

## Crisis looming for seniors who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

By Brian Dodd  
Interim Executive Director  
Seniors Services Society

FUNDING AND supports for seniors who are homeless or at risk of homelessness is decreasing and the need for service is growing.

This is the situation facing Seniors Services Society in New Westminster, one of the only organizations in BC working exclusively with seniors who are homeless or are at risk.

A total of 371 seniors (55 years and older) were counted as homeless in the Metro Vancouver Homeless Count on March 12, 2014.

This is a 38% increase compared to 2011 when 268 seniors were identified and a 75% increase compared to 2008 when 212 seniors were identified.

Seniors represented 18% of the homeless population in 2014, compared to 16% in 2011 and 9% in 2008.

It is generally recognized that the count numbers are an undercount, especially with seniors. Many homeless seniors are "couch surfing," tempor-



As the demand for services continues to grow, the Seniors Services Society is already working with 150 seniors who have no permanent place to call home.

arily living with friends or relatives or weeks away from being homeless.

Seniors Services has been providing housing outreach to seniors in the Lower Mainland for almost 30 years.

The number of requests for assistance and the number of clients served have grown dramatically over that period of time.

The "boomers" are reaching their senior years, and many are facing a housing crisis for the first time.

In October 2014, Seniors Services had 175 requests for housing help.

Seventy-four of those individuals were deemed to be homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and taken on as clients. Twenty-six of those new clients were homeless and 35 clients were at risk, meaning they were a month or two away from homelessness for one reason or another.

At any given time, the housing outreach team at Seniors Services is working with approximately 150 seniors without a permanent place to call home.

On January 1st, Seniors Servi-

*If undeliverable, return to 207 - 1530 Mariner Walk, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 4X9*

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## About COSCO

COSCO is an umbrella organization that brings together 85 different seniors groups, representing 107,000 women and men, to work on common issues.

COSCO is affiliated with the one million member National Pensions Federation which promotes these issues at the national level.

A major focus of COSCO's work is promoting good health. To this end, COSCO volunteers provide a series of free workshops on 42 topics ranging from falls prevention to health literacy. More than 20,000 seniors have attended these workshops.

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

# Do you know your neighbour?

By Lorraine Logan  
President COSCO

**T**HIS MAY seem to be an odd subject line but I do want to address this issue as it relates to our seniors and elders who may be living in isolation and loneliness.

Although isolation and loneliness are not the same, they often have the same outcome.

How often, have we passed by people in our hallways without looking at them or conversing with them?

When you are in your apartment or condo elevator, do you make eye contact and say hello? If you live in a house, do you notice or speak to the neighbours next door or notice who may live across the street from you?

I believe over time we have lost that community spirit, caring or enthusiasm for being part of a society that does embrace the social responsibility of taking care of our most weak and vulnerable citizens.

Many articles have been written about seniors and isolation, but very few are able to give us an idea of how to locate and engage these people or even if they want to be engaged. Perhaps we need to start with some common courtesies and acknowledge the people who live beside us and across the street or in the next complex?

Once a person engages another in conversation or eye contact, you have now opened the possibility of a relationship – getting to know someone's name now makes it personal. Has it been fear or anxiety because the other person is a little scary or may not speak our language?

Well, fear has certainly determined many relationships and I am not suggesting that you attempt to make

friends with someone who you might find threatening or violent. Older adults usually are not these people.

As for language barriers, have any of you travelled to another country not knowing the language? Most of us made out quite well – body language is universal and needs no interpretation.

Take a risk, engage a person you may not have talked to before.

Isolation and loneliness are hidden from us, but at the same time, we cannot ignore the horrible concept of being in those places.

Please take some time to extend a voice, a hand, a kind word to a person who may need some personal contact.

Get to know your community and its resources as well.

You can make a difference. A warm welcoming smile could make someone's day.



Lorraine Logan

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## You can join the call for a plan to reduce poverty in BC

**C**OSCO IS ONE of almost 400 organizations, representing over 300,000 people, that have joined the call for a Poverty Reduction Plan for our province. It's sorely needed. BC has the highest poverty rate in Canada and no plan to tackle it directly.

Now your help is needed. The organizers of the campaign are asking individuals to e-mail Premier Christy Clark, and other political leaders, to emphasize the need to tackle growing inequality and poverty.

