



BC Care  
Providers  
ASSOCIATION

EngAgeBC



# COVID 19: A Turning Point for Seniors' Care

BC Care Providers Association & EngAge BC | 2021 Budget Submission

**Dear Members of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services:**

This presentation comes to you in the midst of a global pandemic that has impacted those living in long-term care, assisted living or independent living residences more than any other part of our society. Even care homes accredited with exemplary standing have been no match for the pernicious spread of COVID-19. While home health care operators have not experienced notable infection rates, they have also experienced challenges with accessing the equipment they need to keep staff and seniors safe.

It is almost difficult to comprehend what life was like for the independent living and continuing care sector pre-COVID. In last year's budget submission<sup>1</sup> BCCPA sought your support in four key areas. These included funding to build and operate new long-term care beds and assisted living spaces, supporting the replacement or refurbishment of care homes which are nearing the end of their functional life, addressing the health human resource crisis through new training spaces, strengthening quality of life for seniors living in long-term care and within the community, and extending the successful Seniors Safety and Quality Improvement infrastructure program (SSQIP).<sup>2</sup>

Though the content of our previous submission to the Committee responds to real needs of our sector, COVID-19 has permanently altered the landscape for seniors' living and care providers. Our latest presentation, titled **COVID 19: A Turning Point for BC Seniors' Care**, puts forward recommended funding measures that will aid the continuing care sector in becoming more resilient in the face of the threat posed by future waves of the coronavirus. These are:

- Taking measures to ensure a robust supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) is available to the seniors living and care sector during a future pandemic;
- Strengthening and growing the seniors care workforce;
- Mitigating financial barriers through refundable tax credits for seniors seeking home health care and independent living services;
- Providing funds to cover COVID-19 related expenditures such as, but not limited to, additional purchases of PPE, and increased infection control measures and other supplies; and
- Improving the quality of life for seniors' care homes through an innovation fund that aims to reduce the social isolation seniors face during a "lockdown" or quarantine period.

Though we must acknowledge the sacrifice and loss felt by so many families, B.C.'s seniors living and care sector, and a collaborative "Team B.C." approach between government officials and key stakeholders, can be credited for limiting the spread of the virus and helping to "bend the curve."

It is understood that we remain at risk of a "second wave" of the coronavirus. Therefore, by ensuring that we have a strong and sustainable continuing care sector through the measures outlined in this submission, B.C. will be better equipped to respond to this threat.

Sincere regards,



Mike Klassen, Acting CEO

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<sup>1</sup> BCCPA. A 2020 Vision for Seniors Care. 2020 Budget Submission. June 2020. Accessed at: <https://bccare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2020-Budget-Submission-June-2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> BCCPA is pleased to be the steward of the BC government's investment of \$10 million to refocus the earlier SSQIP into EquipCare BC with the focus on infection prevention and control (IPC) particularly dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This fund is designed to improve and enhance IPC practices among all non-government operated care homes and assisted living across BC.

## Recommendations

1. That the BC government, working in collaboration with commercial distribution networks, invest \$10M to create regional stockpiles of personal protective equipment (PPE) for future pandemic preparation for B.C.'s health care sector, with an emphasis on seniors' living and care providers, including non-government home health care operators.
2. That the BC government invest \$20 million over three years to fund a comprehensive, industry-led health human resource (HHR) strategy for the seniors' care and living sector to address chronic worker shortages and improve quality of care for residents and clients.
3. That the BC government create a new provincial tax credit program, through which seniors who access non-government home health care or independent living services are eligible to receive a refundable tax credit up to \$2,500.
4. That the BC government provide funding of at least \$15 million per month to cover COVID-19 related costs for non-government long-term care, assisted living, independent living operators in BC. Along with being retroactive to mid-March 2020, such funding should be in place until medical orders are lifted.
5. That the BC Government allocate \$30 million over three years to establish a COVID-19 Innovation Fund to assist non-government independent living, assisted living and long-term care homes to ensure safety, improve quality of life and reduce social isolation by:
  1. implementing measures to ensure proper physical distancing through building enhancements and the implementation of creative visiting solutions;
  2. improving access to new tools and technologies for better communication between seniors and their families; and
  3. increasing and modifying existing recreational therapy programs to improve seniors' quality of life.

