

Vancouver Women's Health Collective

HER VOICE

Fall 2002

Are you interested in...

Doing research on complementary therapies, reproductive issues, or endometriosis? Knowing about the health resources available to you in your community? Finding a new doctor or therapist? Inviting the VWHC to your meeting to do a breast health workshop?

Then please call our health information line: 604-736-5262, visit our Health Information Centre at 1 - 175 East 15th Avenue in Vancouver, or check out our web site: www.womens-healthcollective.ca

Staffed predominantly by volunteers, the information centre is open:

**Monday through Thursday
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

**Monday and Tuesday
2:00 to 5:00 p.m.**

**Wednesday
6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

TREAT THEM LIKE YOU TREAT YOUR MOTHER ...

The title of this article refers to a comment made by Premier Gordon Campbell regarding seniors being pushed out of residential care facilities this summer. As my grandmother would say "the proof is in the pudding". And the pudding seems to be off, Premier Campbell. This article deals with cuts to health services and the huge cost increases facing seniors. These health cuts, of course, effect many of us. However, they do hit some harder including women who earn on average less than men do and, particularly, senior women who live on fixed incomes. As you read the article keep in mind that senior women, according to Statistics Canada, have an average annual income of \$16,000, ten thousand dollars less than senior men. With 24% of senior women living in a "low-income situation" the following cuts will be devastating for many of them...

PHARMACARE

About 50% of expenditures under Pharmacare, our provincial drug plan, are for drugs for seniors. In the past, seniors paid only the pharmacy's dispensing fee; on average \$7 per medication, when having a prescription filled. On January 1, 2002, the BC government announced that seniors who make less than \$24,000 a year must pay up to \$10 each time they fill a prescription covered by Pharmacare, up to a total of \$200 a year. Those seniors making more than \$24,000 a year must now pay up to \$25 for each prescription, to a maximum of \$275 a year. According to the Pharmacare database, BC seniors purchased 1.89 million prescriptions in the first three months of 2001, while over these three months in 2002, 1.18 million prescriptions were purchased - 700,000 prescriptions went unfilled after the user fees were introduced.

And it gets worse, starting January 1, 2003, means testing will be introduced for Pharmacare eligibility for seniors. This new income-based Pharmacare system will mean that about half of BC's 550,000 seniors will likely pay significantly more for their drugs. Seniors who are at the cut-off line and no longer qualify for Pharmacare will be hardest hit having to choose between food, bus fare, and filling their prescriptions. In the long run, these changes are going to cost us more in terms of hospitalization when illness strikes because of missed medication and seniors dying needlessly.

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THE BC HEALTH COALITION & SENIORS

Provincial and regional changes to seniors' care have left many elderly British Columbians and their families anxious and vulnerable, and uncertain about their access to health care. The Seniors Network BC and the BCHC have developed an information and action kit to help ensure that the rights of seniors in long-term care facilities are not ignored. To order your kit, contact the BCHC at justsayno@bchealthcoalition.ca or call 604-681-7945. The BCHC also wants to hear from seniors and their families about problems they are having in gaining access to home care and long-term care. Call the seniors' hotline, toll free: 1-877-600-1180 and share your story with us.

The VWHC along with other women's groups, seniors, people with disabilities, anti-poverty activists, people living with HIV/AIDS, students, community living advocates, health care providers and their unions comprise the BC Health Coalition. Our 2002/03 priorities include: seniors' care; focus on women; a working group on privatization; and setting a post-Romanow progressive health care agenda.

For more information about the BCHC please call the Co-ordinator, Terrie Hendrickson, at 604-681-7945.

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MEDICAL SERVICE PLAN (MSP) PREMIUMS & SERVICES

Only BC and Alberta charge premiums so that residents can access health care. MSP premiums amount to a health care tax. In January 2002, government-subsidized services for podiatry, physiotherapy, chiropractic care, massage therapy, and naturopathy were cut under the Medical Services Plan. Seniors now have to pay for these services or go without.

A couple of months later, in May 2002, the Liberal government then increased MSP premiums to \$54 from \$36 for individuals (\$648 a year) and for couples the premium rose to \$96 a month from \$64, or \$1,152 for a year. The government boasted that low income British Columbians would be exempt from the premiums. However, individuals with an income of \$16,000 per year begin to pay a portion of the premium and at \$24,000 individuals pay 100% of the MSP premium. Couples with an income of \$25,000 begin to pay a portion of the premium and at \$33,000 pay 100% of the MSP premium. Senior women, many with an average annual income of \$16,000, still have to pay a portion of the \$54 monthly premium to access health care in this province.

RESIDENTIAL CARE

Twenty-five thousand seniors live in residential care facilities (also referred to as long-term care or nursing homes). The majority are women and three quarters of these seniors are low income. In April 2002, the provincial government announced it was closing 3,000 residential care beds. One of the consequences, as reported by the media over the summer, was that a number of couples in residential care were being separated as facilities were being closed. As well, couples whose needs and levels of care differ were being forced to live apart.

