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Housing for Seniors



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National Seniors Day in Canada is marked each year on October 1. It coincides with the United Nations International Day of Older Persons and is an occasion for Canadians to celebrate the profound contributions of older adults.

In British Columbia, approximately 75,000 older adults live below the poverty line.

According to Canadian census data (2019), 24 per cent of older adults age 65 and older live alone and many are challenged when trying to navigate housing, financial assistance, healthcare, mental health and wellness, and other services. Without access to appropriate housing and supports, older adults are at risk of homelessness, discrimination, and adverse health outcomes.

Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated social isolation, food insecurity, financial hardship, and housing displacement

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among older adults and other vulnerable members of our communities. To respond to those challenges, a coordinated network of housing navigation and support services for older adults is needed.



Seniors Services Society of BC (SSSBC) is a nonprofit organization located in New Westminster, BC. It connects adults age 60 and older to housing and supports that help them age well and thrive. With over 40 years' experience in the community-based service sector, the organization is on the leading edge of the response to population ageing in British Columbia.

A core element of SSSBC is the focus on supporting the most vulnerable seniors across the province, including those who are homeless or at-risk. To address the housing concerns of diverse seniors who may otherwise fall through the cracks, SSSBC combines housing navigation and support services in an approach that is one-of-a-kind in BC. We have three broad streams of services.

1. Information Referral and Housing Navigation services includes supports around form-filling, applications for government subsidies, housing, taxes, information and referral to mental health/wellness services, the local Community Response Network, and Elder Abuse services.

2. **Direct Services** includes a broad range of services from friendly calls, grocery shopping, meal delivery, digital literacy, shuttlebus services, loan program.

3. **Knowledge Mobilisation** includes training for families, and providers who are keen to learn how to navigate the system for an older adult focused on housing.



As a leader in the sector, Seniors Services Society of BC has successfully partnered with other housing and social service providers across the province to develop several innovative programs in response to the diverse needs of low-income older adults. One such program is the SHINE program (Seniors Housing Information and Navigation Ease).

The SHINE program is jointly funded by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. It is a province-wide initiative designed to facilitate timely access to and navigation of appropriate housing services and supports for older adults.

Using a collaborative approach with partner organizations

in New Westminster (Seniors Services Society of BC), Vancouver (West End Seniors Network and Brightside Community Homes Foundation), Nanaimo (Nanaimo Family Life Association), Prince George (Prince George Council of Seniors), and Kelowna (Seniors Outreach Services Society), SHINE connects older adults and their caregivers to support services in their region to enhance their ability to achieve and maintain stable housing and to improve their overall health and wellness.

Taking a regional approach to partnership-building allows each community agency or housing provider to decide the exact supports or services most relevant to their unique contexts, priorities, population, client base, and goals.

Through partnerships, SHINE has established core services in the following four areas.

1. **Seniors Housing Navigators** located within each partner organization, screen and assess senior clients to identify barriers to accessing or maintaining stable housing and provide advice and assistance navigating housing services that meet the clients' unique needs.

2. **Community Connectors** located across the SHINE network aim to reduce isolation and increase social connections for older adults through linkages and referrals to local community-based programs and education.

3. **Seniors Mental Health and Wellness Provincial Resource** online directory available on SSSBC's website, to increase accessibility of senior-specific

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housing and mental health and wellness information.

4. **Strengthening Communities and Building Collaboration** by contributing to research projects and developing new initiatives, e.g., online services and supports in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Core objectives of SHINE include building a network of service providers addressing older adults' housing and other service needs in BC and advocating for positive change and capacity-building in the sector.

In a notable recent development, SSSBC is embedding a Housing Navigator and Community Connector within affordable rental housing buildings for low-income older adults in Vancouver and New Westminster. This expansion of SHINE programs and services has been developed in partnership with Brightside Community Homes Foundation and BC Housing. A partnership with the BC Community Response Network (BCCRN) has also been developed in response to elder abuse and neglect.

In a partner survey conducted at the end of 2020, 100 per cent of respondents reported the program is currently meeting all

of their expectations and listed collaboration between/among partners and holistic wrap-around services as key strengths of the initiative.

“This is a much-needed service; we would like to be able to expand services to include other nearby regions,” one respondent states. Additional funding is required to continue to grow this successful project and establish and develop additional partnerships.

Through an effective interconnected network of older adults serving organizations across BC, housing information and navigation will become more accessible and available to older adults in the province, contributing to housing stability and ageing-in-place.

What can you do? One of the biggest challenges we face is sustained “core funding.” Older adults need more face-to-face or in-person support, particularly around navigation of the system, advocacy, and legal issues. We would like to invite anyone making their own plans for ageing to consider supporting us with a legacy gift in their Will. A legacy gift ensures that vulnerable older adults will be cared for in years to come. ▲

Alison Silgado, BA (Psychology), MA (Leadership), is CEO of Seniors Services Society of BC. She participates on a number of local and provincial level committees and groups. Her mission is to enhance the quality of daily life of low-income senior renters by developing a blueprint for their care, knowledge exchange and training, and developing a framework for implementation of their system of care.