Advocates for Seniors’ Care (ASC)
Vernon
Submission

To
The Premier’s Conversation on Health

Presented to
Tom Christensen, MLA
May 18, 2007

The Interior Health Authority (IHA)
May 23, 2007
Advocates for Seniors’ Care - Vernon
Proposed Final Submission to Conversation on Health

The Advocates for Seniors’ Care – Vernon (ASC) is a group of concerned citizens that has come together based on their common experiences with the care provided to their loved one, relative or friend in residential care facilities in the Vernon area. The group is entirely volunteer and currently consists of about 100 individuals. Increasing numbers of seniors' currently living independently but worried about their future health care continue to express their concerns through our voice.

The ASC began to come together in February 2006, and through a series of meetings, large and small, identified a number of areas of attention.

In January 2007, via email mail out and 2 open public meetings, the following concerns, beliefs and action statements were re-affirmed and prioritized.

It continues to our belief that our current system of residential care and support for seniors’ continues to be in a state of crisis, and that this crisis will deepen and expand, due to the increasing demographic of older adults predicted, and other pressures on the health care system and government.

We believe that this crisis, is a hidden crisis. The general public is not aware of this crisis. Unless you are a senior in need of care and support, currently a family member supporting a senior or have supported a senior within the system in the past, or work in the system, these issues remain invisible.

We would like to emphasize and state that we are not being critical of the front line staff who on a day to day basis work extremely hard to provide professional and caring support to seniors’. In fact we are extremely appreciative, supportive and thankful of their efforts.

Therefore, we continue to believe, and continue to advocate on the following 5 key points or issues, and offer Seven (7) Recommendations For Action to the Ministry of Health, plus One (1) Recommendation For Action to the Provincial Government:

1. Increase Home Support Services - Publicly funded home support and care levels for seniors living independently in our communities is inadequate, and puts more seniors at risk earlier. This area is of most
urgent concern to seniors or older adults, and clear direction was
given to our group to make this the priority topic and direction.

2. **Increase Staffing Levels** - Staffing levels in seniors residential care
facilities, and in increasing numbers of private care facilities are
inadequate, resulting in reduced quality of care for residents,
inconsistent quality of care and in increasingly, unsafe quality of care.

3. **Improve Standards of Care and Practice** - Standards of care and
practice in Health Authorities and private care facilities are lacking,
and need to be immediately, and continually assessed, reviewed and
improved to ensure that those in care are receiving optimal care,
based on best practice, dignity and respect, not minimal or basic care.

4. **Improve Accountability** - Accountability of the Health Authorities,
and their seniors’ care facilities and operations, to the people they are
there to serve is virtually non-existent, and no viable and sustainable
procedures and policies appear to be in place to address accountability
between the system and those it serves. The Ministry and
government should move immediately to collaboratively develop
with representatives of those they serve, mechanisms and policies
that improve communication, accountability and transparency in
every ministry funded and/or affiliated seniors’ residential care
facility in the province.

5. **Improve Communication** - The Health Authorities needs to become
more pro-active in providing accurate, clearly understandable, and
regularly accessible information to seniors (and the general public) on
matters that are of concern to seniors.

We respectfully recommend the following to the Ministry of Health and the
provincial government, through the Conversation on Health that:

1. There needs to be an immediate increase in levels of home
    support to seniors’ currently living independently in each
    community, in each health authority, and more immediate attention
    and action on home support issues.

2. There needs to be an immediate increase to staffing levels and
    improvement of standards of care and practice in seniors’
    residential health care facilities operated by or affiliated with
    the Health Authorities;

3. **The Ministry and Government needs to immediately create**
    **Facility Advisory Committees** - That each health authority, at
each residential care facility and/or each community served by a health authority, put in place new processes and procedures that improve accountability of that facility or community to the residents or citizens of that community. The ASC has ideas on some possible frameworks and structures, and would welcome working with the Ministry of Health and government on these frameworks and structures. To date, the Interior Health Authority has only listened to us, but not actively collaborated with us.

4. Establish independent “Seniors’ Issues Advisory Committees”
We request that the Ministry of Health move to immediately establish Senior’s Issues Advisory Committees in each community or region served by each Health Authority to help inform the Ministry, the Health Authority and the public on matters of importance to seniors’ health care. For example, this committee should be convened (physically and/or virtually) at least twice a year, and consist of at least 2 citizen/resident representatives from each residential care facility/community affiliated with each health authority. The terms of reference for these Seniors’ Issues Advisory groups to be established based on authentic consultation and collaboration.

5. Establishment of a provincial Seniors’ Care Task Group – We request that the Ministry of Health and government immediately convene a Seniors’ Care Task Group initiative to examine the present and future health care needs of seniors’ within each health authority. We suggest that this task force be balanced, representative, inclusive, open, wide ranging, and be given the mandate of holding an adequate number of public input sessions in each and every community served by each health authority and then be tasked with presenting recommendations for policy and action to each health authority and the ministry. Immediate implementation of the recommendations presented in the recently completed report by the Premier’s Task Force on Senior’s and Aging “Aging Well in BC” would be an excellent start! A recent quote by a concerned citizen: “The blinds have been drawn on transparency and accountability”.

6. Increase Management Commitment and Personal Responsibility - We request that the management of Health Authorities, in particular those that work in the area of senior’s care, reflect upon and increase their levels of personal responsibility in addressing and solving these issues. Further, we would expect that whenever staff shortages occur in seniors care facilities, particularly during traditional holiday times, that
management staff or other support staff step in to help out. We do not think it unreasonable that the health authority management have their holidays cancelled when our facilities are short staffed, and would expect that to happen.

7. **Undertake to develop and implement an immediate, new Accreditation process of all** seniors’ residential health care facilities under the direction of, or affiliated with the Health Authorities, to begin as soon as possible, and with increased citizen and stakeholder involvement;

We respectfully recommend the following to the Provincial Government:

1. **Establish a standing “Working Group on Senior’s Health Care in BC.** We request that the Provincial Government, in addition to its “Conversation on Health” and “Premier’s Council on Seniors and Aging” launch a standing “work group” with the mandate to look into present and future senior’s care needs in our province.

In summary, based on the stories and situations we have heard, and continue to hear, the residential health care needs of seniors’ in our communities are not being adequately met now, and are at great risk of not being met in the future.

We are all much more aware of the fact that the seniors’ population is growing and will continue to grow over the next 20 to 30 years.

It’s time to collaborate, plan and act now!

On behalf of the Advocates for Seniors’ Care,

Respectfully submitted,

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