

We've moved!
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Advocate

Official news magazine of the BC Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)

Vol. 26 No. 4, Winter 2023

**PREMIER EBY:
STRONGER TOGETHER**

**Public libraries
& seniors**

**Seniors' housing
a right for all**

**Don Davies:
head-to-toe
healthcare**

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In this edition

We have an exciting last edition of The Advocate for 2023, with contributions from Premier David Eby, MP Don Davies, and Isobel Mackenzie, who reflects on both the past and future of seniors in B.C. after a decade as Seniors Advocate. BC FORUM member Barb Mikulec provides some insights into the state of housing for seniors and we at The Advocate highlight the benefits of public libraries for seniors and the great services they offer. We hope you have a wonderful holiday time and a happy new year!

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We respectfully acknowledge that the BC FORUM office is located on unceded lands of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nations.

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We have a voice: BCFED lobby 2023

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

It seems I constantly start off each edition of *The Advocate* pondering how we could possibly be at this time of year already, and here I am once again trying to figure out how 2023 is so soon coming to a close. The year started with great fanfare from those of us who worked so diligently to advocate for Bill C-228, short titled The Pension Protection Bill, which received Royal assent on April 27. From past articles in *The Advocate* most of you will know this bill ensures that when a company becomes insolvent or files for bankruptcy they can no longer grab funds from employee pension plans to pay off creditors. Also, workers and some of their benefits have raised a few steps higher in the list of creditors to be paid.

While the year started on that jubilant note, hopes are waning that a Canada Pharmacare Act will be enacted this year as per conditions of the supply and confidence agreement. Health Minister Mark Holland is pushing the “just wait and see, we’ll do it” line; however Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland is setting major roadblocks in its path by stating that a single payer system will be far too costly even though the Parliamentary Budget Officer

has shown time and time again that there will be massive cost savings in the long run. The time is now to pick up your phones, pens, and get on those keyboards. Call, write and email your MPs, the Minister of Health, and every member of the Treasury Board, to lobby for universal pharmacare. It’s been cited as “doable” by health-care experts, as well as former health ministers. Maybe a big push right now is all that’s needed to make it reality.



Meeting with government ©Sam Wiese



The lobbyist gather ©Sam Wiese

Keeping with “big pushes”, the Executive Council of the BC Federation of Labour gathered in Victoria on November 19 to 21 to lobby provincial legislators on the importance of having gig workers covered by employment standards, and to request that necessary changes are made to the Workers Compensation Act to ensure psychological illnesses and impacts of systemic racism are covered. I have been lax in lobbying these past few years but the safe and friendly environment of this week rekindled my lobbyist fire.

2023 has been an interesting year overall. Throughout the spring and summer we saw a significant increase in in-person gatherings and are now seeing an upswing in COVID-19 numbers over the past couple of months, which may lead us into a pretty cautious winter season. I expect we all share the same concerns when we hear about increases in COVID-19 infections and I hope that all of you will take a few minutes to check out some of the things unions are doing with a focus on seniors. HEU’s “Care Can’t Wait” and CUPW’s “Delivering Community Power” are just two very significant campaigns showing how improvements and additions to daily tasks can have such a positive impact.

I am confident I speak for all BC FORUM directors and regional representatives in wishing you all a safe and happy holiday season and all the best for 2024.

WE'VE MOVED

**110-4295 Canada Way,
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After a long wait, BC FORUM finally has a new office! We hope to be ready to serve BC FORUM members in the new space by Jan 1, 2024. In the meantime, we ask for your continued patience as we move in.

Stronger together: building a better B.C. by taking care of each other

By Premier David Eby

I'm grateful to BC FORUM and The Advocate for giving me the opportunity to introduce myself and talk about some of the important work the B.C. government is doing to make life better for people and build a stronger province for everyone.

It's been a difficult few years, with unprecedented crises – like the pandemic, global inflation, and climate-related fires and floods, that have challenged the province and the people who live here.

Throughout it all we've worked hard to keep our economy strong and take care of people as we faced these challenges together.

As former union members you know well the value of solidarity – of holding together when times get tough.

We're stronger together – and our province is stronger when we take care of each other, instead of leaving people to fend for themselves.

At a time when global threats are making life harder and more uncertain, it's important to have strong public services that people can rely on.

That's why we've been hard at work to undo the damage done by more than a decade and a half of neglect of critical services like health care, housing, and public safety.

My predecessor, Premier Horgan made a lot of progress on these and other priorities, and in the year since I first became premier, we've made more progress still.

We've taken decisive action to strengthen health care by hiring more nurses and doctors, accelerating the process of recognizing foreign



Premier David Eby ©Office of the Premier



©Government of British Columbia

credentials, and signing a new deal with family doctors. We're also taking steps towards opening a new medical school at SFU to build the capacity and resilience of our health care system in the long term.

