



COSCO News

Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C.

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<https://www.facebook.com/COSCOBC/>

HAPPY DAYS AREN'T HERE AGAIN...



But they will be in the fullness of time. I can't help thinking about what I will feel when I take off my mask, dare to stand less than six feet from somebody and meet my friends at our favourite restaurant. But there is a shadow over our delight in getting back to normal. Will we have learned from the suffering and deaths of thousands of people? Will greed trump proper treatment of long-term care residents? I wish I could feel confident that all the rhetoric we are hearing is more than what is demanded by the spotlights trained upon the care industry.

Our COSCO members are working very hard to keep the welfare of our most vulnerable men and women on the agenda for all levels of government. Promises are made but soon forgotten. We wanted the federal government to set national standards for long term care. The Speech from the Throne said that was to happen. That was then, now is now, and I fear that those good intentions are victims of the federal/provincial turf war that seems to happen when cooperation is needed.

So the work goes on. We hosted a webinar on March 23rd to use Human Rights as the lens through which we examined long term care. Was it not elder abuse that happened to thousands? Helpless people were left degraded and their well-being was shattered. Just imagine being victimized and terrified; unable to have somebody to turn to; making contact with a loved one through a pane of glass. COSCO is hosting another webinar in April with a similar theme. Please plan to attend.

The next edition of our newsletter is in June. By then, there may be more good news than we have now. Then there is our conference to look forward to in September.

Meanwhile I wish you well.

Sheila Pither - COSCO President

Council Of Senior Citizens'
Organizations Of BC (COSCO)

Visit us at www.coscobc.org &
<https://www.facebook.com/COSCOBC/>

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About COSCO

COSCO is an umbrella organization that brings together 70 different seniors groups, representing approximately 80,000 women and men to work on common issues.

COSCO is affiliated with the 1,000,000 member National Pensioners Federation (NPF) which promotes these issues at the national level.

COSCO is a registered non- profit organization

Send your letters to the editor or other contributions to:

cosconews.editor@coscobc.org

COSCO News, March/April 2021



PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT

BC Assessment of homes recently produced their data based on values of July 2020. You can look up assessed values at www.bcassessment.ca, and a map of the area to compare nearby residences.

The Home Owner Grant threshold for 2021 has been announced at \$1,625,000 which ensures the percent of BC homeowners eligible remains similar to last year. The grant is reduced by \$5 for every \$1,000 of assessed value above the threshold. Some low-income seniors, veterans and people with disabilities can also apply for a supplement that replaces any grant amount they lose due to the value of their home being over the threshold.

The grant for 2021 for the *Basic Home Owner Grant* is up to \$570. For *Homeowners aged 65 and older*, the grant is up to \$845. Larger grant amounts are available for northern or rural areas (beyond Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley Regional District and the Capital Regional District.)

For more info: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/taxes/property-taxes/annual-property-tax/home-owner-grant>

Homeowners may also be eligible for *Property Tax Deferral* if they are **55 years or older** or are financially supporting a dependent child.

See <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/taxes/property-taxes/annual-property-tax/defer-taxes>

New this year, the provincial government will now administer this funding, instead of municipal offices.

Barb Mikulec

I Need a Hug: Social Isolation Summit



In January, *Langley Seniors in Action* hosted a summit on social isolation, with our seniors' advocate, **Isobel Mackenzie**, being the keynote speaker. Mackenzie observed that while isolation and loneliness existed before, COVID revealed vulnerabilities as seniors

lost connections to seniors' centres, libraries and rec centres. For those aged 85 years or more, 41% live alone, and are less able to use technology to connect with others. Residents in long term care and assisted living have been confined to the facility and may have stringent limits to visits with family members, including grandchildren. COVID exposed the impact of poverty among seniors, who can no longer access the internet at a library, or discounted meals at a seniors' centre, or other services that help make ends meet.



Isobel Mackenzie

In fact, COVID exacerbates the problem of seniors being separated from family, friends and neighbours and unable to socialize in 'group' activities. Many seniors in Langley live alone, with low-income, and unaffordable monthly shelter costs. Social isolation can shorten life and is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes per day; and as we age, social isolation may increase due to physical frailty, disability, or deaths among family and friends. Seniors living in long-term care facilities are at risk of isolation and depression, while those receiving home care may become isolated through insufficient supports. Caregivers may be isolated from the outside world as they focus on the care needs of their loved ones.