RECOMMENDATION	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	TOTAL
Personal Protective Equipment	\$10M			\$10M
Health Human Resources	\$8M	\$7M	\$5M	\$20M
Tax credit for home health care recipients	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Fully funding providers for COVID-19 Costs	\$180M	TBD	TBD	\$180M
COVID-19 Innovation Fund	\$10M	\$10M	\$10M	\$30M
Total	\$208M	\$17M†	\$15M†	\$240M

†plus any additional COVID-19 costs for providers

## COVID-19: The Current Situation in B.C.

In many jurisdictions across the world, the most devastating impacts of COVID-19 have been witnessed in long-term care, particularly as most residents are already frail and often suffering from multiple chronic conditions. From a systemic perspective, the pandemic has put further pressure on an increasingly strained continuing care sector, as residents have greater and more complex requirements than ever before and as chronic workforce shortages have posed challenges.<sup>3</sup>

### ***A Relative Success Story***

Though we must acknowledge the sacrifice and loss felt by so many families, B.C.'s seniors living and care sector can be credited for its part in limiting the spread of the virus and helping to "bend the curve" in our province. A collaborative "Team B.C." approach between government officials, seniors care operators and other vital stakeholders was critical to our province's battle with COVID-19.

It is difficult to say why B.C. has been more successful than other jurisdictions, thus far, in limiting the spread of COVID-19 within its care homes. Potential factors, however, may include:

- Less community spread, reducing the chances staff will become infected and bring the virus into seniors homes.
- Early proactive measures, including restricting visitors as well as issuing an order to limit staff to work at one care home.<sup>4</sup>
- Newer care homes with fewer number of multi-bedrooms<sup>5</sup> compared to Ontario and Quebec.
- An early emphasis on seeking and distributing PPE, including a proactive approach by SafeCare BC to collect, centralize and distribute PPE.<sup>6</sup>
- Health authority and provincial measures including protocols for testing staff and residents as well as the deployment of active rapid response teams.
- Quickly pivoting to existing protocols, designed to protect residents from influenza and other respiratory illnesses and adapted them in concert with health authorities.<sup>7</sup>

Some preliminary analysis has also offered evidence on which factors have not contributed to outbreaks. A preliminary analysis completed by the Ontario Long Term Care Association, showed that the magnitude of the outbreak has not varied according to ownership (i.e. public or government vs private). Instead, severity depended on whether the outbreak started before the province implemented its support program, the staffing situation before and during the outbreak, if the home is older and more crowded with four-bed shared rooms, and the amount of external support when needed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Canadian Nurses Association. CNA calls on governments to redesign long-term care to address serious 'vulnerabilities' - May 27, 2020. Accessed at: <https://cna-aicc.ca/en/news-room/news-releases/2020/cna-calls-on-governments-to-redesign-long-term-care-to-address-serious-vulnerabilities>

<sup>4</sup> On March 25, 2020 following an order by Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry workers in British Columbia's long-term care, acute care and assisted-living facilities were limited to working in a single facility. To access medical order see: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/covid-19-pho-order-info-collection-health-care-staff.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> In BC about 88% of rooms are single occupancy, 8% double occupancy and 4% multi-person rooms. Source: Office of Seniors Advocate. Monitoring Seniors Services, 2019. December 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2019/12/MonitoringReport2019.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> CBC News. The long-term care crisis: How B.C. controlled COVID-19 while Ontario, Quebec face disaster. March 28, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/long-term-care-crisis-covid19-pandemic-1.5589097>

<sup>7</sup> That included restricting outside visitors, limiting community activities and implementing enhanced cleaning and sanitation measures. Any residents demonstrating signs of illness were tested immediately for COVID-19 and quarantined for 14 days, erring on the side of caution. (Source: Vancouver Sun. Coordinated "Team B.C." approach has made the province a model for seniors' care during COVID-19. May 30, 2020. Accessed at: <https://vancouversun.com/sponsored/news-sponsored/coordinated-team-b-c-approach-has-made-the-province-a-model-for-seniors-care-during-covid-19-pandemic/wcm/bc89e787-18ea-47ff-9ed1-1b2edbeeb6fd/>)

