



## COSCO Election Special: Final Voting Day is Saturday, October 19

### What you need to know about the BC provincial election

This special section of the COSCO News includes important information from Elections BC about how to vote along with crucial information from our COSCO Elections Committee regarding 12 key issues facing seniors in our province. We hope you will use this as a guide to determine which candidates will best respond to your needs. We are also contacting the leaders of the four parties with seats in the legislature to determine their commitment to these issues and will distribute their responses separately – watch for this later in September.

Also visit <https://coscobc.org/elections/> to learn about election-related events and information.

### New Electoral Districts

As a first step visit the Elections BC website, which provides clear information about the upcoming vote. For 2024, the boundaries of many ridings have changed – please refer to <https://mydistrict.elections.bc.ca/> to determine your electoral district.

### Election Integrity

We are fortunate in British Columbia and in Canada to have non-partisan, independent agencies to run our elections. If in doubt, please refer to Elections BC as your trusted source for accurate and up-to-date information about the electoral process.

During an election, voters receive information from many different sources including candidates and political parties, third-

party advertising sponsors, news outlets and social media. Knowing the facts about the next provincial election will make voting easier when the election is called, and it will help you spot disinformation.

### To register to vote in British Columbia, you must be:

- a Canadian citizen 18 years and older and a B.C. resident for the past six months.
- You can register or update your information no later than midnight October 7, 2024:
  - [online](#)
  - by phone at 1-800-661-8683 (Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. PST)
  - by mail, fax or email by sending us [this form](#)
  - in person at a [registration drive](#) or at our office at #100 – 1112 Fort St, Victoria, BC, V8V 3K8

### Ways to Vote

1. At any district electoral office: from the day the election is called until 4pm on Final Voting Day (October 19, 2024).
2. Vote by mail: packages must be returned to Elections BC by 8 pm on Final Voting Day.
3. Vote in advance: October 10-13 and October 15-16.
4. Vote on Final Voting Day, October 19
5. Vote Anywhere (new technology makes this possible).



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## Voting with new technology:

- New voting processes and technology will be used to administer the election.
- Networked laptops will be used to look up voters and cross them off the voters list, instead of paper lists. This reduces line-ups, makes the voting process more efficient and helps voters vote at any voting place.
- Electronic tabulators will be used to count paper ballots. Tabulators are accurate, secure and efficient. They help us report results quickly on election night.
- These changes mean that almost all ballots will be counted on election night.

## Where to Vote:

Preliminary voting places for the October 19, 2024 Provincial General Election are now available at the links below. Voting place locations will be updated before the election, so make sure to check Elections BC for updates and look for your Where to Vote card in the mail after the election is called on September 21.

## Advance voting

Advance voting will be available **October 10 – 13 and October 15 – 16** (advance voting will be closed Monday, October 14, for Thanksgiving). Advance voting places will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. local time. Not all advance voting places will be open on every day of the advance voting period. [Preliminary advance voting places \(PDF\)](#)

## Final voting

Final Voting Day for the 2024 Provincial General Election is scheduled for **Saturday, October 19**. Voting places will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Pacific time). [Preliminary election day voting places \(PDF\)](#)

## Who is nominated in your riding

The official list for nominated candidates can be found at <https://elections.bc.ca/2024-provincial-election/candidate-list/> Nominations close on September 28

For those of you planning All-Candidates Meetings, an unofficial list that may be more up-to-date may be found along with other background information at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024\\_British\\_Columbia\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_British_Columbia_general_election)





## Here is what BC Seniors want to see in party Election platforms

### 1. Long-term Care

Deficiencies in the system of long-term care services have been noted in many reports by many authors over the years. The results of inadequate attention to these issues were glaringly visible during the time of the pandemic. Concerns about quality of care and quality of life in long-term care in BC are plentiful. They include aging physical infrastructure, short-staffing, high staff turnover, insufficient allied health staff in disciplines such as recreation, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and social work, lack of recreation and meaningful activities, unappetizing meals, and high rates of inappropriate use of antipsychotic medications. More specifically, the seniors advocate's report, *Every Voice Counts: Long-Term Care Resident and Visitor Survey*, released in the fall of 2023 noted the significant need for improvement with respect to residents' quality of life in the areas of experience of meals, frequency of bathing, and lack of meaningful activities. For example, 51% of residents said staff only 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' make time for a friendly conversation or ask how to meet their needs. As well 50% reported only sometimes, rarely, or never bathe as frequently as they wish. The long-standing nature of the institutional model in long-term care and the complexity of the systemic issues call not just for piecemeal action, but instead cry out for true holistic, systemic reform.

**COSCO asks political parties to pledge their support for the development of a comprehensive plan to reform long-term care.**

### 2. Home Support

Personal assistance services such as bathing, toileting, grooming, and medication management offered through the provincial Home Support program enables seniors to remain at home longer, delaying or preventing the need for admission to long-term care. Frequently cancelled visits, rushed caregivers, inflexible care plans that do not meet a person's needs, and a high degree of caregiver burden are some of the concerns that have been identified by the seniors advocate in the report, *We Must Do Better*.

