

# BC BUDGET 2022

## SUBMISSION

to the Select Standing  
Committee on Finance  
and Government  
Services



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BC Budget 2022 Submission  
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# MESSAGE FROM CEO TERRY LAKE

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

This past year has been the most challenging  
ever faced by B.C.'s seniors' living and  
continuing care sector. Our team at BC Care  
Providers Association and EngAge BC has  
strived to support the sector through these  
trying times with collaboration, compassion,  
kindness and creativity.

The effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus were  
felt most harshly by our elderly and frail  
seniors, and in particular those who lived in  
our care homes. While the majority of care  
homes were spared from outbreaks, a select  
number of them were greatly impacted by  
the deadly virus. We must be better prepared  
for a future pandemic when, not if, it happens  
again.

If we do not prepare for the anticipated  
doubling and tripling of demand for aged care  
services, our healthcare system could buckle  
due to overwhelming demand. By investing in  
recruitment and training to strengthen the  
healthcare workforce, and ensuring that our  
infrastructure is the best available, a more  
positive picture emerges for British  
Columbia's families.

We thank you for taking the time to consider  
our recommendations for BC Budget 2022  
toward improving the quality of life for B.C.'s  
seniors through a combination of targeted  
investments.



*"Canada faces an existential  
threat from the demographic  
disruption caused by our  
aging society."*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

BC Care Providers Association/EngAge BC asks the following:

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## **01.** Enhance Staffing Levels & Hours of Care

That the committee recommends investing \$650 million over three years to meet the staffing needs for a new minimum standard of four hours of direct care per day for each resident in long-term care.

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## **02.** Health Human Resource Equity Strategy

That the committee recommends an investment of \$25 million over three years toward the development of a Health Human Resources Equity Strategy – through a collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Advanced Education & Skills Training, as well as sector representatives – that bridges underrepresented groups (including women, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers to Canada and other racialized workers) to quality careers in seniors' care.

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## **03.** Tax Credits to Support Aging in Place

That the committee recommends a refundable tax credit of up to \$2,500 annually for seniors who are aged 70+ to offset the costs of family-directed home health care or independent living services that enhance the ability to “age in place,” and reduce or delay the need for assisted living or long-term care services.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **04.** Extend & Expand EquipCare BC

That the committee recommends the continuation of the EquipCare BC program through an investment of \$20-million over three years. EquipCare BC is an efficiently run program managed by the BC Care Providers Association in partnership with the Ministry of Health. The funds allow long-term care and assisted living operators to purchase needed equipment such as lifts, beds, urgent-response systems as well as infection protection and control systems to enhance employee and resident health and safety.

As well, we ask the committee to recommend to the Minister of Finance that an additional \$5 million investment into EquipCare BC over three-years is made toward mitigating the impacts of climate change in the seniors' care sector. Purchases by operators of air conditioning, HEPA filtering and/or other environmental systems through this fund will help protect elderly residents against the impacts of recurring heat waves, the declining air quality due to wildfires and other natural disasters.

## **05.** Culturally Appropriate Seniors Care & Support

That the committee recommends establishing a \$2.5 million Culturally Appropriate Care Fund to increase the seniors living and care sector's capacity to appropriately support Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2S+ seniors, newcomers to Canada and other people of racialized backgrounds through training, awareness-building and designing culturally appropriate menus.

## **06.** Expand Access and Capacity for Long-Term Care

That the committee recommends \$1.6 billion is earmarked over three years to fund the construction and operation of 5,000 new long-term care beds across the province by 2027.



# ENHANCE STAFFING LEVELS & HOURS OF CARE

Over the last four years, significant efforts have been made to enhance the staffing levels and hours of care provided to residents in B.C.'s long-term care homes. Under the current provincial government, the average hours of care provided each day has increased from 3.11 in 2017 to 3.36 in 2021, due to an investment of \$240 million over three years.