A suggested text for your e-mail is available at <http://bcpovertyreduction.ca/email-the-premier/>. The e-mail says, in part, "We are ashamed of the levels of poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours. At 10.4 per cent, BC has one of the highest poverty rates in Canada. Yet BC is the only province left without a comprehensive poverty reduction plan...."

"There is a false economy in failing to act boldly. Paying for the negative effects of poverty costs much more than dealing with it directly. Let's stop mopping up the floor and fix the hole in the roof."

Please send your e-mail today. Together we can make a difference!

# Keeping Medicare alive in Canada

## Quick facts about our public health care system and the threats that are steadily eroding it

By Kathleen Jamieson,  
Chair, COSCO Health Committee  
and Barbara Mikulec, BCRTA

**T**HE CANADIAN health care system, “Medicare”, is a potent symbol of two important Canadian values – promoting equality and fostering the common good.<sup>1</sup>

These values are entrenched in the five principles of the 1984 Canada Health Act (CHA), Canada’s federal legislation for publicly funded health care.

The five principles of the CHA are: public administration, universal access, comprehensive coverage, accessibility without extra charges or discrimination, and portability across provinces.<sup>2</sup>

The primary objective of the Canadian health policy described in the CHA is “to protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of residents of Canada and to facilitate reasonable access to health services without financial or other barriers.”

The CHA requires the federal government to transfer health care funds to the provinces and territories for the administration and delivery of health services to their residents.

Under the CHA, the federal government has overall responsibility for ensuring the five principles of the Act are observed and it can impose penalties for non-compliance with the Act by provinces or territories.

Provinces and territories have considerable leeway in how they administer and deliver health care so long as they respect the five principles of the CHA.

The B.C. Medicare Protection Act for administering medicare in B.C. is very clear in its commitment to these principles.

Its Preamble begins “Whereas the people and government of British Columbia believe that medicare is one of the defining features of Canadian nationhood and are committed to its preservation for future generations.” It ends, “whereas the people and government of B.C. believe it to be fundamental that an individual’s access to necessary medical care be solely based on need and not on the individual’s ability to pay.”<sup>3</sup>

The leeway in the provision of health services is demonstrated in B.C. through, for example, the practice of charging residents a fee for participation in the provincial health care plan that (except for very low income residents) is not based on income.

B.C. is the only province to do so. Ontario uses the taxation system so that the premium paid by residents is based on income.<sup>4</sup>

The formulas used to allocate the shares of the funding transferred by the federal government to the provinces and territories were negotiated among the federal government and the provinces and territories under a mechanism called the Canada Health Care Accord that operated between 2004 and 2014.

The Accord was a 2004 agreement, negotiated over a three-year period, that provided a “renewal agenda” for Medicare which included a 10-year action plan with the following mutually agreed on health care goals: reduce waiting times and improve

access; increase the supply of health professionals; promote home care services, undertake primary care reform; improve access to health care in the North; establish a national pharmaceutical strategy; support prevention and the promotion of public health; support health innovation: support accountability and reporting to citizens.<sup>5</sup>

It also provided for health care funding increases of 6 per cent per year.<sup>6</sup>

The Health Council of Canada was established in 2003 by First Ministers as a federally funded independent body to monitor the impact of the Accord.

The federal government did not renew the Accord in 2014 and unilaterally adopted a new funding formula for transfers to the provinces and territories based only on population numbers.

Some analysts calculate that other related changes mean that federal health care transfers to the provinces will be significantly reduced to between 3.5 or 4 percent depending on economic growth and inflation.<sup>7</sup>

The federal funding for the Health Council of Canada was not extended in 2014. A 2013 report of the Health Council concluded “the performance of Canada’s health system over the last decade was “less than optimal.”

The Health Council had an important “departing message” for First Ministers and Ministers of Health of Canada.

It noted that public opinion polls consistently show that the public wants the federal government to take

a strong leadership role in health care reform and to “recommit itself to working with the provinces and territories so that the national interest in health care is not lost and that health care reform proceeds in a more effective and efficient manner.”

It advised that, “With less active federal participation in health system planning at the pan-Canadian level”, “there is greater potential for increasing disparities and inequities in terms of access and quality of care across jurisdictions.”<sup>8</sup>

Over the last decade, privatisation of health care is occurring in B.C. through the unrestrained growth of for-profit health care clinics that offer expedited medically necessary treatment or surgical services to individuals based on their ability to pay.

