

AGING/DISABILITY OR DISABILITY/AGING

No matter how you look at it growing old and becoming disabled or being disabled and getting old: life can be a challenge.

For most of us, the old adage that we are temporarily able-bodied seems to hold true. It seems, disabling conditions develop gradually: wear and tear of a lifetime takes its toll on joints, muscles, organs, cells. We naturally and gradually adapt our movements and habits accordingly.

You have heard people jokingly refer to having a “senior moment” when memory has failed them temporarily... On serious reflection, they really are not funny but support ageist attitudes by perpetuating silly and negative stereo types.

A big part of our challenge of dealing with our inevitable physical and mental changes is cultural: our society's obsession with

youth and physical perfection. We see part of our mission to change ageist and discriminatory attitudes towards aging: Old people, as well as disabled persons, are valuable members of our communities - not a liability! Changing prejudices is a tall order because none of us is immune from the society's attitudes. People with disabilities (visible or not) are also burdened with discriminatory and/or ignorant perceptions with the additional layer of getting older.

So how to fix “it”? The magic wand to change our conditioning instantly sadly does not exist. COSCO does it by speaking up at every occasion and advocating/lobbying at all levels of government. We work in partnerships and coalitions with groups when we have a common cause. In addition, we develop and offer workshops – free of charge to any group of seniors upon request, anywhere in the province.



*by Gudrun Langolf,
COSCO President*

Workshops are up to 90 minutes long and led by a trained volunteer senior/facilitator. Each of our forty-three workshops offers practical and useful information that builds on what participants already know. They explore available resources and build confidence for seniors to advocate for themselves and each other. Participating in a group has the added potential benefit of social interaction. So far, almost 40,000 seniors have attended many of these sessions on wide ranging topics. Check the website www.seniorshelpingseniors.ca. There is a list of the topics and information on how you can book a workshop.

Council Of Senior Citizens' Organizations Of BC (COSCO)

Visit us at www.coscobc.org &
<https://www.facebook.com/COSCOBC/>

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Disclaimer: Unless otherwise noted, opinions, viewpoints, accuracy of facts submitted by the member is the sole responsibility of the writer, and not necessarily the opinion of the Editor, Executive, or Membership of COSCO.

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About COSCO

COSCO is an umbrella organization that brings together 85 different seniors groups, representing approximately 100,000 women and men to work on common issues.

COSCO is affiliated with the 1,000,000 member National Pensioners Federation (NPF) which promotes these issues at the national level.

Much of COSCO's work is promoting good health. Our COSCO Health & Wellness Institute trained volunteers provide free workshops on 43 topics. More than 40,000 seniors have now attended these workshops! We update the information in the 90-minute workshops as information changes.

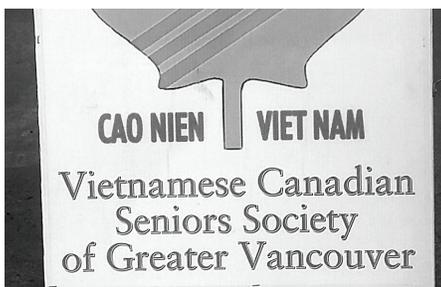
Send your letters to the editor or other contributions to:
cosconews.editor@coscobc.org **and**
pres@coscobc.org

WHAT HAPPENED / WHAT WE DID

“Some highlights - not a complete list of our activities”

Apr 9 - “Defend Public Health Care” demonstration on the Vancouver Court House steps – sponsored by the Council of Canadians (Vancouver Chapter) [Dr. Brian Day is suing the people/government of BC]

Apr 14 – attended with Minister Adrian Dix, Parliamentary Secretary for Seniors, Anne Kang, the Seniors’ Advocate, Isobel McKenzie and Mohinder Grewal at the Kiwasa Neighbourhood House – **Vietnamese Seniors** Housing/ services and celebrating “boat people” of the 1970s



Kiwasa Neighbourhood House - Vietnamese Seniors Housing/ Services

Apr 26 – Burnaby Central Park with COSCO 2nd Vice Pres., John Wynne, Adrian Dix, et al., **press conference** announced 1400 additional hip/knee replacement and supports during preparation and recovery throughout BC.



COSCO 2nd Vice Pres., John Wynne, Adrian Dix, et al.