And we've been doing this work while upgrading, expanding and replacing aging hospital and health care facilities throughout the province.

Finding a place to live in the community you love is a big challenge for people around the province. Many parents and grandparents are worried their adult children will need to move further away to find housing that meets their needs and budget.

That's why we are making changes to deliver more small-scale, multi-unit housing, including townhomes, triplexes and laneway homes. We're also fixing outdated zoning rules to help build more homes faster in communities around B.C. And we've made changes to regulate the rapidly expanding short-term rental market and turn them into homes for people for need them.

This is all part of our Homes for People plan, which will deliver more homes that are within reach for people, at every stage of their lives.

We are also taking concrete steps to make our communities safer for everyone by addressing repeat offenders and dealing with street disorder that leaves people feeling unsafe and unwelcome in neighbourhoods.

Whether it's easing the pressures of everyday costs on families, advancing reconciliation and working together in partnership with Indigenous Peoples to benefit everyone, or building a new, cleaner economy while training people for in-demand jobs – we've made a lot of progress on the things that matter, but we still have lots more to do.

Making things better isn't always quick, and it's rarely easy, but I know that together we can build a stronger province that works for everyone.

Seniors' housing – not just for the rich

By Barb Mikulec

The following is a condensed version of the Housing Report given at the 2023 National Pensioners' Federation Convention.

Seniors need access to adequate, affordable, and suitable housing in all parts of Canada. We all recognize the urgent need for housing to be a priority for seniors as they age, in urban and rural/remote locations, to be within proximity of the services needed, and have transportation to those services, medical centers, as well as social gatherings.

The Hon. Kamal Khera, former Minister of Seniors, wrote 'Every senior in Canada deserves to live in dignity, safety and comfort, regardless of which province or territory they call home.' However, seniors face a growing gap between affordable housing and availability. Many seniors live in 'core housing need' which is spending over 30% of gross income on housing.

The federal budget has allocated an additional \$10 Billion over 10 years for 'housing initiatives' moving towards a long-term solution and away from homelessness. Too many seniors are on the brink of homelessness and the numbers of persons over the age of 55 in shelters is increasing, which is a concern for the ability of seniors to age with dignity. We fear that housing initiatives planned over the next ten years fall far short of seniors' immediate housing needs.

In May 2023 the National Pensioners' Federation (NPF) hosted a webinar focused on housing and its impact on the lives of seniors. The speakers touched on tenants' response to climate change, affordability in this era of global insecurity, and raising rents in many parts of Canada.

Discussions focused on the challenging environment of rental housing stock and the response to climate change with specifics to seniors in rental markets. The lack of decent, affordable housing makes it harder for tenants to survive extreme weather



Barb Mikulec ©Barb Mikulec

events. More needs to be done for housing justice in climate emergencies, with a right to affordable safe housing. Housing should be primarily for use, not for-profit as a commodity.

The NPF on behalf of all its affiliates; which includes BC FORUM, urge the federal government to:

1. Work with all governments to fund immediate construction of affordable housing based on 30% of family gross income.
2. Deliver the annual renter's rebate program which is portable as planned through the National Housing Strategy.
3. Encourage the development of housing co-operatives and non-profit social housing by offering land trust or lease extensions to help co-ops invest in rehabilitation of older structures.

4. Endorse efforts to have poverty reduction plans in all jurisdictions, with the National Homelessness Partnering Strategy adding preventative objectives to reduce homelessness.
5. Ensure housing regulations give fair and equitable compensation to allow senior homeowners with lower income to use the home equity to offset unexpected repairs to a roof or major appliance.
6. Widely publicize the Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit which provides up to \$7,500 for construction of a secondary suite for a senior or an adult with a disability.
7. Ensure tenants are aware of a top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit which provide low-income renters with a \$500 payment to help with the cost of housing.
8. Expand services for Indigenous people, with plans to tackle poverty issues and expand homecare for people with chronic health issues, mental illness and addictions.
9. Build modular or pre-fab homes which are faster to build, and cut red tape on permits.
10. Consider options for rural areas with a variety of choices and services so seniors do not have to leave their community when they need a different form of housing

In closing, we need to continue to reinforce that all levels of government must recognize adequate housing as a basic right, so each person can live with dignity. All Canadians deserve to have a safe and affordable place to live, not just the rich!

Barb Mikulec is a BC FORUM member, BC Retired Teachers Association (BCRTA) member, 1st Vice President of the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations of BC (COSCO) and 1st Vice President of the National Pensioners' Federation (NPF) where she also Chairs the Housing Committee.

