
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Seniors Advocate

Survey results show seniors need better information on supports

Victoria, B.C. – Results from a recent survey conducted by B.C.’s Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie show seniors are often unaware of key programs currently in place to support them.

“We were surprised to learn of the lack of awareness among seniors, particularly low-income seniors, of government programs and subsidies available to assist them,” Mackenzie said. “This is a reminder that it is not sufficient to provide supports. The results of the survey clearly show we need to do a better job of connecting seniors, particularly low-income and older seniors, with subsidies available to them.”

Premium Assistance, which subsidizes MSP premiums, is an example where seniors living on \$22,000 or less could save up to \$864 per year, yet 60% of seniors surveyed, living on \$30,000/year or less, reported they don’t know about the program.

The survey, conducted in late 2014, surveyed seniors’ knowledge and awareness of a range of programs and grants designed to support them, including the Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER), Medical Service Plan Premium Assistance, Fair Pharmacare, Property Tax Deferment Program, Home Adaptations for Independence and the federal Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) programs. Across the board, the survey showed that awareness was lowest among the seniors over the age of 75 and those with incomes of less than \$30,000/year.

“Even those seniors who access subsidies are struggling, so I can only imagine how much greater the challenges are for those who aren’t accessing their entitlements,” said Mackenzie.

The survey also found a high number of seniors, particularly low-income seniors, reported they would need to move in the future because they would not be able to afford to remain in their home. At the same time, a high percentage believed that the provision of daily home support would allow them to age in place.

“Those of us who work in home and community care have always believed that increasing support was the key to allowing seniors to remain at home. However, it appears we have missed a crucial piece, which is affordable housing for seniors to live in while they are receiving these supports,” says Mackenzie. “The results of the survey reinforce what I am hearing from seniors and is a focus of our first systemic report on housing, where we are looking across the housing continuum from independent housing to assisted living, to residential care, and asking three key questions – is this type of housing affordable, accessible and appropriate?”

Among the many issues in the survey, the Office of the Seniors Advocate also probed the degree to which seniors had benefit programs to help to defray costs for ancillary health care needs such as eyeglasses, hearing aids, mobility aids and dental care. Overall, 50% of seniors reported having some form of benefit coverage, but 65% of those with household incomes below \$30,000 said they had no coverage.

“This means that low-income seniors, the ones with the least amount of disposable income, are also the least likely to be covered for key ancillary health care needs,” said Mackenzie. “I continue to be concerned about low-income seniors’ lack of access to ancillary health supports.”

The Seniors Advocate Survey, conducted in conjunction with B.C. Stats and HealthLink BC, had 506 respondents. The sample size will yield a margin of error of no more than +/- 4.38% and is reflective of demographic groupings in the province.

The Office of the Seniors Advocate was established in March of 2014 to serve as an independent voice and go-to resource for seniors’ issues. The Advocate will work with seniors, stakeholders and service providers to identify and understand systemic challenges facing seniors and make independent recommendations for changes to address those issues. The office will continue to conduct surveys on a range of issues and share these findings with the public.

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Learn more:

For a summary of survey results, please see www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca.