

Planning for Seniors

In keeping with our five Great Goals for the Golden Decade, we're building the best system of support in Canada for British Columbia's more than 600,000 seniors.

- In April 2007, the Province introduced legislation to amend the Human Rights Code and eliminate mandatory retirement in British Columbia. This supports one of the key recommendations made by the Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors Issues, in its *Aging Well in British Columbia* report. [Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues](#).
- In December 2006, Premier Gordon Campbell received the *Aging Well in British Columbia* report from the Council – which identifies key areas for action to support older people's participation and quality of living. Government is reviewing the entire report to develop a comprehensive action plan.

Affordable Housing Support

We continue to work with communities to create healthier places to live – and have invested millions of dollars in creating new opportunities for seniors to find a comfortable and secure place to live. These are some of a number of commitments which are building a sense of community, and reinforcing a sense of place and a plan for the future. During spring 2007, support for seniors housing has included:

- In Ucluelet, \$3.5 million for Forest Glen assisted living projects (\$2.5 million from the Province);
 - In Sooke, ground was broken for 57 assisted living and residential care units -- a \$16 million investment at Ayre Manor (\$9.1 million from the Province);
 - In Campbell River, \$11 million for Ironwood Place, 54 units (\$8.15 million from the Province);
 - In Qualicum Beach, \$4.7 million towards annual operations of The Gardens at Qualicum Beach.
 - In Hazelton, \$1.9 million Skeena Place, a new development providing seniors and people living with disabilities with quality, affordable housing (\$1.3 million from the Province).
- More seniors in Victoria will remain in their homes, thanks to \$25,000 towards training volunteers to provide one-on-one home assistance including safety assessments, making a difference for seniors so they are comfortable in their surroundings.

- Since June 2001, the Province has allocated 4,360 assisted living residences and 1,960 supportive housing units for a total of over 6,320 housing units for seniors.
- In March 2004, we provided [\\$2 million through UBCM](#) to help communities assess seniors' housing needs and generate local solutions for seniors' housing and support.
- Residential care waits are averaging one to three months, down from about a year.
- An updated and modernized *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* protects seniors' health and safety in licensed community care facilities and assisted living.

Support for Seniors' Health

- We're strengthening and modernizing services to assist seniors to live independently.
- We're modernizing and replacing outdated residential care beds and creating new independent living options for seniors. Since June 2001 we have built more than 8,494 new and replacement beds and units, with over 3,196 of those net-new. We are on target to achieve our goal of 5,000 net-new beds and units by the end of 2008.
- Health care funding will reach \$13 billion in 2007/08 – up over 50 per cent since 2000.
- ActNow BC is the provincial government's health promotion platform that encourages seniors to stay physically active, eat nutritious foods and make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Through the BC HealthGuide program, government is providing reliable, confidential health information and advice seniors can trust. Visit www.bchealthguide.org or call **BC NurseLine and Pharmacist Service at:** 1 866 215-4700 or in Greater Vancouver: 604 215-4700. For confidential nutrition information, advice and referrals, seniors can call Dial-A-Dietitian at: 1 800 667-3438 or in Greater Vancouver: 604 732-9191.
- We are working collaboratively across the health care system to better manage chronic diseases and the care of frail, elderly people around the province.
- Subsidies of up to 100 per cent are available to offset [MSP premiums](#).
- Government provides funding for an extensive list of drug therapies to seniors through its PharmaCare program.
- Drug costs have been lowered for some B.C. families, including seniors, by focusing Fair PharmaCare financial assistance on those who need it most.
- PharmaCare offers a Monthly Deductible Payment Option to allow some individuals and families, including seniors on fixed incomes, to pay their Fair PharmaCare deductible in monthly installments and receive PharmaCare assistance for eligible prescription costs right away.
- The BC Palliative Care Benefits Program supports BC residents of any age who have reached the end stage of a life-threatening disease or illness and who wish to receive palliative care at home.

