

Planning for Seniors

In keeping with our five Great Goals for the Golden Decade, we're building the best system of support in Canada for British Columbia's more than 600,000 seniors.

- In April 2005, Dr. Patricia Baird, one of North America's leading authorities on health and public policy, was named chair of the [Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues](#).
- The Council will examine how to support seniors' independence and health as well as their ability to continue as contributing members of society. The Council will submit a final report with recommendations to the Premier by November 30, 2006.

Affordable Housing Support

- Since June 2001, the Province has allocated 4,237 assisted living residences and 1,768 supportive housing units for a total of over 6,000 housing units for seniors.
- In March 2004, we provided [\\$2 million through UBCM](#) to help communities assess seniors' housing needs and generate local solutions for seniors' housing and support.
- Residential care waits are averaging one to three months, down from about a year.
- An updated and modernized *Community Care and Assisted Living Act* protects seniors' health and safety in licensed community care facilities and assisted living.

Support for Seniors' Health

- We're strengthening and modernizing services to assist seniors to live independently.
- Funding for health care is forecast to rise to more than \$12.9 billion in 2006/07, an increase of \$2.4 billion from 2001/02, and represents 37 per cent of the provincial budget.
- ActNow BC is the provincial government's health promotion platform that encourages seniors to stay physically active, eat nutritious foods and make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Through the BC HealthGuide program, government is providing reliable, confidential health information and advice seniors can trust. Visit www.bchealthguide.org or call: 1 866 215-4700 or in Greater Vancouver: 604 215-4700. For confidential nutrition

information, advice and referrals, seniors can call Dial-A-Dietitian at: 1 800 667-3438 or in Greater Vancouver: 604 732-9191.

- We are working collaboratively across the health care system to better manage chronic diseases and the care of frail, elderly people around the province.
- Subsidies of up to 100 per cent are available to offset [MSP premiums](#).
- Government provides funding for an extensive list of drug therapies to seniors through its PharmaCare program.
- Drug costs have been lowered for some B.C. families, including seniors, by focusing Fair PharmaCare financial assistance on those who need it most. Approximately 360,000 B.C. seniors received PharmaCare benefits in 2005.
- PharmaCare offers a Monthly Deductible Payment Option to allow some individuals and families, including seniors on fixed incomes, to pay their Fair PharmaCare deductible in monthly installments and receive PharmaCare assistance for eligible prescription costs right away.
- The BC Palliative Care Benefits Program supports BC residents of any age who have reached the end stage of a life-threatening disease or illness and who wish to receive palliative care at home. This program is being expanded to extend these benefits, including eligible pharmaceuticals, to residents of licensed long term care facilities.
- We're providing \$15 million for the Pacific Alzheimer Research Foundation to support new research aimed at eliminating Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The Alzheimer Society of BC has received \$125,000 to develop a documentary on dementia and its prevention, diagnosis and management.
- We're modernizing and replacing outdated residential care beds and creating new independent living options for seniors. We are on target to meet our goal of 2,762 net new beds and units by December 2006 – and 5,000 beds and units by December 2008.

Support for Seniors with Lower Incomes

- The September 2005 Budget Update focused on seniors and allocated an additional \$242 million over three years to improve the lives of senior citizens with the following measures:
 - We renewed the [Senior's Supplement](#) to provide a monthly benefit for approximately 45,000 lower income B.C. seniors.
 - We're investing \$20 million a year to provide the Senior's Supplement of up to approximately \$50 per eligible senior. This means that single B.C. seniors will receive a minimum income of over \$1,140 per month and senior couples will receive a minimum of \$1,895 per month.
 - The Senior's Supplement is not a top-up; B.C. seniors will continue to receive all future increases to old age pension rates from the federal government.
 - We doubled our annual funding for the [Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters](#) (SAFER) program, to provide rental assistance for low-income seniors.

