

Message from Gudrun Langolf Acting President

It is December already – also the time of year when we wish each other Merry Christmas and “Happy Holidays”. From November 1 to January 15 there are more than 25 holidays observed by 7 of the world’s major religions... How appropriate then to wish everyone Happy Holidays and a Happy New Year!

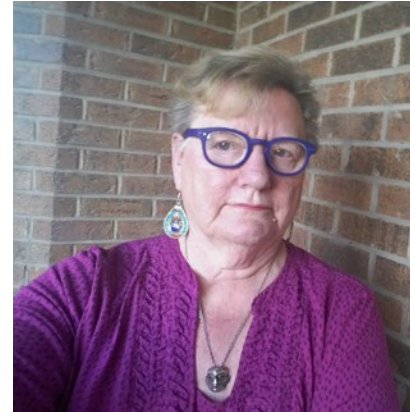
I wished to tell you that our President, Lorraine Logan was back. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Lorraine reports that her energy levels still fluctuate unpredictably. We specially wish her the best over the holiday and hope to see her at our Christmas social.

Thanks to real teamwork, the executive carries on without the president in the chair. Even so, she gives good advice and

provides welcome support. She arranged the recent appointments with our elected officials. That is not an easy job with so many other organizations also wanting to see the officials. As well, the new ministers are getting their offices and staffs in order and at the same time try to manage the incredible expectations of the electorate.

With the dramatic change in our Provincial Government, COSCO is getting to know the ‘players’ and insuring that the new ministers, as well as the opposition MLA’s stay aware of and pay attention to seniors’ issues, particularly for the vulnerable among us.

Your executive members participated in a daylong retreat and decided on the 3 major topics to push this coming year: Universal



by Gudrun Langolf,
COSCO A/President

Pharmacare, Homecare and Bill C-27 [federal pension reform act] while keeping watch for emerging issues.

Of course, those 3 topics do not exist in distinct silos; they overlap in many ways. Without income security, affordable housing, clean environment and access to timely healthcare none of us does well. Sheila Pither, our 2nd Vice President illustrated well in the last issue of the COSCO News: we cannot do everything but we can do something! The retreat was the first of a series to ensure that we work ‘smart’ because our volunteer time is precious.

Council Of Senior Citizens' Organizations Of BC (COSCO)

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About COSCO

COSCO is an umbrella organization that brings together 85 different seniors groups, representing around 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.

A major focus of COSCO's work is promoting good health. To this end, COSCO Seniors' Health and Wellness Institutes volunteers provide a series of free workshops on 43 topics ranging from Falls Prevention to Health Literacy. More than 30,000 people have attended these workshops.

COSCO News welcomes your letters and contributions.

E-mail cosconews.editor@coscobc.org
with copy to president@coscobc.org

WHAT HAPPENED / WHAT WE DID

Sept 14 - COSCO attended the Annual General Meeting of the **Jewish Seniors Alliance**, a longtime affiliate of COSCO.

Sept 15 - Several COSCO executive members attended the **Seniors' Advocate, Isobel MacKenzie's** launch of the latest report "Every Voice Counts Office of the Seniors Advocate Residential Care Survey Provincial Results September 2017"
<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2017/09/Provincial-Results-Final-HQ.pdf>

Sept 15 - Meeting with the **Honourable Judy Darcy**, Minister for Mental Health and Addictions – getting acquainted and outlining our areas of concern about seniors' mental health.



*Photo credit: Raymond Liens
L-R, Mohinder Grewal, Gudrun Langolf,
Hon Judy Darcy, Patrick Brady, Sheila Pither (Sept 15)*

Sept 22 - President Logan & first Vice President Gudrun Langolf were pleased to attend the annual BC Retired Teachers' dinner in Richmond. The BCRTA is a longtime Affiliate and supporter of COSCO.



*Photo credit: Barb Mikulec
R-L, Lorraine Logan,
Gudrun Langolf*

Oct 11 - "Dialogue" with Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, the **Hon Judy Darcy** at SFU. We are concerned about mental health issues affecting seniors.

Oct 20 - Met with **Hon. Selina Robinson**, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Housing, and Minister Responsible for TransLink to discuss the housing crisis for seniors around the province.



*Left to right Gudrun Langolf,
Roz Bailey, Hon. Selina
Robinson, Barb Mikulec*

Oct 26 - 'COSCO Health and Wellness Institute Conference'. Several executive members attended this conference which updated COSCO workshop information.

