

## **ELECTION 2013**

# **Working for change on issues that really matter**



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Organizations Of BC (COSCO)**  
www.coscobc.ca

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# It's time for us to act

**B**ETWEEN ELECTIONS, seniors can lobby, present briefs, make proposals, and advocate for our peers and our families. These efforts are well worthwhile. They can make a real difference in the lives of seniors, our children and grandchildren. However, it is rare – no matter how hard we push – for such efforts to succeed in changing the mind or the direction of an incumbent government.

Only once every four years do we have the opportunity to really be heard and force a change for the better. That time is upon us now.

This edition of the COSCO News outlines the key steps forward that seniors throughout British Columbia have been advocating for a decade. These include practical proposals to fight inequality, help seniors age in place, improve health care and promote age-friendly communities.

We encourage you to discuss these issues with your family and friends.

We encourage you to examine the positions of the parties that are seeking a mandate to govern our province.

We encourage you to support the candidate or party that will implement proposals to recognize the many contributions that seniors make to our province, support us in our desire to age in place, and provide hope for a better future for our children and grandchildren.

On May 14, the decision is ours. Let's send the politicians a message. Let's stick together and use our votes to tell them that seniors are looking for real progress – not another dismissive pat on the head that suggests B.C. would be better off if we were dead.

On May 14, we decide. Let's make it count.



# Respect for seniors

## **PRIORITY**

### **Help seniors age in place with universal home support**

FOR MORE THAN a decade, the government has cut basic home support services such as help with cleaning, shopping and cooking. They have downloaded these services to volunteers and eliminated professional home support workers who are trained and accountable in dealing with the needs of seniors. Without proper home support, many seniors are needlessly forced into institutions.

COSCO is calling for universal home care and home support services, based on need, available seven days a week to seniors and people with disabilities.

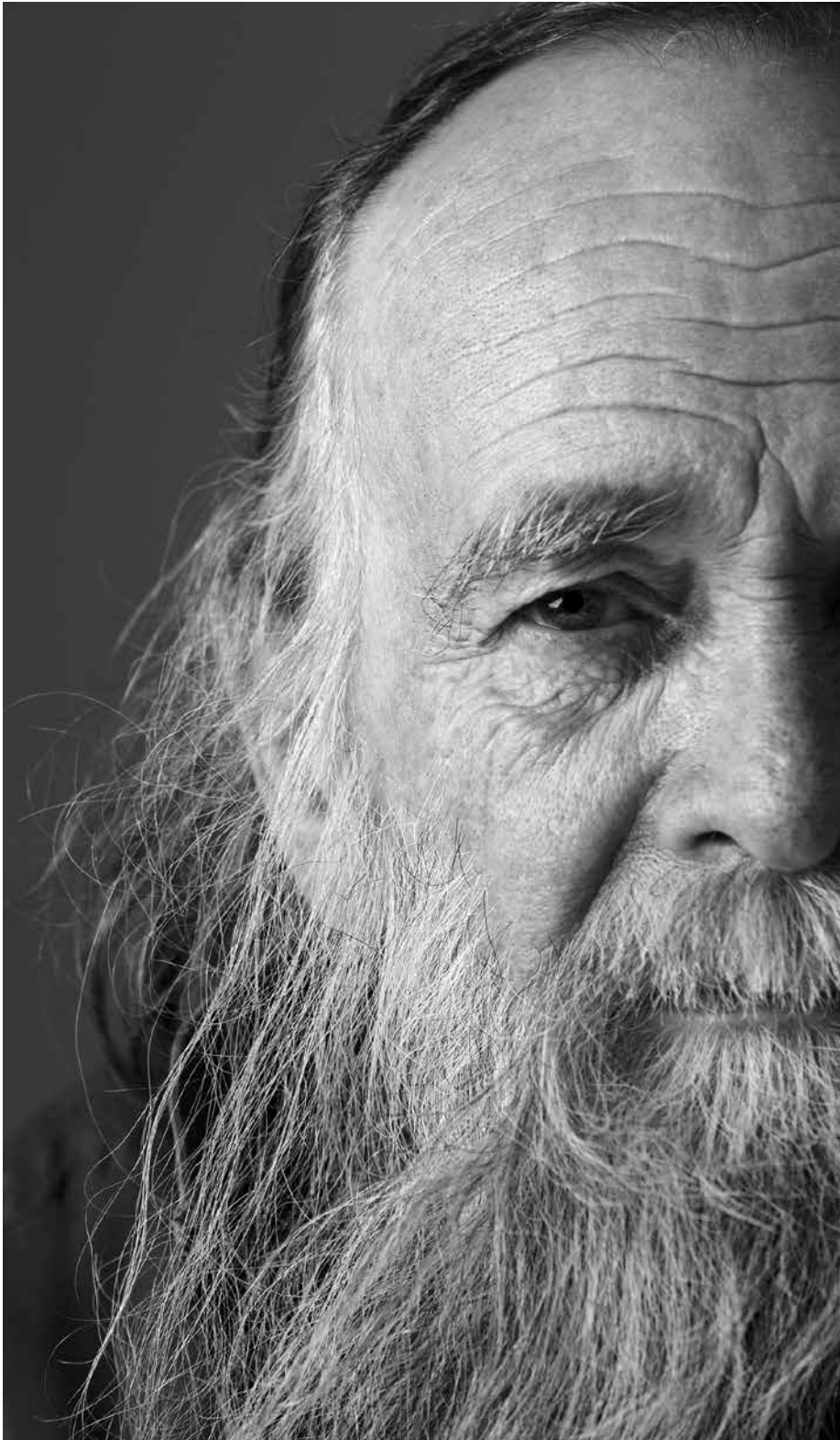
Such a service would make it possible for thousands of seniors to live with dignity and respect in their own homes, at a much lower cost than acute or residential care. It would strengthen our overall public health care system by reducing the pressure on acute care hospitals.