Looming crisis: precarious senior housing

By Sam Wiese, BC FORUM President

Like many “boomers” my twenties were filled with working to afford to live and enjoy life, the dream of buying a home on the horizon. Little did I foresee over the next decades how challenging it would be as a single mom to save the money needed to buy a home.

Like many others, as my dream of home ownership faded, I turned to a dream of securing long term rental accommodations close to friends and family. Sadly, for far too many of us in B.C. and Canada, that dream too has faded. Although I and my family feel somewhat secure, every renter I know sits on pins and needles, awaiting with dread “renoviction”, or eviction so the owner or immediate family member can take possession.

On a recent drive home from Kelowna I stopped at a rest area and was overwhelmed to see RVs obviously set up for long term stays. A senior resident told me she and her husband had been living in their 14’ camper for five months since being “renovicted”. They had since discovered that the building they lived in was torn down and replaced by luxury condominiums; there was never any intent to renovate.

Daily inadequacies in housing are proven by the growing number of people living in our streets and parks. Sadly, we seem to have accepted homelessness as just a part of life. I wonder if we will change our outlook as the number of precariously housed and/or homeless are seniors? Because that, my friends, is the real truth of things.

The United Way British Columbia’s report “Aging in Uncertainty: The Growing Housing Crisis for B.C. Seniors” highlights the impact of the housing affordability crisis on seniors. The report covers the growing gap between income and housing costs, and looks at the ever decreasing supply of affordable and/or subsidized housing. Through research, interviews of seniors and input from service providers and volunteers, the report identifies causes and presents recommendations for viable solutions.

I urge each of you to read the report and determine ways in which you might assist in averting this crisis. The report can be found at uwbc.ca/healthyaging under the research & reports tab.



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From the Office of the Seniors Advocate

The following are a few highlights of news from the B.C. Seniors Advocate, Isobel Mackenzie. For full details search Seniors Advocate – Government of British Columbia (seniorsadvocatebc.ca) and look up Newsletters

Before we provide you with the most recent highlights from the Office of the Seniors Advocate for B.C., we felt it of particular import to share a portion of Isobel’s statement on Health Care Assistant Day, October 18, 2023; appropriate in light of the release results of the long-term care resident survey on November 16:

“Health care assistant is a broad term that captures the vital work done by many people to support seniors living at home, in assisted living and long-term care facilities, and in hospitals in our province. They are also known as resident care assistants, nurse assistants, community health workers, home support workers and personal support workers. Although the work has many different titles, what we must recognize is the incredible dedication, kindness and compassion health care assistants bring to helping older people in our communities age with dignity and enjoy a high quality of life.”

Every Voice Counts: Long-Term Care Resident and Visitor Survey Results 2023

B.C. Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie has released results from the second provincewide survey of thousands of long-term care residents and their family members.

The survey covered 297 publicly subsidized care facilities in B.C. and received responses from over 10,000 residents and almost 8,000 family members and close friends. Just over 500 British Columbians volunteered to assist residents to complete the survey. The questions and design parallel



the 2016/17 survey allowing reliable comparison to previous results.

The survey results show there has been little improvement in areas such as frequency of bathing, help at mealtimes, meaningful activities, engagement with staff and other residents and the overall ratings of quality remain relatively unchanged. Despite these shortcomings, residents continue to give high marks to long-term care home staff for their skill, compassion and ability to treat residents with respect.

Highlights:

- 54% rated the overall quality of the care and services received in the home as ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’.
- Almost 80% of residents felt they could express their opinions ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.
- 81% of residents decide how to spend their time.
- 85% of residents felt their privacy was respected during care ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.
- 95% of residents reported they have never been treated unfairly by staff due to their race or cultural background, and 97% reported they have never been treated unfairly due to their sexual orientation.
- 88% of residents feel safe when they are alone ‘almost’ or ‘most of the time’.

- 87% of residents reported trust in staff to take good care of them and staff treat them like a whole person ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.

- 48% of residents feel their care home ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ feels like home.

- 51% of residents said staff only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ make time for a friendly chat or ask how to meet their needs.

- 50% of residents reported they ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ had the same care aide most weekdays.
- 33% of residents report that they only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ get help to eat when needed.
- One-third of residents only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ get to decide when to get up.
- 29% of residents only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ get help right away if needed although 79% report they could get the services they need ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’.
- Almost two-thirds of residents only ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ find enjoyable things to do on evenings and weekends, or find opportunities to explore new skills or interests.

Recommendations:

1. Increase staffing levels in all care facilities to the nationally recommended 4.1 hours of direct care per resident per day.
2. Increase flexibility of scheduling.
3. Increase social connections for residents by creating more meaningful activities to improve resident engagement.
4. Improve food and mealtime experience to meet residents’ preferences, including nutritional and culturally-specific dietary needs.

