

MAY 2023

# BC BUDGET 2024

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NO TIME TO WAIT: TAKING ACTION  
TO SUPPORT B.C. SENIORS





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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**01.** Message from CEO Terry Lake

---

**02.** Summary of recommendations

---

**03.** Ensure that seniors can access the services they need, when and where they need them

---

**04.** Invest in staffing and hours of care

---

**05.** Establish tax credits to help seniors age in the "right" place

---

**09.** About BCCPA & EngAge BC

---

**10.** About B.C.'s Seniors Living & Continuing Care Sector

---

**11.** References

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## Message from CEO Terry Lake

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

The long-term care waitlist has more than doubled in the past five years. In 2022 alone, the number of seniors waiting increased by 40 percent. Likewise, as of March 31, 2022, 785 individuals were waiting for subsidized registered assisted living, an 11 percent increase from the previous year.<sup>1</sup>

This has a direct impact on other areas of the health care system. In 2022 81 percent of alternate level of care (ALC) days in acute care hospitals were for seniors.<sup>2</sup> This represents seniors who are ready to be discharged but have no appropriate place to go.

This is concerning, but what's more troublesome is that without immediate action, the situation is expected to get much, much worse.

By the end of the decade, close to one in four Canadians will be seniors. That represents a 17 percent increase between now and then.<sup>3</sup> RBC has identified Canada's aging demographic as one of the two most significant existential threats facing the country over the coming decade (the first being climate change).

BC Care Providers Association's (BCCPA) and EngAge BC's submission to the Members of the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services asks the committee to recommend immediate action in three areas – 1) **investments in infrastructure**, so that seniors can access the assisted living and long-term care services they need, when and where they need them, 2) **increased investments in staffing and direct care hours** to support higher acuity residents and 3) **tax credits** to help seniors access family paid home support and independent living services so that they can age in the "right place."

We thank you for taking the time to consider our recommendations for B.C.'s 2024 Budget.

Sincerely,



**British Columbians are experiencing lengthy waits for the long-term care and assisted living services they need. Without immediate action this situation will reach a crisis point this decade.**

## SUMMARY OF

# RECOMMENDATIONS

BCCPA & EngAge BC ask the following:

## **1** Ensure that seniors can access the assisted living and long-term care services they need, when and where they need them

The long-term care waitlist in B.C. has more than doubled in the past five years and the number of seniors waiting increased by 40 percent in 2022 alone. The Association recommends **that \$2.5 - 3.75 billion be earmarked over three years to fund the construction of 5,000 new long-term care beds across the province by 2027.** The Association also asks the government to assess the province's assisted living model, with the intention of investing in future capacity.

## **2** Increase investments in staffing and hours of care

The Association asks the committee to recommend investing **\$550 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, and that efforts continue to ensure access to a robust healthcare workforce to meet this increase.

## **3** Establish tax credits to help seniors age in the "right" place

To help older adults age in their communities, EngAge BC and BCCPA recommend the establishment of **a tax credit which allows for the reimbursement of both private home health and independent living services.**





## Ensure that seniors can access the assisted living and long-term care services they need, when and where they need them

This year in estimate debates, the Minister of Health, Hon. Adrian Dix, referenced a 2.039 billion dollar, ten year capital plan for long-term care.<sup>4</sup> This is encouraging but given that it is now costing an average of between \$500,000 to \$750,000 to construct a single long-term care bed, this plan will fall far short of the projected number of beds needed, particularly as it is expected that much of this capital allocation will be used to upgrade existing beds.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the Conference Board of Canada has projected that over 30,000 new long-term care beds will be required in B.C. by 2035.<sup>6</sup>

Already, British Columbians are facing significant challenges accessing continuing care services. According to the Office of the Seniors Advocate, there were 3,430 seniors waiting for a publicly funded long-term care bed last year. The long-term care waitlist has more than doubled in the past five years and the number of seniors waiting increased by 40 percent in 2022 alone.<sup>7</sup>

This has broad reaching impacts on not only seniors and their families, but on the health care system overall. In 2022, 81 percent of alternate level of care (ALC) days in acute care hospitals were for seniors.<sup>8</sup> This represents seniors 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.

