SUBMISSION TO THE HONOURABLE GEORGE ABBOTT,
MINISTER OF HEALTH FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA
FOR THEIR
B.C. CONVERSATION ON HEALTH

February 16, 2007
Executive Summary

VON Canada respectfully submits the following recommendations to The Honourable George Abbott, Minister of Health for British Columbia as part of the B.C. Conversation on Health public dialogue.

There is no question that Canada’s age demographic is shifting as a large cohort of baby boomers reach the age of 60 this year. Canadians are also living longer and care provided is being transferred from acute settings to home and community whenever possible. Like other provinces, the Government of British Columbia is facing significant and unsustainable health care costs.

The following submission was prepared with a focus on enhancing the quality of life for British Columbians and reducing the province’s per capita health expenditures. We hope you consider our submission and how we can work together to improve the quality of life for the people of British Columbia and address the vital issue of sustainability of the health system in the province.

more than 1,300 communities across Canada. The organization has been providing high quality care to the people in British Columbia for more than 100 years and this year VON Canada is celebrating 110 years of meeting the health and social needs of Canadians.

A full submission follows but we have summarized our recommendations below for quick reference.

VON supports the recommendations in the “Aging Well in British Columbia” final report of the Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues, which calls for a new, broader and more widely available home support system that will increase independence and avoid high costs of institutional care.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase the number of hours of home support per client to appropriately respond to the current need and to minimize costs associated with readmission to hospital and admission to long term care facilities.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase the supportive housing units and implement the appropriate personal support programs that allow individuals to maintain their independence and remain living independently for as long as possible.

VON Canada recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase the availability of community-based respite options to ensure that valued caregivers and contributors to the health care system receive the supports they need to continue to provide care to their loved ones and reduce the risk of being admitted for care themselves.
VON recommends a partnership with the Government of British Columbia to extend access to the electronic drug recording system to caregivers in British Columbia through the VON Canada Caregiver Portal to improve client safety and reduce medication errors, thereby reducing risk of admission/readmission to hospital.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia enhance workplace wellness programs across the province to improve the overall health and wellness of working British Columbians and positively affect the provincial economy.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase community-based wellness programming for seniors to reduce admissions to hospitals and long term care facilities, saving costs within the health care system.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia enhance their chronic disease management programs across the province by implementing a community and evidence-based model of care delivery to respond to the trending in chronic disease and minimize hospital and long term care facility admissions.

VON Canada’s mission is to provide leadership in community based care by delivering innovative, comprehensive health and social services and to influencing the development of health and social policy. As an organization committed to our mission, we have much to offer the Government of British Columbia and look forward to working closely for the benefit of all British Columbians.
Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our input to the B.C. Conversation on Health. We are pleased to be able to provide our recommendations to improve the quality of life for British Columbians and to sustain the provincial health system.

This year, the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) for Canada celebrates 110 years of identifying the health and social needs of Canadians and working in partnership with them to develop and deliver innovative, comprehensive health and social services. VON is a national, not-for-profit, charitable organization offering a wide range of community health care solutions that meet the needs of Canadians from coast to coast. We have a very distinguished record through the delivery of more than 50 different services such as home nursing, personal support and charitable programs such as respite services and volunteer transportation. We are well known for building partnerships with communities, community agencies, organizations and all levels of government to improve the quality of life of Canadians.

Although we are a national organization, the great strength of VON is that it also addresses unique local needs in provinces across Canada. We have been providing home and community care in British Columbia for over 100 years allowing the most vulnerable in society to access the supports they need to remain independent in their communities.

Background:

The province of British Columbia has been responsive to many of the changing health and social needs of British Columbians. Several health issues transcend all provinces across Canada including an aging population, an increase in chronic disease, a shortage of health human resources, poor mental health treatment and an increasing demand to receive care and supports in the comfort of one’s own home.

To respond to the changing needs and demands in this province and to sustain the health care system, more consideration must be given to expanding the role of home and community care, integrating all sectors within the health system and innovations that ensure fiscal sustainability of the British Columbian health system.