Social connections that seniors have are easily broken when physical connection is not possible or where money issues emerge. We can expect residual impacts after COVID as some seniors may take time to re-engage with the world. While COVID connects some people through technology, not everyone can access this.



Debra Hauptman

One of the panelists, **Debra Hauptman**, CEO of Langley Lodge, spoke about social isolation related to the long-term care facility and the *Seniors Peer Outreach Programs* she runs, describing long term care as the poor cousin of health care. Residents average 85 years, 60 % are female and live in the lodge 2.2 years on average. In pre-COVID times, the Lodge worked to create a home-like setting with unlimited 24/7 family visits, many volunteers, worship services, entertainment, etc. But, since the start of COVID, an institutional atmosphere prevails with no volunteers, residents sitting by themselves at meals not able to mingle with their friends. However, some limited visiting is now available. The *Seniors Peer Outreach Program* finds isolated seniors through mail drops, referrals from doctors or nurse practitioners, and community programs. The participants in the program no longer drive a car, live alone, have no close relatives or friends, and are over 90. Program volunteers maintain contact by phone and dropping off care packages.



Shannon Woykin

Another panelist **Shannon Woykin**, Executive Director of *Langley Meals on Wheels Services Society*, said the program provides meals to the doors of Langley seniors, of whom 62% live alone, 82% do not have a partner, 43% are aged 85 plus, 79% are low income and 32% live in rural areas. Volunteers create bonds with their clients to support social connectedness. Now over 50% of clients are subsidized and live with food insecurity. But home support, house cleaning and transportation are all in greater demand, and the program has had to pivot to find new ways to serve its clients.



Dr. Bev Pitman

Dr. Bev Pitman Senior Regional Community Developer, *United Way of the Lower Mainland*, reviewed various grants that support community based programs to address seniors' social isolation. To respond to COVID-19, an all-party committee of the BC Legislature asked United Way to set up an emergency response program, the *Safe Seniors, Strong Communities Initiative*, which connects seniors to services, including friendly visits and check-in calls.

Her recommendations for practical action:

1. create seniors' walking groups
2. start up digital learning programs
3. develop *Men's Sheds* (a place where men can go to work on projects)

Four ways to reduce social isolation identified by panelists included:

1. provide grant dollars to pay for coordination of volunteers and outreach
2. create walking clubs with a food component
3. provide funding to expand outreach
4. seniors centres and programs need to reach out to everyone in the province aged 75 and over

"If seniors don't hear from you, you won't hear from them".

Breakout discussion groups identified key themes:

- Seniors need control over their services
- Seniors need clarity on when to use 211 vs. 811
- Printed communication using Canada Post mailing is effective
- More information is needed on transportation during COVID
- Needs of immigrant seniors have to be considered as part of the whole
- Navigators and peer support are needed to access services
- Service Canada locations need a dedicated service, including a dedicated phone line.
- The barriers that poverty creates exacerbate loneliness and isolation.
- Raise the profile of seniors' isolation in the community
- Isolation is compounded by "fear" of COVID along with mobility and transportation issues.
- Barrier of Internet costs should be brought to the attention of our political representatives.



Sheila Pither, the president of COSCO, attended the summit, and has this to say: *“Attending the Summit reminded me of how a community can intervene when a significant number of their residents are undergoing an enormous change in their lives. Feeling forgotten is a bitter way to meet each day when the conditions that made life tolerable, if not enjoyable, are determined by new rules that are made somewhere else by God knows who. Langley has realized that those who are well must help those who need to be cherished, not merely tolerated. So, congratulations for what was more than just educational. It was a call to action that will be heeded.”*

This virtual summit involved 50 participants representing 26 organizations with the aim to explore social isolation and collectively identify practical solutions. The meeting closed with a commitment to set up working groups to:

1. conduct a survey of Langley Seniors
2. expand upon an intergenerational letter writing project
3. advocate for changed in government policies
4. increase public awareness and marketing
5. improve transportation options

*Submitted by Leslie Gaudette and Kathy Reddington, **Langley Seniors in Action***

