

## Seniors and Public Transportation

November 2016

### Background

Healthy aging, as defined by the World Health Organization (2002) “ considers people of all ages’ ability to be able to live a healthy, safe and social inclusive lifestyle within the physical, social and economic fabric of society.”<sup>1</sup> Most of B.C.’s seniors are currently living in independent housing with varying levels of support and wish to remain in their homes and communities as they age.

For many seniors, the ability to live a healthy, safe and socially inclusive lifestyle is significantly influenced by the accessibility, availability and affordability of transportation. Seniors want to be able to maintain their independence, complete daily activities and participate in social activities, yet many live in areas where access to public transit is complicated or non-existent. While it is imperative to ensure that seniors have adequate home support, there is also a great need to ensure seniors are provided with the necessary supports to travel outside of their homes.

Although the majority of seniors live in independent housing, the lack of access to private vehicles, issues in mobility, and the logistics of managing personal medical equipment such as wheelchairs, can limit opportunities for seniors to get around effectively. In addition, public transportation in British Columbia can be expensive when compared to the income of seniors. Although low-income seniors can access public transportation with greater ease through B.C. Transit’s reduced [annual bus pass of \\$45](#), there are many seniors who have an income slightly above of the ‘low income’ threshold, and continue to pay hundreds of dollars per year, resulting in significant financial hardship.

There are also some seniors across the province, such as those who have physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities, who require greater supports and accommodations. Many of these seniors are unable to use conventional public transportation without assistance. While there are services such as HandyDart that can accommodate the needs of these seniors, the lack of availability and accessibility, as indicated by the high number of unfulfilled regular ride requests in 2014,<sup>2</sup> further limit their options.

Accessible, available and affordable transportation is a key determinant in seniors’ ability to continue to live full, active and healthy lives. Seniors not only need support for attending necessary healthcare appointments, but also for leisure activities. However, research indicates that seniors who depend on others for transportation are more likely to be hesitant to ask for assistance for leisure activities when compared to activities that are perceived to be more essential.<sup>3</sup> Nurses know that social interaction is essential in mitigating feelings of isolation, and providing the necessary supports to facilitate participation and engagement is crucial. While we have recently seen some areas across B.C. expand HandyDart Services such as in [Kamloops](#), [Comox Valley](#), and [Victoria](#), there continues to be a strong need to ensure that these services are available to seniors in all areas across the province, and that seniors are supported financially.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2002). *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*.

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Seniors Advocate. (2016). *Monitoring Seniors Services*.

<sup>3</sup> Turcotte, M. (2012). *Profile of seniors’ transportation habits*.



# Issues Brief

Through ARNBC's consultations regarding seniors health, the need to increase supports in transportation has been identified as a consistent issue. There is strong consensus among nurses that while better home health services that support seniors who wish to remain in their homes are essential, it is equally important to invest in adequate transportation to facilitate social participation and active aging.

## Key Messages:

- Accessible, available and affordable transportation is needed to ensure B.C. seniors have the ability to continue to live full, active and healthy lives.
- Many seniors continue to pay a significant amount for public transportation. Considering that the medium income of B.C. seniors is \$24,000, more financial assistance is needed to ensure seniors are not forced to choose between essentials such as rent, medications, transportation or groceries. All are needed to facilitate healthy aging.
- There continues to be a greater need for services that support seniors with physical and/or cognitive disabilities, such as HandyDart.
- Nurses know that adequate transportation for seniors is equally important as home care and home support in supporting seniors to age safely and healthily within their homes and communities.

## Questions for RNs & NPs:

1. What are some of the issues that seniors are facing within your own communities?
2. What other innovative models exist to bridge the current gaps in transportation for seniors?
3. Who should ARNBC collaborate with to help with this issue?