The waitlist for assisted living is also growing. According to the Seniors Advocate, as of March 31, 2022, 785 individuals were waiting for subsidized assisted living, an 11 percent increase from the previous year. Additionally, assisted living operators report that clients have greater care needs than before.<sup>9</sup>

### Last year:

- ▶ 3,340 seniors were waiting for publicly funded long-term care beds in March.
- ▶ The number of seniors waiting for long-term care increased by 40%. 785 seniors were waiting for publicly subsidized assisted living.
- ▶ 81% of ALC days were for seniors.

Without immediate action, the challenges seniors have when accessing care are positioned to get much worse. By the end of the decade, close to one in four Canadians will be seniors. That represents a 17 percent increase between now and then.<sup>10</sup> RBC has identified Canada's aging demographic as one of the two most significant existential threats facing the country over the coming decade (the first being climate change).

As noted above, lengthy waits for services affect the well being of seniors, who may not receive the appropriate care and support and home, along with family caregivers who face burnout and impacts on their physical, mental and financial health, as a result of prolonged caregiving.

**Recommendation:**

The long-term care waitlist in B.C. has more than doubled in the past five years and the number of seniors waiting increased by 40 percent in 2022 alone. The Association recommends that \$2.5 - \$3.75 billion be earmarked over three years to fund the construction of 5,000 new long-term care beds across the province by 2027. The Association also asks the government to assess the province's assisted living model, with the intention of investing in future capacity.



## Invest in staffing and in 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. An initial investment of \$240 million was made over three years to increase care hours from 3.11 in 2018 to 3.36 in 2021. Further investments have been made, bringing the average up to 3.51 in 2022.

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 a minimum of 4.1 hours of direct care per day is the minimum required for quality care; this statistic is also cited in the HSO's National Long-Term Care Services standard. Owing to the increased complexity of the health of long-term care residents, more recent recommendations from Australia and Alberta indicate minimums of 4.3 and 4.6 hours of care per day, respectively.

"BCCPA is calling upon the provincial government to become a leader in the delivery of quality care by investing **\$550 million** over three years."

BCCPA is calling upon the provincial government to become a leader in the delivery of quality care by investing \$550 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, ensuring that seniors receive the quality of care that they need and deserve.

Providing more care is contingent on ensuring that there are enough people working in the sector to deliver it. The Government of B.C. has taken several positive actions to address the health human resources crisis, such as the creation of the new Health Career Access Program (HCAP), levelling up wages for care workers, expanding the BC Provincial Nominee Program to include Health Care Assistants, investing in nurse-patient ratios, and introducing its 70-point Health Human Resources plan.

However, more must be done to secure a robust workforce. BCCPA encourages the Ministry of Health to work collaboratively with BCCPA and other sector stakeholders to ensure that both government and non-government operators are able to strengthen their workforce. Priority strategies include:

- Raising awareness of the rewarding career opportunities available in the care economy.
- Optimizing scope of practice and redesigning role boundaries for priority occupations, including nurses and care aides.
- Reducing the prevalence of travel nursing agencies and limiting "price gouging."
- Working with federal, provincial and territorial governments to create pathways to permanent residency for international healthcare workers, and to remove barriers to labour mobility and foreign credential recognition.
- Endorsing the recommendations made in the HUMA report on "Labour Shortages, Working Conditions and the Care Economy,"<sup>11</sup> including improving access to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and creating a pan-Canadian approach to collecting healthcare workforce data.

Recommendation:

The Association asks the committee to recommend investing \$550 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, and that efforts continue to ensure access to a robust healthcare workforce to meet this increase.





## Establish tax credits to help seniors age in the "right" place

A 2020 National Institute of Ageing (NIA) survey found that 91 percent of Canadians of all ages, and almost 100 percent of Canadians 65 years of age and older, plan on supporting themselves to live safely and independently in their own home for as long as possible.<sup>12</sup> However, as referenced by NIA, about one-quarter of Canadians aged 75 and over has at least one unmet need with respect to their activities of daily living. In addition to having unmet needs, many older adults who live alone experience issues such as loneliness, falls, malnutrition, and inactivity.

Ensuring seniors have access to adequate, publicly subsidized home support is important for an aging population. However, providing seniors with choice as to who and how their home support is provided is paramount. Commonly, family paid home support provides seniors and their families with more flexibility and greater ability to ensure that they can focus on the things that will really help them stay independent for as long as possible. Supporting seniors to offset costs incurred through hiring a private agency also helps to ensure that the publicly subsidized care remains accessible to those who need it most.