In B.C. alone, in 2014, 14 such clinics are operating in flagrant contravention of the Canadian Health Care Act and the B.C. Medicare Protection

Act.

One such clinic, the Cambie Clinic, is now challenging the CHA through the courts alleging that it deprives Canadian individuals of the choice to pay extra for expedited medically necessary treatment and surgery. This challenge has forced the B.C. government to defend the principles of the CHA.

All the evidence to date suggests that the five principles of the CHA have been inadequately supported over the last decade by both the federal and the B.C. provincial governments, that federal leadership is lacking, and that the principles of the CHA are being undermined by unrestrained privatisation of medically necessary health care.

As the Health Council of Canada concluded in 2014, “there is greater potential for increasing disparities and inequities in terms of access and quality of care across jurisdictions.”<sup>9</sup>

## Endnotes

1. See, for example, the Preamble to the B.C. Medicare Protection Act quoted above; also numerous polls such as the November 2012 poll by Leger Marketing which found that 94 percent of respondents called “universal health care” an “important source of collective pride.” *Globe and Mail* (2012). Universal Health care much loved among Canadians, monarchy less important: poll. [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/universal-health-care-much-loved-among-canadians-monarchy-less-important-poll/article5640454/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/universal-health-care-much-loved-among-canadians-monarchy-less-important-poll/article5640454/)
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3. [www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws.new/document/ID/freeside/00\\_96286\\_01](http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws.new/document/ID/freeside/00_96286_01)
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9. *ibid*

## A reminder to all COSCO affiliates and associate members: It's time to renew

ERNIE BAYER, the hard-working Membership Chair of the Council of Senior Citizens’ Organizations of B.C., has issued a friendly reminder to associate members and affiliated organizations that it’s time to renew their memberships for 2015.

If your organization has not yet renewed, please do so as soon as possible.

Similarly, if you are an individual associate member, your \$25 membership fee for the current year is now due. (See form on page 12.)

Please mail your renewals and payments directly to Ernie Bayer, Membership Chair, 6079 - 184 A Street, Surrey, B.C., V3S 7P7.

If there’s any issue about your membership or affiliation that you’d like to discuss, Ernie can be reached at 604 576-9734.

If your organization is not yet affiliated, please contact Ernie for details on how your group can participate.

If you need any extra forms, you can obtain them online at [www.coscobc.ca](http://www.coscobc.ca) or by e-mailing Ernie at [ecbayer2@gmail.com](mailto:ecbayer2@gmail.com).

## Number 1 in a series on elder abuse: financial

# Almost half of BC seniors have been

**W**HILE ONLY six percent of B.C. seniors say they've been financially abused, when provided with a list of abusive scenarios, more than 40 per cent reported experiencing abusive behavior, according to a new report by Vancity credit union.

The report, *The Invisible Crime: Seniors Financial Abuse*, indicates that while seniors may be aware of, and vigilant against, dramatic forms of abuse such as misuse of power of attorney or being forced to change their will, smaller forms of abuse are not understood as such.

Many appear to be unaware of the different forms financial abuse takes and therefore may be under-reporting their experience.

Seniors financial abuse is when someone uses the money, property or personal information of a senior in an unauthorized and self-beneficial way.

Contrary to popular belief, 55% of all cases of seniors financial abuse are perpetrated by family, friends, neighbours or caregivers.

The most frequently seen cases are demands for money from family members.

There are three different types of financial abuse: monetary, property and legal.

*Monetary abuse* is intended to separate a senior from his or her money. The most common form is to pressure the senior to give a family member an early bequest.

*Property abuse* involves the inappropriate use of a senior's property for the benefit of the perpetrator. This

could be pressure to sell or transfer an asset, or sometimes outright theft of property.

*Legal abuse* is manipulating legal documents to benefit someone other than the senior.

Seniors financial abuse is a growing concern in British Columbia, with previous data indicating that as many as one in 12 seniors could be seriously affected, resulting in as much as \$1.3 billion in lost assets to B.C. seniors.

However, new research indicates that the scope of the problem may be even wider.

When presented with a list of scenarios, 41% of seniors in the Lower Mainland and Victoria regions have

experienced at least one situation that can be classified as financial abuse.