ALTERNATIVES TO LONG TERM CARE



Although some of those living in *long term care* (LTC) need to be there because of either physical or mental health conditions, there are a significant number of residents who don't need or want to be there. These are people who have found themselves in LTC because they can't cope with living on their own. They have difficulty looking after themselves or their homes. But they are not incapacitated. They may need help cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundry, putting out the garbage, shoveling snow, cutting grass, or raking leaves. All of these problems can be dealt with by home supports. That means that someone goes to a senior's home to provide meals (either to deliver meals on wheels or prepare meals). It means that someone takes a senior shopping or, as we have learned during the pandemic, the senior calls the local grocery store to have their grocery list gathered and delivered to the home. Many grocery stores are doing just that. It means someone going to the home and taking garbage out, and retrieving the bins once they have been emptied. It also means that cleaners come in once a week or fortnight to clean the home. And people come to shovel snow, cut grass or rake leaves. There are programs that offer home supports like those just mentioned.

To help with social isolation and loneliness there are day programs or adult daycare. These programs are held in the community, and offer activities and a chance to socialize. Some offer transportation to the centres.

Some seniors need help with personal tasks. Very elderly seniors, or ones with physical problems, need help getting in and out of bathtubs and need help sorting their medications. Other seniors need medical support for wound management or regular injections. These are done by home care professionals. Our health regions usually contract this service. Sometimes seniors need to pay for the service (like bathing) and sometimes it is covered by the medical system.

Some programs are very costly and some cost next to nothing. Some tasks are done by family members or helpful neighbours. But seniors on low income often can't access programs because of the costs. And seniors who do not speak English will have trouble learning about services available. These are some who end up in long term care. It's worth noting that people who end up in long term are mostly women over 84, with lower income.

If the government invested in home support programs, it would make these services more affordable, regulated and secure. And the upside to it would be that seniors get to stay in their own homes, and get to stay out of long-term care. It would also save money on unnecessary hospital visits, as seniors would not reach the point where a serious situation would arise.

To find out more about these programs call your local health authority. Or call your local seniors centre or community centre. Or you can always call 211.

Linda Forsythe, COSCO



NATIONAL PHARMACARE AND DRUG COSTS

The second reading of Bill C-213, on universal public Pharmacare was held in February. It was a private member's bill submitted by **Peter Julian**, the NDP MP for New Westminster and Burnaby. It was defeated.

The Liberals, who have called for universal Pharmacare in their election campaigning for the past two decades, voted against it. Only two Liberals voted in favour. However, Julian and many others mounted a campaign that reached thousands. Much useful information, through articles, talk shows and webinars was passed to us. Thousands of Canadians have become aware of the need for a national Pharmacare program. Now we will need to think about how to move forward.

In the meantime, we need to be protecting ourselves from some of the exorbitant costs of medications and dispensing fees.

Dave Porteous has given us the following tips: "Markups on drugs are different between the various drug stores. Even some national chains with franchise stores allow different pricing from store to store. It's '*Buyer Beware!*' Research by insurance companies and third-party administrators has shown some pharmacies are greedy".

Examples of pharmacies with lower markups: **Costco**, **Save-on-Foods**, and the **Real Canadian Super Store**. Some of the highest markups are usually the franchises of the big drug chains.

One way to check how your pharmacy compares to others is the *Pacific Blue Cross Pharmacy Compass*.

Go to their website -- <https://www.pac.bluecross.ca/> -- top right *Menu*, then *Advice Centre*, *Insurance Basics*, *How can we help you*, then type in *Pharmacy Compass*. '*How to save money on your prescription drugs Pharmacy Compass*'. Then enter the drug name or DIN and search for a location and pricing. Good luck and hopefully you will save money!"

Excerpts from David J.A. Porteous in BC Forum's Advocate, Spring 2021

Notes from office of Canada's Minister of Seniors

Travel



The honourable *Deb Schulte* has once again reminded us to avoid all non-essential travel—both inside and outside of the country. If you travel within Canada, there are no federal travel requirements, but there may be provincial or territorial rules and restrictions. If you travel outside of Canada, you should know that due to the new COVID-19 variants increasing in the country, the Government of Canada has implemented further testing and quarantine requirements for travellers arriving to Canada's air and land ports of entry.

For all travellers arriving by land or air

- All travellers are required to submit their travel and contact information, including a suitable quarantine plan, electronically via ArriveCAN before crossing the border or boarding a flight.

