



COSCO News

Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C.

Election Edition



www.coscobc.org

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

COSCO BC is the voice of BC Seniors. We represent approximately 85,000 seniors and 75 affiliated seniors' groups in all parts of British Columbia.

COSCO BC Election Special: Final Voting Day is Saturday, October 24, 2026

What you need to know about the BC provincial election

This special section of the COSCO News includes important information from Elections BC about how to vote along with crucial information from our COSCO Elections Committee regarding 10 key issues facing seniors in our province. We hope you will use this information as a guide to determine which candidates will best respond to your needs.

The population of adults age 65+ continues to rise in BC and seniors now account for nearly one in five residents of our province or about 1.2 million persons. Due to improvements in health care in past decades, we now enjoy longer, healthier lives than our parents and grandparents. We are major contributors of volunteer labour for the benefit of our families, friends, faith groups and communities. Our unpaid work also includes caregiving for our grandchildren, spouses, and sometimes our very elderly parents. While most of us benefit from social policies to reduce seniors' poverty, many must live on low incomes, with about 600,000 seniors living on \$3,000 or less per month, including about 300,000 living on less than \$2,000. The challenge to our provincial government is to ensure our communities are age-friendly and that social structures are in place to enable older adults to live their lives fully for the benefit of all.

COSCO BC urges all parties to make seniors issues a major part their platforms. Improvements to existing services for seniors will also make life easier for everyone - for adult children caring for their parents, for housing and transit for low-wage workers, and for non-profits and volunteers currently carrying the immense burden of serving community needs.

COSCO BC asks all provincial parties in this 2026 election to commit to:

- a seniors' strategy and plan with accountability targets and timelines
- accessible age-friendly communities through housing, mobility and local planning
- seniors' centres as a core community-based service
- universal home support as an essential public service that forms the corner stone of team-based primary care
- deeply affordable non-market housing
- address inequities in health, and transportation in rural and northern settings

What We Want

The following are COSCO BC's specific requests for party platforms followed by the reasons why we have made these requests.

1. COSCO BC calls for a Ministry of Seniors

Our reasons: COSCO BC would like to see a Minister who will be appointed with responsibility and funding to develop a Seniors Strategy with targets and timelines. This will ensure a myriad of policies and programs are coordinated among the various government ministries responsible for health care, housing, transportation, and social development, and others. A funded Seniors Strategy aligned with Age-Friendly Communities will include community health care, and affordable, accessible housing, integrated with public transportation both within and between communities.

2. Ageism and Human Rights

COSCO BC asks all parties to commit to supporting the efforts of Canadian seniors and allied groups to combat ageism and support the efforts at the United Nations to establish a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

Our reasons: Discrimination based on age (ageism) seriously impacts seniors. Ageism negatively affects the financial well-being of seniors, the ability of seniors to access appropriate health care and the ability of seniors to live in their homes with dignity. The adverse effects of ageism can be particularly serious for low income seniors. The United Nations is currently working to establish a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Recommendations to address this issue have recently been adopted by the UN General Assembly and work is underway at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Ageism is a pervasive and multifaceted form of discrimination that infringes upon the human rights of older persons. It manifests in various forms and leads to significant health, social, and economic challenges for our aging population in British Columbia and in Canada. Guided by the World Health Organization's Global Report on Ageism, COSCO together with the Canadian Coalition Against Ageism is committed to eliminating ageism

through interventions that are backed by real evidence. These include education, intergenerational initiatives, and the development and enforcement of robust policies and laws. These efforts aim to protect the dignity and rights of older adults, ensuring they are valued and respected members of society.

3. Stable funding for Seniors Centres and Neighbourhood Houses

COSCO BC calls on government to provide ongoing, operating, sustainable funding and resources for seniors' centres and neighbourhood houses, to ensure our seniors can remain healthy and contributing members of their communities.

Our reasons: The seniors' population in BC is increasing. Seniors live longer and have diverse backgrounds and diverse needs. Seniors' Centres and Neighbourhood Houses offer a variety of programs and activities including fitness, recreation, food services, and leisure opportunities for social interaction that support the well-being of older adults.

These centres play key roles in our communities by keeping seniors out of hospital, improving our quality of life, engaging with the broader community, addressing social isolation, providing educational programs, as well as helping seniors navigate the system to access government services and programs that they deserve.

4. Integrated Community Health Care

COSCO BC calls for action to build and strengthen a continuum of care that will support seniors to age-in-place.