There will be more than 19,000 hip and knee surgeries, a 23% increase!

Apr 30 – COSCO Stay on the Road Workshops at the Hellenic Centre - Denis Ottewell organized the venue & BC Retired Teachers Association hosted the lunch

of sandwiches and cookies... About 55 people attended and one of the collaborators of the workshop attended as well. The reviews were generally good with excellent and useful, constructive criticism.



Road Workshops at the Hellenic Centre - speakers & attendees

Good participation – more than 200 have attended. Nanaimo had 80 register so we offered 2 sessions – WATCH FOR WORKSHOPS IN YOUR COMMUNITY. Get in touch with Annette O’Connor for booking coscosecretary@telus.net and check the COSCO Website for future scheduling in the fall: www.coscobic.org.

May 10 - Seniors' Advocate, Isobel MacKenzie roll out/release of **Seniors Transportation: Affordable, Appropriate and Available** at the Croatian Cultural Centre in Vancouver. The report reflects over a year of consultation and research, concludes that changes are required to address some of the existing transportation systems and a new program will be required to fill some of the gaps.

The report highlights that getting a person from point A to B does not totally capture the transportation needs of frail and vulnerable seniors. Many seniors may have the physical ability to take a bus or use HandyDART, but they have cognitive challenges that require someone to ac-

company them or, their physical frailty requires someone to assist them throughout their trip. The current programs do not provide for these needs and even with recommended improvements, the report notes they will continue to fall short.

To fill the gap, Mackenzie has recommended a new program called "Community Drives" that would be administered under the existing home support program. A full list of recommendations are in [the full report](#) or, alternatively, [attached to the news release](#).

On May 11, COSCO Delegates heard from the featured speaker, **Dr. Aaron Tejani** of the **UBC Therapeutics Initiative** (TI) www.ti.ubc.ca.

Dr. Tejani used the example of the purchase of a large household item, say a washer/dryer to illustrate what the TI does. You would go to your favorite appliance store/outlet and speak with a salesperson who would ask you about what you needed or were looking for. Then s/he would tell you all about the various models and makes and most likely recommend one. Do you take the salesperson's word for the quality of the items s/he recommends? Many people would. How would you know if they were truthful and not just selling you the floor model, they were instructed to push – regardless of the quality or your needs? How can you be sure about the information you are

HOW TO BOOK A FREE WORKSHOP FOR YOUR SENIORS' GROUP

So far, more than 40,000 seniors throughout BC have participated in the COSCO Seniors' Health and Wellness Institutes free health promotion workshops. We now offer workshops on 43 different issues and topics of particular interest to seniors.

Each 60 to 90 minute workshop is available free of charge to any seniors' group of 10 or more. A trained senior volunteer presents practical and usable information. These workshops are not intended to provide any specific legal, medical or financial advice, just a better understanding and practical suggestions.

To book a workshop for your group, please email: ws_coord@coscoworkshops.org



receiving? Would you ask your next-door neighbour? Most likely, you might comparison shop. Or you might play it really safe and check the latest consumer reports! They tested the equipment, rated it and compared it with other similar machines... The TI fulfills that sort of function for pharmaceuticals by reviewing all studies/reports on certain drugs and/or family of drugs. Their assessments help to inform purchasing decisions by the Ministry of Health which decides what drugs are being paid for by public funds.

Physicians, pharmacists and patients require an independent source of therapeutics information. For this reason, the Therapeutics Initiative was established at UBC and made independent from the government and any other vested interest groups.

May 16 - Friesen Conference (SFU) - Focus on social isolation – with the UK Minister for Loneliness featured as the keynote speaker.

PowerPoint slides are available [here](https://tinyurl.com/ybbxw3o2). They are updated to include suggestions for further reading.” <https://tinyurl.com/ybbxw3o2>

May 24 – Primary Health Care strategy roll out – press conference with Premier Horgan, Health Minister Dix et al. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2018PREM0034-001010>

May 26 - Quadra and South Vancouver Granville Seniors' Centre sponsored a forum on Social Isolation and Loneliness. About 120 people attended as well as the Vancouver Granville MP and Minister of Justice, Hon. Jody Raybould-Wilson. Eddy Elmer of SFU and the City of Vancouver's Seniors' Advisory Committee produced the report.