For travellers arriving to Canada by land

- All travellers, with limited exceptions, are required to provide proof of a negative result of a COVID-19 molecular test taken in the United States within 72 hours of arrival.
- In addition, travellers entering Canada at the land border will be required to take a COVID-19 molecular test on arrival and another toward the end of their 14-day quarantine.

For travellers arriving to Canada by air

- All travellers, with limited exceptions, will be required to take a COVID-19 molecular test when they arrive in Canada before exiting the airport, and another toward the end of their 14-day quarantine period.
- With limited exceptions, air travellers are also required to reserve a three-night stay in a government-authorized hotel, at their own cost.
- Air travellers are required to provide proof of a negative result of a COVID-19 molecular test taken less than 72 hours before their scheduled flight.

For those who must travel, get more information at <https://travel.gc.ca/travel-covid>.



Fraud

The Minister also posted some important information on FRAUD since thousands are victims of fraud and millions of personal savings are lost each year.

If you get emails asking you to open attachments, follow link to unfamiliar website, or give sensitive, personal or financial details, Stop and Think!

- Resist the pressure to act immediately. Use caution with anyone you meet online. Consult a trusted friend or family member.
- If you get a request for money from someone claiming to be a family member or friend ask questions and be skeptical.

Service Canada will **never** make threatening phone calls.

- Hang up and report it to the Canadian anti-Fraud Centre (or call 1-888-495-8501).

Service Canada will **never** request your personal information or ask you to complete a financial transaction in an email.

- Vaccines are free. Don't pay for them.

Govt. of Canada Programs and Services for Seniors website:

Canada.ca/seniors



Booking Your Vaccine

The dates are constantly changing for appointment times. Listen to your local news or call your health authority.

Information you need to book:

1. legal name
2. date of birth
3. postal code
4. personal health number from the back of your driver's license or BC services card

When you call, you will be given a list of local vaccination clinics to choose from.

The call agent will give an appointment time and location.

You will receive a text message or e-mail confirmation to the contact information you provided.

People should only call in when they are eligible. Anyone who misses their age-based dates can still call, book, and be vaccinated at any time after they become eligible.

To avoid fraud, the province is warning people that the health authority will never ask people for their social insurance number, driver's license number, or banking and credit card details.



Number to call

Following are the phone numbers for each health authority. You should call the health authority where you live. Phone lines will be open daily from 7 AM to 7 PM, starting March 8.

Fraser Health	1.855.755.2455
Interior Health	1.877.740.7747
Island Health	1.833.348.4787
Northern Health	1.844.255.7555
Vancouver Coastal Health	1.877.587.5767





BC Government News

Calls for Action

Next federal budget must address nine pressing issues

BC FORUM has called on the federal government to take action on issues that have been neglected or ignored for far too long. In a pre-budget brief, President **Diane Wood** said the next budget must provide for:

- A national universal comprehensive and public Pharmacare plan. Canada remains the only country with public health care that does not cover prescriptions. One in five Canadians are unable to afford needed medications.
- Significant and rapid improvements to long term care, including national standards, ongoing monitoring, and a plan to phase out the profit motive.
- Index Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement to both prices and real wages to stop the erosion of these benefits.
- A national dental plan, as part of universal public health care, to provide access to medically necessary dental care.
- A program to immediately build thousands of units of affordable seniors subsidized housing. Many seniors are living in inadequate or unsafe accommodations.
- Provide core funding for non-profit community based senior centres which provide physical, emotional and social health support to seniors, especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Change bankruptcy and insolvency laws so workers and retirees are first in line, not last, when it comes to paying creditors, and work with provinces to create a mandatory, industry financed pension insurance program to rescue stranded pension plans.
- Protect defined benefit pension plans, and enact policies and incentives to increase access.
- Implement the Liberal campaign commitment to increase Canada Pension Plan survivor benefits, which was promised with an implementation date of July 1, 2020.

Taken from The Advocate (BC Forum newsletter), Spring 2021

Upcoming



COSCO Conference – September 27 & 28th



Please mark ***September 27th and 28th*** on your calendars.

Those are the dates of COSCO's virtual 2021 Conference. The title of the event is **Living in the 21st Century: A Seniors' Strategy**, and we are expecting 400 participants. COSCO has been sponsoring conferences every four years since early this century and one was planned for 2020. Then COVID-19 changed everything and we postponed our plans. Our conferences always attract world-renowned speakers and there are lots of opportunities to attend workshops led by them.