- We've also expanded the SAFER program by removing the 10-year Canadian residency requirement for eligibility. As of June 1, 2006, low income seniors who rent their home and who have lived in B.C. for one year are eligible for assistance.
- We've increased levels of assistance and expanded eligibility to include those who pay pad rental fees for their manufactured homes.
- Since 2001, we have reduced personal income taxes by an average of 25 per cent with the greatest benefit going to low-income taxpayers, including seniors. In addition, in 2005, we introduced the BC Tax Reduction credit, which reduces or eliminates taxes for people with net incomes under \$26,000.
- Seniors with locked-in pension funds now have greater flexibility, financial independence and fewer restrictions on their pensions following changes to the Pension Benefits Standards Act.
- On July 1, 2005, the threshold to qualify for MSP premium assistance increased by \$4,000. Expanding the eligibility requirements means an estimated 215,000 British Columbians now have lower or eliminated premiums or are eligible for premium assistance.
- We increased the refundable B.C. sales tax credit for low-income seniors and other British Columbians by 50 per cent, to \$75 from \$50 per year.
- Budget 2006 made home ownership more affordable by improving and expanding the Home Owner Grant Program. The grant for seniors, disabled people and veterans increased to \$845 from \$748, and the threshold at which homeowners qualify for the full grant increased to \$780,000 in assessed value.
- We maintained the [Property Tax Deferral Program](#), which allows B.C. residents over 60 or their surviving spouse and other qualified British Columbians to defer payment of their annual property taxes for as long as they live in their homes.
- We changed the *Estate Administration Act* to make the process less complex for British Columbians who need to access an estate worth less than \$25,000.
- Seniors who are 65 or over and drive their vehicles for pleasure only may be eligible for a [25 per cent discount](#) on their basic auto insurance.
- We protected the [seniors' bus pass program](#) so that low-income seniors have affordable transportation options.
- We gave the 411 Seniors Centre Society \$4.2 million to help purchase its own heritage building (April 2006).

Support for Senior Women Affected by Violence

- In January 2005, as part of a 33 per cent increase in annual funding for [Stopping the Violence programs](#), we committed \$1 million a year for new violence prevention initiatives focused on older women, immigrant and visible minority women, women with disabilities and Aboriginal women.

- We have also committed an additional \$436,200 a year for three safe homes and a transition house for older women.
- We are providing \$80,000 a year for a residence providing a quiet and safe living space for senior women escaping violence, one that meets their unique needs. Construction is underway is expected to be complete by late 2006 or early 2007.

Support for Aboriginal Seniors

- Through the [First Citizens Fund](#), the BC government offers the Elders Transportation Program. Each year, the program provides a total of \$25,000 to 25 Aboriginal organizations for elders to travel to heritage, cultural and educational events around the province. The organizations can apply for a conditional grant up to \$1,000 toward elders' transportation-related costs for workshops and conferences. Approximately 400 elders benefit each year.

Support for Information Seniors Want

- We expanded the Ministry of Health's [toll-free line](#) to give seniors one-stop access to information on government services. Call: 1 800 465-4911. In Victoria: 250 952-1742.
- The Ministry of Health's *Guide to Your Care* describes home and community care services for seniors. Copies are available from physicians or on the website at: www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/hcc/
- We have revised our popular *BC Seniors' Guide*, in [Chinese](#), [Punjabi](#), [French](#) and [English](#). An online version can be found at the government's BC Seniors' Online website. This user-friendly version is updated regularly so that seniors, their caregivers and families can access the most current information.
- We provided \$50,000 to the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation to give more B.C. seniors access to the [Mature Driver Program](#), a comprehensive, community-based approach that includes workshops, self-assessment tests and a handbook in support of safe senior mobility.
- We provided \$125,000 to the Alzheimer Society of BC to develop, in partnership with the Knowledge Network, a 60-minute documentary that will examine current knowledge around the cause of dementia, evidence-based approaches to prevention, diagnosis and management, including psycho-social impacts and challenges for patients and caregivers, care planning and available support.

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**For more information, contact
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