In this report, the advocate noted that 13% of newly admitted long-term care residents in B.C. could have been cared for at home, which is a rate twice as high as Alberta and Ontario. One possible reason for this finding is that the charge for home support presents such a financial burden for some low-income seniors that long-term care can be a less costly alternative. The seniors advocate recommended waiving the home support charge as well as increasing respite care, modernizing care plans, and establishing provincial standards to better evaluate program performance.

**COSCO asks that political parties follow through and implement the Seniors Advocate's recommendations for improvements to the Home Support program.**



### 3. Support for vision, mobility, and hearing needs

Treatment, equipment, and devices for vision, mobility, and hearing needs are critical to supporting the health, functioning, and independence of seniors. According to the Seniors Advocate, 83% of low-income seniors do not have an extended health care benefits plan. This means that costs for items such as eyeglasses, walkers, or hearing assistive devices are out-of-pocket and out of reach for many. Aside from the value of supporting the health of older British Columbians because it is good and right to do so, financial support for these needs is in the interest of all British Columbians as it may prevent or delay decline in health and functioning that may reduce the need for services in the future. For example, consider the impact of hearing loss. Alzheimer Society Canada has noted that hearing loss is a modifiable risk factor for dementia and is calling for governments to support policies that promote better brain health which may reduce the prevalence of dementia.

**COSCO asks that political parties commit to addressing the issue of seniors who cannot afford the treatment, equipment, or devices necessary for meeting their vision, mobility, or hearing needs.**

### 4. Building an adequate supply of safe affordable housing

A recent report from a US University claims that housing in Vancouver is “Impossibly Unaffordable”. In order to purchase a house in Metro Vancouver, a family’s income has to be at least \$250,000/year. Some seniors are fortunate enough to own a home they purchased many years ago and that asset helps fund their retirement years. Senior homeowners can also help their financial situation by deferring their property taxes.

Currently, many levels of government seem to be counting on the “for-profit” housing development industry to provide much-needed affordable housing, despite the fact that industry has made it quite clear that they are only interested in building anything when profit levels meet their expectations.

Affordable housing can be provided and run by government agencies, co-ops, not-for-profit agencies or groups, faith-based organizations, or the private sector, provided guarantees are in place to ensure it remains as affordable housing in perpetuity.

**COSCO BC continues to call on all levels of government to ensure the rapid construction of safe, appropriate and affordable (based on no more than 30% of gross annual income) not-for-profit housing, with necessary support services available on site (or nearby) for those who require them.**





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### 5. Ensuring rents are 30% of income

Seniors who are renters are often only one or two pension cheques away from being homeless. It's impossible for the private sector to build accommodation for low-income households – often older women living alone – with truly affordable rents unless there is significant public investment. The recent increases in the SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) rent ceilings to \$931 remain far below the market rents of \$1558 in October 2023 for a one-bedroom apartment in British Columbia.

**COSCO BC calls on government to raise financial assistance levels, including the BC SAFER Grant, along with other social and income support programs to an amount that will ensure no senior ends up homeless due to the cost or unavailability of appropriate housing.**

### 6. BC Seniors Supplement

A key priority for COSCO in the upcoming 2024 Provincial election is the need to address poverty issues for low-income seniors. The BC Labour Minister, Harry Bains said BC's minimum wage is "permanently tied to inflation" to "prevent our provinces lowest paid workers from fallen behind...".

Yet BC seniors are also falling behind. Approximately 45% of seniors make less than the minimum wage, which the BC government regularly increases to inflation. Similarly, increases tied to inflation are needed to the BC Seniors Supplement to prevent seniors from falling further and further behind. We acknowledge the BC government increased the Supplement from \$49.30 to 99.30 in 2021, however BC still has one of the lowest rates of seniors supplement in Canada.

**COSCO asks each political party to support the following actions:**

- **Increase the seniors supplement to at least the top three rates in Canada, joining Saskatchewan, Nunavut, and Alberta, who currently have the highest rates of seniors' supplement.**
- **Permanently index the supplement to the rate of inflation, as other pension incomes are.**
- **Extend without claw-back at the top rate, a wider income band.**

Supporting these measures will go a long way to meeting the target of reducing seniors' poverty by 50% laid out in the 2024 BC Poverty Reduction strategy.



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### 7. Stable funding for Seniors Centres

The seniors' population in BC is increasing. Seniors live longer and have diverse backgrounds and diverse needs. Many seniors live at or near the poverty level and with increasing reports of food insecurity, the meal programs offered by many centres provide crucial nutrition.

Seniors' centres in BC also play key roles in our communities by keeping seniors out of the hospital, improving their quality of life, engaging with the broader community, addressing social isolation, ageism and other relevant issues through educational programs, as well as identifying problems seniors face. And seniors Centres help older adults navigate through the myriad of programs and services available.