Despite these commendable actions, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the limitations of the current long-term care system, as well as the pitfalls of low staffing levels and inappropriate skills mix. For example, the report from the Royal Society of Canada, Restoring Trust: COVID-19 and The Future of Long-Term Care, identified that low-staffing levels and acute worker shortages were the number one contributing factor to Canada's disproportionately high mortality rate in long-term care during the first wave of the pandemic.

Nearly two decades have passed since the most comprehensive empirical study on appropriate staffing levels and skills mix was conducted in the United States. This report identified that 4 hours of direct care per day is the minimum required for quality care (to say nothing of quality of life, or the increasing acuity of seniors living in care). Currently, Ontario is on the only jurisdiction in Canada poised to meet this minimum standard, having announced investments of over \$1.9 billion to raise care standards over the next four years to 2025.

BCCPA is calling upon the provincial government to become a leader in the delivery of quality care by investing \$650 million over three years – this would increase the hours of direct care received by each long-term care resident to an average of four hours per day, thus ensuring that seniors receive the quality of care that they need and deserve.

## Recommendation #1:

*That the committee recommends investing \$650 million over three years to meet the staffing needs for a new minimum standard of four hours of direct care per day for each resident in long-term care.*



# HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCES EQUITY STRATEGY

BCCPA has frequently communicated about the impacts of the health human resource shortage on the seniors living and continuing care sector. With both an aging population and care workforce, the continuing care sector is among Canada's fastest growing industries. To meet the needs of older adults over the coming decades, British Columbia will require an expanded pool of qualified health care professionals. Over 42,000 additional nurses, care aides and allied health workers will be needed over the next ten years in B.C.

The events of the COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the risks associated with low staffing levels and burdensome workloads in continuing care. Early outbreaks in Quebec and Ontario caused significant loss of life; and while many factors contributed to this tragedy, foremost among them were staffing shortages, as thousands of workers were either infected or walked off the job out of fear of contracting the virus and bringing it home to their families.

British Columbia must fortify its care sector against the possibility of future calamities. BCCPA is calling upon the provincial government to invest in a collaborative health human resource equity strategy to bridge marginalized workers to quality careers in care, thus strengthening the seniors' care and living workforce.

BC Care Providers Association is calling upon the committee to recommend that the Government of British Columbia invest \$25 million over the next three years to:

- Promote awareness of the rewarding careers available in B.C.'s seniors living and continuing care sector. With an investment of \$1 million over three years, this campaign would promote economic equity among groups that are underrepresented in the labour market (e.g., women, racialized workers, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers to Canada, etc.).
- Expand access to health care education by investing \$20 million over the next three years to establish 800 additional nursing seats, paired with supports for work-integrated learning opportunities.
- Streamline and harmonize the credential recognition process for internationally educated health care professionals, bridging these skilled workers to economic opportunities that make the most of their skills and education.
- Improve safety for existing continuing care workers by investing \$3 million over two years to provide enhanced infection prevention and control training, as well as mental health resources and supports.

#### Recommendation #2:

*That the committee recommends an investment of \$25 million over three years toward the development of a Health Human Resources Equity Strategy – through a collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Advanced Education & Skills Training, as well as sector representatives – that bridges underrepresented groups (including women, Indigenous Peoples, newcomers to Canada and other racialized workers) to quality careers in seniors' care.*





# TAX CREDITS TO SUPPORT AGING IN PLACE

A recent survey from the National Institute of Ageing (NIA) found that 91 per cent of Canadians of all ages, and almost 100 per cent of Canadians 65 years of age and older, plan on supporting themselves to live safely and independently in their own home as long as possible. However, while remaining independent might be the intention of older adults, it is estimated that about one-quarter of Canadians aged 75 and over have at least one unmet need with respect to their activities of daily living.

By supporting older adults to access independent living and private home health services, B.C.'s government has an opportunity to situate older adults to age as independently as possible, all while offsetting health care costs and ensuring that care can be there for those who need it most by reducing the number of older people who require publicly subsidized long-term care and assisted living services.

Across B.C., hundreds of non-government home health providers 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 under-recognized component of B.C.'s senior care continuum. 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.