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ADVOCACY

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5. Implement compulsory professional education for all care home staff in cultural safety and emotional health and well-being of residents.
6. Allow all residents (or substitute decision maker, if appropriate) to name their “essential visitor”.
7. Work closely with the Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC to raise awareness and increase the function of resident and family councils at all long-term care facilities in B.C.
8. Improve community-based services, in particular home support, to ensure seniors are not required to seek long-term care unless their care needs cannot be met in the community.

The full report can be found at: seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2023/11/OSA-LTC-SURVEY-REPORT-RESULTS-2023.pdf

Survey on Market Basket Measure of Poverty

The federal government has launched a comprehensive review of the Market Basket Measure which is Canada’s Official Poverty Line. StatsCan is asking Canadians to complete an online survey to estimate how much money a family needs for food, clothing, shelter and transportation. The questionnaire takes no more than five minutes to complete and is open until March 31, 2024. All responses are anonymous. To learn more go to: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/consultation/2023/mbm-poverty>.

Medical Masks in Long-Term Care Homes

Due to the increase in respiratory virus infections in B.C., visitors to long-term care facilities are required to wear a medical mask when they are in common areas and participating in indoor events, gatherings, activities in communal spaces of the care home or residence.

Fall Vaccination Program

Invitations are being sent by email and text message to everyone who has received a COVID-19 vaccine in B.C. The invitation includes a direct link to book an appointment to receive the both the COVID-19 and influenza vaccines. People most at risk of severe illness, such as residents of long-term care facilities and seniors 65+, are encouraged to get their vaccinations as soon as possible.

Seniors Personal Planning Workshops

The Seniors’ Health & Wellness Institute is hosting a series of free webinars on advance care planning to help seniors prepare for future personal, medical and legal needs. Topics include representation agreements, advance directives and wills. Webinars take place weekly during the months of October and November.



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Head-to-toe public health care: Let's make it happen

By NDP MP Don Davies,

Over half a century ago, the NDP's founding leader, Tommy Douglas, used his influence in a minority Parliament to build our country's public health care system.

Universal, public health care has since become a hallmark of Canadian identity. It's an institution cherished from coast to coast to coast. It's an affirmation that we will take care of each other at our most vulnerable. It's a reflection of our commitment to equality and justice.

However, Canada's public health care system isn't perfect, and it's not complete. Many important health services remain uncovered. For these, patients are at the mercy of their ability to pay.

New Democrats believe that access to comprehensive health care should be a right in this country, not a privilege. That's why we've been fighting to provide head-to-toe public health care to all Canadians since our founding convention.

In the current minority Parliament, through our Confidence and Supply Agreement with the government, the NDP has again achieved historic health care breakthroughs. We've secured an expansion of our public system to address two critical areas of need: dental care and prescription medication.

Millions of Canadians can't access to life saving medication

Today, approximately 20 percent of Canadians, representing 8 million people, have inadequate drug coverage or no coverage at all. One third of working Canadians don't have drug benefits provided by their employer and most work-based plans don't cover the full cost of medicine.



MP Don Davies ©Don Davies

As a result, every year millions of Canadians are unable to fill their prescriptions, skip doses, or otherwise fail to take medication as prescribed because they can't afford it.

This can lead to dire health consequences.

A recent study from the Canadians Federation of Nurses Unions revealed that inadequate drug coverage results in thousands of preventable deaths across Canada. The study also found that not being able to afford medication increases the risk of hospitalization, disability, and poor quality of life for many Canadians, especially those with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and asthma.

Canada's lack of pharmacare wastes billions of dollars every year

Canadians consistently pay among the world's highest per capita prescription medication prices due to our fragmented and private approach

to drug coverage. However, universal, public pharmacare has been a long-standing solution proposed by numerous expert bodies dating back as far as the 1940s.

Such a system would not only ensure that all Canadians have access to the medicines they need, but also generate significant savings as we gain the bargaining power to negotiate lower prices for more drugs and implement other cost-saving strategies.

Most recently, the Liberal-appointed Hoskins Advisory Council found that, once fully implemented, universal, public pharmacare would reduce Canada's total annual spending on prescription drugs by \$5 billion overall.

These savings are not isolated and are likely understated. Peer-reviewed studies and other independent sources have repeatedly demonstrated that universal, single-payer pharmacare would result in national savings of up to \$13 billion annually.

We ought also to remember that further long-term savings could be reaped through streamlined administration. Canada currently has more than 100 public and 100,000 private drug insurance plans. The aggregate cost to administer this patchwork is far greater than the administrative cost of a single public program.

