

# Ensure that the right support is available at the right time

**“Eliminating co-pay would be huge. As someone who now lives on my old age pension and Canada Pension Plan, there is not extra money to do very much else with. Many people are in the same boat as me.”**  
– Person living with dementia

Most people living with dementia want to remain at home for as long as possible but, for many, the availability, appropriateness and cost of home support makes this challenging. The Office of the Seniors Advocate has identified high co-payment rates are a key barrier<sup>1</sup>. Notably, B.C. is among a minority of provinces requiring older adults to pay for publicly funded home support services. Currently, older adults receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement are exempt from these charges but this only includes a small number of older adults. Seventy per cent of older adults are ineligible for the supplement, based on their annual income. Someone with an annual pension of \$29,000, for example, must pay \$9,000 every year to be eligible for only an hour-long daily visit<sup>2</sup>.

## **Recommendation 1: Eliminate the co-payment model for home support services and improve access to adult day programs.**

Having a home support worker understand a person living with dementia’s needs, preferences, likes and dislikes is critical to person-centred care. But home support staffing is often inconsistent, with workers varying from visit to visit. This can be distressing for someone living with dementia and even more time-consuming when family members may also have to restate specific family or cultural practices. As a result, many people opt out of the support they need.

People living with dementia and their families also tell us that what the publicly-subsidized home support system can offer doesn’t always meet their needs. Visits focus on activities of daily living – bathing, meal support, dressing, etc. – yet clients’ needs are often more holistic and may include things like housekeeping, meal preparation or even companionship.

When people affected by dementia are either unable to access home support or it does not meet their needs, it can result in accessing acute care, including emergency room services, or an earlier transition to long-term care. This puts further strain on the already stretched health-care system. In B.C., 12.8 per cent of newly admitted long-term care residents could potentially have been cared for at home<sup>3</sup>. Most people don’t want to move into long-term care before they need to, but don’t have access to the care they need to stay supported in their own home.

<sup>1</sup> CBC/Radio Canada. (2024, February 12). \$733M in federal health funding for B.C. Seniors could improve access to home care | CBC news. CBCnews. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-seniors-federal-health-funding-1.7113211>

<sup>2</sup> We must do better: Home Support Services for B.C. seniors. We Must Do Better: Home Support Services for B.C. Seniors – Seniors Advocate. (2023, February 23). <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/we-must-do-better-home-support-services-for-b-c-seniors/>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2022). New Long-Term Care Residents who Potentially Could Have Been Cared for at Home. CIHI. [https://yourhealthsystem.cihi.ca/hsp/inbrief?lang=en#!/indicators/082/new-long-term-care-residents-who-potentially-could-have-been-cared-for-at-home;/mapC1;mapLevel2;provinceC9001;trend\(C1,C9001\);/](https://yourhealthsystem.cihi.ca/hsp/inbrief?lang=en#!/indicators/082/new-long-term-care-residents-who-potentially-could-have-been-cared-for-at-home;/mapC1;mapLevel2;provinceC9001;trend(C1,C9001);/)

**“Long-term care has become more of a crisis response versus a choice.” - A caregiver**

Like home support, adult day programs offer care for people living with dementia who aim to age in place. They play a vital role in providing a range of personal care, health care and therapeutic activities.

They also offer respite to family caregivers<sup>4</sup>. Adult day programs experienced a 96 per cent decline in program days during the first year of the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. Although new programs are emerging<sup>6</sup>, the number of program days remains 19 per cent lower than pre-pandemic levels<sup>7</sup>.

Ensuring access to adult day programs and home support enables people affected by dementia to maintain their independence and quality of life, but also contributes to the overall sustainability of B.C.’s health-care system. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. calls on all parties to support the elimination of the home support co-payment and improve access to adult day programs.

## **Recommendation 2: Undertake a systemic review of the assisted living system to identify opportunities to better support people living with early and moderate dementia.**

For people living with dementia, aging in place is not always possible, especially for people without the support of friends and family nearby. Safety concerns and the desire to avoid social isolation can also make staying at home challenging. It is no longer safe for some people to stay at home – but either they are not eligible for long-term care or it is not appropriate option for them.

Assisted living can offer a valuable alternative and meet a person’s support needs, while enabling them to live as independently as possible. The model is not often considered for people living with dementia – particularly given the progressive nature of the disease, safety concerns and the requirement that

4 Health, M. of. (2019, July 14). Adult day services. Province of British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/accessing-health-care/home-community-care/care-options-and-cost/adult-day-services>

5 Monitoring seniors services. Monitoring Seniors Services – Seniors Advocate. (2024, March). <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/monitoring-seniors-services/>

6 Health. (2024a, April 12). Expanded adult day program supports Surrey Seniors. Expanded adult day program supports Surrey seniors. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024HLTH0043-000547>

7 Monitoring seniors services. Monitoring Seniors Services – Seniors Advocate. (2024, March). <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/monitoring-seniors-services/>

assisted living residents be able to manage their own affairs<sup>8</sup>. This leaves people with limited options.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is recommending that all parties commit to reviewing the Province's assisted living model to determine how it can best support people living with dementia, if elected. A revised model would recognize the diverse needs of people living with dementia and emphasize independence.

### **Recommendation 3: Commit to increasing the number of long-term care beds across the province.**

In 2022, there were approximately 85,000 people living with dementia across B.C. An estimated 29 per cent, or almost 25,000, of these people live in long-term care. A 2017 study by the Conference Board of Canada estimated that close to 31,000 new long-term care spaces will be needed by 2035<sup>9</sup>. Further modelling indicated that approximately 64,000 beds will be required to meet demand by that year<sup>10</sup>. While recent commitments to build

more long-term care spaces are positive, they do not begin to address existing needs, let alone future demands. We are already seeing the effects of the shortfall. Long-term care will become necessary for many people living with dementia as the disease progresses, and the long waitlists mean people are often waiting many months in the community without the support they need. In 2023, the Office of the Seniors Advocate reported the average wait time for long-term care was 215 days<sup>11</sup>.

As demand increases and the number of available care spaces falls behind, the challenges of accessing long-term care will only grow. This shortfall is already straining the acute care system, with an increased number of people unable to be discharged from hospital, despite not requiring significant acute care. These factors will continue to drive up health-care costs.

Significant investments from the provincial government and support from the federal government is urgently needed to sustain the long-term care homes in B.C. We call on all parties to commit to developing a strategy to meet future demand for long-term care beds.

8 HOME SUPPORT SERVICES FOR BC SENIORS. (n.d.).

<https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/app/uploads/sites/4/2023/06/Assisted-Living-Review-2023.pdf>

9 Gibbard, Robyn. Sizing Up the Challenge: Meeting the Demand for Long-Term Care in Canada. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2017.

10 BC Care Providers Association. (2019, May). Bedlam in BC's Continuing Care Sector: Projecting Future Long Term Care Bed Needs. [https://bccare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Bedlam\\_in\\_BC\\_Continuing\\_Care\\_Sector.pdf](https://bccare.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Bedlam_in_BC_Continuing_Care_Sector.pdf)

11 Monitoring seniors services. Monitoring Seniors Services – Seniors Advocate. (2024, March). <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/monitoring-seniors-services/>