

# The next four years

By Art Kube  
President

**T**HE RELATIONSHIP between the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations (COSCO) and the provincial government over the last ten years has been very rocky. This was largely due to government tax-cuts followed by severe program cuts especially to programs negatively affecting seniors.

Even when COSCO was able to show that these program cuts were not cost effective, and harmful to seniors, the government very seldom backed off.

The bureaucracy which advised the government held the mindset that people were dying at 68 or 69. The idea that seniors' health care costs could only be leveled off or reduced by keeping seniors healthy somehow did not permeate the ranks of the health bureaucracy.

COSCO time and time again pushed the government to implement a universal program of home care and home support as the way to reduce the intake into the expensive residential form of care.

That advice was not acted upon. The result was that residential care quality started to deteriorate. A good number of seniors' care facilities were shut down and COSCO had to visibly and vocally demonstrate against the actions mandated by government to the Regional Health Authorities. The Carter Ombudsperson report on seniors' health care was a good reflection of what has happened over the last 12 years.

COSCO had limited success in mitigating the damage done. However, we were successful in changing some perceptions and developing a

*See "The next four years" on page 3*

## Training younger seniors in leadership skills

**As today's leaders prepare to pass the torch, new leaders are needed**

**I**T HAS BEEN apparent for some time now that the age of leaders of seniors' organizations has been creeping up and that our ranks have been thinning. In an attempt to meet this challenge, COSCO with the financial assistance of a New Horizons grant has developed a two day workshop to help train new leaders for seniors' organizations and organizations working with seniors.

*See "Workshops" on page 3*

*If undeliverable, return to 1908 – 1330 Harwood St. Vancouver, B.C. V6E 1S8*

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*COSCO News welcomes your letters and contributions. Contact [soren.bech@shaw.ca](mailto:soren.bech@shaw.ca), or Editor, 2102 Porter Rd. Roberts Creek, B.C. V0N 2W5.*

# **Demand for workshops soars**

**T**HIS HAS BEEN an extremely busy year for the COSCO Seniors' Health and Wellness Institute workshop program. So far this year we have presented 239 workshops attended by 3,159 seniors.

The most frequently requested workshop has been Memory and Aging, but there are 37 other topics on our list. You can find them all at [www.coscobc.ca](http://www.coscobc.ca).

Requests for workshops have come from a wide variety of sources and one of the most noteworthy developments has been the number of public libraries that want to sponsor our programs. Senior residences, church groups, community centres, health fairs – we are there.

The workshops are still offered free of charge and that allows groups without a lot of money to bring up-to-date, relevant information to their members.

Our facilitators are not paid, except for out-of-pocket expenses, and so far we have managed to fill requests for workshops all over the province, no matter how remote the location.

Annette O'Connor has kindly offered to write grant requests for us and she has been successful in bringing in some funding.

We rely totally on grants and donations and for five years we have managed to keep our project up and running. However, the enormously heavy demand for workshops means that we need to ask for donations from the people who are reading this Newsletter.

You won't receive further begging letters. I won't send you address labels or refrigerator magnets. However, you *will* have the satisfaction of knowing that you are part of the COSCO pledge: Seniors Helping Seniors.

## **Please consider making a donation**

**Y**OUR DOLLARS will be well spent and none of the money will be used for salaries or office space. Not every charity can make that statement. You will receive a tax receipt for your donation and the health and wellness of fellow seniors will be strengthened because of you.

Cheques should be made out to COSCO Seniors' Health and Wellness Institute and sent to:

Sheila Pither, Treasurer  
COSCO Seniors' Health and Wellness Institute  
1908 – 1330 Harwood Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 1S8

## THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

# Changing the mindset on seniors' issues

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seniors' agenda reflective of our increased longevity.

As you know, COSCO frequently repeats several vital messages:

- Seniors are an asset, not a liability.
- Don't plan for seniors, plan with seniors.
- Seniors helping seniors.
- The only people who know what's good for seniors – are seniors themselves.

Our coined language is finding its way into policy makers' speeches, and our proposal for a universal program of home care and home support has

received both academic and general public support.

With this in mind we will use these next four years to change the government's mindset on seniors' issues.

I've already had a good meeting with Mrs. Linda Larson, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, who was quite supportive of some of our proposals.

I also wrote to Dr. Terry Lake, the B.C. Minister of Health, asking him for a meeting to discuss his vision of seniors care. I pointed out to him that some of his predecessors' visions turned into seniors' nightmares.

In addition we will lobby the feder-

al government to cover home support under the Canada Health Act.

In regards to our relationship with Victoria over the next four years we will endeavour to have a positive relationship.