- A. Provide core, sustainable funding for *seniors' centres and neighbourhood houses* that offer a wide range of programs and activities and opportunities for social interaction that support the well-being of older adults. Importantly, seniors Centres help older adults navigate through the myriad of programs and services available.
- B. Continue the work to build a strong *primary care foundation* by supporting the growth and development of the public Community Health Centre model that offers team-based care and longitudinal care.
- C. Develop a funding model for *extended health benefits* to ensure that treatment, equipment, and devices that support health and independence such as walkers, wheelchairs, hearing assistive devices, and lens replacement are affordable and accessible.
- D. Improve the affordability and responsiveness of the *Home Support program* by eliminating the co-pay charge to clients as well as increasing the flexibility of the program to better meet care needs in order to reduce or delay the need for long-term care.

- E. Work to increase the existing supply of *affordable residential care options* appropriate for a range of care needs, e.g. supportive housing, assisted living and long-term care.

Our reasons: Services that contribute to the health and wellbeing of seniors have not kept up with increased demand.

- The rate of access to home support has decreased by 7%,
- Wait-times for surgery have increased,
- The number of subsidized Long-Term Care (LTC) beds per 1,000 seniors aged 75+ has decreased,
- Wait times for LTC have lengthened
- 84% of people waiting in hospital for safe discharge are seniors. These are mainly people waiting to get into LTC.

Patchwork initiatives to address issues in isolation are ineffective. A system-wide approach is needed to build a continuum of care that will support seniors to age-in-place.

5. Build an adequate stock of safe, secure, appropriate, and affordable housing

COSCO BC calls on government to ensure the rapid construction of safe, secure, appropriate and affordable not-for-profit housing designated for seniors and others who live on fixed incomes.

Our reasons: Currently, each level of government depends on for-profit developers to provide all types of housing. However, it has become increasingly difficult to persuade industry to build affordable housing stock when the profit levels do not meet their expectations.

Affordable housing is defined as ‘no more than 30% of household income before taxes’ which for seniors means rents of between \$600 - \$800 per month.

Affordable housing is built and operated by government agencies, co-operatives, not-for-profit societies, and faith-based organizations, and provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains affordable in perpetuity. Governments can also release publicly owned land to vastly reduce the capital costs of building.

6. Ensure RENTS are 30% of income

COSCO BC calls on government to increase SAFER assistance levels to an amount that will ensure no senior ends up homeless due to the cost or unavailability of appropriate housing.

Our reasons: Seniors who are renters are often only one or two pension cheques away from being homeless. The private sector needs significant public sector investment in order to accommodate low-income households – often older women living alone – with truly affordable rents.

The recent increases in the SAFER (Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters) rent ceilings to \$1150 remain far below the average market rent of \$2000 per month in October 2026 for a one-bedroom apartment in British Columbia.

7. Vacancy Control for Renters

COSCO BC call on government to protect affordability and address extreme rent increases in British Columbia by implementing vacancy control.

Our reasons: BC is facing a housing crisis, and the brunt of this crisis is borne by the 1.5 million British Columbians who rent their homes. ‘Vacancy control’ ties allowable rent increases to a housing unit, rather than to individual tenancy agreements, which is the current model of rent control in B.C. Without vacancy control, rental prices between tenants continue to rise far out of proportion to inflation or wage increases.

The current model of rent control incentivizes landlords to end long term tenancies in order to seek higher rents in tight rental markets. This hits low-and-fixed income tenants the hardest, and contributes to the province’s homelessness and mental health crisis. Tying rent control to the unit will remove the economic incentive to end tenancies and decrease the number of "renovictions" and other types of bad-faith evictions.

8. Reverse changes to the Property Tax Deferment Program

COSCO BC calls on government to reverse the change to the property tax deferment program announced in BC Budget 2026.

Our reasons: Seniors who are homeowners have been able to access BC's Property Tax Deferment Program for decades. The Program helps eligible seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children meet property tax obligations

Budget 2026 changed the interest terms for property taxes deferred for 2026 and beyond from simple interest to interest compounded monthly at prime plus 2%. These changes will substantially increase the cost of deferred taxes and can erode the home equity of people with modest homes and increasing property taxes who depend on the program; A program that was intended to help British Columbians remain in their homes should not undermine their financial security.

9. Increase the BC Seniors Supplement

COSCO BC calls on government to increase the seniors supplement, index the supplement to the rate of inflation, and increase the income threshold to extend the seniors supplement to more seniors.

Our reasons: A key priority for COSCO BC in the 2026 Provincial election is the need to address inadequacies in the BC Seniors Supplement program. OAS and GIS incomes are indexed to the rate of inflation. However, the BC Seniors Supplement was last increased to \$99.30 per month in 2021. BC still has one of the lowest rates of seniors' supplement in Canada and seniors are falling further and further behind in this expensive province.

10. Comprehensive, Interconnected Public Transportation

COSCO BC calls for the following improvements to public passenger transportation in BC.