<sup>8</sup> Times Colonist. Private nursing home owners under pressure as COVID-19 exposes flaws in system. May 28, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.timescolonist.com/private-nursing-home-owners-under-pressure-as-covid-19-exposes-flaws-in-system-1.24142844>



Dr. Samir Sinha, director of health policy research at the National Institute on Ageing at Ryerson University, also notes it is simplistic to say for-profit care homes are more likely to have COVID-19 outbreaks than not-for-profit homes as both are having problems. In particular, the reason for-profit homes appear to be more severely affected may be due to the fact that there are more of them – similar to BC close to two-thirds of long-term care homes are also privately owned.<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately further information and time will be required to determine by BC has seen early success in “bending the curve.” Our province has not been without its challenges however, and our focus now must be on improving our preparedness against any “second wave.” BCCPA’s recommendations for this preparedness action plan are discussed herein.



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<sup>9</sup> Times Colonist. Private nursing home owners under pressure as COVID-19 exposes flaws in system. May 28, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.timescolonist.com/private-nursing-home-owners-under-pressure-as-covid-19-exposes-flaws-in-system-1.24142844>

## 1. Ensuring Adequate Supply of PPE

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) has demonstrated the importance of emergency PPE stockpiles. With global shortages, seniors' care and living providers have been largely unable to secure necessary purchases of masks, gloves, gowns, hand sanitizer, eye protection, disinfectant wipes, and other supplies.

Unfortunately, seniors care providers, including home health operators, struggled early on to get access to PPE. Operators found that their needs were not prioritized in the same way which hospitals or acute care was, even though they support vulnerable seniors, the majority of whom are medically and/or cognitively frail.

The pandemic has also highlighted the challenges of static stockpiles, as products purchased during the H1N1 crisis in 2009-10 have now passed their five-year expiry date.

BCCPA is calling upon the provincial government to work with commercial vendors to create regional stockpiles throughout B.C. that are available for purchase by government and non-government care providers alike. By expanding warehouse space and ensuring that supplies are cycled properly, the government can help ensure British Columbia is well-prepared for future pandemics, and that older adults are protected.

### RECOMMENDATION #1

**That the BC government working in collaboration with commercial distribution networks, invest \$10M to create regional stockpiles of personal protective equipment (PPE) for future pandemic preparation for B.C.'s health care sector, with an emphasis on seniors' living and care providers, including non-government home health care operators.**



## 2. Strengthening the Seniors Care Workforce

With Canada's aging population, it is well documented that BC's continuing care sector will be among the fastest growing industries over the next decade. In order to meet the needs of B.C.'s frail and elderly citizens, the province will require a robust pool of qualified health care professionals, including an additional 17,900 health care assistants over the next ten years.<sup>10</sup>

However, the recent coronavirus pandemic has highlighted several challenges in Canada's continuing care sector—particularly chronic worker shortages. While BC has demonstrated early success with “bending the curve”, the outbreaks in long-term care in Quebec and Ontario demonstrate the significant risk posed to seniors by worker shortages in outbreak scenarios.

British Columbia must fortify its seniors' care sector against the possibility of a “second wave,” as well as continue to strive towards our provincial goal of providing 3.36 hours of care per day to each resident. In order to protect our most frail and vulnerable citizens, BCCPA is calling upon the Government of British Columbia to invest in a robust, industry-led health human resource (HHR) strategy to address chronic worker shortages in seniors' care, as well as retain our current workforce.