The City of Vancouver Advisory Committee initiated a special project to investigate the causes and consequences of chronic isolation and loneliness among older adults, and to develop recommendations to help the City of Vancouver and other stakeholders reduce and, ideally, prevent these problems.

The report includes 23 recommendations based on a detailed literature review and the insights of over 200 service providers in the Vancouver area. City Council has asked staff to review the report and to provide advice on potential next steps.

Although the report was written for the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health, other jurisdictions may find it helpful as well. In addition, although the report focuses on aging, much of the material is applicable to people of all ages.

The full report can be downloaded [here](https://tinyurl.com/yb5gnp4v) (<https://tinyurl.com/yb5gnp4v>). This version is up-to-date as of May 26, 2018 and supersedes all previous versions. Additions have been made to reflect newly-released findings from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. Please note that the recommendations section should be read in the context of the literature review, rather than separately.

There is a brochure that accompanies this report, which you can print and share with your networks

PowerPoint slides from the May 16th presentation at the John K. Friesen Conference are available here. They have been updated to include suggestions for further reading.

Individuals looking for information about coping with isolation and loneliness can consult **Recommendations 10 and 18 in the report.**

MAY BE USEFUL INFO



Property Tax Deferment Program Benefits Homeowners

Did you know you may be eligible to defer your property taxes?

Property tax deferment is a provincial low-interest loan program that helps qualified homeowners pay their annual property taxes on their principal residence.

Taxes can be deferred for any year the homeowner lives in the home and continues to qualify for the program.

Who Can Defer

Property tax deferment is available to B.C.

homeowners who are 55 years or older, a surviving spouse, or eligible persons with disabilities. Deferment is also available for homeowners who financially support a dependent child.

How it Helps

Deferment helps seniors stay in their homes longer and allows families to focus on providing for their children. Eligible homeowners are then able to use some of the appreciation in the value of their home to pay their property taxes at a later date.

How it Works

You must apply each year you wish to defer your property taxes. There are two options: the Regular

Program, and the Families with Children Program. For new applications to the Regular Program there is a one-time fee of \$60, and a \$10 annual renewal fee. For the Families with Children Program, there is no fee for applying or renewing.

When you defer your annual property taxes, the Province charges interest on your tax deferment loan. The current loan rate is 1.2% for the Regular Program and 3.2% for the Families with Children Program.

The deferred taxes and interest are paid when your home is sold or transferred.

Find out if you are eligible:

<https://tinyurl.com/yahxpb5f>

We have now had a 'new government for almost a year. CBC analysis of our government's performance "Premier John Horgan's government has fulfilled a majority of the promises on their election platform".

The item continues, "It's the traditional tone of any young government. But a detailed analysis of the NDP's record in government shows they have moved forward on a number of items. One hundred of them, in fact." [Out of 122 promises made.]

If you're interested in the list, go to the **CBC 'tracker'** <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-government-ndp-promise-tracker-1.4669968>

Many of the items have a direct impact on seniors and some are more universal, not exclusively focused on seniors.

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS when you see your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

1. CHANGES? Have any medications been added, stopped or changed, and why?
2. CONTINUE? What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
3. PROPER USE? How do I take my medication, and for how long?
4. MONITOR? How will I

know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?

5. FOLLOW-UP? Do I need any tests, and when do I book my next visit?

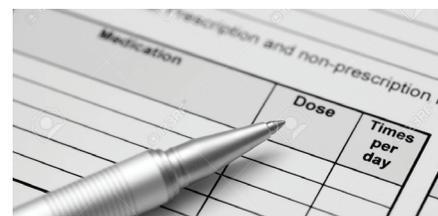
KEEP YOUR MEDICATION RECORD UP TO DATE

Remember to include:

- Drug allergies
- Vitamins and minerals
- Herbal/natural products
- All medications including non-prescription products

Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist to review all of your medications to see if any can be stopped or reduced.

Reprinted from the <https://www.deprescribingnetwork.ca/blog/2018/2/6/9-tips-medications>



COSCO Associate Membership

In addition to my \$25 Associate Membership fee, I wish to make a donation of \$_____ to COSCO.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

COSCO does not share mailing lists with third parties, unless we are required by law to do so.

