



*June 14, 2022*

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Room 224, Parliament Buildings,

Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

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### **BC Budget Submission**

I am writing on behalf of the 411 Seniors Centre. The Centre is a 45 plus year old organization years dedicated to the well-being of those aged 55 and older. We are a community hub where seniors meet, socialize, learn, laugh and organize around issues important to seniors.

For a number of years, we have been temporarily located at 333 Terminal Avenue. While space limitations limit some programming, the centre has remained vibrant and active with a full set of advocacy, education and social programs.

The 411 Centre also runs a robust Information and Referral program where seniors assist other seniors on a number of issues. These range from applying for Old Age Security, and SAFER to assisting homeless and precariously housed seniors. The 411 Seniors Centre Information and Referral program has also assisted seniors who are impacted by the digital divide. The Centre is currently actively engaged with the SFU STAR Institute carrying out research on what the digital divide entails (defined as the barriers that keep people from participating in the online world) and what viable solutions would look like. An example of this includes helping seniors fill out various online forms including the Empty Homes declaration form.

In 5 months, we will be moving to our own purpose-built seniors' centre at 3502 Fraser Street. The 411 Seniors Centre is grateful to be given the opportunity to make a submission in regard to the 2023 Provincial Budget.





## What we Need

Core funding for community based nonprofit seniors' centres and other nonprofit community-based seniors serving organizations.

Our number one recommendation is that the 2023 provincial budget include long term core funding for nonprofit community-based seniors centres and other nonprofit community-based seniors serving organizations.

Many of these organizations, including the 411 Seniors Centre rely on short term grants, and fundraising to exist. The grants are generally short term, and while some provide small amounts of core funding, others are program based. These grants often require annual applications and have complicated reporting structures. We spend an inordinate amount of time on fundraising, and this takes us away from interacting and serving seniors. At the 411 Seniors Centre we play a critical role in the healthy aging continuum by providing a place where seniors can learn, meet with others, have fun, volunteer in meaningful ways, get assistance, and have someone to talk to. The practical and social support we offer reduces senior social isolation and helps seniors continue to live vibrant and full lives.

The 411 Seniors Centre believes that our organization, which is based on the model of seniors helping seniors, strengthens the social fabric of BC and positively contributes to healthy seniors. It's also a very cost-effective solution as seniors do this work as a public service without formal compensation.

But the required framework costs money. As seniors age, and as more people on the province become seniors there is a greater need for the programs and support offered by our centre.

In addition, some of the seniors we are seeing are facing multiple barriers and need increased support and assistance. There is a continuum or service increase needs that is directly related to the age and capability of the seniors served.

All of this costs money, and the provincial government can play a vital assisting role by





providing long term core funding to the 411 Seniors Centre, and other community based nonprofit seniors' centres and seniors serving organizations.

The pandemic negatively impacted many seniors. Our Centre continued to operate either virtually or in person for the bulk of the pandemic. We reached out to isolated seniors, talk to seniors who were stressed, and we worked with seniors to get needed information. We provided an essential service during the pandemic, and in recognition of this work and the ongoing needs we are asking that the 2023 provincial budget include long term core funding for the 411 Seniors Centre and other community based nonprofit seniors' centres and seniors supporting organizations.

Community based nonprofit seniors serving organizations are crucial to strengthening and maintaining the social fabric of our great province.

Our primary recommendation is that long term core funding be provided in the 2023 budget to community based nonprofit seniors serving organizations, including seniors' centres. Food Security at the 411 Seniors Centre we have always seen food insecurity among seniors. It was the reason that compelled us to run a small free food pantry. With the rapid recent increase in food prices, we are talking to seniors who are struggling to purchase food.

In our new purpose-built seniors centre we have a large kitchen and dining area with the aim of providing healthy low-cost meals to seniors. This will improve seniors' health, provide opportunities for socializing, and for participating in Community kitchens.

From the research we have done we know that running meal programs is expensive. We also know that such programs are very beneficial. This is why in the upcoming budget we are asking that funds be allocated to fund food programs in seniors centre and in community based nonprofit senior serving organizations.

## **Housing**

Housing remains a major concern for the seniors at the 411 Seniors Centre. Many of the people





we speak with are fearful about renovations, or their buildings being demolished to make room for condos. Other seniors are living in substandard housing but will not speak up for fear of losing that housing.