In particular, BCCPA is requesting that the provincial government make \$20 million in investments over the next three years, including:

- Expanding **access to health care education** by investing an \$12 million over the next three years to establish an additional 400 health care assistants (HCA) program seats across the province each year, as well as an \$3 million investment to create a **bursary program** of up to \$5,000 for applicants with demonstrated financial need whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19.
- **Promoting awareness** of the high-quality, “pandemic-proof” job opportunities that exist in BC's seniors care and living sector. Modeled off of the successful [Choose2Care](#) campaign and with an investment of \$1 million over two years, this program would be tailored to British Columbian's whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19, bridging them to new careers in care. It should be noted that recruiting potential staff may be particularly challenging, given the negative attention the sector has received as it has attempted to manage the virus.
- Streamline and harmonize the **credential recognition process** for internationally educated health care professionals, including \$1 million to establish competency assessment testing centres outside of the Lower Mainland, including exploring opportunities to bring testing “online” through the use of virtual technology.
- Improve safety for existing continuing care workers by investing \$3M over two years to provide enhanced infection prevention and control training, as well as mental health and wellness supports. Working collaboratively with health authorities, unions, industry representatives, SafeCare BC and the Canadian Mental Health Association, deliver training to all frontline workers in seniors living and care.

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<sup>10</sup> Good Jobs for Today and Tomorrow. February 2020. Government of British Columbia. Accessed at: [https://www.workbc.ca/getmedia/30a4a0d6-57bd-4047-8b8b-250c54b505c3/BC\\_Good\\_Jobs\\_For\\_Today\\_And\\_Tomorrow\\_2019.aspx](https://www.workbc.ca/getmedia/30a4a0d6-57bd-4047-8b8b-250c54b505c3/BC_Good_Jobs_For_Today_And_Tomorrow_2019.aspx).

## RECOMMENDATION #2

That the BC government invest \$20 million over three years to fund a comprehensive, industry-led health human resource strategy for the seniors' care and living sector to address chronic worker shortages.





### 3. Implementing Tax Credits for Home Health Care and Independent Living

Across B.C., hundreds of non-government home health operators and independent living operators support tens of thousands of seniors to remain independent.

Non-government home care and home support services are a critical, but often underrecognized component of B.C.'s senior care system. There are many reasons why seniors choose to access private home health services, including greater flexibility, more continuity in workers, personal and care needs which exceed the level of service delivered by the public system, and financial impetus.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, independent living (sometimes referred to as seniors' living or retirement living) has become a preferred choice for many seniors who are able to continue living independently, but can benefit from assistance from services such as meal service, housekeeping and recreation.

However, over the coming years, we expect COVID-19 to affect the affordability and sustainability of private home health services and independent living in three key ways:

- Wage compression is expected to occur, due to the wage-levelling and "hero-pay" bonuses which are currently underway in the long-term care and assisted living sectors. While these initiatives will not apply to non-government home health or independent living operators, they will be required to compete with soaring labour costs. As costs increase, many organizations will have no choice but to consider raising client rates.
- Economic impacts of COVID-19 are expected to affect the available income of seniors and the family members who financially support them. This will have further impacts on the affordability of care and seniors living options.
- While many seniors express a preference to age in place, fear of contracting COVID-19 may be a further incentive for seniors to remain at home for as long as possible, or to look at independent living options. Further, there may be disruptions to the availability of publicly subsidized home health care and adult day programs, as has occurred during the first wave of the pandemic. While these factors will increase the need for home health and independent living services, these services may not be within reach for seniors.

As such, BCCPA is recommending that a new stand alone, provincial tax credit be established, to help subsidize the costs incurred by seniors who access services privately. A refundable tax credit of \$2,500 would support seniors to age in place and remain independent. It would also ensure that the public system can remain sustainable as our province prepares for an aging population. It is recommended that this credit be implemented in addition to the federal medical expense tax credit, and that applicants need not be eligible for the disability tax credit to apply.

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<sup>11</sup> It is not unusual for moderate- or higher-income clients to pay the same or less to access private support than they would to access publicly subsidized support.

### RECOMMENDATION #3

That the BC government create a new provincial tax credit program, through which seniors who access non-government home health care or independent living are eligible to receive a refundable tax credit of \$2,500.



## 4. Fully Funding Care Providers for COVID-19 Costs

Since the beginning of the pandemic in March, BCCPA and EngAge BC have been advocating to the provincial Ministry of Health and the regional health authorities to provide funding to all seniors care and independent living operators, as to cover the costs for COVID-19 related expenses. This increased funding is urgently needed to support the large incremental expenses incurred by operators in managing and mitigating the impacts from COVID-19.

