

# COSCO Highlights

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June 2020

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**Submission to Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Service**

**Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC**

**June 10, 2020**



**I wish to thank the members of this Select Standing Committee for providing the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC with the opportunity to speak to you this morning.**

COSCO is a non-profit umbrella organization of 71 affiliated groups and more than 200 individuals who are associate members. COSCO was founded in 1950 and this year we are celebrating 70 years of advocacy for the rights and well-being of the seniors who live in British Columbia. Our affiliation with the National Pensioners Federation provides a forum for concerns that extend beyond BC.

Today we will be making recommendations about the long term care of seniors. It isn't the case that governments were unaware of the need for reform in senior health care. The Ombudsperson and the Seniors Advocate both made recommendations that were not acted upon. Then COVID-19 came along and the dreadful treatment of many seniors in long term care was revealed. The horror that we all felt must become the catalyst for positive changes.

We know that previous governments cut back on publicly provided services and encouraged privatization and contracting out of many of the services that would allow seniors and disabled people to stay in their homes as long as possible, rather than seeking residential care. Evidence indicates that publicly provided services ensure a better quality of life for seniors and they are certainly more cost effective.

I think that most people would agree that British Columbia fared better than many other jurisdictions in coping with the virus. However, it is impossible to predict when this very strange time will be over. Meanwhile, our concern is for the seniors still living in residences that betrayed their trust. The public need to be kept informed about the measures that are being taken to protect vulnerable people who cannot come to their own defence. Transparency is essential.

In any case, bemoaning the past won't alter the future. COSCO has eight recommendations to put before you. We recommend:

1. That the BC government work collaboratively with the federal government to include long term care in the Canada Health Act and to develop national standards of care.
- 2, That an independent review panel be appointed immediately, to examine the quality of care of seniors and frequency of inspections in all long term care facilities in British Columbia.
3. That recommendations of the Ombudsperson and Seniors Advocate regarding long term care be implemented.
4. That the human rights enshrined in Canadian and international laws be acknowledged and enforced in British Columbia.
5. That the government immediately stop allowing privatization of long term care residences and begin a buy-back process.
6. That the government establish standards of training and compensation for long term care facility staff and that working conditions and pay rate be closely monitored.
7. That the mental health impact of the pandemic be studied and that assistance be available to help those in need of counselling,
8. Other factors that contribute to the ability of seniors to stay in their own homes and to have their needs met must be provided. Dental care, vision and hearing, medication reviews, access to prompt and appropriate care all contribute to that outcome. On the plus side, those provisions are less expensive than institutional care.

When COVID-19 is conquered, and we are putting our world back together, senior care cannot return to the way it was. Will there be retribution for those who put profits before human decency, who took advantage of the vulnerability of people they were pretending to care about? We members of COSCO will always be advocates. Seventy years of effort mean something. However, we don't have the power to punish those who put greed before human dignity. That power is in the hands of government. We trust that it will be used wisely.

Thank you for inviting us to participate in this important economic consultation.

Our Health Committee chair Kathleen Jamieson has prepared a brief that we will be sending along for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

*Sheila Pither, COSCO President*

## Jim Sinclair Talks With COSCO on Zoom



On June 12<sup>th</sup>, COSCO hosted a virtual meeting of our affiliate delegates and our associate members, to have a conversation with Jim Sinclair, Board Chair of Fraser Health and a long-time friend of our organization. The discussion was lively and, as always, Jim was forthright in his answers to our questions. Times being what they are, much of the discussion was concerning COVID-19, but other topics were discussed as well.

Here are some of the points that were raised:

- \* The system of senior care, including long-term care, has been flawed for years in British Columbia.
- \* The money put into senior care should go to patient needs not to real estate or mortgage payments by private owners. Some of the profits are truly amazing.
- \* There needs to be much better oversight of every care facility. It's not just 'them', it's 'us'. Government is guilty of lack of awareness but so is society in general.
- \* The question of whether private ownership of facilities should be forbidden is complicated by the fact that the government has signed contracts that it does not want to break. However, it looks as though new ones may not be opened. We want a buy-back plan.
- \* We need to have a national discussion of long-term care standards. The provincial government needs to discuss what we have learned so far and use that knowledge to go forward in an informed and careful way. Senior care should be in the Canada Health Act.
- \* Government decisions made in the early 2000s resulted in the loss of 2,000 beds, which made public beds scarce. Private companies filled the gap.