Congregate living environments (i.e., independent living) can also offer a tremendous benefit – including better health, more opportunities to be social and engage in recreation, fewer falls, better nutrition and the security of knowing support is available if they need it. It also addresses the issue of loneliness and is thought to delay cognitive decline.

Tax credits can help seniors age in their place of choice and take pressure of the formal health care system.

By promoting congregate living options, governments can also better utilize scarce health care resources, by keeping seniors well for longer. Seniors "right-sizing" also has a direct impact on housing affordability and availability and is significantly more climate friendly when compared with the decision to remain living alone in an independent dwelling.

Seniors should be supported to access family paid home support and independent living services. One model to look to is Quebec's "[Tax Credit for Home-Support Services for Seniors](#)". The tax credit is equal to 35 percent of the expenses paid for eligible home-support services. If a person's family income is over \$60,135 the tax credit is reduced by 3 percent of the amount by which the family income exceeds that threshold, and 7 percent of the portion of the annual family income that exceeds \$100,000.<sup>13</sup>

Individuals who live in a "certified private seniors' residence," can claim the tax credit for certain home support services included in their rent, such as housekeeping services, laundry, personal care services, companion services, nursing, meal preparation and delivery, emergency call systems, etc.

Recommendation:

To help older adults age in their communities, EngAge BC and BCCPA recommend the establishment of a tax credit which allows for the reimbursement of both private home health and independent living services.

## About Us

Established in 1977, BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) is the leading voice for B.C.'s continuing care sector. Our growing membership base includes over 450 long-term care, assisted living, and commercial members from across British Columbia. Through its operating arm EngAge BC, the organization represents independent living and private-pay home health operators.

BCCPA and EngAge BC members support more than 19,000 seniors annually in long-term care and assisted living settings and 6,500 independent living residents. Additionally, our members deliver almost 2.5 million hours of home care and home support services each year.

## About B.C.'s Seniors Living & Continuing Care Sector:

There are four key components of the seniors living, wellness and care continuum which work together to support seniors.

1

**Independent living:** For seniors who are confident in their ability to live alone safely but do not want to worry about things like home maintenance, housekeeping or cooking. Seniors feel more confident knowing that help is there if they need it, and they enjoy the amenities and activities available in their purpose-built retirement community. Some seniors living in independent living also receive home health supports and care.

2

**Home health care:** Home care and home support options enable seniors to get the help they need at home. Services range from publicly subsidized care, which is delivered through the health authorities, to customized private-pay options, which can include medical care, transportation, companionship, and home making.

3

**Assisted living:** Assisted living homes are for seniors who can still live independently and make decisions for themselves but require additional support due to physical or health challenges. Assisted living services provide housing, hospitality services, and personal care services.

4

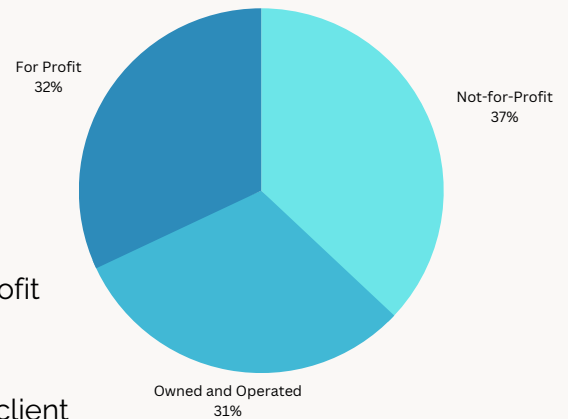
**Long-term care:** Long-term care homes are an option for seniors who need 24-hour professional support and care because of their physical needs or because they have significant cognitive decline.

Different considerations including cognition, overall health, and ability to live alone safely all affect the level of care and/or support a senior requires. Factors such as the ability to pay for private care, and individual needs and preferences will also affect what kind of care or support a senior chooses.

## Long-term care delivery type

There are 29,194 long-term care beds in B.C., which exist in 327 care homes. Of these beds:

- 31 percent (8,925 beds) are owned and operated by health authorities.
- 32 percent (9,377 beds) are operated by for-profit organizations.
- 37 percent (10,392 beds) are operated by not-for-profit societies.



Of these beds, 1,492 are private pay (meaning that the client pays for the service in full) and 18,777 are publicly subsidized (B.C. residents pay a co-payment of 80% of their after-tax income, subject to a minimum and maximum rate).<sup>14</sup>

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