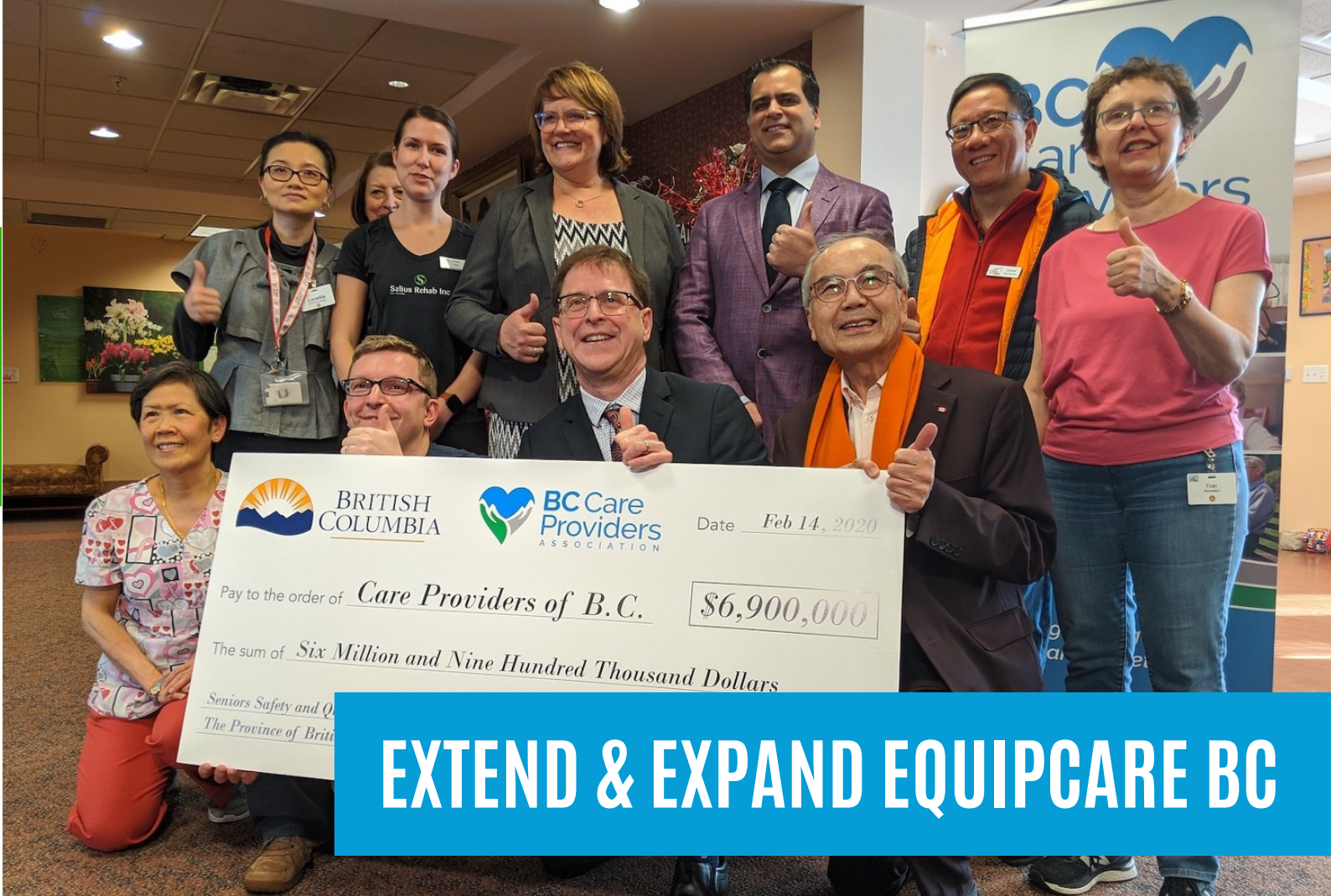
Likewise, independent living (sometimes referred to as seniors' living or retirement living) has become a preferred choice for many seniors who are able to continue living independently, but can benefit from assistance from services such as dining services, recreational programs and the watchful eye of staff. While independent living is not considered to be part of the province's healthcare system, it plays an important role by enabling seniors to age in place.

