
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

October 22, 2014

B.C.'s Seniors Advocate Report States That "We Can Do Better"

Vancouver – The Seniors Advocate, Isobel Mackenzie, announced that she will use the powers granted to her under the Seniors Advocate Act to demand public reporting on the quality and accessibility of key services to B.C. seniors.

"The current situation, with information scattered across a number of ministries, health authorities and service providers and with varying degrees of reliability and transparency, is clearly not meeting the needs of seniors," says Mackenzie.

As one of her first actions toward sweeping reform, Mackenzie's office will commission independent, standardized province-wide satisfaction surveys for all residential care facilities, home support and HandyDART services. "I will go directly to the seniors who use these services and ask them what is working, what is not working, and how services could be improved."

"If we are going to achieve the transformational change required to support the independence of our growing seniors' population, it is crucial that we hear from those who are using the current system and that we have a systematic method of measuring improvement. This is a significant undertaking, and it has not been done on this scale anywhere in Canada. Government and service providers need to see where they stand, and the public deserves to know how well their government and service providers are meeting the needs of the most frail and vulnerable seniors," says Mackenzie.

The announcement was made as Mackenzie released her first report, *The Journey Begins: Together We Can Do Better*. The report reflects Mackenzie's initial findings after meeting and talking with thousands of seniors, their family members, service providers and other stakeholders across British Columbia over the past six months.

"Clearly, there are a number of areas where seniors and their families are struggling, and the inconsistency in supports and services, depending upon where you live in the province, was both surprising and troubling to me," says Mackenzie.

The report highlights seniors' concerns about housing, transportation, income supports, residential care, home support and a pervasive culture of ageism that thwarts the independence of seniors and erodes their sense of dignity.

Mackenzie also announced that her first major review will respond to the most significant issue she heard from seniors in over 26 communities throughout B.C., the issue of housing.

“As expected, almost all seniors want to remain in their own home for as long as they can. However, seniors feel anxious that increasing costs and decreasing services are major impediments to their ability to live independently. I heard many stories of challenges with accessing transportation, with the cost of rental housing or home repairs, with the availability of suitable housing in more rural and remote communities, and with infrequent or non-existent support services,” stated Mackenzie.

Government and health authorities have based community services and supports to seniors on the assumption that seniors enjoy affordable, accessible and appropriate housing, but there is no information to confirm this assumption. The Office of the Seniors Advocate will look at the full continuum of housing, from independently owned or rented housing to assisted living and residential care, and will deliver recommendations on improvements that can be made to better support seniors’ independence across the continuum.

Mackenzie signalled her approach with the title of her report *The Journey Begins: Together We Can Do Better*. “We are all participants in what will be a continuous journey. This is not just about what governments should be doing. Supporting the dignified aging of seniors, both today and tomorrow, will require constant effort by everyone involved in the lives of seniors as new issues, research and attitudes emerge. When I think back to what community care offered when I started two decades ago and I compare it to today’s services, I am reminded both of the incremental nature of progress and of the need to keep pressing boundaries,” concluded Mackenzie.

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Learn more:

The Office of the Seniors Advocate is now open and is seeking public input into seniors’ issues in British Columbia. Visit seniorsadvocatebc.ca, call 1- 877-952-3181 toll-free (in Victoria: 250-952-3181) or email info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca.

Backgrounder to follow.

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BACKGROUND

The Office of the Seniors Advocate

The Office of the Seniors Advocate was established by the provincial government as part of the Seniors' Action Plan, a strategy to address the needs and issues of B.C.'s growing seniors' population.

The Seniors Advocate Act was passed in 2013. In March 2014, Isobel Mackenzie was appointed the first seniors advocate for the Province of British Columbia.

Key functions of the Office of the Seniors Advocate

1. **Monitoring and analysis:** The advocate is responsible for monitoring the provision of seniors' services in the areas of health, personal services, housing, transportation, and income supports. The office will monitor through data analysis, surveys, consultation and input from seniors and their families.
2. **Information and referrals:** The office will provide information to seniors and members of the public about seniors' services. The office will refer individual complaints to the appropriate person or body for resolution and will track the issues raised by individuals and stakeholders, which may become topics for review.
3. **Examining issues of importance:** The office will work in the best interest of seniors by identifying, analysing and promoting awareness of systemic challenges, and finding solutions to these challenges.
4. **Recommendations:** The office will make recommendations through direct advisories to service providers and stakeholders; public statements and reports on specific topics; and mandated formal reports to the minister.

About the seniors' advocate

Isobel Mackenzie has over 20 years' experience working with seniors in home care, licensed care, community services and volunteer services. Isobel led B.C.'s largest not-for-profit agency, serving over 6000 seniors annually. In this work, Isobel led the implementation of a new model of dementia care that has become a national best practice, and led the first safety accreditation for homecare workers, among many other accomplishments. Isobel has been widely recognized for her work and was named B.C. CEO of the Year for the not-for-profit sector and nominated as a Provincial Health Care Hero.

Prior to her appointment as the Seniors Advocate, Isobel served on a number of national and provincial boards and commissions, including the BC Medical Services Commission, the Canadian Homecare Association, BC Care Providers, BC Care Aide and Community Health Worker Registry, and the Capital Regional District Housing Corporation. Isobel currently serves on the University of Victoria's Board of Governors.

Isobel received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Victoria and has a Certificate in Health Care Leadership from the University of Toronto. Isobel lives in Victoria with her husband and they have two children attending university.

For more information

The Office of the Seniors Advocate can be reached Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. at 1 877 952-3181 or via email at info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca. Translation services are available.

For more information visit: seniorsadvocatebc.ca.