We look forward to seeing you there.

FREE classes



(ZOOM and TAI CHI)



Are you interested in learning how to use Zoom? And once you know, would you like to take classes in Tai Chi for Seniors? The *Voices of Burnaby Seniors* (VOBS) is offering a short class in learning Zoom by computer or on the telephone.

Immediately after that there will be a class offered in learning Tai Chi by Zoom. Tai Chi is a gentle practice that improves physical, mental, spiritual health and well being. This introduction to the basics of Tai Chi will be offered once a week for one hour, on Mondays at 10 AM starting April 26th. If you are interested, contact vobsSociety@gmail.com or by calling 604-761-1867.

Register for Tai Chi at [https://www.vobss.ca/activities/introductory-tai-chi-for-seniors - h.u0eab5x6guko](https://www.vobss.ca/activities/introductory-tai-chi-for-seniors-h.u0eab5x6guko)

All seniors in the province are welcome.

AGEISM AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE



Lately, there has been a lot of discussion on ageism, likely because of the recent pandemic and the fact that the United Nations (UN) has declared 2021-2030 as the decade of Healthy Aging. In March 2021, the UN produced *'the Global Report on Ageism'*.

The Long-term Care disaster in Canada may have caught our nation by surprise, but for those living in these homes, and their families and friends, it is not particularly astonishing. Why is it that most people didn't know about the conditions in Long-term Care homes? And if they did, how have these conditions been allowed to continue? The answer lies partly in the idea of ageism, defined by the UN as "...the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards people on the basis of their age. It can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed".

A recent presentation offered by COSCO and the National Pensioners (NPF) pointed out that the checks and balances to ensure the safety and dignity of people living in care homes is not in place. There are few resident/family councils in the care homes. Those that exist often do not have any ability to be heard or taken seriously. There is chronic understaffing, partly because the wages are so low and the work is so strenuous. There is little accountability in the care homes and when infractions are noted, the enforcement mechanisms have few teeth.

The problem of social isolation has hit Long-term Care residents particularly hard. Residents have essentially been locked up for the past year. They have not had the right to see family or friends, and certainly not in the privacy of their own rooms. Social isolation leads to feelings of loneliness and mental health problems. The BC Seniors Advocate has noted that the use of anti-psychotic drugs is once again increasing in care homes, and has set back all the gains that were made in the past few years in controlling this practice.

For most of us, happiness comes from social interactions. Social isolation affects thinking, sleep and life expectancy. In fact, people suffering from social isolation can have a 50% higher mortality rate.

So what can we do about this situation? We need to have a separate covenant on the rights of the older person. We need to see these rights enshrined in law and we need to see that these laws are enforced. The rights of older persons are not just a long-term care issue; it affects all of us. We need to demand that our governments listen to us and take clear action, action that is based on our human rights.

Linda Forsythe



Council of Senior Citizens'
Organizations of BC
Representing Seniors Since 1950

National Pensioners
Federation  Fédération Nationale
des Retraités

COSCO BC and NPF Zoom Webinar series

 **Webinar 2: Friday April 23 (10:00-11:30 AM PDT)**



https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fCSuqRT-RrKdtsbBT3--jA

Protecting the Human Rights of Older Adults in the Canadian Health Care System

Speakers:



Andre Picard, Author of:
"Neglected No More: Canada's ongoing
battle to fix long-term care"

Margaret Gillis, President
International Longevity Centre
Canada



Dr. Claudia Mahler
UN Independent Expert on the
enjoyment of all human rights
by older persons.

COSCO Associate Membership

In addition to my \$25 Associate Membership fee, I wish to make a donation of \$ _____ to COSCO.

Name: _____

Address: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

COSCO does not share mailing lists with third parties, unless we are required by law to do so.

Associate Membership is \$25 a year. Please make cheques payable to **COSCO** and mail your application to: **Linda Forsythe**, Membership Secretary, E-Mail: membership@coscobc.org
Box 81131 South Burnaby, Burnaby V5H 4K2 Telephone: (604) 444-4300

For information about **Affiliate (organizational) Membership**, please contact the Membership Secretary.



You can now join and/or contribute on our website <http://www.coscobc.org>



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