The province has a great vision and leads Canada in innovative thinking. Throughout this document, we make reference to how our recommendations fit well into the “Five Great Goals” of British Columbia:

1. Make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent;
2. Lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness;
3. Build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors;
4. Lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none; and
5. Create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.
British Columbia, more than other provinces, has begun to shift its thinking from that of a primarily institutional health care system to one whose vision includes public health and healthy communities. The regional role of the health authorities is key to enabling programs and services to address the unique needs of the five different regions of the province. British Columbia is leading the way with respect to home and community care integration with hospitals, long term care and other community agencies.

The province has been progressive with the development of the *BC Health Guide* and the emphasis on individuals taking more responsibility for their own health but being appropriately supported by the health care system and health care professionals. The Guide’s focus on disease prevention and health promotion reflects the forward thinking that must happen across the country to ensure sustainable health care systems.

And while these initiatives are admirable, the environment, demographics and changing trends dictate that we need to do more if we are to meet the ever-growing needs and demands for quality health care that the people of British Columbia deserve.

The goals of the new government-to-government relationship with Aboriginal people of British Columbia are commendable. VON supports the restoration, revitalization and strengthening of First Nations and their communities to improve the circumstances and eliminate the gap in standards of living with other British Columbians.

VON has recently agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations to undertake joint efforts in the development of strategies and initiatives intended to improve First Nations’ health. VON understands the unique community health needs and social issues of First Nations communities across Canada such as isolation, determinants of health, access to services on-reserve and high incidence of diabetes and renal disease. Many of the issues within this submission, specifically health and wellness and chronic disease management are highly relevant in all regions in British Columbia, including aboriginal communities.

The following sections respond to the following “Great Goal” for the province of British Columbia:

“*Build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors.*”

**Home Care:**

The final report from the Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues titled, “*Aging Well in British Columbia*”, describes “…a new vision for home support – one focused on prevention, maintaining quality of life, and avoiding the high cost – financial and human – of institutional care.” Home supports and services such as personal care involving bathing, dressing, grooming and household chores such as meal preparation and cleaning, help individuals age well in their own homes. From a report conducted by Hollander Analytical Services, we know that ignoring the preventive aspects of home care may not only lead to increased costs in the overall health system, but may also lead to suffering and emotional distress for individuals.”
The Government of British Columbia has an opportunity to expand the role of home care, truly support the aging population in their own homes and communities as they desire, and reduce the costs associated with individuals admitted to institutional levels of care.

*VON supports the recommendations in the “Aging Well in British Columbia” final report of the Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues, which calls for a new, broader and more widely available home support system that will increase independence and avoid high costs of institutional care.*

The current assessment criteria for home nursing are restrictive and only allow for a certain number of hours of care per client. This often does not fully meet client need and leads to individuals being readmitted to hospital - a much costlier alternative to home care.

*VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase the number of hours of home nursing per client to appropriately respond to the current need and to minimize costs associated with readmission to hospital and admission to long term care facilities.*

**Assisted Living:**

As our population ages, more and more seniors will demand to continue to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. For those seniors who do not require 24-hour care in a residential facility but are no longer capable of managing alone in their own home, assisted living is the popular choice among elderly individuals. This alternative to hospital admission or long term care facilities is more cost effective and responsive to the demands of Canadians and allows individuals to receive the care and supports they need to remain living safely and independently.

A current lack of supportive housing units equates to more individuals going to emergency departments and acute care hospitals because there is no where else to go. These visits and stays in hospital are costly for the health system. Although the Government of British Columbia has identified investment in the construction of assisted living and community residential buildings to respond to the demands of the increasing aging population, more housing units with appropriate services and supports are required.

*VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase the supportive housing units and implement the appropriate personal support programs that allow individuals to maintain their independence and remain living independently for as long as possible.*

**Caregivers:**

Caregivers are people who provide care and assistance for their family members and friends who are in need of support because of physical, cognitive or mental health conditions.
According to Statistics Canada’s, there are an estimated 3 million caregivers in Canada – who day in and day out provide care and support ranging from arranging resources and community supports to meal preparation and transportation, to medicine administration and dressing changes, and to emotional and social support.