Moreover, by eliminating cost barriers to prescription medications, universal, public pharmacare would ensure patients receive the optimal treatment for their health conditions. This would result in better outcomes, lower demand for hospital services, and reduced health care costs in the long run.

For example, removing out-of-pocket costs for the medications used to treat just three health problems—

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diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and chronic respiratory conditions—would result in up to 220,000 fewer emergency room visits and 90,000 fewer hospital stays annually. This would save the health care system up to \$1.2 billion a year for those three diseases alone.

Dental gaps hurt Canadians' health and wealth

Similarly, dental care is not accessible or affordable for many Canadians. At present, approximately 35 percent of Canadians have no dental insurance, and over 9 million Canadians avoid the dentist every year because of the cost.

This can have serious impacts on the oral and overall health of Canadians. Poor oral health can lead to pain, infection, tooth loss, and reduced quality of life. It can also increase the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory infections.

Moreover, untreated dental problems can result in costly and preventable visits to emergency departments. An estimated one percent of all emergency room visits across Canada each year are made by patients with non-urgent dental conditions, such as tooth decay. An analysis of dental-related emergency visits in British Columbia in 2017 found that one percent figure translated to nearly \$155 million in avoidable costs for the province in that year alone.

Canada's lack of access to dental care is also a social justice issue, as it disproportionately affects the most marginalized people. For example, 50 percent of low-income Canadians have no dental coverage, along with a majority of seniors over the age of 60. In seniors, poor oral health is a risk factor for dehydration and infirmity, and yet, many retirement home and long-term care facility residents do not receive adequate oral health care due to cost and access issues.



How the NDP has pushed for change

New Democrats have championed universal, public pharmacare and dental care in Canada for decades. We have introduced many bills, motions, and petitions calling for these services. We have also advocated for these issues in every election campaign and made them a priority in our negotiations with the Liberals in the current minority Parliament.

Through the Confidence and Supply Agreement, the NDP has secured historic commitments from the government to make progress on pharmacare and dental care.

Specifically, the Liberals have agreed to pass a Canada Pharmacare Act by the end of 2023 and task the National Drug Agency to develop a national list of essential medicines and bulk purchasing plan by the end of the agreement.

New Democrats have also forced the Liberals to agree to launch a new dental care program for low-income Canadians, as a first step towards universal, public coverage.

Once fully implemented, the new Canadian Dental Care Plan will support up to 9 million uninsured Canadians who have an annual family net income

of less than \$90,000 in getting the oral health care they need, with no co-pays for those with family incomes under \$70,000. The government has announced that it expects to begin rolling out the plan for under 18-year-olds, seniors, and persons living with a disability by the end of 2023.

What challenges and opportunities lie ahead

These commitments are significant and transformative. They represent the single greatest expansion of our public health care system in a generation. They will make a difference in the lives of millions of Canadians who struggle to afford prescription medication and dental care. They will also save money for individuals, employers, and governments, by reducing out-of-pocket costs, administrative overhead, and unnecessary health care spending.

While New Democrats celebrate these achievements, we also recognize that there is still much work to be done. The Liberals have a history of breaking their promises and dragging their feet on health care reform. They have also faced pressure from powerful interests, such as the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, to maintain the

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status quo or adopt a weak and patchwork approach.

That's why the NDP will continue to hold the Liberals' feet to the fire until they deliver. We will also push them to go further and faster, by expanding the scope and timeline of the pharmacare and dental care programs. We will not settle for anything less than a truly universal, public, and comprehensive system that covers all Canadians.

We invite all Canadians to join us in our fight for head-to-toe health care.

Together, we can make pharmacare and dental care a reality for everyone. We can fulfill the vision of Tommy Douglas and complete the unfinished business of Medicare. And we can build a healthier and fairer Canada for all.

Don Davies is the NDP's health critic and Member of Parliament for Vancouver Kingsway.

Still fighting for fairness



Striking worker Rosa Gomez ©UNITE HERE Local 40

We featured the striking members of UNITE HERE Local 40 members in our last edition of The Advocate. Sadly, there has been no change, and they continue to walk the line for fairness.

These workers, predominantly women, immigrants and racialized workers, deserve your support!

A donation page has been set up to raise money, which you can access here: www.gofundme.com/f/striking-hotelworkers.

You can ensure you are supporting unionized hotels and avoiding picket lines by checking the website fairhotel.org before you travel or celebrate this holiday season.

Find out more about these workers and their continued struggle at www.uniteherelocal40.org.

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Timeless havens: Libraries and seniors

by Aliza Nevarie, Editor

Public libraries have long been regarded as the beating heart of communities, serving as a haven for knowledge seekers of all ages. In recent years, libraries have taken on an increasingly crucial role in supporting seniors, providing them with a space for learning, socializing, and accessing essential resources. As the world continues to evolve, public libraries stand as a timeless haven for seniors, fostering a sense of community and intellectual engagement.