In particular, the pandemic has necessitated unprecedented quantities of personal protective equipment and levels of staffing to support infection prevention and mitigation processes, escalating costs beyond the scale of current funding levels. As noted in earlier correspondence sent to the BC government in March and a letter dated April 9, 2020 BCCPA members expect that the province will commit to ensuring that care providers will be able to fully recover any unexpected, identified and quantifiable costs attributed to ensuring safe and quality care for seniors during the pandemic.

BCCPA and EngAge BC are calling upon the provincial government to begin flowing funding immediately to providers and for the duration of the public health emergency. This is vital given that many care providers were in a precarious fiscal situation even prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, as noted from data in a 2020 Office of the Seniors Advocate report, over one-third of contracted care homes (60 total) are in a deficit position, or not making any profit.<sup>12</sup>

With up to one-third of care homes in a weakened financial position, the additional financial pressures of COVID-19 could lead to a number of unexpected closures, thus causing a significant loss of long-term care beds. Ensuring the fiscal viability and sustainability of seniors living and care providers for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic will be critical to ensuring that older adults continue to have access to care services.

### **COVID-19 Cost Analysis**

Working with several large care providers in BC, BCCPA has attempted to estimate the cost of additional COVID-19 related costs for long-term care and assisted-living residences (excluding costs associated with wage levelling). In this specific analysis, costs that were looked at included PPE (i.e. face masks, shield, gloves, gowns, etc.), human resources (i.e. overtime, sick, agency costs, onboarding, training costs, etc.) and cleaning and other supplies (i.e. overbed tables, single use food containers, buckets, garbage cans, etc.).

Without any additional COVID-19 outbreaks, BCCPA estimates that the monthly cost to cover additional COVID-19 related expenses will be \$7.9 million for long-term care homes and \$7.1 million for assisted living residences. Should additional outbreaks occur, these costs will be higher. An overview of these costs is outlined in the following table below.

In partnership with EngAge BC, the BC government should perform a further analysis as to understand the cost implications of the pandemic on non-government home health operators, as they are also experiencing significant costs related to PPE – both in terms of more need for supplies, and higher costs.

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<sup>12</sup> BC Office of the Seniors Advocate. A Billion Reasons to Care. February 2020. Accessed at : <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/ABillionReasonsToCare.pdf>

		PPE	Human Resources	Cleaning and other supplies	TOTAL COST	
					Per day per bed/suite	Monthly Cost†
Long Term Care	No COVID-19	\$4.08	\$7.26	\$3.34	\$14.68	\$7.92M
	COVID-19 Outbreak	\$5.10	\$13.40	\$3.68	\$22.18	\$11.9M
Assisted Living	No COVID-19	\$1.43	\$3.86	\$3.28	\$8.57	\$7.07M
	COVID-19 Outbreak	\$1.78	\$5.58	\$3.65	\$11	\$9.07M

† Calculated as the cost of operating 18,000 long-term care beds and 27,500 assisted living suites for 30 days.

### Other Jurisdictions

Other Canadian jurisdictions have already committed to providing seniors care and living providers with additional funding to address COVID-19 related costs, including:

- Alberta committed on May 19<sup>th</sup> to provide an additional **\$14.2 million** per month to seniors, designated supportive living, and long-term care for enhanced staffing and extra cleaning supplies as well as to address lost accommodation revenue.<sup>13</sup> This funding is also retroactive to March 15<sup>th</sup> and will be ongoing until various medical orders are lifted. Providers will also requirement to report on the use of these funds, and sites will need to return money not spent on COVID-19 related purposes.<sup>14</sup>
- In Ontario, where COVID-19 outbreaks have been generally more severe, the provincial government also recently committed to providing **\$88 million** in one-time emergency funding to its 627 publicly-funded long-term care homes. Each care home will receive a baseline of \$12,000 and \$200 per bed, with additional funding for those homes with active cases of COVID-19. The funding is intended to flow to care homes in one envelope, allowing each organization flexibility to allocate dollars where needed.<sup>15</sup>
- In late March, the Quebec government also announced long-term care homes and seniors residences in that province will receive up to **\$133 million** in emergency funding in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. In particular, the money will go towards hiring staff and buying more protective gear and disinfectants in those care homes.<sup>16</sup>

BCCPA is calling upon the Government of British Columbia to follow the example of Alberta, Ontario and Quebec to immediately allocate funding to providers to cover current and future COVID-19 related costs.