However, if the government engages in policies which negatively affect seniors, COSCO will be out front defending the interest of seniors and civil society, just as we will applaud the government for any positive measures in support of seniors.

Seniors and friends of seniors, as they say: "Old age isn't for Sissies", and "We might have snow on top, but we still have fire in the belly."

## Workshops scheduled throughout B.C. to help pass the torch to new leaders of seniors' groups

**"These workshops will go some way towards rejuvenating our seniors' organizations..."**

**– COSCO**

*Continued from page 1*

The two day workshop deals with a wide range of issues:

- Leadership and changing demographics
- Leadership basics like the hierarchy of human needs
- The requirements and qualities of leadership
- Criteria for effective seniors' organizations
- Organizing and leading volunteers
- Conducting meetings
- Setting organizational goals and

project planning

- Seniors' needs identification and fulfillment
- Advocacy and referral
- Building programs and securing resources
- Searching out talented volunteers
- Networking and lobbying skills

As you can see, it is a comprehensive workshop, backed by good reference materials for participants.

### Workshop schedule

The first workshop was held in Kelowna on September 9 and 10.

Additional workshops will be held in Prince George on October 8 and 9; in Terrace on October 10 and 11; in Castlegar on October 22 and 23; in Kamloops on November 4 and 5; and in Campbell River on November 12 and 13.

Workshops in Greater Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo will be scheduled for January and February 2014. The date and locations will be announced a month ahead.

### Register today

There is no cost for the participants, other than the cost of getting to the workshop.

COSCO will cover the costs of two lunches, coffee breaks, reference materials and the rental of the venue.

We require a minimum of 15 participants for each workshop.

To register, please contact Sheila Pither at (604) 576-8000 or send her an e-mail: [pither470@shaw.ca](mailto:pither470@shaw.ca)

COSCO believes these workshops will go some way towards rejuvenating our seniors' organizations and help us successfully "pass the torch" to the next leaders of our groups.



# BC Elders Gathering brings together delegates from every part of the province

By Gudrun Langolf,  
First Vice-President

On July 9th – 11th 2013, Chief Dominic Frederick welcomed 4,000 delegates to his homeland in Prince George, on the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh Nation. The occasion was the 37th Annual BC Elders Gathering. Linda Forsythe and I attended this event on behalf of COSCO. The venues were the CN Centre and spectacular University of Northern British Columbia.

The theme of the 37th Annual Elders Gathering was “Honour Your Journey.” The event happened on the 100th anniversary of Lheidli T'enneh being forced from their village in what is now downtown Prince George, and moved to their current reserve. The “journey” was honoured through a colourful, fantastic show of song and dance that showed the Lheidli T'enneh Nation's journey from the past to the present.

For 36 years, First Nations Elders have met yearly in various locations of BC. The first Gathering was in the Sto:Lo Nation, hosted by the Coqualeeza Elders.

Elders Gatherings are a perfect opportunity for people to visit, exchange memories and knowledge, to create new friendships and renew old ones. The Gatherings provide a chance to learn about how other First Nations people live.

The basic purpose of the Gatherings is to fulfill the need for Elders throughout the province to strengthen social and community links. These links help bind them together as First Nations. They allow them to intermingle with like-minded, like-aged individuals and their families, and to share common grounds that strength-

en those links.

There were many opportunities for intergenerational activity and knowledge sharing, in order to help youngsters develop respect for Elders, and to honour their Elders.

Many workshops packed the agenda for each of the three days. Some seemed to cover topics of our COSCO workshop offerings.

COSCO set up an information table with our brochures, newsletters and friendly “getting to know you” chats. Both Linda and I are not shy about speaking and it felt like we had said hello to at least half of the delegates!

Our hosts were generous and we think pleased that we were curious about them and look forward to the next sharing event – next summer in Penticton. We also took this opportunity to link up with some other Prince George seniors and hope to

build on the connection in the future.

We urge you to take part in this the year of Reconciliation. There may be events planned in your community. Check: [www.reconciliationcanada.ca](http://www.reconciliationcanada.ca)



Top: Two participants in the Elders Gatherings' colourful opening ceremonies. Below: COSCO executive member Linda Forsythe staffs the COSCO information table at the event.

# New wheelchair tax hits those who have the least

**T**HE NEW \$25 a month wheelchair tax takes unfair advantage of people who are already between a rock and a hard place. Vancouver Coastal Health Authority has backed down on the fee, but at press time Fraser Health had not.

The government has already significantly raised the fees for residential care to 80 percent of income – unless your income isn't high enough to pay the minimum of \$958.90 per month. Then they take the extra from your spouse, creating additional misery.