Public libraries offer a plethora of resources that cater to seniors' diverse interests and learning preferences, ensuring engagement in lifelong learning. Many libraries also host workshops and events specifically designed for seniors, covering topics such as technology literacy, health and wellness, and cultural enrichment.

Traditional Materials

When we think of libraries, we think of books, of course, the oldest and arguably most perfect vehicles of information, knowledge, storytelling, and entertainment. Libraries also have audio books, DVDs, and digital materials that widen options and assist with access, both in terms of diversity but also accessibility. Many popular books are offered in multiple formats: large-print, e-book, and physical and digital audio books, for example. Digital materials have the advantage of being able to be accessed remotely, which is helpful for people who have limited mobility or live in more remote areas of the province.

Accessible Services

For those who have heightened accessibility needs, public libraries



Materials await delivery to homebound patrons, Lower Mainland, B.C.



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typically provide a deeper level of service through outreach or accessible services. This is achieved through the provision of digital readers and digital playback devices, such as the DAISY reader, and Braille materials, for those with print disabilities or who are blind.

Libraries in B.C. augment their accessible collections and services through partnerships with organizations such as CNIB, the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) through the BC Library Co-op, and the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). You can become a member of CELA and access services and materials through your public library.

Accessibility is also achieved through the delivery of materials to patrons who are experiencing mobility

issues or difficulty accessing library facilities. Staff carefully develop patron profiles and thoughtfully select materials that will be of most interest to recipients. Given the cost of providing these services, there is usually a threshold to qualify. Contact your local library to find out what might be available to you.

Digital divide

Libraries play a crucial role in bridging the digital divide for seniors who may not have easy access to technology. Through computer classes and assistance programs, older adults can gain the skills needed to navigate the digital landscape, connect with loved ones online, and access valuable information.

Many of the resources seniors rely on, including governmental programs, can only be accessed online.

Libraries provide not only access to physical computers in-house but also assistance in navigating websites and completing on-line forms, signing up for and using email, scanning and printing needs, and other computer basics such as creating and saving documents and cyber security. Staff will also help troubleshoot issues with digital devices and help patrons get set up with e-books.

Libraries are Community

Isolation and loneliness are significant challenges faced by many seniors, for those no longer be in the workforce or who have lost close friends and family. Public libraries serve as vibrant hubs where seniors can connect with others, fostering a sense of belonging and community.

Many libraries organize book clubs, discussion groups, and social events tailored to seniors' interests. These gatherings not only provide intellectual stimulation but also create opportunities for social interaction, reducing feelings of isolation. By participating in library-sponsored activities, seniors can build meaningful relationships with like-minded individuals, forming a supportive network within their community.



Town of Creston, British Columbia

There are also often volunteering opportunities for seniors in libraries, including assisting with deliveries for home-bound patrons in more rural communities or participating in organizations like Friends of the Library, who raise money to support local libraries through book sales and other events. Find out how you can help by contacting your local library.

Spotlight | Creston Valley Public Library

The Town of Creston is a small rural community with 5,600 residents in the Kootneys. Thanks to its uniquely mild weather it is a popular landing place for seniors, and the median age of the community is over 60. Although just one branch, the library services a wide area that stretches up to 90 km from town and serves 15,000 people.

"The library in Creston is a community hub" says Saara Itkonen, the library's director. For Itkonen, formerly a librarian at the Vancouver Public Library, small town libraries like Creston's are able to provide a more nimble and responsive service to patrons than systems in large municipalities. "These are your neighbours, the people you see on the street and in the grocery stores. You get to know who they are and what they need."

Residents, in particular seniors, find connection and community through



Saara Itkonen, Library Director, Creston Valley Public Library ©Creston Valley Public Library

volunteering. Itkonen notes that in contrast to larger municipalities, there are more opportunities for participation in community programs.

As do many libraries in rural areas, Creston Valley Public Library relies significantly on volunteers to help deliver materials to patrons who aren't able to make the journey into the library. They also work in partnership with three reading centres in the area to reach patrons in remote locations, namely Riondel, East Shore and Yahk.

As Creston grows along with community support, the library will

and has been able to increase the number of unionized staff including the addition of a full-time IT specialist and a part-time accessible services coordinator, which is great news for the library and the community.

The human touch

The greatest resource libraries have to offer are staff. The majority of public libraries in B.C. are unionized, and patrons can feel good about supporting these amazing and critical publicly funded and unionized services.

Library workers are dedicated, trained and educated to help you find and access the information you need. No matter what you are looking for, there is someone at the public desk or at the end of the phone line ready to assist you in your quest.