In addition to the impact they make on the quality of a care recipient’s life, caregivers provide more than 2 billion hours of caregiving, saving the Canadian health care system about $5 billion each year. Simply put, from both a quality and financial perspective, caregivers are vital to ensuring a sustainable health care system.

In British Columbia, 80% of care of frail and vulnerable older adults is done by family members and other informal caregivers. Despite the positive contributions of caregiving, there are significant negative spin offs or consequences associated with caregiving and the statistics are staggering:

- 50% of caregivers report health problems due to caregiving;
- 79% of caregivers report some emotional difficulty i.e. increased stress, sleep disturbances and other physical problems;
- 25% of caregivers report their employment situation has been affected by their caregiving responsibilities; and,
- More than 2/3 of caregivers spend more than $100/month on caregiving.

Support must be provided to this group of people that save the taxpayers so much money and provide the care and supports needed by their loved ones. We must learn to care for the caregiver. Respite care has been identified by caregivers as an excellent way for them to focus on their own health and well being knowing that their family member or friend is safe and happy. Respite care can be considered a health promotion and protective factor for caregivers, potentially leading to better care and reduced institutionalization.

*VON Canada recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase the availability of community-based respite options to ensure that valued caregivers and contributors to the health care system receive the supports they need to continue to provide care to their loved ones and reduce the risk of being admitted for care themselves.*

VON Canada has a philosophy that individuals have primary responsibility for their own health and that maintenance of health directly and positively affects the quality of their lives. Part of our mission is to deliver innovative, comprehensive health and social services and it is within this context that VON Canada is working to implement the first Canadian Caregiver Portal. The VON Canada Caregiver Portal will be a virtual space where all caregivers can get the information, resources and supports they need to provide better quality care to their families/friends.

It will also be a space where caregivers can seek respite for themselves. The portal will provide up-to-date, accessible, community specific and professionally vetted information that will improve their access to important health information. There are opportunities for the
Government of British Columbia to take advantage of the work already begun by VON Canada. This innovative resource should be included in the next edition of the BC Health Guide to encourage and support British Columbians in taking responsibility for their health and well-being. Another opportunity involves the electronic drug recording system:

**Electronic Drug Recording System.** As the only province in Canada to have an electronic drug system available to pharmacists, physicians and clinicians, VON sees a unique opportunity to work together to support seniors and their caregivers. By extending the availability of the BC electronic drug recording system to caregivers, through the VON Canada Caregiver Portal, polypharmacy, adverse side effects and reactions to drugs would be reduced, thereby improving client safety and reducing costs to the health care system by reduced visits to emergency rooms and doctor’s offices.

*VON recommends a partnership with the Government of British Columbia to extend access to the electronic drug recording system to caregivers in British Columbia through the VON Canada Caregiver Portal to improve client safety and reduce medication errors, thereby reducing risk of admission/readmission to hospital.*

This next section addresses one of the “Five Great Goals” for the province of British Columbia:

*“Lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness”.*

**Health and Wellness:**

The benefits of healthy living have a huge and positive impact on the quality of life for all Canadians. Generally speaking, the people of British Columbia are among the healthiest, with among the best health outcomes in the country. But for various reasons many British Columbians continue to lack good nutrition and physical fitness.

**Working British Columbians:**

The Conference Board of Canada, among others, has proven the direct link between a healthy workplace, employee satisfaction and organizational performance. The consequences for any organization that has an unhealthy workforce include work-related accidents, high rates of absenteeism, high turnover, high levels of stress, loss of productivity and high incidence of health-related litigationiii - all of which negatively affect productivity and organizational success.

Canada lags behind other OECD countries in the area of productivity. According to the OECD Compendium of Productivity Indicators, 2005, Canada is one of four OECD countries that have not been catching up with US productivity levels over a period of time. While working British Columbians contribute to the provincial economy, a focus on workplace wellness can increase productivity levels that would positively affect the economy while improving the overall quality of workers’ lives.
An article by Jeremy Rifkin, the Foundation on Economic Trends, in the Globe and Mail in May 2006, highlighted that for every dollar invested in comprehensive prevention and health promotion programs, companies save $3 - $8 in the form of reduced health costs and gains in productivity.

