

# THE FIRST ANNUAL BCCPA CARE TO DEBATE BC CARE PROVIDERS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

## Emergency Management Planning for BC's Care Homes

Resolved that, the BCCPA advocate for the adoption of a Province-wide emergency management plan for Care Homes in BC. This will ensure that Care Homes are able to prevent, mitigate, prepare and respond to emergencies and disasters. As such, strategies for seniors in homecare should also be considered as they lack assistance during a crisis (consider senior friendly communities). This can be promoted through a province wide standard for emergency response in senior care homes.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this brief is to bring attention to the perceived and actual risks of disasters within British Columbia and implement a province-wide emergency management plan within Care Homes so as to protect the safety of seniors. Disasters can be things such as earthquakes, floods, influenza, wildfires, landslides and so forth (*Get Prepared BC*, 2015). Disasters as defined by the Justice Institute of BC (JIBC) are social phenomenon that result when a hazard intersects with a vulnerable community in a way that exceeds their capacities to cope and/or respond and leads to serious safety, health and environmental issues (2011, p.3). As seniors are a vulnerable population, more attention is required to develop emergency management tactics in care homes in order to prevent and mitigate risks that could be evident during an emergency or disaster.

### ISSUE

Donner & Rodríguez (2008), in their study highlight that seniors are one population most vulnerable to disasters (p. 1104). This is due to mobility issues during evacuation, lack of insurance, and not having their immediate health needs taken care of following an emergency situations resulting in death or prolonged illnesses (p. 1104). Moreover, children, seniors, immigrants and individuals with disabilities are seen as vulnerable populations during disasters because “they all can be seen as lacking access to vital economic and social resources, possessing limited autonomy and power, and having low levels of social capital” (Peek & Stough, 2010, p. 1261).

It is noted as a case example that “Hurricane Katrina resulted in the deaths of at least 986 Louisiana residents. The major causes of death include: drowning (40%), injury and trauma (25%), and heart conditions (11%). **Nearly half of all victims were over the age of 74**” (Plyer 2016). Moreover, “the majority of elderly people who died during Hurricane Katrina, were trapped in their homes, and subsequently drowned or had heart attacks as their pre-existing health conditions were exacerbated. A similar pattern seems to have occurred in Hurricane Sandy” (Harvey, 2013). While this is just one case example, it is not difficult to imagine that seniors would be facing significant risks during an emergency or disaster, regardless of the scale due to mobility, mental and health challenges. While Care Homes may be equipped with the resources to provide care for seniors and the disabled, improper prevention

tactics could increase risk to seniors and reduce effective response and recovery methods for care staff.

While the Province of British Columbia does advocate for ALL members of its society to be apart of emergency preparedness tactics (*Get Prepared BC, 2015*), it does not develop specific province wide guidelines or strategies for Care Homes or seniors and their staff in homecare – who are considered the most vulnerable populations during a large scale emergency event or disaster. Such events could be an earthquake, prolonged power outage, flooding, freezing weather/ poor conditions that disable the ability to drive or move to different shelter and so forth.

In light of this, I advocate the implementation of emergency management tactics as discussed by the Justice Institute of British Columbia (2011) which strive for prevention and mitigation of potential disasters, preparedness for such disasters, effective response to disasters, and recovery from disasters (p.3). This process begins with a Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability (HRVA) assessment by care staff to outline any possible key risks within the facilities area (bio-containment issues, landslides, update building coding). From their care staff must put in place tactics to prevent or mitigate such disasters (store all unsafe materials away from seniors, train personal on evacuations and update building codes etc.). Preparing (preparing resources, funding and training before disaster strikes) and responding to such events effectively.

As well this paper advocates the adoption of senior friendly communities to ensure that seniors at home are taken care of and their needs are considered in the event of a disaster. Well emergency personal strive to take care of the most vulnerable first, it is recommended that residents (including care homes) have non-perishable foods, 4L of water per day (up to 3 days worth) and all required prescriptions, clothing etc. and to be able to sustain themselves independently until assistance arrives. Therefore, it is imperative for care homes to consider the tactics of emergency management, acknowledge the risk in their community and try to prevent the potential of disastrous risks from occurring in the event of an emergency. Other things to consider during a crisis situation is alternative care settings for seniors during times of evacuation, appropriate staffing to care for seniors of all needs and the relationship between care homes and the local community and emergency management teams ([link](#)). This can all be assessed in a provincial wide-emergency training program for senior care homes and homecare staff.

Ultimately “The development and implementation of a comprehensive, community-based emergency management plan reinforces the prominent role home health care [and residential care] provides within the community setting” (p. 381, Doherty). As a key stakeholder, community member and knowledgeable health partner care homes must be an integral part of the emergency management process in order to strive for providing not just excellent seniors care but also technical advice and information to emergency personal in terms of protecting our most vulnerable in the worst of times.

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