asian ethnicity by 785 percent, and of African ethnicity by 507 percent.

POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT:

- Establish a clear dementia care pathway and support family practitioners to do more early screening for dementia.
- Develop a dementia support strategy, with a focus on cultural safety.
- Fund the Alzheimer's Society to develop and run a campaign to reduce stigma and support early detection.