

Stand UP for SENIORS CARE

FACT SHEET #4

Bed closures and shortages

Access denied: closures, privatization fuel crisis in seniors' care

In 2001, B.C.'s Liberal government promised to work with non-profit care facilities to build 5,000 new, long-term residential care beds by 2006. But that's not what happened.

More than 2,500 beds were closed, most of them in not-for-profit facilities. Access to residential care was restricted to those with complex care needs – dementia, multiple disabilities, and significant medical problems. Health authorities were directed to build assisted living and supportive housing for those who were no longer eligible for complex care – alternatives which provide far lower levels of care than the intermediate care facilities they replaced.

The result? Many seniors simply cannot find the appropriate residential care they need, when they need it, which puts more pressure on already overworked family members to provide care or purchase care privately. Seniors without family support are left to languish at home until a health crisis lands them in a hospital emergency room. And because people are forced to wait much longer in their homes or hospitals, they are entering residential care more frail, less stable and more likely to die shortly after being admitted.

The truth is...

With the possible exception of New Brunswick, B.C. now has the lowest number of residential care beds in the country.

In May 2008, a B.C. Medical Association policy paper criticized government for its failure to build 5,000 new, long-term residential care beds, the substitution of assisted living beds, and for confusing the issue by combining new beds with replacement beds in supportive housing and assisted living.

Government claims assisted living and supportive housing are suitable options for residents with Intermediate Care needs, but the facts don't bear this out. These facilities offer 40 to 97 per cent less services. Research shows the average direct nursing and personal care hours formerly provided in intermediate care facilities was 2.3 – 2.5 hours per resident per day. In comparison, the current direct care hours in assisted living is 1.5 hours and in supported housing it is only 0.7 hours.

And because new policy forces seniors to accept the first available bed, potentially in a for-profit facility, many residents and their families face additional, unexpected, out-of-pocket charges. Provincial policy in this area is often unclear, making it possible for for-profit facilities to add additional charges to boost their revenues.

OUR SOLUTIONS

- In order to ensure that B.C. can meet the needs of its population, the provincial government must reinstate its original commitment – to build 5,000 additional not-for-profit, licensed residential care beds by 2006 – and factor in the additional beds required for 2009 and beyond.
- Increase the capacity in the provincial Ministry of Health, or an agency such as B.C. Housing, to support non-profit societies to design, finance and build new residential care facilities.