Associate Membership is \$25 a year. Please make cheques payable to COSCO and mail your application to:

Linda Forsythe, Membership Secretary,

E-Mail: membership@coscobc.org

702 – 4353 Halifax Street, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 5Z4

Telephone: (604) 444-4300

For information about Affiliate (organizational) Membership, please contact the Membership Secretary.

You can now contribute on our website www.coscobc.org

HIGHLIGHTS OF STATISTICS CANADA'S LATEST 2016 CENSUS

In the latest statistics released by the federal government, reveals that BC has 5 communities in the list of the 10 highest proportions of the population aged 65+ in Canada. These 'age-friendly' communities include Parksville (43% seniors), Penticton (29%), Salmon Arm (27.5%), Courtenay (27.3%), and Powell River (27%).

Seniors in Canada number 5,935,635 people, now account for a record high 19% of the entire population. For the first time ever, there are now more people in Canada age 65 and over than there are below age 15.

The median age of Canadians is 41.2 years compared to 40.6 years in 2011. For the first time in Canada, the proportion of seniors at 16.9% exceeded that of children at 16.6%.

The gender ratio changes. At 85 and older, women outnumber men nearly two to one. At 100 and up it's five women to one man. According to the census, 770,780 people reached the age of 85 and older. That group grew by 19.4% since 2011. The census found that the centenarians, people reaching the age of 100 and beyond, were the fastest growing population by 41.3% between the

years of 2010 to 2016! In 2016, there were 8,230 Canadians over the age 100.

Canada is one of the youngest countries in the G7 [Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom & the United States]. We have the second lowest proportion of seniors aged 65+ out of the G7 countries. In Canada, more people are approaching retirement [4.9 million] than are beginning to enter the work force [4.3million].

These statistics from the last census help focus on the population trends in Canada.

by Barb Mikulec

March 2018 the House of Commons received the report/study by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and Status of Persons with Disabilities. It is available on the 'web'. The 8th Report "*Advancing Inclusion and Quality of Life of Seniors*" is well worth reading! <https://tinyurl.com/ycvc9a6j>

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SHOULD SENIORS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE BE TRADED AS COMMODITIES?

Amidst the euphoria, that has greeted recent announcements of improvements in health care by the B.C. NDP government, a major blind spot remains: an apparent refusal to stop or at least slow down the privatization of seniors' care in B.C.

Among many examples of the ongoing trend to hand over the care of B.C.'s most fragile seniors to the free market is the situation confronting seniors living on the Sunshine Coast of B.C.

Seniors groups on the Sunshine Coast have been protesting the plan of the previous B.C. Liberal government to replace two publicly owned long-term care residences in Sechelt with a single privately built and operated long-term care residence for two years.

In 2016, the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, the arm of the government responsible for the delivery of public health care on the Sunshine Coast, awarded the

contract to build and operate the new private long-term care facility to a private company, Trellis Seniors Services without public consultation.

Sunshine Coast seniors groups are urgently demanding cancellation of the contract with the private company, Trellis Seniors Services, and a publicly owned and operated facility built instead.

Trellis Seniors Services is described by one local newspaper, Coast Clarion, on January 14, 2018, as being part of a web of companies with different names operating private long-term care facilities in B.C. The article comments that Trellis shares its Vancouver office with a large US corporation.

The provincial government pays for long-term care of seniors, a fixed amount per resident to the operator. It is a prized source of guaranteed income for investors. Indeed, Trellis has announced that it is planning to build more

private long-term care homes in B.C.

Hopes were high that the new NDP government would reject the privatization agenda of the previous government that seemed to permeate every aspect of seniors care and that it would cancel the contract with Trellis.

Health Minister Adrian Dix and NDP MLA Nicholas Simons met with local groups on Monday, 20 March, in Sechelt, to discuss the issue. The groups were stunned to learn from Minister Dix that, despite NDP support for their cause prior to the election, he now refused to cancel the contract with Trellis and would not ensure that the new facility would be publicly owned as before.

Curiously, the Minister was reported to be unapologetic and, according to the March 20 Coast Reporter newspaper, said, "I am proud" of the decision. He also said that he was involved with Trellis in negotiating with First Nations for land on

which Trellis Senior Services could build the new private Sunshine Coast facility. He argued that the contract with Trellis was "perfectly legal" and could not be cancelled.