As a matter of both human decency and common sense economics, providing universal home support so people can remain in their own homes must be a priority for the next government of our province.



Professional home support services – including help with cleaning, shopping and cooking – allow seniors to live with dignity in their own homes and to remain healthy, active contributors to their community.

# Respect for seniors



Homelessness and poverty are growing rapidly among seniors in British Columbia – as fast or faster than any other age group.

## **PRIORITY**

### **Help seniors age in place with quality public services and housing**

**T**OO MANY SENIORS are living on the streets, and sleeping in doorways. Poverty and homelessness are growing quickly among seniors in British Columbia.

COSCO is calling on the next government of our province to build geared-to-income housing to overcome homelessness.

This initiative can be paid for with funds from tax points that the federal government transferred to the province for social housing.

**A**GEISM AND DISCRIMINATION against seniors must end. This is particularly important in health care where people are sometimes told, “You’re getting old” rather than given treatment.

COSCO is calling on the next government of B.C. to support quality public services which respect the cultural diversity and diverse needs of seniors.

We also call on the next government to stop and reverse the privatization and downloading of vital public services, including the downloading of non-medical home support to the voluntary sector.



# Respect for seniors



## **PRIORITY** **Fight inequality by making taxes fair for everyone**

**S**INCE THEY WERE first elected in 2001, the B.C. Liberals have relentlessly made our tax system more unfair. They have shifted more and more of the burden to ordinary families, while cutting taxes for corporations and the wealthy.

The shift away from income taxes, which are based on ability to pay, has been matched by large increases in regressive MSP premiums, sales taxes and user fees.

A recent report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives demonstrates how extreme income inequality has become.

Based on an analysis of the latest data on incomes, the report found that the richest one percent in Vancouver are earning \$189,000 more today, after accounting for inflation, than they did in 1982.

During the same period, the bottom 90 percent saw their incomes decline by \$4,300.

British Columbia was the only province where 90 percent of residents are living on less income than they did in 1982.

COSCO is calling on the next provincial government to establish a commission of inquiry to recommend taxation policies that will ensure individuals and corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

Fair taxes are essential to meeting the needs of a civil society. This includes the full range of quality public services such as environmental protection, health care, education and skills training, child protection, and economic opportunities for young people.

# Respect for seniors

## **PRIORITY**

### **Work with Ottawa to improve retirement security**

**T**HE CANADA PENSION PLAN – a joint federal-provincial program – is in urgent need of updating. It was created as a supplement to employer pension plans, and provides a maximum benefit of 25 percent of average earnings.

Things have changed dramatically. Few employers offer pensions any more. And with the growth in precarious work, few workers are with a company long enough to qualify even if the company did offer a pension. On average, young people today will have held 11 different jobs by the time they're 30.

The plethora of voluntary private savings plans proposed by the Harper government and the B.C. Liberals are not the answer.

For one thing, when people are struggling to get by in insecure jobs, they can't save for retirement.

For another, bankers and brokers in Canada charge among the highest administration fees in the world.

This means that when you invest in an RRSP or mutual fund, even if it does well, management fees of



2.5 percent deducted from your account every year will significantly reduce your return. In some cases, management fees will total three times as much as they pay to you.

The only solution that works for ordinary people is to improve the Canada Pension Plan.

The CPP is well managed. It has low management fees of 0.5 percent, and a large pool of capital. It covers all workers and all employers, so coverage stays in effect when young people must change jobs.