<sup>13</sup> Alberta Government. Strong protection for vulnerable seniors. May 19, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=71386D035BB2D-B631-0BFC-9D02B950AD5AF7D0>

<sup>14</sup> On April 20, 2020, the Alberta government also announced \$24.5 million is being advanced to operators to help address immediate cost pressures due to COVID-19. These funds address immediate cash flow issues for operators although not additional expenses. For further information see: <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=70127FF594C5C-CE00-2934-863516C3FEDF723E>

<sup>15</sup> BCCPA. Funding the COVID-19 crisis in care: B.C. providers feeling the strain. May 8, 2020. Accessed at: <https://bccpa.ca/2020/05/funding-the-covid-19-crisis-in-care-b-c-providers-feeling-the-strain/>

<sup>16</sup> Global News. Quebec's health-care system ready as coronavirus deaths rise to 25, premier says. March 30, 2020. Accessed at: <https://globalnews.ca/news/6749583/quebec-coronavirus-march-30/>



In particular, BCCPA recommends that the provincial government provide funding of at least \$15 million per month to non-government providers in order to cover COVID-19 related costs for long-term care, assisted living and independent living. Along with being retroactive to mid-March such funding should be in place until medical orders are lifted while providers should be required to report on all expenses and refund any funds not spent directly on COVID-19.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4

**That the BC government provide funding of at least \$15 million per month to cover COVID-19 related costs for non-government long-term care, assisted living, independent living operators in BC. Along with being retroactive to mid-March, such funding should be in place until medical orders are lifted while providers should also be required to report on all expenses and refund any funds not spent directly on COVID-19.**



## 5. Fostering Innovation to Protect Seniors and Reduce Isolation

On March 17, 2020 B.C. restricted visitors in long-term care, assisted living and co-located independent living to essential visits only. Essential visits included compassionate visits for end-of-life care and routine assistance with feeding or mobility. As outlined in late April, B.C.'s Public Health Officer indicated that the government hopes to ease COVID-19 restrictions on visitors at seniors' residences and hospitals this summer, allowing at least one family member to visit a loved one.<sup>17</sup>

### **Seniors Isolation and COVID-19**

While BCCPA and EngAge BC supports visiting restrictions, as they are critical in the fight against COVID-19, it is also important to look at the mental and physical impacts they can have on seniors. As noted previously by BCCPA, seniors isolation can have detrimental effects the elderly.<sup>18</sup> A 2012 study released by the National Academy of Sciences, for example, suggests social isolation and loneliness are associated with higher risks of mortality in older adults.<sup>19</sup> Other studies note that isolation among this cohort is comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day,<sup>20</sup> while another states it can be twice as unhealthy as obesity, increasing chances of early death by 14 per cent.<sup>21</sup>

Social isolation among seniors is also correlated to the development of chronic illnesses such as lung disease, arthritis and impaired mobility. In particular, research shows that increased loneliness can lead to depression, as well as cognitive decline and an increased risk of dementia.<sup>22</sup> Along with increased risks of mental and physical illness, social isolation may increase vulnerability leading to elder abuse and the development of addictions.<sup>23</sup>

Seniors isolation in long-term care was an issue prior to COVID-19, as a survey of residents showed that about 45 percent reported there is no one living in the care home that they consider a close friend and no one for them to do things with.<sup>24</sup> While it is difficult to quantify, it is clear that feelings of social isolation have escalated greatly since the onset of the pandemic particularly.

