



Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC

Representing seniors in British Columbia since 1950
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Analysis of BC Budget 2025

The Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC (COSCO), a non-partisan non-profit Society representing 80,000 seniors across the province, continues to call for a government plan for healthy ageing that integrates a continuum of health care services, housing, income security and transportation to ensure the health and well-being of a growing aging population

The population of older adults aged 65+ is steadily increasing and is projected to represent almost 25% of all BC residents by 2041.

Prior to presenting the budget, Minister of Finance, Brenda Bailey said in an interview for the Globe and Mail... *"There's tremendous uncertainty and what we're doing is kind of putting our arms around protecting the services that are so important for people, and that's really the focus that we've taken during this budget."*

Within the current climate of economic uncertainty, large deficit and looming tariffs, COSCO BC very much appreciates that government funding for services for the BC population remains stable in most areas, with no major cuts. We are also pleased to see seniors identified as benefitting from several budget measures. What is missing is an integrated age-friendly plan to ensure seniors can participate and contribute fully to their families and communities.

Budget 2025 responds to a number of COSCO election asks:

- The budget includes provisions to respond to the increased demand on **health care services**, to improve team-based primary health including funding for Community Health Centres, hiring of health-care workers, reducing emergency department wait times, improving cancer care and operating new and renovated hospitals and long-term care facilities which will benefit seniors.
- Previously planned increases to **home care and home support** – an increase from \$46 million to \$146 million - will help reduce demand on other more expensive health services. However, seniors with incomes above \$28,000 must pay the full cost of home care and no funding is allocated to relieve this burden.

- Low-income renters aged 60+ will also benefit from the meaningful increases to the ***Shelter Aid to Elderly Renters (SAFER) program***. The increase in income threshold from \$37,240 to \$40,000 will benefit 1,600 more seniors. This combined with raising the rent ceiling from \$931 to \$1150, will result in the average supplement increasing from \$261 to \$337 per month. Overall, 25,000 senior renters are expected to benefit.
- The ***homeless seniors' population*** in BC is growing (up to 25% of homeless are 65+). The budget provides additional funding for the HEART and HEARTH programs to help those living outdoors to access temporary supportive housing or shelter beds. This may assist some seniors.

Some COSCO BC election issues were not fully addressed in the budget.

- **Long-term care** - Concerns about quality of care and quality of life in long-term care in BC remain and are plentiful, including short-staffing, high staff turnover, insufficient personal support workers and 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. Enforceable standards for long-term and home care are critical.
Budget 2025 announced funding to build new and renovated Long Term Care beds, but it is not clear how many would be new beds. Little direction is given regarding the implementation of national standards to improve the quality of LTC.
- **Building an adequate supply of safe affordable Seniors Housing that costs no more than 30% of a person's gross income:** While the BC Builds program is speeding up the development of new homes for middle class families in BC, a greater supply of safe, affordable housing that provides a continuum of senior-specific housing options with a range of services to enable older adults to age in place must be recognized as essential with appropriate funding. Social housing with rents-geared-to-income is desperately needed. Innovative alternative supportive housing needs to be expanded from pilots to enhanced availability and accessibility e.g., home sharing, intergenerational housing, co-housing, multi-unit housing, naturally occurring retirement communities – all considered within an age-friendly community design.
Budget 2025 announces modest increases to the BC Builds program but rents are still too high for most seniors.
- **Affordable transit** - Affordable transit remains a critical need for older adults who are no longer physically or financially able to drive. Public transit may be the only means

seniors can use to access food, medical appointments and other key requirements of daily living. Transit and HandyDART passes need to be available at minimal or no cost. Further, HandyDART operations need to be publicly operated on a not-for profit basis. *Budget 2025 funds BC Transit to construct a new Victoria HandyDART centre but limited information is available as to how this funding will improve service across the province and reduce the current patchwork of programs in communities. Budget 2025 does not address the need for public operation of transit services.*

COSCO BC election asks completely missing from BC Budget 2025 include:

- **Financial supports so that seniors may balance their budgets**
 - Need for an extended health benefits plan to cover hearing aids, eyeglasses and mobility aids
 - Increases to the BC Seniors Supplement to bring BC up to par with other provinces
- **Seniors Centres and community-based services for seniors:** Many seniors and their caregivers rely on community seniors' centres for help in maintaining their physical, emotional and social health. These non-profit centres are key to mobilizing community resources to address social isolation, food insecurity, and assistance with daily living, yet many lack core funding. At the same time, they encourage the full participation of older adults in their communities by assisting older adult to navigate through the myriad of programs and services available.
Budget 2025 does not address support to these organizations that play an important role in addressing social isolation which is recognized by the World Health Organization as a critical public health issue.
- **Call for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons to recognize the value and voice of seniors and to protect their human rights:** It is of critical importance that the government recognize the value of seniors as volunteers and caregivers contributing billions of dollars of volunteer time, talent and expertise to their families, their communities and to our province.