This year the government tightened up requirements for residential care so that only those seniors who have been defined through the assessment process as having complex care needs will now get into residential care facilities. It is estimated that between 6,000 and 8,000 seniors, who up to now were eligible for residential care, will no longer be eligible. This is the provincial government's approach to tackle long wait lists for residential care - wait lists increased by 76% from 1993 to 1999. Another way was that the government claimed that 30 to 40% of seniors in long-term care facilities didn't need to be there. Dr. Larry Barzelai, a Vancouver family physician specializing in geriatric care, challenges the government's figure. Dr Barzelai says it's more like 5%.

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The Liberals' New Era promise during election time was to build 5,000 new not-for-profit long-term care beds. In fact, the government is now saying it will build 1,500 residential care beds for seniors requiring complex medical services and 3,500 assisted living spaces. These assisted living spaces will be built through public/private partnerships by redirecting money formerly used to build low-income housing. Of the 3,500 assisted living spaces, however, it looks like only 1,500 new units will actually be built, 1,000 units will be converted from existing buildings, and a further 1,000 seniors in private facilities will receive rent supplements.

Each assisted living bed costs between \$11,000 and \$15,000 a year, while residential beds cost up to \$70,000 a year. One of the reasons is because the assisted living model of "care" further off-loads costs on to individual seniors to meet their care needs i.e. drug costs, medical supplies and equipment, and recreational activities. Further, assisted living is defined as housing and not facility care. Presently there are no regulations in place to protect residents in assisted living units and ensure their quality care.

HOME CARE

As the provincial government was moving seniors out of residential care facilities this summer and into assisted living units and promising other seniors that they would help them stay in their own homes they were also busy preparing to cut home care services. All of the health authorities across the province have reduced home care services to seniors in order to stay within the budgets imposed on them by the provincial government.

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority announced in late-October that it would reduce shopping, cleaning and laundry services to about 5,600 residents in the Lower Mainland. The VCHA is subjecting 7,000 seniors to a case-by-case reassessment for home care

services. About 80% of these seniors, who have already been judged by professionals to need the services, will experience a reduction in home care services. The decision to force seniors to make due with less personal assistance such as housekeeping, cooking, shopping, and running errands is a blow to preventative health care and to quality community-based assisted living. Seniors will have to rely on family and friends to help out with these day-to-day tasks further burdening women, who are typically the caregivers in the family.

SENIORS' PENSIONS

In October 2002, 75,000 retired teachers, college instructors, and municipal and public service workers were told they will now have to pay between 50 and 100% of the cost of their Medical Service Plan premiums – their pension benefits included the payment of MSP premiums until now. Provincial government increases in MSP premiums, elimination of services covered by MSP like chiropractic care and physiotherapy, and cuts to Pharmacare coverage have increased the costs for pension plans and some of these costs are now being passed on to the retirees themselves.

Overall, this massive restructuring of BC's health care system is happening at a fast pace. In the past, health care costs were shared for the most part by the collective. Increasingly health care is being off-loaded on to individuals, their families and friends. This is going to result in poorer care for those who are vulnerable in society leading to ill health and unnecessary deaths. Are we really treating senior women like we want our mothers and grandmothers to be treated?

Caryn Duncan is the VWHC's Administrator and the Community Co-chair for the BC Health Coalition. Both of her grandmothers have died in the past two years and she misses them a lot.



SING OUT SING LOUD

In 1986, the first Raging Granny group was launched in Victoria by peace activists protesting against the presence of US nuclear powered warships and submarines in BC's naval bases at Nanoose Bay and Esquimalt. Raging Grannies are now active all across Canada, in several American States, and in Athens, Greece. Not all of us are actual grandmothers; some are not even mothers. Ages range from the 40s to the 90s.

Militarism continues to be one of our issues and the focus of many songs. (We steal the tunes and write new words.) We also regularly sing out against pollution, poverty, racism, and the shattering of Canada's health care system.

Health care first appeared in our repertoire in August 1991. Outside the Whistler hotel where provincial health ministers were meeting we sang (to the tune of Mocking Bird Hill):

*In the midst of the Gulf War we now realize
The MPs were planning our Medicare's demise
Behind closed doors the Tories did plot
To reduce transfer payments that mean such a lot.*

Thanks to Gordon Campbell, we in BC are now moving toward Medicare's demise. The Raging Grannies, to the tune of Put Your Arms Around Me Honey, regularly sing:

*Campbell's cutting back the funds for Medicare
If we don't protest loud and clear it won't be there
We will get a two tier plan
Just like they have in Alabam.*

The increase in prescription and premium fees and the curtailing of home care services in BC are vicious blows against senior women including many



Grannies. The Grannies have raised their voices against these health cuts to the tune of There's a Tavern In Our Town:

*There's a drugstore in our town, in our town
And there my pension cheque goes down way on down
Because now we have to pay a bigger fee
The big shots never think of me.*

We persist in raging...with new songs, different words, same message.

Lucette Hansen is a long-time VWHC volunteer and has been a Raging Granny for more than a decade.

Are you looking for a welcoming, comfortable, women-centred meeting space to offer a workshop, hold training sessions, etc...

The VWHC has space available for \$12.50/hr plus GST .