As such, it will be important to look at ways to reduce social isolation that can result by visit restrictions. In this regard, BCCPA launched an earlier campaign called [#Telltheyoucare](#) inviting British Columbians from all corners of the province to submit a positive greeting to seniors receiving home care and those living in long-term care, assisted and independent living settings.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Times Colonist. Care-home visiting rules could ease in summer. April 27, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/care-home-visiting-rules-could-ease-in-summer-1.24124449>

<sup>18</sup> BCCPA. Suffering in Silence: Solving Seniors Isolation in BC. February 2020. Accessed at: <https://bccare.ca/2018/02/suffering-silence-solving-seniors-isolation-bc/>

<sup>19</sup> Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. Andrew Steptoe et al. February 15, 2013. Accessed at: <http://www.pnas.org/content/110/15/5797.full>

<sup>20</sup> Holt-Lundstedt, J., Smith, T.B., and Layton, B.L. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. PLoS Medicine, p. 12. Retrieved from

<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1000316>

<sup>21</sup> Loneliness twice as unhealthy as obesity for older people, study finds. The Guardian. Ian Sample. February 16, 2014. Accessed at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/science/2014/feb/16/loneliness-twice-as-unhealthy-as-obesity-older-people>

<sup>22</sup> Steptoe, A., Shankar, A., Demakakos, P., and Wardle, J. (2013). Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women, p. 5797. Accessed at:

[http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/Growing\\_Old\\_Alone\\_April\\_2014.pdf](http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/Growing_Old_Alone_April_2014.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> 20 Facts About Senior Isolation That Will Stun You. Accessed at:

<https://www.aplaceformom.com/blog/10-17-14-facts-about-senior-isolation/>

<sup>24</sup> Office of the Seniors Advocate. Every Voice Counts: Provincial Residential Care Survey Results. September 2017. Accessed at:

<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/residential-care-survey/>

<sup>25</sup> EngAgeBC. #Telltheyoucare: Online Campaign Invites Public to Send Greetings to Seniors. April 2020. Accessed at:

<https://engageseniors.ca/telltheyoucare-online-campaign-invites-public-to-send-greetings-to-seniors/>

## ***COVID-19 Innovation Fund***

While such social media campaigns like #Telltheyoucare are a positive step, BCCPA and EngAge BC believes more must be done to reduce seniors' isolation during the coronavirus pandemic. BCCPA is calling upon the Government of British Columbia to create a new COVID-19 Innovation Fund to reduce social isolation and improve quality-of-life for older adults.

### ***Building Enhancements for physical distancing, isolating residents and increasing safety***

BCCPA and EngAge BC believes that the Innovation Fund should provide funding to providers in long-term care, assisted living and independent living in order to:

- Make modifications or enhancements to care homes and residences to allow for physical distancing;
- Better isolate or quarantine residents who may have contracted COVID-19 and to prevent overall spread;
- Support care providers as they implement measures such as Plexiglas, visiting pods or other creative interventions to allow for safer visits between family members and residents.

An example of a building enhancement would be the establishment of the family meetup centres which were developed by PARC Retirement Living in the Lower Mainland. These spaces allow residents living at five retirement residences to visit with family, while keeping safe from the spread of COVID-19. In this instance, storage containers have been outfitted with a Plexiglass partition that allows residents to enter from one side, and their families to enter from the other. Each of the units which costs between \$15,000 to \$20,000 and have been outfitted with hand sanitizer, HEPA filters and air conditioning.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Technologies and tools to reduce social isolation***

Technology can also be used as a helpful tool for combating social isolation; however, the costs can be high for providers who are already dealing with new COVID-19 related pressures. An Innovation Fund could provide support for the adoption of technologies such as laptops or tablets to enhance communication between residents and family members when visiting restrictions are in place. While some support has been provided for this in some health authorities, it is not nearly enough to meet demand.

### ***Improving seniors' quality of life through greater recreational therapy***

The third area that an Innovation Fund could support is increasing access to important recreational therapy programs.