A significant number of seniors at the 411 Seniors Centre are paying more than 30% of their income for rent. This means they have to make choices about purchasing healthy food, socializing or paying rent.

Our Information and Referral program regularly assists seniors in applying for subsidized housing through BC Housing. The seniors feel that subsidized seniors housing will greatly improve their quality of life but experience a letdown when we tell them that the median wait time is well over 2 years.

Sadly, at the 411 Seniors Centre we are seeing more seniors who are unhoused.

It is almost a daily occurrence at the 411 Seniors Centre where we are contacted by a senior or the family member of a senior who is in desperate need of safe affordable housing, we cannot provide real solutions. The seniors remain in very concerning housing situations. This takes a huge toll of the seniors themselves, and the 411 volunteers and staff. We need more real affordable housing. A May 10th 2022 article in the "Daily Hive" cited a report from rentals.ca which predicted that the cost of renting in Metro Vancouver will continue to rise throughout 2022, due to a number of factors. Increased costs of rents negatively impact seniors, many of whom are on a fixed income.

We also assist seniors in applying for the Shelter Allowance for Elderly Renters (SAFER). We were pleased in 2018, the Provincial Government, increased the SAFER rent ceiling. However, we know that the average rent in all parts of BC has been increasing. The rent ceiling for SAFER has not increased since 2018 despite the fact that rents have risen. Our next recommendation is that the rent ceiling for SAFER be increased to match increased cost of rent.

Lack of Affordable Housing is a major issue. There is not enough affordable housing for seniors.





At the 411 Seniors Centre we see this lack of affordable housing all too often as we often hear horrendous tales from seniors about their needs for housing. We also know that the definition of affordable greatly varies, and many of the definitions of affordable housing puts it far too expensive for seniors. The 411 Seniors Centre is aware that the province has built real affordable housing for seniors, but we also know that much more housing needs to be built. Our next recommendation is that the 2023 provincial budget commit to building a significant amount of affordable housing for seniors, and that in this context the rents be pegged to 30% of income, with the base being a senior who is receiving OAS, and GIS.

At the 411 Seniors Centre we regularly talk to seniors who are eligible for SAFER, but do not know about it. This means they are not availing themselves of this important program and are continuing to pay too much money for rent. Our next recommendation is that the province set aside funds to increase the awareness of the SAFER program. This could be done with mailings to all those receiving the BC Seniors Supplement, working with Seniors Centres and other community based non-profit seniors serving organizations.

Currently SAFER does not apply to most housing co-ops. This information is outlined in the SAFER application form. If SAFER applied to housing co-ops it would provide one more source of affordable housing for seniors. Our next recommendation is that SAFER apply to housing co-ops.

### **Hearing aids, and mobility devices**

At the 411 seniors Centre we routinely talk to seniors who need hearing aids, walkers, scooters or mobility aids. We assist them to the best of our ability by referring them to places to get refurbished hearing aids or help in accessing mobility devices. We know that often it is a slow and laborious process to get these much-needed items.

It is also very expensive and for many of the people we work with the cost is prohibitive. We know that this means seniors can't leave their houses or participate in activities or even socialize. One of the seniors we were assisting told us that when they were in Alberta, they had the costs of their hearing aids and mobility devices partially covered by the provincial government. We





checked this out and were surprised to learn that in Alberta through the provincially run Alberta AIDS to Daily Living (AADL) program, hearing aids and some mobility devices are covered on a cost sharing basis. We believe that a similar program should be adopted in BC. Our next recommendation is that in the 2023 budget the province begin a rollout of a made in BC version of the AADL program.

### Transportation

The 411 Seniors Centre has previously done some surveys of our members and we found that the bulk of our members rely on public transportation.

In September 2021, BC Transit changed its policy to allow children aged 6-12 to travel on public transit for free. This was part of the 2021 BC Budget, and it was aimed at making life in BC more affordable. This is an important and worthwhile initiative, and we would like this to be expanded to seniors 65 and older. Currently, low-income seniors receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement can apply for and receive a \$45.00 per year bus pass. However, seniors who make even \$1.00 more than the GIS income cut-off are not eligible for this bus pass. This is why our next recommendation is the 2023 BC Budget take steps to making transit more affordable for seniors.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Marion Pollack'.

Marion Pollack  
President, 411 Seniors Centre Society

Cc: 411 Seniors Board of Directors  
Leslie Remund, Executive Director 411 Seniors