For example, VON’s comprehensive health programming for businesses includes health promotion and assistance interventions; recognition of the needs, preferences and attitudes of different groups; recognition of lifestyle behaviours; consideration of the different environments in which programs operate; and support the development of a strong health policy in the workplace.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia enhance workplace wellness programs across the province to improve the overall health and wellness of working British Columbians and positively affect the provincial economy.

Seniors:

The final report from the Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues titled, “Aging Well in British Columbia” is timely in identifying how British Columbian society can support the participation, health and well being of older people in the province. As stated in the report, life expectancy in British Columbia is among the highest in the world at over 81 years of age. Given the increasing aging population in the province, the recommendations in the final report are extremely helpful to ensure that this growing population receives the care and supports they need, where they prefer to receive them – in their homes and communities.

Visits to doctor’s offices, emergency departments and placements in long term care facilities increase relative to increasing age. These levels of care are costly and can be avoided through comprehensive community-based wellness programming that involves fitness programs, education and counseling. These programs enable older British Columbians to remain independent in their homes, for as long as possible, and active participants in their communities. Wellness programs also help to ensure a sustainable health care system by keeping seniors healthy and out of institutions, freeing up beds and other valuable resources within the health system.

A health and wellness program targeted to the senior population can also help reduce an increasing number of falls among seniors in the province. According to B.C. Health, one in three seniors will fall during any given year. In 2001, this resulted in 10,000 seniors being hospitalized. Regular physical activity through a comprehensive wellness program would help seniors maintain their balance and flexibility and prevent falls.

It comes as no surprise that the Council’s report recommends to “significantly enhance healthy living initiatives focused on older adults, customized for British Columbia’s diverse population.”
VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia increase community-based wellness programming for seniors to reduce admissions to hospitals and long term care facilities, saving costs within the health care system.

Chronic Disease Management:

With an increasing aging population comes an increase in chronic health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Chronic disease is the leading cause of death among Canadians over the age of 65. More than 16 million Canadians live with chronic illness and it is responsible for:

- 60% of hospitalizations
- 70% of all deaths in Canada
- 2/3 of medical admissions via emergency departments
- 80% of family doctor visits
- 60-80% of total medical costs

According to the World Health Organization, by 2020, almost 75% of all deaths worldwide will be from chronic disease. Unlike health and wellness, which focuses on maintaining health and preventing diseases, chronic disease management focuses on maintaining health and preventing disease from progressing after the point of diagnosis. Prevention and control is vital to improve the health and wellness of individuals in communities across Canada.

Chronic disease management can help individuals manage their disease, avoiding episodes of ill health and complications that would lead to hospitalization. Traditional methods such as prescriptive advice and didactic education have proved ineffective. (41% of Canadians say they have received information on physical activity or sport in the last 3 months. 49% of Canadians say the information they received did not influence them to become active.)

Successful chronic disease prevention and management programs use multiple strategies and interventions, promote collaboration among providers, organizations, individuals and community groups, are client-centred, empower individuals to increase control over and improve their health, are evidence-based and include evaluation to ensure objectives are achieved.

VON Canada recognizes the current Chronic Disease Management Program delivered by the health authorities in British Columbia but recommends a more enhanced model to appropriately and adequately meet the changing health needs of older individuals in the province.

VON recommends that the Government of British Columbia enhance their chronic disease management programs across the province by implementing a community and evidence-based model of care delivery to respond to the trending in chronic disease and minimize hospital and long term care facility admissions.
Conclusion

VON Canada is proud of its history of delivering quality community health services for the past 110 years to Canadians, many in rural and remote communities. We are a leader in working together with governments, communities and Canadians in identifying unmet needs and finding innovative ways to address these gaps in care and social services. VON is well placed to assist in the development of effective programs and services that respond to the changing health and social needs of British Columbians, now and into the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input into the Conversation on Health and we wish you well as you deliberate on the feedback you receive.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with you to improve the quality of life for all British Columbians.

Respectfully submitted,

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iii Whitehead (2006); Verow and Hargreaves (2000); Adley et al. (2001)

iv Rapoport, J. et al (2004); Chronic Diseases in Canada in CDM for the SIMS partnership. Phase 2 – CDM Program Design. CDM working group (April 12, 2006.)