The most common experiences of the survey respondents were:

- 18.7% had someone borrow their money without their knowledge, or having someone refuse to pay back a loan
- 18.1% had someone pressure them to give that person money
- 12.1% had experiencing an unsolicited work scam where someone offers to perform work for a reasonable fee, then after starting the work insists on more than originally agreed before completing the work

### Warning signs

**I**T IS IMPORTANT that seniors and those around them be vigilant in preventing financial abuse. Although impossible to predict, warning signs that a senior may be the victim of abuse are if he or she:

- feel they are losing some control over their financial affairs
- find that they are unexpectedly failing to meet financial obligations for the first time
- see unexpected transactions on their bank or credit card statements.

Interpersonal relationships can also flag potential abusive situations. Be aware of situations in which a senior is pressured by another individual to:

- have their bank statement sent to someone other than the person(s) listed on the account.
- change important documents such as a will or property title
- sign documents that the senior does not understand or is not given enough time to read.
- give or lend them money
- relinquish control over making financial decisions

# Seniors victims of financial abuse

- 10.1% had someone take a valuable possession from their home, either to keep it or to sell it
- 9.0% had someone pressure them to buy that person something or to pay a bill for that person
- 7.9% had someone forge their signature
- 7.1% had someone use their credit or debit card without their permission.

The report recommends financial institutions like Vancity need to work with community and government stakeholders to better determine the scope of seniors financial abuse, identify the types of financial abuse seniors most commonly experience and develop solutions to address the problem.

Vancity created a new workshop to help seniors detect and protect themselves against financial abuse, and hosted the workshop at various branches throughout November.

There are a number of ways to reduce the possibility of seniors financial abuse and reduce exposure to exploitation. Seniors should:

- get independent legal advice before signing any documents, especially those involving their home or other property
- set up auto-deposit government and pension cheques into their bank account and also auto-pay for bills to prevent someone intercepting funds and misusing them
- keep financial and personal information in a safe place, and never give anyone your bank-card PIN
- if lending money, write down the

person's name, the amount, and the date of loan; ask the person to sign this document

- keep a file of their accounts and legal documents, and keep a record of financial transactions and changes to legal documents
- keep in touch with a variety of friends and family so they don't be-

come isolated.

“The report found that 46 per cent of seniors are concerned about financial abuse. We believe financial institutions have a responsibility to ensure seniors have secure access to the assets they've built up over their lifetime,” said Linda Morris, senior vice-president of Vancity.

## Risk factors

**A**NY SENIOR can be at risk of financial abuse, regardless of their financial status, background or ethnicity. However, a senior may be more vulnerable if he or she is:

- lacking confidence in understanding financial matters
- without a strong social circle, resulting in being socially, geographically or culturally isolated
- a newcomer to Canada, with language or cultural barriers to understanding contracts or financial matters
- unsure of the value of his or her assets – particularly a house
- partly or fully dependent on others for help with financial or day-to-day matters
- experiencing health issues which may bring on stress or exhaustion, or may require medication which might impair judgment.

## If a senior is financially abused

**I**F A SENIOR thinks he or she may be the victim of senior financial abuse, they should tell someone – a friend, family member, healthcare or social-services professional, financial advisor, a member of their faith community or the local authorities. They should also seek legal advice.

Many victims do not take action because they are ashamed, afraid of what may happen to them or the abuser, or worried about the legal costs. But it is important they protect themselves and their assets, and they can get help at little or no cost:

- Seniors Abuse and Information Line provides free advice and support to seniors who may be victims of abuse.
- Lawyer Referral Service offers consultations with a lawyer for up to 30 minutes for a fee of \$25 plus tax.
- Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia supports seniors who are victims of abuse and neglect.

## COSCO News interview

# “Ignorance is our biggest challenge,” says Don Berg

By Gudrun Langolf  
COSCO First Vice-President

**D**ON BERG and I sit in a Commercial Drive coffee shop on a fine Vancouver morning. He represents the Federation of Russian Canadians organization in the capacity of Member-at-Large on the COSCO Executive.

In the past six years, we at COSCO discovered that if we need something done, more often than not, we can call on Don. Just one example is that he picks up and delivers the COSCO News – a job that requires a car and quite a bit of muscle...but I digress already.

During the hour-long coffee break I discover: He was attracted to COSCO because we share some of his interests and concerns: inadequate affordable housing supply, lack of support for homecare, disappearing public services and more.

He turned 80 last October and his life experience is remarkably diverse and always in service to others. He received his Canadian citizenship in 1976, is fluent in Russian and German, and lives in the Waterfront Housing Co-op (Van. East).