BCCPA therefore recommends that a new standalone provincial tax credit be established to help subsidize the costs incurred by seniors who access these services. 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 the average age of the population increases. 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.

### Recommendation #3:

*That the committee recommends a refundable tax credit of up to \$2,500 annually for seniors who are aged 70+ to offset the costs of family-directed home health care or independent living services that enhance the ability to "age in place," and reduce or delay the need for assisted living or long-term care services.*





In March 2020, EquipCare BC was announced by the Government of British Columbia with the intention of expanding the mandate and scope of the Seniors Safety Quality Improvement Program (SSQIP). With the previous \$10 million SSQIP program, an impressive 99% of eligible long-term care operators in B.C. applied and received funding for a wide-range of essential equipment and life-enhancing systems. Operators purchased over 8,000 new items, including beds and mattresses, shower chairs and tubs, mobility equipment, lighting and visual aids, sensory rooms, music therapy tools, and ergonomic furniture.

With the EquipCare BC program, B.C.'s long-term care and assisted living residences were also eligible for funding for infection control systems and products to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the help of this funding, over 3.5 million items were purchased, including much needed personal protective equipment (PPE), medical and screening devices, food services, environmental cleaning, housekeeping and laundry, furniture, waste management and hygiene solutions.

...continued

With all funding for this important program now allocated, additional funds are required. BC Care Providers Association is calling upon the Government of British Columbia to extend the successful EquipCare BC initiative through a \$20-million three-year partnership between the Government of British Columbia and the BC Care Providers Association(BCCPA). Funds would allow long-term care and assisted living operators to purchase much needed equipment such as lifts, beds, urgent-response systems, as well as infection protection and control systems to ensure the health and safety of residents and workers alike.

Oversight for EquipCare BC would continue to be provided by a group of industry stakeholders and government, including representatives from BCCPA, SafeCare BC, Denominational Health Association and the Ministry of Health.

## Mitigating Against Climate Change and Other Natural Disasters

Over the summer, raging wildfires in the Interior of British Columbia forced thousands of people to evacuate their homes, including vulnerable seniors in long-term care homes. This posed a significant logistical challenge as well as additional costs to care operators and resulted in tremendous stress for residents and their families.

As climate change threatens to increase the duration and severity of B.C.'s wildfire season, the province must prepare to support seniors to manage the associated challenges. Along with preparing to relocate residents, measures are required to ensure seniors are protected from the negative effects of poor air quality, as older adults with chronic conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease, or asthma, are particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of air pollution and need to receive frequent monitoring.







As outlined in a document by the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC), cleaner indoor air is the best way to protect residents in long-term care and assisted living residences when conditions are smoky. Methods to achieve this include preventing smoke from getting into the building, and cleaning smoke out of the indoor air by filtering the air coming through HVAC system, as well as air cleaning.

Along with the wildfires, the effects of the heat wave also had significant impact on seniors and providers. This was, for example, highlighted in a BCCPA news release prior to the June 2021 heat dome which noted that extreme heat as well as poor air quality can be dangerous for the elderly and those with respiratory issues. In the case of the June 2021 heat dome, temperatures exceeded over 35 degrees in many parts of the province.

#### RECOMMENDATION #4

*That the committee recommends the continuation of the EquipCare BC program through an investment of \$20-million over three years. EquipCare BC is an efficiently-run program managed by the BC Care Providers Association in partnership with the Ministry of Health. The funds allow long-term care and assisted living operators to purchase needed equipment such as lifts, beds, urgent-response systems as well as infection protection and control systems to enhance employee and resident health and safety.*

*As well, we ask the committee to recommend to the Minister of Finance that an additional \$5 million investment into EquipCare BC over three-years is made toward mitigating the impacts of climate change in the seniors' care sector. Purchases by operators of air conditioning, HEPA filtering and/or other environmental systems through this fund will help protect elderly residents against the impacts of recurring heat waves, the declining air quality due to wildfires and other natural disasters.*



# STRENGTHEN CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CARE

British Columbia's seniors' living and continuing care sector supports seniors who are incredibly diverse in their language, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender identity/expression and sexuality. To support older seniors safely and appropriately – both today, and in the future – it is important that organizations have the necessary access to resources and supports, and that all workers in the seniors living and continuing care sector have the necessary training.