Several "newbies" participated and got to know workshop facilitators from around the province.

Oct 27 & 28 - Six COSCO executive members and delegates found the BC Health Coalition Regional Gathering and AGM worthwhile, memorable and used the opportunity to speak briefly with the Minister of Health, **Hon Adrian Dix** about homecare and universal pharmacare.



*The Hon. Adrian Dix,
Minister of Health*

Oct 30 - COSCO board retreat – established areas of particular focus for the coming year: Pharmacare, homecare & Bill C27.

Oct 31 - Follow-up Conference call with **Road/SafetyBC** about changes to testing the Ministry was contemplating.

Nov 2 - Phone follow-up with the **Seniors' Advocate Office** about transportation and seniors.

Nov 7 - Interview with **“Passenger Directed Vehicle Service”** [Taxies, Uber, HandyDart, etc] The transportation needs in BC vary widely. Our opinion is that it needs to be safe

and well regulated for the protection of drivers and passengers.

Nov 10 - Stakeholder of the Passenger Transportation Board - Meeting concerned itself mostly with taxi regulations including a discussion about updating the training manual for cab drivers. The conditions are not uniform in all BC communities. It may now be possible for cab owners to purchase refurbished, used taxis that are accessible for wheel chairs and other mobility devices.

Nov 17 - Linda Forsythe represented COSCO at a brief Minister’s Roundtable on Housing.

Seniors' Repair Service

The Senior Citizens' Repair Service provides low-cost minor house repairs, renovations and maintenance services for seniors 55 years and over and for people with disabilities in Metro Vancouver.

Services include plumbing, carpentry, electrical work, gas fitting, painting, yard work and general handyman services. All services are guaranteed for 30 days, and are performed by experienced trades people who are retired or semi-retired.

Sponsored by the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union Local 170.

Office hours are 9 AM to 12 Noon, Monday to Friday.

Phone: 604 529-1100

May Be Useful Info

BC HYDRO

Thanks to John Wynne for this update: BC Hydro has again re-introduced two free ways to save on your Hydro bill.

1. Receive an energy saving kit with energy and water-saving products such as LED bulbs and high-efficiency shower heads that you can install yourself.
2. Get a home energy assessment and energy-saving products installed by a professional contractor. You may also qualify for a refrigerator, furnace, and insulation.

From the **BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre** [via John Wynne] : as part of the BC Hydro Rate Design proceeding, the BC Utilities Commission ordered BC Hydro to create a pilot

Customer Emergency Fund (CEF) for residential customers who are facing arrears and/or are facing service disconnection and are in “temporary financial crisis”. We have collaborated with BC Hydro and others to design the pilot, and if all goes according to plan, it could be in place for June 1, 2018. The pilot would run for two years, with the possibility of extension if it is successful.

MEDICATION

(Thanks to Betty Bolton and Annette O’Connor)

When you go for your annual check-up, ask your doctor to review the medications you are taking, including non-prescribed and/or over-the-counter medications. This will check:

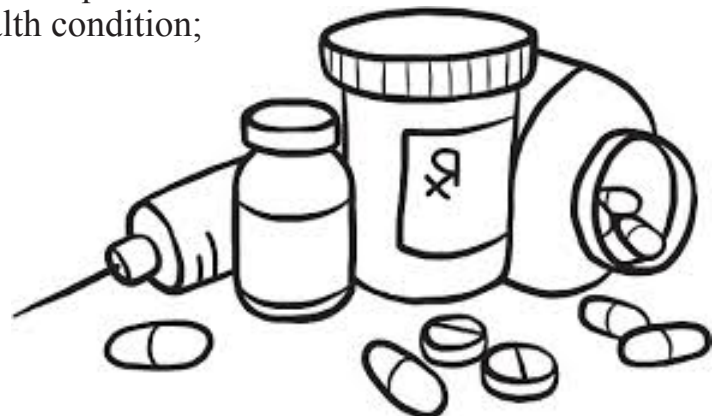
- If the medications you are taking are still required for your health condition;

- If the dosages you are taking are still appropriate to your age and health condition;
- If there is a possible interaction between your prescribed and over-the-counter medications

You may also wish to speak to your pharmacist regarding possible interactions between prescribed and over-the-counter medications. Some pharmacists even make appointments to discuss the issue.