The only problem is that CPP benefits are too low. The most anyone can collect right now is about \$11,000 a year and the average benefit paid out today is about \$6,000 a year. We can double future pension payouts to \$22,000 a year by paying a little bit more now

and putting it away for the future.

COSCO is calling on the next provincial government to:

- Lobby the federal government, and other provincial governments, to gradually double CPP benefits for young people currently in the workforce.
- Lobby the federal government, and other provincial governments, to reverse the federal decision to increase the retirement age to 67.
- Lobby the federal government to immediately increase Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) to lift seniors out of poverty.
- Stop the provincial clawbacks to seniors' benefits which occurs every time there is a cost-of-living increase in the OAS and GIS.

# Respect for seniors

## **PRIORITY**

### **Improve care for seniors in British Columbia**

ON VALENTINE'S DAY 2012, Ombudsperson Kim Carter delivered her second report on care for seniors.

Entitled *The Best of Care: Getting it Right for Seniors in BC*, it is a comprehensive analysis of what's required to deliver care for seniors, in home, community and residential settings.

"Our report focuses on key areas where significant changes should be made with many recommendations that can be implemented quickly.

"We need to provide a renewed commitment to some of the most deserving and vulnerable members of our communities: a commitment that focuses on their needs, listens to their concerns and respects their choices," says Carter.

The long awaited report runs to more than 400 pages. It contains 143 findings and 176 recommendations. It calls for "consistent, province-wide standards and processes that treat seniors across B.C. in a fair and equitable manner."

Crucially, it recommends government should assist sen-

#### **THE BEST OF CARE:**

GETTING IT RIGHT FOR SENIORS  
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA (Part 2)

REPORT | VOLUME 2



Public Report No. 47 | FEBRUARY 2012  
to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

iors to continue to live at home by assessing the adequacy of home support programs and analyzing the benefits and costs of expansion.

Unfortunately, an analysis by the B.C. Health Coalition shows government has fully implemented only four of the

recommendations made directly to the health ministry.

COSCO is calling on the next provincial government to fully implement the Ombudsperson's recommendations for consistent, fair and equitable province-wide standards of care.



# Respect for seniors



The B.C. Liberals collected \$1.86 billion from MSP premiums in 2012, twice as much as in 2001. B.C. is one of only two provinces that still charge this regressive tax.

## **PRIORITY**

### **Eliminate MSP premiums and reinstate Pharmacare benefits**

**T**HE B.C. LIBERALS, with continuous increases in Medical Services Plan premiums, have almost doubled this regressive tax.

At the same time, they have eliminated coverage for services such as physiotherapy, chiropractors and eye exams. It's truly a case of paying more – much more – for less.

The amount that ordinary people are paying in MSP premiums now exceeds corporate taxes. On top of that, the HST, which corporations don't pay, soaked us for almost four times as much as corporate taxes in 2012.

We're one of only two provinces that impose a fee for health care. It's time to eliminate it.

COSCO is calling on the next provincial government to fund health care from general revenues, and eliminate the regressive MSP premiums that hit low and middle income families the hardest.

At the same time, we are calling on the next provincial government to reinstate Pharmacare benefits for seniors to the level that existed in 2001.



# Respect for seniors

## **PRIORITY**

### **Stop and reverse the privatization of health care**

**T**HE B.C. LIBERALS have steadily increased for-profit health care in British Columbia. They tore up legal contracts with health care workers, and passed legislation that allows private companies to take over vital cleaning and maintenance services in our hospitals.

They have allowed the number of private, for-profit surgical and medical clinics to more than double.

Private, for-profit contractors are now providing the largest share of residential care for B.C. seniors.

In some cases, these developments are clear violations of the Canada Health Act. In others, they result in reduced levels of care as corporations place profit ahead of public service. Research shows that for-profit operators hire fewer staff, do a less effective job of keeping hospitals clean and free of infections, and provide a lower level of care.

To ensure that our hospitals are clean and safe, and that providing the best of care is the number one goal in our health system, COSCO is calling on the next provincial government to stop and reverse the privatization of health services.



**Hallway medicine:** While the government looks the other way, private clinics continue to charge extra for insured services, and overcrowded acute care hospitals are treating patients in hallways and coffee shops. The B.C. Liberals have closed or downsized 12 public hospitals.

# Respect for seniors



HandyDART offers an important service in many communities, helping seniors and people with disabilities get to scheduled appointments. However, much more needs to be done to create age-friendly communities.

## **PRIORITY**

### **Promote age-friendly communities**

**B**RITISH COLUMBIANS today are living longer, healthier lives. Their continuing contributions to civil society must be recognized and through a firm provincial commitment to create age-friendly communities.

