

news release

February 21, 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Seniors' advocate position weakened without independence

Coalition questions government's stewardship of seniors' care, points to little progress made on B.C. Ombudsperson's recommendations, no focus on seniors' care in 2013 budget

Vancouver — The BC Health Coalition is expressing frustration that the seniors' advocate legislation tabled yesterday will not create an advocate that is independent of government.

"Last year the Ministry of Health consulted seniors and other stakeholders on their priorities for an advocate position, and independence was a clear top priority," says BC Health Coalition co-chair Rick Turner.

"An independent seniors' advocate would allow for arms-length assessment of seniors' issues, similar to the role of the representative for children and youth and the BC Ombudsperson," says Tuner.

By contrast, a seniors' advocate that is a part of government – as tabled in yesterday's Bill 10, the *Seniors Advocate Act* – will be limited to serving at the discretion of government and will therefore be unable to play the watchdog role that seniors need it to.

"We are pleased that the position is being created, but without a truly independent advocate, and in the absence of other comprehensive action on the part of government to improve seniors' care, we cannot address the systemic challenges we face," says Turner.

Turner notes that Bill 10 comes one year after the release of the BC Ombudsperson's report on the state of seniors' care in B.C. The Ministry of Health has fully implemented only four of the 141 recommendations made directly to the ministry since the report's release, and partially implemented only approximately 25 per cent of the recommendations.

"The Ombudsperson's findings indicate that the Ministry of Health has, in many cases, failed to fulfill its leadership role for seniors' care in our province," says Turner. "Given that there is little evidence in the 2013 budget to suggest our government intends to take serious action on seniors' care, we're concerned that one advocate that is tied to government cannot fill that gap."

The BC Health Coalition, among many other stakeholders, has called for an independent seniors advocate who reports to the legislature since 2009.

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