Before the war, his family fled from Europe and settled in the USA. He translated for his mother who had to work and consequently had no time to study/learn English beyond the daily necessities. As a teenager, he attended the House Un-American Activities hearing to translate for his mother who was compelled to testify: an early lesson in so-called justice gone amok. Then, after the Second World War, as a young American soldier with electri-



Photo by Gudrun Langolf

cian's journeyman skills and a proven language talent, he was with occupation forces in Berlin and served there until he turned 25.

He raised his family, a son and an adopted daughter. Later, here in Canada, quit his job to care for his ailing partner of 27 years. For eight and half years, he experienced most of the issues confronting most caregivers struggling with the lack of adequate support systems.

Playing the cello with the 90-member Vancouver Little Nights Orchestra brings him pleasure and joy. Last year, Don's very green thumb saw him grow five months worth of tomatoes, some pineapple (!) peppers, spices and herbs.

He helped to establish the East End Food Co-op, worked on the expansion of the Reach Medical Clinic, as well as the beginning of CCEC (Credit Union) and the Mountain Equipment Co-op.

Based on observations and life experience, Don has a number of strongly held opinions. “Seniors know about environmental issues. We cannot afford to ignore climate justice. We have to make more people understand.” (The Suzuki's Seniors Advisory Council benefits from Don's participation.) “Ageism, racism and sexism just divide us and must be eliminated, the sooner the better.”

When others tease that his mind is everywhere, he says, “...that's better than having no mind.” Almost, as if to make the point about his helping nature, his phone rang three times with people seeking info/advice while we were sipping our coffee.

As Don says, turning 65 does not mean we disappear; our intelligence and experience are there and still expanding. I can recommend sitting with a friend and over a coffee or tea, just listen to their life's story. You will be amazed – I sure was!





Craig and Judy Gray, Wilbur and Jan Wostradowski, and Dan Wack are members of the Steering Committee for the newly formed Kootenay Council of Seniors Associations (KCOSA).

## New COSCO branch formed in Kootenays

### Kootenay Council of Seniors is off to a flying start as numerous local groups of seniors apply to become affiliates

**K**OOTENAY COUNCIL of Seniors Associations (KCOSA) was initially founded when Craig and Judy Gray, both COSCO workshop facilitators, approached the B.C. Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations, and asked their permission to establish a Kootenay Branch of COSCO.

Two Seniors organizations were re-

quired for this formation. They are the West Kootenay/Boundary Regional Council of Seniors (a branch of Senior Citizens Association of BC) and West Kootenay Lake Retired Teachers.

We had our first Formation Meeting November 20, 2014, with 17 local seniors advocates present and signed the COSCO Branch application at that time.

Also at this meeting a Steering Committee of five members was chosen to establish KCOSA's By-Laws and Procedures for the March 18, 2015 Annual General Meeting.

Presently we have four organizations as members for a total of 1,400 local seniors as affiliates in less than

three months.

We have numerous other local seniors groups applying to join, and hope to be well over 4,000 senior affiliates by the end of the year.

COSCO's Kootenay Branch's purpose is to make available to Kootenay Seniors the Advocacy of a united front that has been missing for seniors in our area.

KCOSA's goal is to reach out to all Kootenay seniors, assist them in all their chosen endeavours, and to promote local seniors in participating in their local seniors associations.

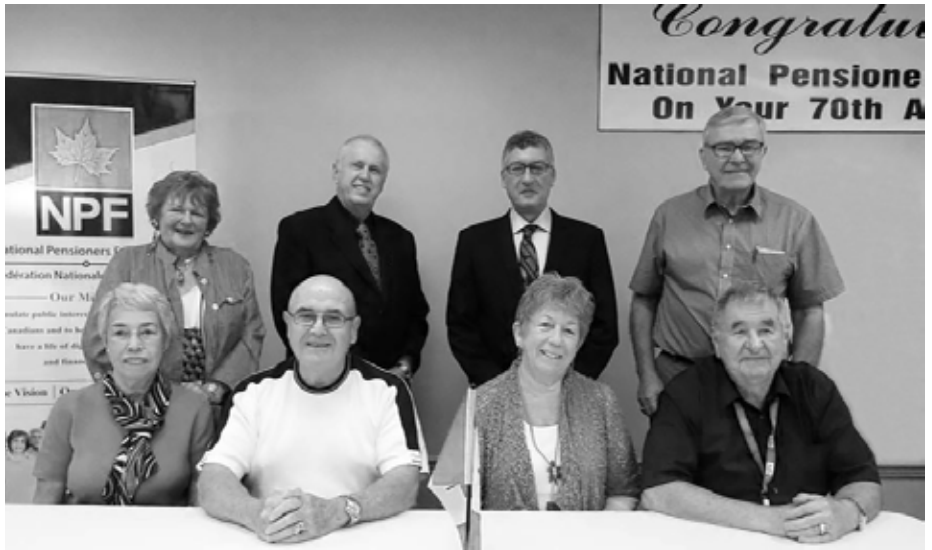
Our motto: "Seniors working with Seniors."