Public libraries have evolved into dynamic community spaces that cater to the diverse needs of seniors. As bastions of knowledge, social connection, and support, libraries play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for older adults. By continually adapting to the changing needs of their communities, public libraries remain steadfast in their commitment to providing seniors with a welcoming and enriching environment. In an era of rapid technological advancement, and growing uncertainty in the truth of information, these institutions continue to stand the test of time, proving that their value extends far beyond the pages of a book.

Where is my library?

There are 71 public library systems, and 245 public locations in British Columbia. You can find the one closest to you by visiting <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/arts-culture/public-libraries/find-your-public>.

From the Minister of Seniors

The following are extracts from Minister O'Regan's November newsletter of pertinence to BC FORUM members. For complete and regular updates sign up at - [Canada.ca](https://canada.ca), search: updates from the Minister of Seniors

The retirement Hub online has been launched, available at: <https://retraite-retirement.service.canada.ca/en/home>.

This is an online guide that helps you learn and plan for your retirement. Remember, it's never too early or too late to learn about your retirement options and plan for your future. Find out about public pensions, when to collect them and tips to consider for your retirement income. (note from Sam: I've read it and am impressed).

The Minister of Health Mark Holland and I hosted roundtables on national standards for safe long-term care. We heard from seniors, advocates and health care experts. Seniors deserve to age with dignity, and so we'll make sure they can. Long-term care needs fixing in Canada. This is not the system that seniors, their families, or workers deserve.

I also recently joined the Minister of Health to discuss another very important service. As we look to the end of the year, the Canadian Dental Care Plan will expand to provide dental care to seniors who couldn't see a dentist before. Right now, we're hearing from seniors, advocates, and other experts on how we can make sure the benefit is effective and accessible.

We're on the right track, but we'll keep working hard to deliver on what's important to seniors.

Mistreatment of Older Persons: Report

By the end of the 2030s, it is projected that 23% of Canadians will be 65 or older. Canadians deserve dignity, safety, and respect, at any age. It is



unfortunate that many older persons experience mistreatment. I am committed to continuing our government's work in preventing the mistreatment of older persons and taking action to support their well-being. Helping older Canadians starts with us calling out mistreatment of older persons, including ageism, and putting policies in place to stop further harm.

A summary of the valuable feedback received can be found in the What We Heard Report:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate-reports/seniors-aging/consultation-senior-abuse-definition-results.html>

Based on the feedback received and analysis of various definitions, the Government of Canada has developed a federal policy definition of "mistreatment of older persons." The federal policy definition will not replace definitions currently in place in provinces and territories and will not be a legal definition.

To learn more about the federal policy definition read the explanatory report: Mistreatment of Older Persons: Federal Policy Definition - Explanatory Document - Canada.ca.

New Multigenerational Home Renovation Tax Credit

Are you 65 years of age or older and currently live or plan to live with family? If so, your family member may be eligible to claim up to \$7,500 on their income tax and benefit return

with the new Multigenerational Home Renovation Home Renovation Tax Credit (MHRTC)

Commencing in tax year 2023, the owner of the dwelling or property may be able to claim certain renovation expenses to create a separate secondary unit for you to live in.

The tax credit is 15% of the costs, up to a maximum of \$7,500, for each eligible claim, after a renovation has been completed. It is important to keep all the agreements, invoices, and receipts to support the claim.

To claim the MHRTC, all conditions must be met. For more information go to the Multigenerational home renovation tax credit (MHRTC) webpage.

Protect yourself from respiratory illness this fall and winter

While respiratory infections occur year-round, there is a significant increase in the fall and winter months when people spend more time inside. This includes COVID-19, the flu and respiratory syncytial virus.

Vaccination is particularly important for those at increased risk of severe outcomes, including people who:

- are aged 65 or older;
- have underlying medical conditions; and reside in nursing homes or other care facilities.

November is Fall Prevention Month

November is Fall Prevention Month, a time to share and learn evidence-based information on fall prevention.

Take some time to learn about preventing falls at <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/aging-seniors/publications/publications-general-public/you-prevent-falls>.

Supporting BC FORUM has never been so important

Through our unions we saw the benefits of collective action. We know our voices are strongest when we stand in solidarity. That's where BC FORUM comes in. We are the only provincial organization that represents union members who have retired or are nearing retirement. We are an integral part of the labour movement, with formal representation in leadership bodies, and we maintain strong links with provincial and national seniors' groups. Here's how you can support and benefit from BC FORUM:

Renew your membership

Look at the mailing label on this edition of the Advocate to check whether your membership is now due for renewal. If your membership is about to expire, you can renew by mailing the coupon below to BC FORUM, 110 - 4295 Canada Way, Burnaby, BC V5G 1H1; or renew online at www.bcforum.ca.