A member of the audience at the March 20 meeting called this action an example of privatization by stealth. Recently he said that he felt "betrayed." He said that their MLA, Nicholas Simons had supported the community opposition to the plan prior to the election but now, only a few months later, was opposed to it. He said that he had voted NDP for 50 years and worked in many elections to help the NDP be elected but would do so no more.

This situation on the Sunshine Coast raises an important question for all seniors in B.C. Is the publicly paid

provision of health care for B.C.'s frailest seniors going to continue to be turned over to private operators that can buy and sell these facilities complete with occupants?

From the Sunshine Coast groups' experience, can one conclude that:

- 1) The decision by the current B.C. Minister of Health in favour of a privately built and operated corporation (replacing two publicly owned facilities) ignores the evidence that the quality of care in for-profit seniors' long-term care is inferior to publicly owned care and that these residences can be traded among large corporations based in other countries;
- 2) The privatization of seniors' health care services and thus unequal access to quality care for seniors that was practiced by the former

B.C. Liberal government is being continued by the new BC NDP government;

3) The community does not have to be consulted by B.C. health authorities about the privatization of long-term care;

4) The voices of many concerned seniors living on the B.C. Sunshine Coast are being ignored.

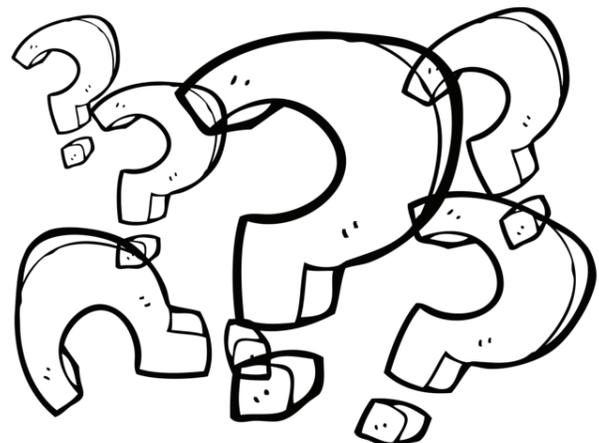
There are important questions for our government to answer:

Is the out-of-hospital out of home care of fragile seniors in facilities considered a necessary part of a publicly funded, publicly accountable, quality health care system or not?

Why are our oldest citizens traded as commodities -earning profits for big, often foreign, corporations?

by Kathleen Jamieson

COMMODITIES



BIOGRAPHY: RUDY LAWRENCE

It Takes a Village...

Rudy Lawrence was president of COSCO from 1998 to 2008. Here is his story.

Rudy Lawrence claims that his life has been marked by moments when key people entered his life and created huge change.

The first occurred when he was a young teen and home life became unbearable – an aunt stepped in and took him to live with her. Later when he needed help with his own children, his next-door-neighbour came to his rescue – that neighbour was Dave Barrett who went on to become a lifelong friend. In one of his earliest jobs of setting up the Haney Correctional Institute, he was given the task of organizing the staff into an association and collecting the membership cards and money. That union person was Ed O'Connor. The BC Government Employees' Association went on to transform itself into the BCGEU.

Because he was an accountant by trade, Rudy became involved in the credit union

movement in 1957. He was the 1st and youngest elected credit union president in British Columbia.

After years of work and volunteering, Rudy retired. He went to COSCO meetings in the mid-1990s but felt they were just discussion groups that didn't meet his needs or interests. Rudy wanted to see changes in the situation seniors were encountering. Jack Phillips took over the leadership of COSCO and according to Rudy, got it into 'shipshape'. At that time Rudy was president of Silver Harbour Seniors Centre, 1st VP of the BC Government Retired Employees' Association (BCGREA) and the chairman of the GREA Vancouver Branch, where one of the demands at the time was a dental plan in the GREA retirement package. Rudy became a delegate to COSCO.

Jack Phillips decided to retire as COSCO president and approached Rudy to run for the position. Rudy only agreed when Phillips promised to mentor him for a year. Phillips kept his promise.

Rudy was president of COSCO from 1998-2008. He recalls that his early years involved developing an executive, expanding the membership, and 'planning and scheming' with VP Patrick Thomas from the Retired Teachers. They operated out of Rudy's basement as they had no money. They made contact with both the provincial and federal governments, started participating with other organizations and made contact with the media. Thomas drew up a document entitled 'Requirements for Seniors' and he and Rudy took this to Victoria. They gave it to the ministers and their staff with a promise to return to talk about it and lobby for changes. In 2000 an Office for Seniors was opened with 2 staff. The staff saw to it that seniors' issues were presented to the ministers.