- \* In terms of staffing it is often done by casual workers so that the employer doesn't have to provide benefits. Staff needs to have proper training and they should not need to take several jobs in order to get enough money to live on. There are between 1,500 and 2,000 foreign nurses waiting to get certified in B.C.
- \* We should not need to rely on other countries to supply Personal Protective Equipment. We have the capability to make our own.
- \* Turning to other matters, Jim said that, in order to have a viable national pharmacare program, Canada needs to produce medications. In his opinion, now is the time to push for the other measures that were built into the 1967 medicare agreement.
- \* Home support would enable many seniors to stay at home and now is the time to plan measures to achieve that goal. Community health care clinics are being opened and they are providing a good care model which needs to be strengthened.

In closing, Jim thanked COSCO for the work it does for seniors. We are grateful for his advice and encouraged by his devotion to the well-being of seniors.

*Submitted by Annette O'Connor and Albert Lemonnier*

## INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS



October 1st 2020 marks the 24th United Nations International Day of Older Persons. This year's theme is "Leaving No One Behind: Promoting a Society for All". Due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements, many of us will be having to rethink how we will commemorate IDOP this year, keeping safety in mind. So, put your thinking caps on! COSCO would love to hear of any ideas, or plans you might have yourself, to honour this day, keeping this year's theme in mind.

I can be reached at <[agnes.jackman@gmail.com](mailto:agnes.jackman@gmail.com)>



*B.C.'s Seniors Advocate Statement on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2020*



Isobel Mackenzie  
Seniors Advocate

Victoria, B.C.—" June 15<sup>th</sup> was designated World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) by the United Nations in 2011. Today is an opportunity to reflect and to educate ourselves, our seniors, organizations, and policymakers on the realities of elder abuse in our community."

"Elder abuse takes many forms, whether it is psychological, financial, emotional, physical or sexual abuse. We all have a role to play in helping to eliminate elder abuse by educating ourselves on the signs and symptoms of elder abuse and reporting concerns to the appropriate people."

"In addition to a current systemic review of elder abuse and neglect that is currently underway, my office, along with the BC Securities Commission produced an educational video about the signs of financial elder abuse, which includes the mishandling of an older person's money or property and acts of fraud. This is very timely as the challenges of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic may place increased pressure on seniors to financially support family members or as seniors look to new investments during the current uncertainty in the markets."

"My office has also worked with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner to launch an awareness campaign to help seniors understand how to protect their privacy online and off, with tips about protecting your personal information. This is particularly important as more seniors turn to the internet during the pandemic for ordering goods and supplies and to communicate with friends and family."

"As the world collectively places their attention upon elder abuse, you will see symbols of supports across the province with purple lights illuminating the Legislature and the WEAAD flag flown in Victoria, people wearing purple clothing or donning purple ribbons. Today, I encourage you to educate yourself about elder abuse and to know how to report it. Elder abuse is preventable, and everyone has a role to play."

View the financial elder abuse video: <https://vimeo.com/429153502>

View the privacy brochure for seniors: [https://www.oipc.bc.ca/media/17317/privacy-tips-for-seniors-brochure\\_oipc\\_seniors-advocate.pdf](https://www.oipc.bc.ca/media/17317/privacy-tips-for-seniors-brochure_oipc_seniors-advocate.pdf)

*Isobel Mackenzie -- Seniors Advocate*

**Media Contact**

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The abuser is often a spouse or partner, family member (often adult child), caregiver, friend, or a trusted person in the senior's life. Financial abuse is often accompanied by other forms of abuse, such as emotional abuse, physical abuse, or denial of rights.