# An active year of advocacy

By Pat Brady, Secretary  
National Pensioners Federation

**C**OSCO is one of the member organizations of the National Pensioners Federation and has been very active in contributing to the finances, policies, procedures, and organizational elements of NPF for many years. What follows is a brief summary of some of the activities of NPF during the past few months:

- Made representations to the Canadian House of Commons committees dealing with the federal “Fair Elections Act” and was invited to testify before the H of C committee dealing with a Bill which proposed one “point of contact” at the federal level on matters relating to the death of a citizen (instead of having to contact various federal agencies (e.g. OAS, CPP, Internal Revenue, GAIN, etc.). NPF supported the Bill and it was eventually passed in the House.
- NPF has co-applied with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers on a charter challenge re postal delivery changes. (Please see NPF web site.)
- Engaged with other seniors organizations in attempts to see a new Canadian Health Accord negotiated between the provinces and the federal government. (The previous Accord expired in 2014.)
- Established four “portfolios” within NPF (Housing, Health, Communications and Outreach, and Finance) and is seeking volunteers to serve on these committees/portfolios. The Terms of Reference can be found on the NPF web site [www.nationalpensionersfederation.ca](http://www.nationalpensionersfederation.ca). If you would be willing to serve, please email [patbrady@uniserve.com](mailto:patbrady@uniserve.com) with your contact information. Pat is the NPF Secretary.



The executive of the National Pensioners Federation

- NPF is cooperating with the National Association of Federal Retirees, veterans, and other national groups in opposing “target benefit pension plans.” Again, see the NPF website for more information.
- Entered into discussions with the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada in respect to the observance of and actions on October 1, 2015 – The International Day of Older Persons. Member organizations of NPF have been urged to hold some form of “event” to mark the day.
- Representatives of NPF met with federal government officials and pension industry leaders to discuss pension reform urging stable, adequate and dependable income in retirement.
- Diversity Canada Federation and the NPF argued before the Canadian Radio-television, and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) that the 30 day cancellation for home phone, internet, and broadcast service policy was unfair to consumers. The CRTC agreed with the points we raised and announced that as of January 1, 2015 you may cancel at any time and without the 30 day notice.
- In November, NPF representatives attended the biannual meeting of the Service Canada Seniors Advisory Council in Toronto. Approximately 12 seniors’ organizations were represented and gave considerable input in respect to Service Canada’s programmes which affect seniors.
- Also in November, our representatives attended the Canadian Health Coalition’s “Fighting Privatization Conference”. The conference included an excellent and comprehensive review of what is wrong with privatization in the health sector. Following the conference, lobbying of federal politicians occurred with the subject raised including a new Canada Health Accord, Pharmacare, single tier universal health system, transfer of health care dollars from the federal government to the provinces, and the need for a Canada-wide comprehensive seniors care plan. Readers may wish to check out the Canadian Health Coalition’s web site at [healthcoalition.ca](http://healthcoalition.ca)

# Senior isolation – are there solutions?

By Barb Mikulec  
Chair, COSCO Housing Committee

**H**ousing needs are first and foremost in people's minds: can we afford it, will our income be able to meet payments for rent, utilities, cable and food?

What about parking and pets?

All of these questions come to mind in thinking of our housing needs.

As we age we may need to think of an appropriate housing model with care, perhaps we need medical help, meal preparation, cleaning and companionship.

Quite a reasonable list of needs, or is it just a wish list?

Imagine if you are culturally in a minority in a care facility and the food choices are not customary dishes that you might enjoy?

Food is often cooked off premises and is generic. Wouldn't it be great if there were more choices to suit the residents?

Another concern is diminished eyesight or hearing.

As we age and some of our seniors will live for many years in retirement, our bodies also age.