Here's a Fraser Valley example.

An elderly woman collecting \$515.97 a month in Old Age Security and \$317.08 in Guaranteed Income Supplement – the current averages paid by the federal government – has a monthly income of \$833.05.

Her husband, already living on a tight budget before she was admitted to residential care, has to pay the difference of \$1,510 a year. As of September 1, he had to find an additional \$300 a year to pay for wheelchair maintenance.

Could he buy one instead? Sure. But she may need a more sophisticated wheelchair in a few months at a far greater cost, something that care home staff are quick to point out.

The government maintains that its residential care fees are set to ensure that individuals have a minimum of \$350 a month for personal expenses. A health ministry information sheet claims that even after paying the wheelchair tax, "Residents in B.C. are left with at least \$325 a month for personal expenses and other allowable charges."

That's only true if you are fortunate enough to have a relatively good



Many seniors require residential care because home care, if it was available, can no longer meet their needs. They require a wheelchair to get to meals and the washroom. These seniors are captive targets for a tax.

income. It's not true if your only income is OAS and GIS, as is the case for many elderly women.

The wheelchair tax is especially aggravating for seniors' advocates who recall buying wheelchairs when their parents were admitted to residential care, and then donated them to the care home when their parents died. Now the users of these wheelchairs are forced to pay for the privilege.

Health minister Terry Lake claims that's entirely fair.

"While residential care is a person's home, and while the public health system covers the cost of medical and health care needs, residents pay for the cost of their personal equipment and supplies just as they would if they

lived in the community," he said July 24.

Janine Farrell, Seniors' Care Researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, questions that argument. "The new fees undermine the human rights of persons with disabilities and seniors in this province. They will hit those least able to afford it the hardest. How is that fair?" she says.

"The home and community care sector is especially vulnerable to creeping user fees that undermine universality... (but) should not be used as a Medicare loophole to raise extra funds," says Farrell.

*Reprinted from BC FORUM's news magazine, The Advocate.*



# How COSCO works with the BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre to promote social justice

By Gudrun Langolf  
First Vice-President

THE COUNCIL OF Senior Citizens' Organizations of BC doesn't normally provide regular and direct advocacy for our members. We work in hand-in-hand with many who do. One example is our association with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. This is a quiet but very effective organization which "punches well above its weight" – and normally stays out of media stories.

Here is a description of the scope of the work four lawyers, occasional contract experts and three support staff undertake:

"The BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre (BCPIAC) was founded in 1981 to advance the interests of groups that are generally unrepresented or under-represented in issues of major public concern. Over the past 33 years, we have represented clients before the British Columbia Provincial Court, British Columbia Supreme Court, British Columbia Court of Appeal, Tax Court of Canada, Federal Court of Canada, Federal Court of Appeal, Supreme Court of Canada and numerous administrative tribunals including the British Columbia Utilities Commission, BC Human Rights Tribunal, Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission, Residential Tenancy Board, Canada Pension Plan: Pension Appeals Board, WorkSafeBC, Employment and Assistance Appeals Tribunal, the Employment Standards Tribunal and Employment Insurance Board of Referees, as well as before the British Columbia Ombudsperson, BC Forest Safety Ombudsperson and BC Coroner's Service."

In particular, BCPIAC lawyers regularly intervene in proceedings at

the BC Utilities Commission to represent the interests of low and fixed income residential ratepayers of BC Hydro, FortisBC gas and electrical utilities, Pacific Northern Gas and Insurance Corporation of BC. PIAC's work is grounded in social justice.

BCPIAC's work at the BCUC fits well with the anti-poverty and social justice work. The BCUC sets the rates that utilities can charge their customers. Energy rates are important because they are linked to a basic cost of living, but energy rates are regressive, like consumption taxes. This means that rate increases disproportionately impact people who live in poverty. PIAC's Social Justice work in the poverty law and human rights areas informs the analysis of issues that arise from representations made at the Utilities' Commission. Being connected to the lived experiences of people living in poverty and front line advocates is essential to PIAC's developing realistic arguments about energy programs and rate issues.

Not surprisingly, energy issues have become more central to larger policy questions and environmental and social questions overlap. The affordability of energy as a basic necessity in Canada can be in conflict with the need to more fully recognize the real 'cost' of energy. The concept of "Energy Poverty" captures the intersection of energy, environment and anti-poverty work that is at the heart of BCPIAC's work today. Energy poverty is the inability to afford the basic energy or energy services necessary to meet daily living requirements. BCPIAC has been central in raising the issue of Energy Poverty in BC, particularly in the past five years.