SHINGLES VACCINE

Thanks to Jerry Gosling: Check with your physician or professional health care provider about the **new shingles vaccine** and if it is advisable for you to get it.



National News Flashes



There is a lot happening in health care around the country. These flashes are just a few that we thought would interest you:

MANITOBA – On September 13 Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister announced that his government is considering introducing a health-care tax based on income. He said this is necessary because of the cut in Canada Health Transfer payments. The Premier says it is either this or a cut in services. Rock and a hard place!

SASKATCHEWAN – Medical technicians have warned the government that it needs to take immediate action to fix the crushing workload that they face. Many technicians reported that they cannot do their jobs properly, resulting in burnout, family problems, and total dissatisfaction with the service level that they are providing.

QUEBEC – New regulations allow volunteers to perform construction work in public sector institutions, including health facilities. CUPE and other unions are fighting this move but so far to no avail. COSCO has been warning about this type of initiative for

years. We insist that volunteers should not take jobs away from trained workers.

REGINA – Health care services to people age 65+ who find it hard to leave home are visited by a team from the Health Call Program. On the team are nurse practitioners, paramedics and pharmacists who provide in-home assessment and treatment. One thousand visits were made last year and approximately 350 of those patients avoided hospitalization.

ONTARIO – The Wynne government is setting up a new agency to make Personal Support Workers (PSWs) provincial employees. This will take publicly - funded home care away from the profit and not-for-profit agencies that provide it now. Lots of opposition as you can imagine but the government sounds pretty determined.

ONTARIO – Rallies at the provincial legislature are calling on MPPs to get Bill 33 back on the agenda for third reading. That bill would order that seniors in nursing homes receive 4 hours of hands-on care every day. That would be a model that British Columbia could adopt.

ONTARIO - Eric Hoskins, the Ontario health minister, has approved a new government agency called the Self-Directed Personal Support Services Ontario (SD-PSSO) - an awkward title but a clear purpose. In a move towards self-directed care patients would be able to personally choose their Personal Support Worker (PSW) and schedule services at the times they want. Lots of opposition but Hoskins is determined to get this plan underway

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Coquitlam, BC - November 17: People with severe addiction and mental illness to get help at new centre on River-view lands – announcement

Victoria, BC – Nov 25: Testing for driver competency will no longer be triggered by age. When someone has to take a driving test, it will not include the Drivable computer test.

COSCO is working with Providence Health Care on course material for our affiliates about what seniors can expect when they have to come to a hospital.

[Thanks to Sheila Pither](#)

Call for a National Universal Pharmacare Program

On November 17, several COSCO reps met with MLA Anne Kang, Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors together with Amanda van Baarsen, Ministerial Assistant to Health Minister Adrian Dix. We stressed the need for BC to participate in the national universal Pharmacare program for which the provincial/territorial health ministers have received federal support to explore the feasibility of implementing.

We pointed out that even with the Fair Pharmacare program in BC, gaps remain. 1 in 10 Canadians chooses not to fill prescriptions because of cost. Fair Pharmacare has deductibles and co-payments, and does not cover all drugs, meaning that some people with low to moderate incomes may not be able to afford prescribed medications. On top of that some drug related supplies are not covered (e.g., diabetic strips), so costs add up.

The push for more in-home care means that many drugs and ancillary therapies (e.g., physiotherapy or occupational therapy) that would have been provided in hospital are not covered when care is provided in the community. A universal pharmacare program would help alleviate these extra costs.

Polypharmacy is concerning and expensive: 1 in 3 seniors receive one or more medications that are a risk for older patients, while 1 in 5 hospitalizations is caused by prescription overuse, underuse or misuse. Having the right prescription(s) at the right time in the right amounts is important to ensure good health outcomes for British Columbians.

Recent research by the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Officer along with University of BC professor Dr. Steve Morgan indicate that single payer pharmacare would save Canadians \$4 to \$7 billion every year. Right now in Canada there is a patchwork of purchasers meaning that Canadians pay much more for their drugs than any country other than the United States.

We see the following pillars are needed for an effective National Pharmacare plan:

First, a **single payer** to maximize ability to negotiate low prices with pharmaceutical companies, and who could take other measures to reduce costs including high dispensing fees and admin costs in private insurance plans

Second, a **National Formulary** based on evidence-based

assessments to ensure drugs will provide health benefits to the population. We are glad to see that the current BC Government has increased funding to the UBC Therapeutics Initiative which conducts this type of research.