Accessible transportation servi-

ces are a key component in helping seniors to stay active, involved and engaged in their communities.

HandyDART services are important, but must be scheduled in advance. Other options such as the TaxiSaver program – recently saved from termination after an uproar from seniors – must also be provided. In addition, the lack of public toilet facilities at SkyTrain stations is inexcusable. And the DriveABLE program – in which a private company assesses whether seniors should retain the right to

drive – must be made more fair and offered as a public service.

COSCO calls on the next provincial government to consult with seniors and people with disabilities to improve public transportation services, a vital component in building accessible, inclusive communities.

We call on the next government to help seniors help themselves by providing financial support to seniors' organizations that provide advocacy and health literacy education services to their peers.

# Respect for seniors

## **PRIORITY**

### **A truly independent seniors' advocate with a mandate to prevent abuse**

**E**LDER ABUSE is a silent epidemic that affects up to 500,000 seniors in Canada. Vulnerable seniors – with few places to turn to – are often reluctant to report abuse so the number may be even higher.

The abusers are often family members, friends, or other untrained caregivers. The forms of abuse include physical violence, emotional belittling, neglect, and sexual abuse. The most common abuse is financial, including theft and fraud.

The B.C. Liberals have introduced legislation to create a seniors' advocate position. Unfortunately it falls far short of what's needed. Instead of being an independent officer of the Legislature, like the advocate for children, this seniors' advocate will be taking orders and subject to the political whims of the minister of health.

COSCO is calling on the next provincial government to move quickly to create a truly independent seniors' advocate, with a priority mandate to prevent elder abuse.





# Respect for seniors

## **PRIORITY**

### **Let's use our votes to bring about real improvements for seniors**

**E**LECTION DAY is Tuesday, May 14. It's our opportunity to make a real difference – when seniors stick together we have tremendous political power.

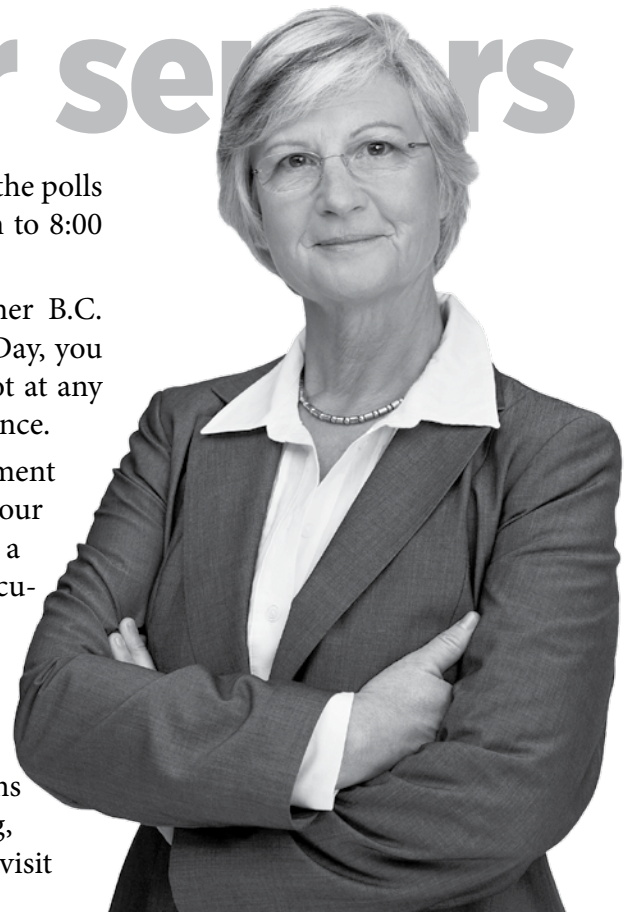
If you can't vote on May 14, Advance polls will be held from Wednesday May 8 to Saturday May 11.

On all days mentioned, the polls will be open from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm.

If you will be in another B.C. constituency on Election Day, you may cast an absentee ballot at any polling station in the province.

You will require government photo identification with your name and address (such as a driver's license), or two documents with your name, at least one of which has your address.

For more information, including additional options for early or absentee voting, phone 1-800-661-8683, or visit [www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca).



## **Membership Application**

Please mail to the address below

- ☐ I wish to join COSCO as an Associate Member. I enclose my \$25 membership fee.
- ☐ I wish to make a donation to COSCO. Please find enclosed a cheque for \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to COSCO.

Mail your application to Ernie Bayer, Membership Secretary,  
6079 - 184 A Street, Surrey, BC V3S 7P7 604 576-9734.

Seniors groups and organizations wishing more information about joining COSCO should write or phone Ernie Bayer and request a membership package.