Despite the good work seniors' centres do, funding is insecure and sporadic, with paid staff devoting many hours to secure grant funding, while costs continue to rise.

**COSCO calls for parties to provide core sustainable funding and resources for seniors' centres to ensure our seniors remain healthy and able to contribute to their communities.**

### 8. Ageism and Human Rights

Discrimination based on age (ageism) can seriously impact seniors. Ageism can negatively affect the financial well-being of seniors, the ability of seniors to access appropriate health care and the ability of seniors to live with dignity. The adverse effects of ageism can be particularly serious for low-income seniors. The United Nations is currently working to establish a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Recommendations to address this issue have recently been adopted by the UN General Assembly

Ageism is a pervasive and multifaceted form of discrimination that infringes upon the human rights of older persons. It manifests in various forms and leads to significant health, social, and economic challenges for our aging population in British Columbia and Canada. Guided by the World Health Organization's Global Report on Ageism, the COSCO together with the Canadian Coalition Against Ageism is committed to eliminating ageism through evidence-based interventions. These include education, intergenerational initiatives, and the development and enforcement of robust policies and laws. These efforts aim to protect the dignity and rights of older adults, ensuring they are valued and respected members of society.

**COSCO asks that all parties commit to supporting the efforts of Canadian seniors and allied groups to combat ageism and support the efforts at the United Nations to establish a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.**





### 9. Affordable Transit

As transit is often the only means seniors can use to travel about their community, it must be affordable. Transit offers seniors access to shopping, social opportunities, medical appointments and entertainment that would otherwise not be available. Many seniors take pride in being able to navigate the transit system to meet their daily travel needs.

A significant number of seniors live on a fixed income. They have seen living expenses increase to the point where they are forced to make hard choices between rent, food, medication and transportation.

The 2024 Poverty Strategy recommends that the province increase access to transportation to more seniors, including assessing the feasibility of expanding the bus pass for people with disabilities and seniors to include HandyDART, so everyone can stay connected to their community.

**COSCO asks that all parties commit to ensuring that transit and HandyDART passes for low-income seniors will be available at minimal or no cost.**

### 10. HandyDART

People who are unable to use regular transit rely on HandyDART to move about their community. Many HandyDART passengers are seniors.

HandyDART is managed by Translink in Metro Vancouver and by BC Transit in the rest of the province. When HandyDART service is provided in-house, the drivers are well trained, better paid and motivated to do the job well. When not operated in-house, operators are contracted to provide the service with TransLink or BC Transit equipment. In many cases, non-profit organizations such as charitable societies or local governments provide very good service. When for-profit entities are involved, evidence shows that the quality of service will be sacrificed for profit. When taxis are substituted for HandyDART, neither the operators nor the equipment are able to match the high quality of in-house service.

In areas where HandyDART is offered, demand for the service often outstrips supply. Many communities have no service at all.

**COSCO asks that all parties commit to ensuring that HandyDART services will be expanded to areas where needed and provided as a public service, or if that is not practicable, by not-for-profit agencies.**



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### 11. Province-wide public Transit Service

Many seniors living on a fixed income are not able to operate their own cars due to economic or health challenges. While some destinations may be within walking distance, many are not. These seniors require dependable transit service. For the regional travel required for health care and other needs, intercity bus service is required.

In our major urban areas transit service is falling behind demand, making it more challenging for seniors to get around. In Metro Vancouver there is a fast-approaching short fall in funding.

The Seniors Advocate Report *Resilient and Resourceful; Challenges Facing BC's Rural Seniors*, details the unique struggles of seniors aging in place in rural communities. One recommendation of the report is to “Make transit more reliable, frequent and affordable especially in rural, remote and Indigenous communities where many people without cars struggle to get around” The report also mentions the challenge that rural governments face in paying their share of the cost of transit service. The only source of funds for transit is property taxes. This funding source makes it difficult to maintain an adequate amount of funding for transit service.

The 2024 update of the Poverty Reduction Strategy from the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction included seniors as a concern for the first time. The strategy recognizes that public transportation is an important part of social inclusion for seniors who don't drive. The report also specifies that both local transit and regional passenger transportation are important to seniors.

**COSCO asks that all parties commit to ensuring that sustainable and ongoing funding for public or not-for-profit public transportation service will be available within, and between, all areas of the province.**

### 12. Homelessness – Need for temporary safe housing

Up to 20% of current homeless people are seniors, and the results of any efforts by various levels of government to provide adequate permanent housing for those already un-housed always appear to be at least five years in the future. In the meantime, more and more seniors are in imminent danger of joining those who are already homeless, including those couch surfing or living in their cars.

**COSCO BC calls on all levels of government to cooperate so that safe housing and associated support services are immediately provided for anyone who is homeless, even if it is “temporary” housing until more permanent solutions can be constructed.**

