



## Remarks to Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services – June 10, 2020

Thank you, members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for inviting BC Care Providers Association and EngAge BC to present today.

Through our association we speak for the majority of organizations that provide long-term care, assisted living, and private home health services, as well as those who operate independent living residences in B.C. As you know, in our province, approximately two-thirds of front-line care for seniors is provided by private and nonprofit operators.

This presentation comes to you in the midst of a global pandemic that has impacted our elderly population more than any other part of our society, and in particular those people who live in our care homes. Even those care homes accredited with exemplary standing have been no match for the pernicious spread of COVID-19.

And 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.

At BC Care Providers Association and EngAge BC, we believe that COVID-19 has permanently altered the landscape for seniors' living and care providers. This is why our 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. We recommend the following:

1. That the BC government, working in collaboration with commercial distribution networks, invests \$10M to create regional stockpiles of personal protective equipment for B.C.'s health care sector to prepare for future pandemics, with an emphasis on seniors' living and care providers, including non-government home health care operators.
2. That the BC government invests \$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 and improve quality of care for residents and clients. This funding will also allow for investing in the current workforce by providing more training in infection control, and mental health and wellness programs for care workers.
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 provides funding of at least \$15 million per month to cover COVID-19 related costs for non-government long-term care, assisted living, and 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. Finally, 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:
  - a) implementing measures to ensure proper physical distancing through building enhancements and the implementation of creative visiting solutions;
  - b) improving access to new tools and technologies for better communication between seniors and their families; and
  - c) increasing and modifying existing recreational therapy programs to improve seniors' quality of life.

The total estimate over three years for this funding would be up to \$240 million. In return for this investment, BC will realize significant savings through improved health outcomes, less social isolation, higher worker retention, and reduced risk to care staff. Our province can and should be the best place to live to a ripe old age.

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.

We must always acknowledge the sacrifice and loss felt by so many families, due to the novel coronavirus.

However, we must credit B.C.'s seniors living and care sector, and the collaborative “Team B.C.” approach between elected officials, government staff and key stakeholders, for helping to “bend the curve” and limiting the spread of the virus.

Thank you again for your time this morning. A detailed budget submission document from our association will soon be provided to the committee.

**\*\*Please check against delivery.\*\***