- a. Identify a stable, new long-term source of funding for all public transportation services. Establish standard safety protocols and training in every corner of the province. Provide transit and HandyDART service to underserved areas.
- b. Provide minimal or no cost transit passes for conventional and HandyDART transit for low income and physically challenged riders.
- c. Implement a policy for publicly funded transit and HandyDART services that all systems must be operated in-house or by contract with non-profit entities.
- d. The new funding identified for supporting transit must also support intercity transportation on unserved routes. In some cases, the expansion of Health Connections service would be suitable.
- e. The Vancouver Island Rail Corridor and the BC Rail line between North Vancouver and Prince George offer great opportunities for the development of viable passenger transportation services. They both enjoy strong public support and provide needed capacity at a lower cost compared to new highway construction. The province must develop a plan to take advantage of these opportunities. It is long past due that the province establishes an integrated public transportation network in B.C. and end competitive relationships between transit authorities and operators.
- f. Develop timed, convenient intermodal connections between all public transportation systems in the province. Provide physical assistance as required to ensure the transfers are convenient and accessible to all users.

Our reasons: Due to financial and/or health circumstances, driving is not an option for many older adults. Without good public transportation, many seniors are challenged travelling within their community for shopping, social, entertainment and medical purposes.

- Transit systems in all areas of the province are experiencing demand for more service, while their operating budgets remain static or face reductions. Many rural areas have minimal or no transit and HandyDART service. Areas served by BC Transit have only property taxes to fund their share of transit. The transit levy on ICBC insurance could have overcome this challenge, but it has been rejected outright. HandyDART provides a critical link to communities and quality of service, training and funding should be standardized to ensure safe affordable transportation.
- Poverty rates for older adults in BC have been rising steadily for the last 20 years. More than one in four BC residents have an after-tax income less than \$25,000. These people have hard choices to make between rent, food, medication and transportation. The BC Poverty Strategy identified accessible affordable transit as a key poverty reduction action.
- Many BC Transit systems and HandyDART services are contracted out to foreign owned, for-profit companies. When profit takes precedence over service, passengers suffer. Tax dollars are being sent to offshore accounts, this must stop.
- Non-driving older adults in rural areas require intercity public transportation to access much needed health care in regional centres. In many communities this service does not exist thereby denying seniors from receiving the health care they require. Or, huge stress is put on family and friends to drive.
- Rail offers the potential for safe, efficient passenger service. BC has two abandoned/underused railway corridors that could be revitalized to provide intercity passenger service in key areas of the province.
- Many intercity journeys require transfers between transport modes. For example, a single trip may require travel by transit, intercity bus and BC ferries. Making these connections can be challenging for older adults. Provision of public intercity transport in northern and rural areas would go a long way to address many obstacles seniors throughout British Columbia encounter.

COSCO BC and its affiliated members are grateful to live, work, and be in relation with people from traditional and unceded territories, across all regions of British Columbia. We are committed to reconciliation, decolonization, and building relationships in our communities.

2026 Provincial Election



A provincial general election has been called. Final Voting Day is October 24, 2026.

Voters will elect 93 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Each Member represents an electoral district (or riding) and has a seat in the provincial Legislature. Elections BC will deliver Where to Vote cards to already registered voters before advance voting starts on October 16. Look for yours in the mail and remember to bring it with you when you vote. The following is the essentials list. Much more information is available on the website elections.bc.ca/2026-provincial-election/. If the computer and website baffle you, call 1-800-661-8683 and give them the list of your questions.

Who can vote

If you are: a Canadian citizen, 18 or older on October 24, 2026, and a resident of B.C. since April 23, 2026.

Ways to Vote

There are four (4) ways to vote in the provincial general election.

1. **Vote at advance voting: October 16-21 | 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (local time)**

- Advance voting is a convenient option for all voters. Voters can vote at any advance voting location.

2. **Vote on Final Voting Day: October 24 | 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Pacific time)**

- Voters have an assigned voting place on Final Voting Day. Your assigned voting place will be listed on your Where to Vote card.

3. **Vote at a district electoral office:**

- From when offices open until 4 p.m. (Pacific time) on October 24. You can vote at any district electoral office once it is open. The list of district electoral offices is on the website under Ways to Vote.

4. **Vote by mail:**

- Unfortunately, this is not helpful if you are reading this, since we are past the deadline for mail-in votes.

Voter ID

All voters must prove their identity and residential address before voting at the poll places. There are three ways to do this. Option 1 is listed here. (Note: There is a long list of the other ID that can be used to prove your identity and address. Go the Elections BC 2026 website and look for voter ID)

Option 1

Show **one** of these pieces of ID: (Be sure to bring it with you.)

- BC Identification Card (BCID)
- BC Services Card (with photo)
- Another card issued by the Government of B.C. of Canada that shows your name, photo and address
- Certificate of Indian Status

The Candidate list is published on the website where you can see the names of your candidates and their party.

<https://elections.bc.ca/2026-provincial-election/candidate-list/>