Recreational therapy is a practice that uses recreation and leisure-based interventions to improve functioning and independence, as well as to decrease or eliminate the effects of illness or disability. It is also critical in ensuring seniors are engaged socially, which has a significant impact on both physical and mental wellbeing. For older adults in long-term care, participating in recreational therapy programs leads to improvements in their social, mental and physical health.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> CTV News. Here's how some B.C. retirement homes are helping families visit seniors safely. May 27, 2020. Accessed at: <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/here-s-how-some-b-c-retirement-homes-are-helping-families-visit-seniors-safely-1.4957552>

<sup>27</sup> CALTC. Recreation Therapy to Promote Mobility Among Older Adults in Long Term Care. 2018. Accessed at: [https://bccare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Rec-Therapy-Guide\\_CALTC.pdf](https://bccare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Rec-Therapy-Guide_CALTC.pdf)

Delivery of recreational therapy programs during the coronavirus pandemic has become even more important, particularly due to visitor restrictions. However, many existing recreational therapy programs will need to be modified so that they can be safely delivered in the context of COVID-19. The coronavirus pandemic, for example, has made providing recreational therapy to persons living with dementia even more challenging as in some cases can be difficult to get them to follow public health advice like physical distancing or proper hand washing.

The Innovation Fund would support care homes and seniors living residences to make modifications to their recreational therapy programs so that they can be delivered within the context of COVID-19.

Two examples of care homes that have already successfully modified their recreational therapy programs are Menno Place and Tabor Village in Abbotsford. Menno Place, a campus of care in Abbotsford, which established Zoom teleconference ability for hundreds of distanced patient visits, and streamed community activities to all residents to help them feel connected.<sup>28</sup> At Tabor Village also in Abbotsford, therapeutic recreation staff were required to develop new activities such as doorway bingo, where long hallways were converted into a games room.<sup>29</sup> However, not all care homes have the ability to modify their programming without additional financial assistance.

BCCPA calls on government to provide funding of \$10 million each year over three years to support the establishment of such a fund. Not only will this help improve the safety of seniors and those who visit, it will reduce seniors' isolation and improve quality of life as we prepare for a potential subsequent wave of COVID-19.

## **RECOMMENDATION #5**

**That the BC Government allocate \$30 million over three years to establish a COVID-19 Innovation Fund to assist non-government independent living, assisted living and long-term care homes to ensure safety, improve quality of life and reduce social isolation by: 1) implementing measures to ensure proper physical distancing through building enhancements and the implementation of creative visiting solutions; 2) improving access to new tools and technologies for better communication between seniors and their families; and 3) increasing and modifying existing recreational therapy programs to improve seniors quality of life.**

<sup>28</sup> Vancouver Sun. Coordinated "Team B.C." approach has made the province a model for seniors' care during COVID-19. May 30, 2020. Accessed at: pandemic. Accessed at: <https://vancouversun.com/sponsored/news-sponsored/coordinated-team-b-c-approach-has-made-the-province-a-model-for-seniors-care-during-covid-19-pandemic/wcm/bc89e787-18ea-47ff-9ed1-1b2edbeeb6fd/>. As a result of COVID-19 Menno with its local streaming television station was also forced to create from scratch a weekly schedule of shows on various topics such as Morning Prayer, Devotions, Church services, Bingo, lunch announcements, Hymn Sings and Chair and brain exercises. (PR Leap. When Teams Unite in Innovation and Change: Menno Place Teams Recognized for Reinventing Seniors Care during COVID-19 pandemic. May 26, 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.prleap.com/pr/275755/when-teams-unite-in-innovation-and-change-menno-place-teams-recognized-for-reinventing-seniors-care-during-covid-19-pandemic>).

<sup>29</sup> Vancouver Sun. Dan Levitt: A new hope for rethinking the aging journey. May 2020. Accessed at: <https://vancouversun.com/opinion/dan-levitt-a-new-hope-for-rethinking-the-aging-journey/>.



## About BCCPA & EngAge BC

BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) has represented non-government care providers for over 40 years. Along with EngAge BC, we work with over 390 long-term care, home health care, assisted living, independent living, and commercial members across the province.

## About BC's Continuing Care Sector

Each day senior's living and continuing care providers strive to support B.C.'s seniors in a way which enables the best quality of life possible – while COVID-19. B.C.'s Home and Community Care budget exceeds \$2.5 billion, which is on par with the fifth largest Ministry. Over two-thirds of all seniors' care in the province is delivered by non-government providers – which includes both for-profit and non-profit providers. Many non-government providers are funded directly by the regional health authorities to deliver seniors' care services across the province.



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