At that time the Seniors Council of BC was created (by the government) and met annually to review documents and hold face-to-face meetings of government and interest groups. This Council was cancelled when Gor-

don Campbell and the BC Liberals won the election of 2001. Rudy's blood pressure rises when he talks of Campbell, who he calls a one-man wrecking crew. Campbell made such outrageous proposals as suggesting that all drivers licenses be cancelled once people turned 80. COSCO went to the media where radio announcer Bill Good put the issue on the airwaves. Campbell relented and the system of retesting people over 80 was instituted. Rudy was pleased with his relationship with Bill Good and continued to work with the press to bring issues forward. Even though Rudy was not experienced in public speaking, he responded to a call from Jim Sinclair, president of BC Federation of Labour. The government was going to increase hydro

rates and Sinclair wanted Rudy to speak and lobby for the government to provide subsidies to low income seniors. Rudy had a mentor in Sinclair, and a working relationship and friendship that lasted for years.

Finally, it's important to mention Rudy's involvement with the National Pensioners Federation. In the late 90s COSCO did not have the funds to send someone back east for meetings. However, the Fishermen's Union did send Helen O'Shaughnessy and COSCO received her reports. Finally, COSCO joined the NPF and Rudy replaced Helen as VP. Art Kube replaced Rudy and later became president of the National Pensioners. Rudy stepped down as president of COSCO in 2008 and Art

Kube was elected.

Rudy thinks it most important for COSCO to have a good relationship with the media, one that requires constant nurturing. He believes we need a strong voice for seniors. He also thinks that seniors should get their heads out of the sand and educate themselves on issues of aging, specifically problems of isolation and falls prevention. He's thankful for the friends and mentors he's met along the road. He's still passionate about all this, even as he approaches his 88th birthday!

by Linda Forsythe



Photo Credit: Denis Ottewell
Rudy receives Lifetime Honorary Membership

Photo Credit: Rudy Lawrence

FROM OUR AFFILIATE: BC OLD AGE PENSIONERS' ORGANIZATION

Our organization has a long and interesting history. We are the oldest seniors' organization in Canada.

The early years of the 1900's were a very changeable time: the First World War, high prices, followed by a recession and a depression. It was a difficult time for all, but particularly so for the seniors who had been the pioneers of the country. The federal government eventually recognized the difficulties being experienced by seniors and enacted legislation on mandatory retirement; also, Old Age Pension legislation based on a means test and a minimum age of 70 years.

The pension was a cost shared program and a matter of Provincial jurisdiction. B.C. had been the most assertive province for the program and was the first province to join the new program in 1927. The first cheque issued on September 1, 1927 went to William Henry Derby of Port Alberni. The cheque, for the maximum monthly allowance of \$20,

was presented by A.W. Neil, MP who then purchased the cheque back from Mr. Derby and framed it.

The qualifications for eligibility were quite stringent: must be a British subject, 70 years of age, 20 years residence in Canada, 5 years in the province, not an Indian under the Indian Act, not in receipt of an income of as much as \$365 a year, etc.

E.R. Vipond was the co-founder and the first president of the BCOAPO. He had applied for a pension and his application was rejected on the ground that his several sons were capable of supporting him. The pension would only be awarded if he took his sons to court under the Parent Maintenance Act and the court decreed his sons could not support him. Angry, he consulted a lawyer, Gerald V. Pelton, and after some discussion they arranged a meeting of interested persons to establish the Old Age Pensioners' Organization of British Columbia.

The aim was to:

- Protect the rights and interests of Old Age Pensioners or prospective pensioners over 60, to prevent discrimination, avoid technicalities and undue delay in the consideration of applications for pensions;
- Endeavour to secure and maintain fair and just legislation and executive action at all times in the best interest of old age pensioners;

Preserve their status as citizens, entitled to pensions, as a social and legal right and not by way of relief or charity, and enable them to maintain their dignity and self-respect as pioneer citizens of Canada.