Support for Seniors with Lower Incomes

- The September 2005 Budget Update focused on seniors and allocated an additional \$242 million over three years to improve the lives of senior citizens with the following measures:
 - We renewed the [Senior's Supplement](#) to provide a monthly benefit for approximately 45,000 lower income B.C. seniors.
 - We're investing \$22 million a year to provide the Senior's Supplement of up to approximately \$50 per eligible senior. This means that single B.C. seniors will receive a minimum income of approximately \$1,162 per month and senior couples will receive a minimum of \$1,924 per month. The Senior's Supplement is not a top-up; B.C. seniors will continue to receive all future increases to old age pension rates from the federal government.
 - We doubled our annual funding for the [Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters](#) (SAFER) program, to provide rental assistance for low-income seniors.
 - We've also expanded the SAFER program by removing the 10-year Canadian residency requirement for eligibility. As of June 1, 2006, low income seniors who rent their home and who have lived in B.C. for one year are eligible for assistance.
 - We've increased levels of assistance and expanded eligibility to include those who pay pad rental fees for their manufactured homes.
- Since 2001, we have reduced personal income taxes for most taxpayers by 30 to 35 per cent with even larger reductions for low-income taxpayers, including seniors.
- 250,000 British Columbians pay no provincial income tax, and others have seen a reduction of up to 70 per cent in the tax they pay.
- Seniors with locked-in pension funds now have greater flexibility, financial independence and fewer restrictions on their pensions following changes to the Pension Benefits Standards Act.
- On July 1, 2005, the threshold to qualify for MSP premium assistance increased by \$4,000. Expanding the eligibility requirements means an estimated 215,000 British Columbians now have lower or eliminated premiums or are eligible for premium assistance.
- We increased the refundable B.C. sales tax credit for low-income seniors and other British Columbians by 50 per cent, to \$75 from \$50 per year.
- Budget 2006 made home ownership more affordable by improving and expanding the Home Owner Grant Program. The grant for seniors, disabled people and veterans increased to \$845 from \$748.
- Budget 2007 increased the threshold at which homeowners qualify for the full grant to \$950,000 in assessed value.

- Budget 2007 also ensures that low income seniors are eligible for a Home Owner Grant regardless of their home's assessed value.
- Budget 2007 provides \$45 million over four years to upgrade 750 social housing units enabling seniors to remain in their communities longer.
- Budget 2007 adjusts the age of eligibility for the [Property Tax Deferment Program](#), to age 55 from 60 – providing British Columbians with more flexibility in planning their own budgets as they prepare to retire.
- We changed the *Estate Administration Act* to make the process less complex for British Columbians who need to access an estate worth less than \$25,000.
- Seniors who are 65 or over and drive their vehicles for pleasure only may be eligible for a [25 per cent discount](#) on their basic auto insurance.
- We provide the [seniors' bus pass program](#) to low-income seniors so that they have affordable transportation options.
- We gave the 411 Seniors Centre Society \$4.2 million to help purchase its own heritage building (April 2006).

Support for Senior Women Affected by Violence

- In January 2005, we committed \$1 million a year for new violence prevention initiatives focused on older women, immigrant and visible minority women, women with disabilities and Aboriginal women.
- In March 2006, \$1.2 million “[Partners in Prevention](#)” grants were announced, funding innovative violence prevention projects that collaborate with men and boys as partners in prevention.
- In April 2007, outreach support services for elderly victims of abuse in Vancouver were strengthened with a \$89,000 grant.
- We have also committed an additional \$436,200 a year for three safe homes and a transition house for older women.

Support for Aboriginal Seniors

- Through the [First Citizens Fund](#), the BC government offers the Elders Transportation Program. Each year, the program provides a total of \$25,000 to 25 Aboriginal organizations for elders to travel to heritage, cultural and educational events around the province. The organizations can apply for a conditional grant up to \$1,000 toward elders' transportation-related costs for workshops and conferences. Approximately 400 elders benefit each year.

Support for Information Seniors Want

- The Ministry of Health's *Guide to Your Care* describes home and community care services for seniors. Copies are available from physicians or on the website at: www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/hcc/

- We have revised our popular *BC Seniors' Guide*, in [Chinese](#), [Punjabi](#), [French](#) and [English](#). An online version can be found at the government's BC Seniors' Online website. This user-friendly version is updated regularly so that seniors, their caregivers and families can access the most current information.
- Since 2006, we've provided a \$115,000 to the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation to give more B.C. seniors access to the [Mature Driver Program](#), a comprehensive, community-based approach that includes workshops, self-assessment tests and a handbook in support of safe senior mobility.
- We provided \$125,000 to the Alzheimer Society of BC to develop, in partnership with the Knowledge Network, a 60-minute documentary that will examine current knowledge around the cause of dementia, evidence-based approaches to prevention, diagnosis and management, including psycho-social impacts and challenges for patients and caregivers, care planning and available support.

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