Third, a **Drug Safety Agency** must be put in place to assess adverse drug reactions over the long term in the population and to monitor health impacts of polypharmacy and inappropriate prescribing.

We look forward to learning more of the status of universal pharmacare for our province and nationally and to finding out the results of the feasibility study on national universal pharmacare program as announced following Health Ministers meeting held in Edmonton in Oct 2017. COSCO will continue to work with many partners, including the BC Health Coalition to advocate for pharmacare.



by Leslie Gaudette

New Federal Funding Brings New Hope For Quality Home Care For Frail Seniors In BC

[Text of a November 17 COSCO presentation to Anne Kang, the B.C. Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors].

We would all like to be able to live in our homes and not in an institution for as long as possible in our “golden years.” To be able to do so with dignity and safely we need to receive high quality, integrated, and regulated home health care services.

Unfortunately, for the last 16 years in BC, we have experienced ongoing funding cutbacks and underfunding for home care programs for services for housebound, frail seniors. The result has been an ever-increasing reliance on the private sector or on volunteers to provide essential care and support. All kinds of unregulated services for vulnerable seniors have expanded exponentially to fill the gap. Seniors’ access to quality home care is unpredictable,

very expensive, and depends primarily on ability to pay and not on need.

Seniors with low to moderate incomes (that is most of us) can be forced into long-term care prematurely, which is a much more expensive option for government than home care. They may have to rely on care in hospital emergency departments when their unmonitored symptoms get out of control; they may languish in hospital beds

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

702 – 4353 Halifax Street, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 5Z4

Telephone: (604) 444-4300

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

at a cost of at least \$1,000 a day when they could be receiving quality care at home instead. Professional hospital employees have also told us that some seniors with dementia or mental health problems are being discharged early from a hospital (against medical advice) with nowhere to go and no plan for their care.

So we at COSCO are very pleased that under the recent bilateral (Canada-B.C.) agreement on health care funding, the federal government is now providing B.C. with an additional **\$785.7 million** over the next 10 years specifically for “better home care including addressing critical home care infrastructure requirements.” This funding began to flow in April of this year. A Health Canada News release of February 17, 2017 states that the funding is expected to reduce “the number of patients in hospital who could be supported and better cared for at home.”¹ That goal is very clear but we believe B.C. can do much more.

We are in full support of the accountability and reporting

requirements mentioned in this News Release that include the development of “performance indicators and mechanisms for annual reporting to citizens, as well as detailed plans on how these funds will be spent, over and above existing programs.”

¹ *Government of Canada, Health Canada (2017). Canada Reaches Health Funding Agreement with British Columbia. News Release, February 17, 2017.*

<https://www.Canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2017/02/canada-reaches-healthfunding-agreement-with-britishcolimbia.html>

We understand that with this federal home care funding some other provinces are forging ahead with new home care plans and accountability measures. Examples are the Saskatchewan government’s new pilot projects “Home First/ Quick Response” and the “Seniors House Call Program” and the Ontario government’s new home care agency that is a publicly accountable government

operated program.

As long-time advocates for quality home care for all seniors in B.C., COSCO is pleased that additional federal dollars are now available for home care and so we would now like to take this opportunity to ask you:

- 1. How far along is the B.C. Ministry of Health with a new home care plan to improve home care access and quality care for seniors? And,**
- 2. What public accountability measures for this new home care funding are in place?**



by Kathleen Jamieson, Chair of the COSCO Health Committee

What is Bill C27?

Liberals break pension plan promise with Bill C-27

Bill C-27, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, is an attack on the retirement security of Canadians.

This bill will allow employers to shift from good, **defined benefit plans** that provide secure and predictable pension benefits, into the much less secure form of **target benefits**. If passed, this bill would open the door to a disturbing trend of shifting all the risk of pension plans onto workers and retirees.

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that defined

benefit pension plans that workers and retirees have already paid into **should not be retroactively changed** into target benefit plans. Yet, this is exactly what Bill C-27 will do.

On October 19, 2016, the anniversary of the Liberal government's election, Finance Minister Bill Morneau introduced his Target Benefit Plan (Bill C-27). Pensions of federal employees and in federally regulated industries are the first targets. You can take this to the bank: others will follow! There was no advance notice to unions, pension plan members or retirees, and no public consultation.

