

SENIORS' CAREGIVERS CHALLENGE CHANGES

(from the Vancouver Sun, May 3rd – COSCO was one of the 17 signatories)

We have concerns about the provincial government's plan to divert federal funds for affordable housing to finance assisted living units for seniors. With waiting lists for seniors' housing and residential care growing out of proportion, and with reductions in home support services, never was there a more important time to seek input from the community before embarking on a redesign of how seniors' housing and health care services are to be delivered.

In the government's pre-election promises, they said they would provide 5,000 long term care beds by 2006. Instead, it appears that they are now ready to use recently allocated federal government housing funding to create 3,500 assisted living units.

Although assisted living is an appropriate housing model for some, it should not be used to replace existing models such as long term care facilities. We are concerned about the immediate and long term impacts these proposed changes could have on the health and housing needs of BC seniors. Our other concerns are:

That by channelling housing dollars into the delivery of assisted living for the frail elderly the housing, health and services needs of other low income seniors, families, individuals and the disabled, may not be met.

That community-based home nursing, home support programmes and adult day cares may not be adequately funded to allow seniors not in care to live independently in the housing of their choice.

That family and informal caregivers of individuals with dementia may not have access to appropriate supports, services and housing.

That reductions of residential care beds may force seniors with moderate to high level care needs to live at risk in the community.

That non-profit housing providers may be forced to offer care, supports and services without appropriate preparation, properly trained staff and adequate budgets.

That the recent federal/provincial housing agreement of \$80 million in matching funds will not be used to continue to provide housing for seniors, low income families and individuals, and the disabled through a variety of programmes including supportive and assisted living.

Finally we urge government to initiate a province wide consultation with

health care, housing and seniors' groups before embarking on what many are concerned may neither meet British Columbian's health or housing needs.