Specific signs of financial abuse may include:

- the senior not having sufficient cash for their daily expenses
- the senior not knowing the details of their financial position or being evasive about it when questioned
- adult children living with the senior with no visible means of support
- the senior having paid for goods and services which they do not need

### Reporting Financial Elder Abuse

Elder Financial abuse can be reported to the following agencies:

- **RCMP/Local Police**
- **BC Securities Commission** Telephone: 1-800-373-6393 (toll free) or 604-899-6854 Email: [inquiries@bcsc.bc.ca](mailto:inquiries@bcsc.bc.ca) Website: [www.investright.org](http://www.investright.org)
- **Consumer Protection BC** Website: <https://www.consumerprotectionbc.ca/consumer-help/> Telephone: 1 888-564-9963
- **Seniors First BC** Telephone: 1-866-437-1940 (toll-free) or 604-437-1940 Website: <http://seniorsfirstbc.ca/> Seniors Abuse & Information Line (SAIL): TTY: 604-428-3359 TTY Teletype for the deaf
- **Regional Health Authorities:** Their role as designated agency is to respond to all types of seniors' abuse. Website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/partners/health-authorities/regional-health-authorities>
- **Government of BC – Scams and Frauds** Website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/financial-legal-matters/scams-and-fraud>



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Joint statement on B.C. Seniors Week

Updated June 1, 2020

Office of the Premier Ministry of Health

VICTORIA Premier John Horgan and Ronna-Rae Leonard, Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors, have released the following statement in recognition of B.C. Seniors Week 2020:

B.C. Seniors Week is an opportunity to honour an important group of people seniors who have spent their lives building our province and shaping our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected seniors. Our hearts go out to families and friends of seniors who have lost their lives to this virus. We know it's incredibly hard for people who are unable to visit their loved ones and can only imagine what a lonely and frightening time this is for elders and those who care for them. Finding new ways to connect and following provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry's orders are ways to show we care.

Today, people who are over 65 make up about 20% of British Columbia's population, and this number will grow in the coming years. Our government is working to make sure seniors can live safe, active and socially engaged lives, whether independently at home or in assisted care. We are investing more than \$1 billion over three years to improve the quality of care for seniors.

To support seniors during COVID-19, B.C. is funding added supports through local community service agencies and the expansion of bc211 to the North and Interior. Now, seniors throughout the province can dial 211 to connect with local volunteers who are ready to help with things like picking up groceries and prescriptions, meal delivery, friendly phone calls and virtual social visits.

This week, we encourage British Columbians to reach out to a senior in their life. If you're not already doing so, think about how you can offer a helping hand to elders in your community. Doing our part to keep B.C.'s COVID-19 curve flat is one of the best ways we can honour seniors.

During this challenging time, making sacrifices to help protect the most vulnerable, are acts of compassion. Coming together to support each other is how we will get through this crisis and be stronger than before.

Contacts:

Jen Holmwood -- Press Secretary Deputy Communications Director Office of the Premier  
Jen.Holmwood@gov.bc.ca 250 818-4881

Ministry of Health Communications 250 952-1887 (media line)

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: [news.gov.bc.ca/connect](https://news.gov.bc.ca/connect)

# COVID-19 Challenges for the Hearing Impaired



The past few months of extraordinary times due to the Coronavirus pandemic have been difficult for us all. The Public Health authorities mandated very specific guidelines so as to slow the spread of this dangerous disease. And for the most part, we are all doing our best to comply with those requirements. No longer able to move about in our communities freely, learning how to maintain one's physical distancing, not only from strangers, but also friends and family

has been challenging. Our efforts are now being rewarded with greater freedom but with continued restrictions to halt the virus spread. Washing hands thoroughly and often, maintaining a 2-metre spacing between one another, not touching our faces without having clean hands and wearing protective facial masks are the 4 basic expectations placed on us all as well as, naturally, staying home with even the slightest hint of illness. As businesses open up for clients, another level of protection has been added to the 2-metre distancing between individuals; plexiglass shields/barriers now set up on check-out counters and separating tables in restaurants. All these measures have proven to work to "flatten the curve" of the spread of new cases of the virus.

