



Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC

Representing seniors in British Columbia since 1950

www.coscobc.org

April 30, 2024

Hon. Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing
Victoria BC

Dear Minister Kahlon

Re: Measures needed to avert homelessness for BC seniors

The Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO) is deeply concerned with reports from our members about the increasing number of seniors who are faced with extreme housing insecurity, leading to a rising number of vulnerable older adults living in their cars or on the streets, with no home to call their own. This is in sad contrast to our fervent belief that housing is a human right for seniors living in all parts of our province.

Affordable housing should be geared to 30% of income, which translates to rents of \$500 to \$700 per month for the many seniors with monthly incomes of \$2,000 or less. And for seniors who need to leave their current rental unit due to redevelopment or other reasons, we hear from our members that homelessness may well be the tragic result. To be crystal clear, older people on lower incomes are simply unable to afford units with market rents of \$2,000 or more per month.

To overcome the crisis of homelessness, we urge you to act on the following measures.

First, continue to improve the **Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER)** program. We thank you for the announcement in the Budget 2024 to raise the income ceiling for the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) and your commitment to make annual adjustments for inflation. This work is not completed: ***we further ask that the rent ceilings be adjusted to a level that is much closer to the median market rent.***

Second, we ask that ***rent controls be applied to the unit and not to the tenant.*** Too many seniors are faced with crippling rent increases when circumstances require them to move, and then lose access to the lower rent that accrued over the years through rent controls. Landlords may take advantage of the now vacant unit to substantially raise rents for the next tenant, while the senior ends up on the street.

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Third, we appreciate the many efforts your Ministry is taking to increase the supply of all forms of housing. To meet the housing needs of our lowest income seniors, we urge you to continue to ***increase the supply of subsidized housing units for seniors, including housing co-operatives.*** Data from the BC Seniors Advocate show that while the supply of seniors social housing has slowly increased by about 1 percent per year, this increase has not kept pace with the increase in the seniors population, and the wait lists are increasing. Housing co-operatives also provide truly affordable housing to seniors and we support measures to deliver funding for those co-ops which are ending leases so they may remain viable and keep rents low.

In closing, we thank you and your government for the increased funding for supportive and transitional housing which help address the needs of those already homeless.

Seniors deserve a safe and affordable place to call home. We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss these concerns.

Yours sincerely

Leslie Gaudette
President, COSCO

Barb Mikulec
COSCO 1st VP and Housing chair

cc. Dan Levitt, BC Seniors Advocate
Harwinder Sandhu, Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors Services and Long-Term Care
Karin Kirkpatrick, MLA and Shadow Minister for Housing, BC United Party
Sonia Furstenaus, Leader, BC Green Party
John Rustad, Leader, BC Conservative Party