
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Forests and Range and Minister Responsible for Housing
Ministry of Health

OPEN DOORS SHOWCASES SENIORS' HOUSING AND CARE OPTIONS

VANCOUVER – Open Doors 2006, the first-ever provincewide celebration of seniors' housing and care services, will help mark the International Day of Older Persons, Health Minister George Abbott announced today at Haro Park Centre.

Open Doors, a program initiated in 2005 by the Care Guide in Ontario and later expanded into British Columbia, is a day of open houses hosted by participating seniors' residences. Supported in B.C. by a group of key public and private partners – BC Retirement Communities Association, BC Care Providers Association, the Ministry of Health, and BC Housing – Open Doors 2006 presents a wide range of housing and care options available to seniors in this province.

“Open Doors is an excellent opportunity to showcase the care options available to B.C. seniors today,” said Abbott. “With 1,830 new beds as of July 2006, we are on target to meet our commitment of 5,000 new beds by December 2008. Seniors in B.C. now have better care options and more choices when they are planning for their future health and lifestyle needs.”

The number of B.C. seniors has grown at twice the rate of the general population over the past 10 years. There are currently more than half-a-million people over the age of 65. That age group will increase to an estimated 1.16 million people by 2026.

“Today's seniors are living longer, healthier lives,” said the Ida Chong, Minister responsible for Seniors' Issues. “Most are able to live independently for many years and the Province is responding by supporting programs such as the expanded Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) and Independent Living BC (ILBC), which offer lower-income British Columbians more choices.”

“Seniors are as individual as any of us – it's the age of diversity,” said Carol Omstead, president of BC Retirement Communities Association. “Seniors over 75 want the freedom from home management challenges, help close at hand and a more enjoyable lifestyle. Retirement communities blend the sanctuary of private suites with the joy of new friends, great meals, wellness and recreation programs and care services. BCRCA communities will continue to push the envelope and offer innovative housing and service options which ensure choice and service excellence.”

Ed Helfrich, CEO of the BC Care Providers Association, representing more than 110 facilities and home care agencies, believes this care sector is at a critical crossroad wherein work being done today will make a profound impact on future systems.

“Our rapidly growing population of senior citizens is expected to double within the next 10 to 15 years,” said Helfrich. “By opening our doors and engaging in this valuable public education initiative, we encourage young and old alike to think now about the quality of their later years.” Helfrich hopes the event will promote discussion among families around their long-term care needs and the wide range of options available to them in British Columbia.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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