These activities are an inconvenience for the most of us, but for those who have hearing loss, these protective



measures, combined with an increasing reliance on technology in order to communicate with others, have added to greater isolation and loneliness for them. With the use of "Zoom" or similar types of audio-visual communication technology being more frequently used, hearing impaired individuals do have the benefit of getting some visual cues to understand some of the dialogue but often the audio quality is poor, and those kinds of calls don't have the capacity for computerized note-taking or captioning. Once the decision is made to venture out into the community, particularly in noisy environments, it is a even more of a challenge to clearly discern what someone was saying. Now, encountering those wearing masks, the voices are more muffled, and there's no longer the ability to read lips or have the benefit of facial expressions to aid understanding. The results increase stress levels and add to the sense of loneliness and isolation.

Dr. Bonnie Henry's mantra "be kind, be calm and be safe." applies to all of us to consider what added challenges there are when living in the time of COVID-19, especially for the hearing impaired.

*Submitted by Pat Thiesen, BCRTA*

## UPDATE FROM THE MINISTER OF SENIORS, DEB SCHULTE



On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I wanted to reach out to share some tips on how to be vigilant about fraud and abuse in these uncertain times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put seniors at increased risk of abuse since so many are living in isolation. Today I am asking all Canadians check-in on our parents, grandparents, neighbours and friends.

Please see my video here: <https://youtu.be/SW70-ySgieQ>

### Keeping seniors' benefits safe from fraudsters:

With new financial supports to seniors during the pandemic, they may face an increased risk of being targeted by fraudsters.

The Government of Canada is providing a **one-time, tax-free payment** of \$300 for seniors eligible for the Old Age Security pension and an additional \$200 for seniors eligible for the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Allowance recipients will also receive \$500. **Seniors do not need to apply for the payment and they should not share any personal or banking information to receive it.** Both direct deposit and cheque payments will be issued the week of July 6, 2020. Seniors who reside in Canada should expect to receive the payment that week. Those abroad will receive it in July.

Working seniors who stopped working due to reasons related to COVID-19 are eligible for the **Canada Emergency Response Benefit**, worth \$2,000 a month. **Seniors should be wary of people they don't know offering to help them apply for the benefit, often for a fee.** You can easily [apply online](#) or by phone (1-833-966-2099) yourself. Seniors should also keep in mind they only have access to the benefit if they were working, earned over \$5,000 in the previous year and stopped working due to the pandemic.

### Here are a few tips to help protect yourself from financial fraud:

You may get phone calls, emails and texts on COVID-19. Be cautious when receiving them:

- remember that if you didn't initiate contact with a person or a business, you don't know who you are dealing with
- never click on links or attachments in unsolicited or suspicious emails
- never give out your personal or financial information by email or text
- note that financial institutions will never ask you to provide personal, login or account information by text or email
- when banking online, enter your financial institution's website address in your browser yourself
- beware of questionable cures for sale: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is

For more information, check out our **Little Black Book of Scams**: <https://www.competitionbureau.gc.ca/eic/site/cb-bc.nsf/eng/04333.html> (copy and paste into your browser)

And the **Canadian Anti-fraud Centre**: <https://www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca/index-eng.htm>

More tips on how to stay protected from **Financial Fraud** are available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/finance/fraud.html>.

**Conclusion:**

I look forward to keeping you informed and updated on the Government's COVID-19 response for seniors. Thank you for all the valuable work and outstanding support you continue to provide during this challenging time.

Together, we can and we will get through this.

Sincerely,

Minister Deb Schulte

**Spread the News:**

I hope you'll take a minute to ensure this message reaches as many seniors and the people who support them as possible. Please share it with your networks in whatever format works for you: such as social media, email or your newsletter.

**For regular updates follow:**

Twitter: @ESDC\_GC

Facebook: [Seniors in Canada](#)

Note that Highlights will continue over the summer.  
Send any comments or suggestions to Annette at [cao.cosco@gmail.com](mailto:cao.cosco@gmail.com)

And one last thing...



Please stay home, read a book, call a friend, write a letter, or .....