BC Care Providers Association recommends that the Government of B.C. establish a \$2.5 million, three year, Culturally Appropriate Care Fund to increase the seniors living and care sector's capacity to provide culturally safe and appropriate support, particularly as it relates to Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2S+ seniors, newcomers to Canada and other people of racialized or marginalized backgrounds.

The funding would allow for customized training, awareness-building and education in diversity. Funding would also allow for the creation of a series of resources and workshops to build culturally diverse menus. Further, funding would be used to support a series of five pilot projects to take place across the sector. These pilot projects would be overseen by BCCPA, which would also play a role in the dissemination of any findings.

This Culturally Appropriate Care Fund would be managed by BCCPA and oversight would be provided by a governance committee including representation from industry stakeholders and government, Indigenous partners, and educational partners specializing in the areas of newcomers and LGBTQ2S+ older adults.

BCCPA is recommending that this fund be created in addition to an analysis of per diem rates, as to ensure it is possible to provide culturally appropriate meals across the publicly subsidized continuing care sector.

#### Recommendation #5:

*That the committee recommends establishing a \$2.5 million Culturally Appropriate Care Fund to increase the seniors living and care sector's capacity to appropriately support Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2S+ seniors, newcomers to Canada and other people of racialized backgrounds through training, awareness-building and designing culturally appropriate menus.*





# EXPAND ACCESS AND CAPACITY FOR LONG-TERM CARE

Like the rest of Canada, British Columbia's population is aging. According to the Conference Board of Canada, B.C. will require over 30,000 new long-term care spaces by 2035 to meet the demands of our changing demographics.

Already British Columbians are facing significant challenges accessing continuing care services. The Office of the Seniors Advocate has reported that the accessibility of seniors' care services is on the decline, citing increasing wait times and longer wait lists. Furthermore, each year up to 15% of B.C.'s hospital beds are filled by patients (usually older adults) who are ready to be discharged but have no appropriate place to go.

Without significant investments in new long term care beds, access challenges will continue to escalate as older adults are denied access to appropriate care in the community.

While the 2021 B.C. Budget commits to renewing and expanding publicly-owned long-term care spaces— including adding 1,500 net new beds and replacing 2,850 existing beds— many more continuing care spaces will be required to prepare for the future of our aging population.



BC Care Providers Association is calling upon the provincial government to prepare today for an aging population through an investment of \$1.6 billion over three years to fund the construction and operation of 5,000 new long-term care beds across the province by 2027.

To achieve this target, BCCPA further recommends that the government leverage the existing capacity of the non-government long-term care sector (e.g., private pay-beds), and aim for an equitable distribution between public, private and non-profit providers with respect to new long-term care beds.

**Recommendation #6:**

*That the committee recommends \$1.6 billion is earmarked over three years to fund the construction and operation of 5,000 new long-term care beds across the province by 2027.*

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# ABOUT US

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OVER TWO-THIRDS OF ALL SENIORS' CARE IN THE PROVINCE IS DELIVERED BY NON-GOVERNMENT PROVIDERS – WHICH INCLUDES BOTH PRIVATE AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT PROVIDERS. MANY NON-GOVERNMENT PROVIDERS ARE FUNDED DIRECTLY BY THE REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES TO DELIVER SENIORS' CARE SERVICES ACROSS THE PROVINCE.

## About BCCPA & EngAge BC

BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) has represented non-government care providers for over 44 years. Along with EngAge BC, we work with over 425 long-term care, home health care, assisted living, independent living, and commercial members across the province.

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