**Please call
604-736-4234
for more information.**

THE VANCOUVER WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE

Our Purpose

We have all been taught that only medical experts know about good health care. In fact, health information has been passed down from one generation of women to the next for centuries. Since our founding in 1972, the VWHC has promoted and supported women helping women to help themselves.

Our Mission Statement

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective provides information, resources and other support for women to empower themselves to take charge of their own health care.

Our Members


We are a charitable, non-profit women's organization, funded primarily by donations, membership fees,

grants, and fund-raising initiatives. Volunteer members are an essential part of the VWHC. There are many opportunities for volunteers to share their stories and enhance their skills. Please call us for more information. Many thanks to past and present volunteers and members, without you we would not be here!

HER VOICE

HER VOICE, the VWHC newsletter is published twice a year. HER VOICE is a forum to connect VWHC members, as well as the broader community, around women's health issues and activities at the VWHC. Submissions relevant to women's health and/or well-being are always welcome. Opinions expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the VWHC.

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VWHC INFORMATION CENTRE RESOURCES FOR WOMEN GROWING OLDER

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective has a variety of health resources available for senior women. Women can call our Health Information Line at 604-736-5262 for information regarding community resources for issues such as abuse, advocacy, addiction, counseling, disability, seniors centres, food delivery, health care, housing, income assistance, support groups and volunteering. We can refer women to organizations such as the 411 Seniors Centre and SWAP – the Seniors Well Aware Program. Pamphlets and brochures we carry include the Screening Mammography Program of BC, Battered Women's Support Services, Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and the BC Palliative Care Benefits Program.

We receive several newsletters and magazines relevant to senior women including: West End Seniors' Network; A Friend Indeed: a newsletter for women in the prime of life; First Mature Women's Network Society; Caregiver Times; and 50 Plus. Our extensive health files contain information from both mainstream and complimentary sources on topics such as osteoporosis, heart disease, aging and sexuality, elder abuse, mental health and breast cancer.

Our non-lending library has many books of interest to senior women. Titles like Celebrating Women, Aging and Cultural Diversity; New Ourselves, Growing Older: Women Aging with Knowledge & Power; and Preventing & Reversing Osteoporosis: Every Woman's Essential Guide are just a few of the great books available. Come and visit us, pick up a book or health file and stay awhile; our pillow room is a comfortable and inviting place to get more informed about your health.

Of course the collective can always use your wisdom, experience and sassy senior self. To find out more about volunteering, call Cindy, the Information Centre Coordinator at 604-736-4234 for more information.

The VWHC's menopause kit, *Menopause: a self-help approach*, is now available for \$10 (plus \$2.50 if postage is required).
Please call 604-736-5262
to order a VWHC menopause kit.

NEW PROJECTS AT THE VWHC

Over the past 30 years, the activities of the VWHC have ranged from medical services and publications on women's health to support groups and coalition building. During the next few months our members will be exploring some exciting new ideas to further promote our work, create much needed feminist health information and better connect with women in our community.

One subcommittee is developing a fact sheet that will be distributed throughout the year on various health issues; the information will be easy to understand, reflect a feminist perspective on women's health and well-being and will offer further resources to women looking to take charge of their own health.

Another subcommittee is organizing a few discussion groups that will happen at our Information Centre throughout the year that will include presenters from within the community on women's health issues. Possible topics include fertility/menstrual awareness, naturopathic approaches to women's health and breast health.

Finally, another subcommittee will be revamping and updating our web site. If you have any thoughts on any of these projects and would like to be involved, contact Cindy Weeds, Information Centre Coordinator at 604-736-4234.

MAD as HELL!



GREY POWER ON THE MOVE TO VICTORIA

Rally

Tuesday, Nov. 26

11:30 a.m.

Victoria



**After all the
cuts – now
Pharmacare**

Join seniors who are
"Mad as Hell" for a rally
at 11:30 a.m. at the B.C.
Legislature to protest cuts
to Pharmacare.

**FOR BUS TRANSPORTATION AND MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CALL:
604-294-5834 • 604-731-4820 • 604-793-2922 (Fraser Valley Contact)**



✂

Yes, I want to help women access quality health information!

I would like to join the VWHC I would like to renew my VWHC membership

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____
(street)

_____ (city/province) (postal code)

VWHC membership category: Fee enclosed: \$ _____

- Volunteer pay what you can up to \$25/yr
- Associate \$10-\$25/yr
- Health Practitioner/Therapist/Business \$50/yr

All VWHC Members

- receive the VWHC's newsletter and invitations to special events
- may participate at the monthly Steering Committee meeting & the AGM
- support the mission statement, values, and goals of the VWHC

Volunteer Members

- expected to volunteer at the information centre & attend one bingo shift

Health Practitioner/Therapist/Business Member

- entitled to a business card ad in HER VOICE

I wish to make a donation to the VWHC (*a charitable tax receipt will be issued*) \$ _____

Full amount of my membership fee and donation \$ _____

Thank you for your support!

✂

Contact Us

1 - 175 East 15th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5T 2P6

health information line: 604-736-5262
fax: 604-876-1282
administration line: 604-736-4234
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