Climate change is arguably the result of what some have called the

"greatest market failure of all time" -- energy prices that do not capture the true cost of energy use. Our global economic system is built on this market failure, which policy makers are only now beginning to recognize. But the need to start paying a price for the "externalities" associated with energy use brings with it an important social question:

How do we address the climate crisis without disproportionately harming those who have contributed the least to the problem; have benefited the least from the system that has created the problem; and who have the least ability to mitigate any major changes?

So while COSCO has a total commitment to work on the determinants of health, as they affect seniors, their families and friends - the picture is a bit more complex than fighting for better (livable) pensions, Medicare, PharmaCare, affordable housing and age-friendly communities. There is good reason to work with others because there is no way any single organization on its own can do all of the work effectively.

A very short list of organizations we work with and/or support in addition to BCPIAC is: the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), BC Health Coalition, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, First Call, SPARC, BC Coalition for People with Disabilities, etc. We report on those activities to the Executive from time to time.

Under the leadership of your Executive generally, and President Art Kube specifically we have formed many important connections and working relationships which stand seniors in good stead by advancing your interests.

# Millions at risk of undernourishment

A STUDY BY Statistics Canada has found that more than 4.1 million elderly Canadians are at “nutritional risk.”

A survey of more than 15,000 seniors found that 34 percent of Canadians aged 65 or older are at risk of being undernourished.

“Nutrition is a building block for optimal health,” said report author Pamela Ramage-Morin. “Undernourishment can lead to falls. It can lead to hospitalization.”

Ramage-Morin said the goal of the study was to identify the circumstances which place seniors at risk of malnourishment before they reach that stage.

The study found that how well older Canadians eat is affected by how often they shop, how difficult it is to cook, and difficulty in swallowing. Eating alone, financial constraints and lack of help with shopping and cooking also contribute to nutritional risk among seniors.

Depression and loneliness can also be factors, especially for women aged 75 and older, the agency said.

About half (49 percent) of people living alone were at nutritional risk, compared with 28 percent of those who live with others. This difference was particularly large for men who live alone.

Overall, a higher percentage of women (38 percent) than men (29 percent) were at risk of undernourishment.

People with disabilities and those taking medications and were also at risk.

“Anything less than weekly participation in social activities such as religious services, sports or volunteer activities was associated with a higher

likelihood of nutritional risk,” said the report.

“In addition, people who lacked someone to support them in practical matters such as help with meals or chores were more likely to be at risk.”

In the study, gaining or losing more than 10 pounds (4.5 kilograms) in the past six months and skipping meals almost every day were the main factors used to identify those who were at nutritional risk.



## COSCO GROWS TO MORE THAN 100,000 MEMBERS

Lloyd Pelton, representing COSCO's newest affiliate, the B.C. branch of the National Association of Federal Retirees, shakes hands with President Art Kube. Pelton is now a COSCO General Vice-President, speaking on behalf of 28,000 retired federal employees as well as retired members of the RCMP, the armed forces, and judges.

## BC Government Retired Employees

IF YOU'RE receiving a pension from the Public Service Pension Plan, you should be a member of the B.C. Government Retired Employees' Association (BCGREA), a COSCO affiliate.

Joining the BCGREA is an opportunity for you and your spouse to speak with other retirees about pension issues, renew acquaintances with former co-workers, make new friends and have a voice about your PSPP pension.

To join today, make out a cheque to the BCGREA – \$20 for you, or \$40 for you and your spouse – and send it to the BCGREA at PO BOX 791, Station A, Nanaimo, B.C., V9R 5M2. For more information, call 1 866 729-9299 (toll free); send a note to [bcgrea@telus.net](mailto:bcgrea@telus.net); or visit the website, [bcgrea.com](http://bcgrea.com).



# Labour Day, 2013

THREE EXECUTIVE members – President Art Kube, Assistant Secretary Linda Forsythe and First Vice-President Gudrun Langolf – staffed the COSCO information table at this year's Labour Day Picnic.

This one was at Trout Lake and hosted by the New Westminster and District Labour Council, Vancouver and District Labour Council and the B.C. Federation of Labour.

There were free hot dogs and Chilliwack corn, face-painting, fun for kids, great company, and best of all: no speeches.

It was simply a fun gathering celebrating workers and the summer. No one got stung by wasps and excellent live music enlivened the event.

For us it provided a fine opportunity to try and capture 'seniors-in-training', blow our horn about our good works as well as renewing acquaint-



Art Kube and Linda Forsythe pass out information about COSCO and seniors' issues at the Greater Vancouver Labour Day celebration.

ances from times past.

With a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, our President tried to convince

people that if they joined COSCO they would stay forever young...

– Gudrun Langolf

## 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.