Our eyesight or hearing may not be as acute. Some seniors are both blind and deaf.

Several deaf seniors lived in separate facilities but now have been welcomed into an assisted living home in Surrey for three residents.

Their attitude, personality and outlook changed dramatically as to be more positive, being with others.

The staff is learning to sign with the clients who are more communicative as they chat with each other.

Vincent Kennedy of the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of

Hearing reports that two Deaf-Blind siblings living in Burnaby and Vancouver would love to be together in the same building, as the quality of their lives would then be tremendously improved.

Three Deaf-Blind residents in three separate care homes in Ladner, Maple Ridge and Kelowna would prefer to move into a facility which would give them improved quality of life, service and communication level for interactions with staff and residents.

Soon another Deaf-Blind lady in

Surrey may be ready to move to assisted living.

Why not prioritize senior housing which is proactive in planning for an inclusive, caring housing model with dignity?

I believe barriers can be overcome with thoughtful planning and consideration.

We are all aging, and we hope the transitions will be available for a variety of housing models which will meet our needs.

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## Seniors face a homelessness crisis due to funding cuts

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ces had to reduce outreach staff and programs due to a combination of a reduction in Federal Homeless Partnering Strategy (HPS) funding, and a redefinition of the "types" of homeless senior that can be served.

Those seniors who are homeless for the first time, or who are only at risk of homelessness, will fall through the cracks as they will not meet the criteria for funding under the new HPS Housing First programs.

The majority of the housing clients served by Seniors Services do not meet the new criteria for assistance.

They quite simply have not been homeless long enough as Housing First guidelines stipulate that a potential client must be homeless for six months or have been homeless three times over the past year.

Non Housing First projects now only represent 35% of the federal HPS funding. The Housing First principles work extremely well for the street homeless and those who are in and

out of homelessness, but will have adverse affects on many seniors.

Seniors find themselves homeless for many reasons. Mental and physical health issues or the passing of a long term partner can sometimes mean that the rent does not get paid and eviction notices are ignored.

The cost of housing in Metro Vancouver can often mean that savings are whittled away to nothing very fast, and many seniors can or will not admit there is a problem until it is too late.

The stress that these situations cause can often be devastating.

These are the folks that need assistance before they find themselves without a roof over their head.

The recent changes in HPS funding emphasize the need for a new strategy to assist seniors who are homeless and at risk of homelessness, especially those who are homeless for the first time.

Those seniors will be facing a housing crisis in 2015.

# Advocating for better care for seniors in BC

By Alice Edge  
COSCO Second Vice-President

**S**YSTEM CHANGE FOR SENIORS CARE, a sold-out all day event sponsored by the CCPA and BC Health Coalition Remaining Light Project, was held February 6 in Burnaby.

It was attended by 400 citizens – care givers, activists, politicians, government, service providers and staff – anxious to hear updates from the Ombudsperson, Kim Carter, and the Seniors Advocate, Isabel Mackenzie.

Marcy Cohen provided background on the successful appointment of the Seniors Advocate. She reminded everyone that it was the strength and power of the collective voice that made it happen.

Cohen also noted that the lack of independence of the Seniors Advocate office remains a sticking point. The

Advocate must speak out on broader issues beyond health, like income, housing, senior services and transportation.

By contrast, the Ombudsperson is independent and has five years to continue speaking about her 176 recommendations regarding seniors care.

Kim Carter provided an update to her report Best of Care Part 2. Her office investigates and reports on systemic problems, while the majority of complaints are of an individual nature. Two of the most important issues to focus on are analyzing if home and community care is meeting the needs and goals of citizens and developing an objective and measureable standard of care.

Isabel Mackenzie sees her mandate as being very broad. The social determinants of health (health care, personal support, housing, transpor-

tation and income) intersect with health or physical well being. A province-wide survey of residential care, home support and handyDART will be undertaken. The core functions of her office are: monitor key services, outreach and engagement, information and referral, and recommendations and report. Her goal is to allow seniors to live as they want to while respecting their choices and opinions.

The afternoon featured breakout sessions on Inequality and Poverty, Seniors Centers and Neighbourhood Houses, Transportation, Home Support, Residential Care and Affordable Housing. These provided an opportunity to strategize about how we can secure major improvements to fractured and inadequate services.

COSCO representatives attended each session and will provide feedback at a delegate meeting.

## 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 \$\_\_\_\_\_.

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(PLEASE PRINT)

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

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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.