In 1932 the BCOAPO organized its first provincial legislative petition. The petition was aimed at federal regulations under the Act and called for an end to the calculation of fictive income from adult children. Copies were sent to all towns

in B.C. and the target was 20,000 signatures. We are not sure if that target was met.

As an organization, we continue to advocate on behalf of seniors in British Columbia through our resolutions discussed and passed at Convention.

This year our Convention will be held from June 12

to 14 in Nanaimo where **Branch No. 4 is celebrating 80 years of existence.**

Over the years there has been much discussion about removing the words 'Old Age' from our organization's name, but that pension dispute was the reason for our organization. **REMEMBER OUR ROOTS!**

by Betty Bolton



Watch for COSCO's upcoming campaign to help eliminate the regressive proposal to change pension legislation. BILL C 27 is still pending. We want it never to see the light of day again! There is a good discussion about what the issues are - by the National Association of Federal Retirees. <https://tinyurl.com/y9ob3unf>

COLUMN: MINERS UNDERSTOOD – WE ALL PAY, WE ALL BENEFIT

Some time ago, an American expat working as a taxi driver made one of the most profound statements I've ever heard about Canadian health care.

The man was drawn here by the love of a Canadian woman but he fell in love again when he realized that in Canada, he no longer lived in fear that his health insurance would not cover a serious

illness.

Before coming here, he said he was a strong Republican who rejected out of hand any attempt to have Canadian-style medicine in the United States.

The provincial government decision to activate changes to the Medicare Protection Act should help lessen the fear in everyone. These changes were long overdue

— they were drafted in 2003 — stopping doctors from extra billing for medical surgeries and procedures that are covered under our health care system.

Extra billing is a nice way to put it.

Put another way, it is queue jumping, and it not only undercuts the most basic foundation of our system, it is directly eroding our ability

to provide health care in the most tangible way possible — in our collective pocket books.

The federal government recently reduced the health care transfer payment to British Columbia by \$15.9 million. That's \$15.9 million we cannot use to provide equal and fair health care to all. Private clinics that are breaking the law are not saving us money, they are costing us federal funding. It's time for the myth of private pay not hurting the public system to end.

Every day, Fraser Health works to make the system more efficient but we know that in British Columbia, we face some real challenges. Last year, we had the second lowest health care spending per capita of any province, according to the latest report from Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The answer lies in recommitting to public health care, to equal access to health care, to health care based upon need, not upon the size of a person's wallet.

That's why, at Fraser Health this year, we are increasing the number of hip and knee

surgeries by 23%, or 836 additional surgeries, and the number of MRIs by 14%, or 7,770 additional exams (private MRIs simply allow patients with money to move up the waiting list while others wait longer for care as a result).

As Canadians, we believe in taking care of each other.

That's the fundamental principle that underpins the Canadian health care system. Most people trace the start of Canadian health care to Tommy Douglas in the 1960s but the first health care program in Canada started in Cape Breton as early as 1883.

The miners in the Glace Bay (N.S.) District pooled a small part of their wages each week so that they could collectively afford to take their children to the doctor when they were sick — something they could never do by themselves.

More than a century has gone by and it is essentially the same principle today. We put our money in. A lot of people don't use it but when they need it, they get the best care possible no matter who they are.

If Cape Breton miners 135 years ago understood the power of public health care and a Republican taxi driver from the U.S. can acknowledge that he used to live in fear, I say it is time to leave fear behind and embrace hope.

We need to continue to embrace our public health care system and we need to continue to make the changes and the investments necessary to make it the best in the world for all British Columbians.

And to be clear, those investments do not include paying millions in fines because we allow private for-profit companies to continue extra billing practices.

by [Jim Sinclair](#), Fraser Health Authority – Board Chair

Jim Sinclair is Fraser Health's (fraserhealth.ca) new board chair and former president of the BC Federation of Labour.

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SENIORS' REPAIR SERVICE

The Senior Citizens' Repair Service provides low-cost minor house repairs, renovations and maintenance services for seniors 55 years and over and for people with disabilities in Metro Vancouver. Services include **plumbing, carpentry, electrical work, gas fitting, painting, yard work and general handyman services**. All services are guaranteed for 30 days, and are performed by experienced trades people who are retired or semi-retired.

Sponsored by the Plumbers and Pipefitters Union Local 170.

Office hours are 9 AM to 12 Noon, Monday to Friday.

Phone: 604 529-1100