Encourage your friends to join!

Together, we can make a difference for ourselves and our families. Please encourage friends, colleagues and family members to join!

Many unions cover first year dues

BC FORUM actively welcomes union members who are 50 and better, working or retired, and the list of unions that cover the first (and some up to three years!) membership for their qualified members keeps growing! If you're not yet a member, contact your union for details. Solidarity makes us strong!



Extend the benefits of membership to your spouse

BC FORUM has always provided free \$2,500 Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance coverage to members.

We are proud to extend this coverage to members' spouses at the low cost of \$5 per year. All you have to do is check the appropriate box when you apply or renew your membership. BC FORUM's AD&D coverage is valid until you reach age 86, the maximum age we were able to negotiate.



Your expiry date is on the mailing label. BCGEU, BCFMW, HSA, MoveUp, CEU, CUPE Locals 386, 402 and 7000; UFCW 1518, Heat and Frost, and LiUNA 1611 pay first year dues for qualified members.



B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members • 110-4295 Canada Way, Burnaby V5G 1H1
604 688-4565 • 1 800 896-5678 • Fax: 604 430-5917 • bcforum@bcfed.ca • www.bcforum.ca

Membership: Application Renewal New address

Name: LAST FIRST INITIAL

Address: STREET ADDRESS CITY POSTAL CODE

Phone: E-mail:

Union: Date of birth:* DAY MONTH YEAR

Spouse's name: Spouse's birth date:* DAY MONTH YEAR

Single membership: <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 - 1 year <input type="checkbox"/> \$49 - 3 years With AD&D for spouse: <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 - 1 year <input type="checkbox"/> \$64 - 3 years <input type="checkbox"/> Cheque <input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> MC Expiry <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> CVV* <input type="text"/> Card number: <input type="text"/>
--

..... SIGNATURE

Date of application: DAY MONTH YEAR

* Required for Accidental Death & Dismemberment group insurance coverage to age 86.
* Credit card companies now require the CVV for payment to be processed.

Thank you for a decade of advocacy

By Isobel Mackenzie, B.C.'s Seniors Advocate

In April 2024 I will retire after working 30 years in seniors care, the last ten years as the Seniors Advocate for British Columbia. As I reflect over the span of my career, I am struck by how much has changed, the progress we have made and how much farther we can go given the ever-changing tools and technology at our disposal.

Our ability to support people at home as they age has grown exponentially. Medical equipment once available only in facilities is now scaled for home use, treatments and therapies now done at home or as an outpatient once required days lying in a hospital bed, transport systems that bring everything to your doorstep where you once would only see the pizza delivery person, these are all advances that allow us to live where we want for much longer than in the past.

With progress, however, come unintended consequences, namely those who get left behind. In the case of seniors, this has generally meant those who are lower income, have little family support or live in rural B.C. Aging will challenge us all differently, but challenge us all it will. How much money you have, where you live and where your family lives can all significantly impact your ability to live in your own home for as long as possible.

Most of you are very fortunate, you enjoy a workplace pension and the extended health benefits that often come with it. While incomes will vary, most of you earn enough to be in the top 50% of income earners age 65 and older. Currently almost half of B.C. seniors earn less than minimum wage and have no extended health benefits. These seniors will face significant financial challenges in face of the rising costs related to aging. For these retirees the advances of the last thirty years will pale in comparison to their



Isobel Mackenzie © Office of B.C.'s Seniors Advocate

challenges of today. However, I am optimistic that we will find a way to better support these marginalized seniors as I have seen how much British Columbians care about seniors. Yes, we have made tremendous advances in the last 30 years, but there is always more to do. In the words of Florence Nightingale more than 150 years

ago, "Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better".

In closing, I want to thank the BC Federation of Retired Union members for all the work you do in support of seniors in B.C. and in your support for the work of my office. The opportunity to serve as B.C.'s Seniors Advocate has been an immense privilege and I am forever grateful for the opportunity. I have met some of the most incredible people in every corner of this province. While some of my work has been to hear the heartbreaking stories of those in need, another part has been to witness the awe inspiring commitment of so many British Columbians to make B.C. a better place for seniors. In every community there are people volunteering to deliver groceries, medications, run seniors' centers, visit those who cannot get out of their homes, the list is endless. These are ordinary British Columbians, many of them will be your members and together they are making the lives of B.C. seniors better each and every day. To you all I say a most profound and heartfelt thank you.

New address? New e-mail address?

Please send your new address and e-mail address to BC FORUM. You can mail in the form on page 15, or you can reach us by telephone at 1.800.896.5678 (toll free) or 604.688.4565; or by email at bcforum@bcfed.ca.



Please check the expiry date on your label. Is your membership due for renewal?