Unions and retiree groups were quick to condemn the Liberals for resurrecting the Harper Conservatives' target benefit plan agenda, abandoned in 2014.

Changes to the pension landscape, through the introduction of a target benefit plan designed to allow employers and governments to abandon their pension promises and legal obligations, must be made with real, thorough public debate and consultation that includes pensioners.

The BC Retired Teachers Association and COSCO have teamed up to campaign against passage of Bill C-27.



How to book a free workshop for your seniors' group

Over the last few years, 25,000 people throughout BC have participated in the COSCO Seniors' Health and Wellness Institute's free health promotion workshops. We now offer workshops on 43 different issues and topics of particular interest to seniors.

Each 60 to 90 minute workshop is available free of charge to any seniors' group of 10 or more. A trained senior volunteer presents practical and usable information. These workshops are not intended to provide any specific legal, medical or financial advice, just a better understanding and practical suggestions.

To book a workshop for your group, please contact:
Gordon Dainard, Workshop Coordinator
eMail: ws_coord@coscoworkshops.org
Phone: 1-604-820-1300



From Our Prince George Affiliate

This is testimony on behalf of the PG Seniors Resource Centre to the Federal Human Resources panel by **Lola-Dawn Fennell**, Executive Director, Prince George Council of Seniors on October 3rd. 2017

The Prince George Seniors Resource Centre is open six hours a day, or about 1,500 hours annually, and assists around 3,500 phone calls and over 3,000 walk-in clients. Some clients seek specific information and can follow up themselves, but the ma-

ajority come to us in crisis – financially, emotionally, psychologically, and physically. The Canadian Census identifies 45.1% of Prince George seniors, 65 plus, as low-income. We see frustration, anger, tears, and hopelessness, as well as shame in seniors – often single – barely managing from month to month.

Renters owe back rent and may face eviction and homelessness. Rent leaves little to live on. Homeowners need repairs – especially roofs

and furnaces – or routine maintenance such as painting, cleaning eaves-troughs and snow removal beyond their means. Both renters and homeowners struggle with utilities. We see more seniors falling behind each winter, having utilities cut off, unable to scrape together amounts owed or deposits to have services reinstated. When already stretched to your monthly income and emotional and physical limits, a broken-down furnace or bill collection notice or one more hour of caregiving can

become a last straw. We also see suicidal seniors.

Clients routinely express feeling unheard in this rushed, impersonal, and highly technological world. We often discover their crisis is more complex than originally presented as they are isolated by depression and other mental illnesses. However, they are still proud northerners who worked hard for families and homes, never accepted handouts, and do not expect charity now.

Despite these values, poverty erodes health. Simple personal hygiene is a struggle when they cannot get in and out of bathtubs safely, or lift partners in and out. Laundry is a struggle when facilities are downstairs. Diets suffer when they cannot manage transportation to grocery stores or carrying groceries

upstairs. Healthy fruits and vegetables are the first items cut from diets due to poverty or lack of teeth or dentures. Many must choose which crucial prescriptions to ignore each month, and lack of appropriate eyeglasses and hearing aids isolates further. We also learn about literacy challenges, especially computer literacy.

Our Resource Centre can refer clients to many sources of assistance, can explain benefits and help fill out applications, but our efforts are seldom immediately helpful and consequently not very reassuring. Application processes take time and waitlists are everywhere.

We are seeing several worrisome trends grow, such as seniors with maxed-out credit cards and payday loans with high interest rates

as well as Canada Revenue Agency debts. Assistance is not keeping up with living costs. For example, the maximum rent that qualifies for a SAFER subsidy in BC has only increased 9% since 2005 while rents have increased 34%. The BC senior supplement has remained unchanged at \$49.30 for the past 30 years. Younger people also struggle, resulting in more elder abuse. The technological gap between those with access to information and those without is spreading. Unfortunately, I have more questions about these trends than solutions.

I wish I could bring a busload of our clients here to share their own personal stories. Thank you for allowing me to witness on their behalf.

Here is the link to the hearing:

<https://openparliament.ca/committees/human-resources/42-1/64/>

The Prince George Council of Seniors has operated the Seniors Resource Centre at 7th and Victoria since 2013.

*Lola-Dawn Fennell,
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