

Written Submission: Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget



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Submitted by the British Columbia Care Providers Association (BCCPA)

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Recommendations:

BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) recommends that the Government of Canada:

1. *Invest \$3.76M over five (5) years to adapt the Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST) Program to support growth in the seniors care labour force;*
2. *Create a Seniors Care Infrastructure funding envelope within the National Housing Strategy to enable critical upgrades to long-term care facilities;*
3. *Convene provincial and territorial health officials, sectoral leaders, and relevant stakeholders to undertake the development of National Long-Term Care Standards; and,*
4. *Create a National Accreditation Program for long-term care facilities.*

BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) has been the leading industry association for British Columbia's continuing care sector for 40 years, today representing more than 350 members delivering long-term care, assisted living, home support and commercial services to 23,000 seniors and other vulnerable adults across the province.

BCCPA is grateful for the opportunity to share its learned COVID experiences and recommendations as a leading B.C. voice on cooperative pandemic management and response.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed long-standing, pervasive deficiencies in many long-term care (LTC) facilities across Canada. This unacceptable state of healthcare had tragic outcomes for thousands of elderly victims and their families.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, while Canada's overall COVID-19 mortality rate was relatively low compared with the rates in other OECD countries, it had the highest proportion of deaths occurring in long-term care. **LTC residents accounted for 81% of all reported COVID-19 deaths in Canada**, compared with an average of 42% in other OECD countries (ranging from less than 10% in Slovenia and Hungary, 31% in the United States, to 66% in Spain).¹ As of May 25, 2020, about 1 in 5 (18%) Canadian COVID-19 cases were among LTC residents.

Profound public concern has now turned to demands for immediate, meaningful and lasting change. As the leading industry association for British Columbia's continuing care sector, BC Care Providers Association is in full agreement that the quality of eldercare can – and must – be improved across the country, in what will be a collaborative effort with industry, government, and patient care groups.

Informed by our on-the-ground pandemic experience in British Columbia, where the long-term care sector has led the country by many measures, BC Care Providers Association (BCCPA) is eager to share that experience with the Government of Canada as it charts the way forward in supporting Canada's seniors.

Our mission is a national strategy to ensure Canada's elderly citizens get the consistent, quality, and compassionate care they deserve everywhere in the country. This is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to show national leadership in caring for some of Canada's most vulnerable, particularly in the areas of labour force recruitment, infrastructure innovation, and standardized accreditation.

Specifically, we are making four recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of long-term care in Canada:

¹ *Pandemic Experience in the Long-Term Care Sector: How Does Canada Compare With Other Countries?* Canadian Institute for Health Information. <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/covid-19-rapid-response-long-term-care-snapshot-en.pdf>

Recommendation 1: Investments in labour force recruitment

BCCPA recommends that the Government of Canada invest \$3.46M over five (5) years to adapt the Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST) Program to support growth in the seniors' care labour force.

The Challenge: Prior to COVID-19, it was estimated that Canada would need almost 180,000 new Personal Support Workers (PSWs) over the next ten years, just to meet increased demand from our aging population. With governments now committing to enhanced quality of care in these facilities, the workforce will need to grow even more.

The Solution: BCCPA recommends the Government of Canada invest \$3.76M over five years to adapt ***Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent*** (FAST), an existing online analytics tool which helps unemployed and underemployed Canadians and new immigrants transition into careers in seniors' care. Administered by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC, the FAST Program's model has been proven and backed by funding from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre.

Within four months, FAST could deploy competency assessments and gap training for priority health care/care aide occupations. Within five years, 200,000 candidates would have completed assessments and be positioned to meet the needs of the health care/care aide sector. Within this five-year timeframe, FAST's homecare streams would become self-sufficient.

In addition to helping Canadians find jobs, FAST will serve as an effective tool to screen and recruit talent from overseas to help meet the growing demand for workers in this field.

Recommendation 2: Investments in much-needed upgrades to long-term care infrastructure

BCCPA recommends that the Government of Canada create a Seniors Care Infrastructure funding envelope within the National Housing Strategy to enable critical upgrades to long-term care facilities.

The Challenge: The pandemic amply proved it is difficult to contain the spread of infection in decades-old long-term care homes with outdated ventilation systems; three- and four-bed wards; shared washrooms and bathing areas; communal dining rooms and narrow hallways; and small, crowded nursing stations and medication areas.

The Solution: By creating a Seniors Care Infrastructure envelope within the National Housing Strategy, the Government of Canada would enable joint federal-provincial funding for the refurbishment or replacement of aging LTC infrastructure. This could provide affordable financing to private operators, and grants for not-for-profit facilities. This would provide the federal government with an opportunity to mandate standards aligned with stated priorities, including energy efficiency certification (e.g. LEED) and infection control building standards.

Recommendation 3: Using national standards to fix inconsistency in care

BCCPA recommends that the Government of Canada convene provincial and territorial health officials, sectoral leaders, and relevant stakeholders to undertake the development of National Long-Term Care Standards.

The Challenge: COVID-19 cases and outcomes in Canada's long-term care facilities varied significantly among provinces and territories. For example, as of May 25, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and the territories had no reported deaths in retirement homes and LTC facilities, whereas LTC deaths represented over 70% of all COVID-19 deaths in Quebec, Ontario and Alberta and 97% of all deaths in Nova Scotia.² This inconsistency in care is incongruent with principles of Canadian healthcare.

The Solution: The federal government should assume a leadership role in establishing *National Long-Term Care Standards* across the country, starting with convening provincial and territorial governments, sectoral leaders, and relevant stakeholders to develop consistent industry standards, credential assessment, regulations, and an accountability schedule.

Recommendation 4: Using standardized accreditation process to ensure quality care across the country

BCCPA recommends that the Government of Canada create a National Accreditation Program for long-term care facilities.

The Challenge: Care in Canada's LTC sector varies widely between provinces and territories, and indeed within regions. At present, facilities can opt to participate in independent accreditation programs (e.g. Accreditation Canada or Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) to demonstrate their quality of care to their staff, patients, clients, and the community. These programs audit LTC facilities and provide a ranking in relation to their compliance with a wide variety of standards. Participation in these accreditation programs, which are independent from government, is entirely voluntary. As such, there is very little incentive for LTC facilities – particularly those most in need of improvement – to participate in an accreditation program that would offer them a poor, public-facing ranking.

The Solution: BCCPA is calling on federal and provincial governments to collaborate on the creation of a set of national, standardized assessments and common, evidence-based metrics to ensure the provision of consistent and high-quality care no matter where Canadians need it.

² *Pandemic Experience in the Long-Term Care Sector: How Does Canada Compare With Other Countries?* Canadian Institute for Health Information. <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/covid-19-rapid-response-long-term-care-snapshot-en.pdf>