

NEWS RELEASE

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B.C. seniors cite affordability as the primary challenge to healthy ageing

VICTORIA – A new report released today by the Office of the Seniors Advocate reaffirms B.C. seniors on fixed incomes are disproportionately impacted by the high cost of living and unable to absorb increased costs for housing, food, medical equipment, mobility aids and other necessities for healthy ageing.

“Seniors are a diverse group with each person being shaped by their unique life experiences, needs, culture, health, language and abilities. However, the vast majority are worried about affording food and other expenses, where and how they will live as they grow older, and accessing health care when they can no longer drive to medical appointments,” said Levitt. “Many of the seniors I met are taking care of other seniors in their communities and giving so much of themselves to help their friends and neighbours. They feel there is already a shortage of supports and services and are worried about the future.”

B.C.’s new Seniors Advocate Dan Levitt undertook a ‘listening tour’ in April travelling throughout the province to meet with seniors in both rural and urban communities and hear about their issues and concerns. He also met with local seniors’ service providers, volunteers and other stakeholders to learn about the gaps, barriers and suggestions for improvement as well as what is working well for older people.

“Long-term care waitlists in B.C. continue to grow and we are not increasing units at a rate to keep pace with the growing seniors’ population. One of the areas my office will be looking into is access and availability of long-term care. We want to have a solid understanding of what must be done to ensure the most vulnerable seniors in our province have access to publicly-subsidized long-term care close to their home communities when they need it,” said Levitt.

The report recommends government take the following immediate actions:

1. Provide immediate financial relief for low-income senior renters by redesigning the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program so that seniors’ rents are 30% or less of their income and rent ceilings are adjusted to reflect the current reality of the rental market.
2. Increase the amount of BC Seniors Supplement and index the supplement to inflation consistent with other government income supports for seniors like CPP, OAS and GIS.
3. Eliminate the daily rate charge for home support that places a financial barrier for seniors to get the help they need to live independently in their homes for as long as possible.

4. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends people over 50 years old receive the shingles vaccine. The Province should provide a shingles vaccine program at no cost to B.C. seniors.
5. Develop and implement a cross-ministry strategy and action plan for seniors with key targets and performance measures with annual public reporting on performance.

“It is estimated that one in four British Columbians will be over 65 by 2036 which is more seniors as a proportion of the population than at any other time in our history,” said Levitt. “It is essential that we act now to make sure the services all of us will need as we grow older are comprehensive, coordinated and available in our communities.”

Read the report here: <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/reports/>.

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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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