

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. UBCM Resolution: SAFER Funding for Seniors

Submitted by: Councillor Klassen

WHEREAS

1. The Province of British Columbia's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program helps make rents affordable for BC seniors with low to moderate incomes. SAFER provides monthly cash payments to subsidize rents for eligible BC residents who are age 60 or over;
2. Over half of Vancouver households rent their homes, which includes many seniors. That is why the City of Vancouver is actively working to implement strategies to improve protections and supports for renters;
3. According to the 2016 census, seniors represented 15.5% of the population of Vancouver, a share that has grown larger with each census and is forecast to keep growing;
4. The *City of Vancouver Housing Needs Report* from April 2022 notes that in March 2021 the Province supported 3,457 Vancouver-based seniors through the Shelter Aid For Elderly Renters (SAFER) program and that the number of seniors supported with SAFER has increased steadily since 2011;¹
5. Seniors have a diverse range of housing needs, with seniors living in rental housing or with low-incomes, or in disproportionately impacted communities, many needing different types of housing and/or housing-related supports such as social housing, rent assistance, or wheel-chair accessible units;
6. The City of Vancouver's *Draft Seniors Housing Strategy* (Draft Version: April 18, 2024) likewise highlights the diversity of housing needs of elders and older adults, which vary widely depending on socio-economic status, age, health, and other factors. For example, there is a notable lack of culturally appropriate supports and inclusive care environments for 2SLGBTQ+ residents;
7. From March to May 2023, as part of the *Seniors Housing Strategy*, the City conducted an engagement process to understand the existing housing challenges and future housing needs of older adults. Several common challenges were identified including a lack of affordable housing for low-income older adults and long waitlists for social, co-op and supportive housing;

¹ In June 2021, BC Housing counted 1,998 seniors on its social housing waitlist and in March 2021 provided 3,457 Shelter Aid For Elderly Renters (SAFER) monthly payments. Housing needs for seniors in Vancouver will be addressed specifically as part of an upcoming City of Vancouver *Seniors Housing Strategy*.
<https://council.vancouver.ca/20220427/documents/cfsc3.pdf>

8. The *Seniors Housing Strategy* engagement also identified poor supports for market renters, in particular the fact that the SAFER Program that provides rent supplements to market renters is “grossly inadequate given current area rents” and that an overhaul to the program is needed to keep up with changing market conditions;
9. The high cost of housing in the city, combined with a lack of affordable housing for low-income older adults, long waitlists for social, co-op and supportive housing, and the inadequacy of home support services is unnecessarily leading to premature admissions to the province’s long-term care facilities – the costliest level of support for seniors;
10. A recent paper published in the journal of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) noted that the proportion of people 50 years and older using shelters is increasing, even as most shelters in Canada are not adequately designed and resourced to meet the needs of older adults ² (*Tackling late-life homelessness in Canada* - May 21, 2024);
11. In 2021, 32% of people using shelters were aged 50 years and older, which does not include the many older adults who were unsheltered, living outdoors, and experiencing hidden homelessness in provisional accommodations, such as living temporarily with friends or family;
12. In August 2023, the Office of the Seniors Advocate presented its 2022/23 Annual Report to the Minister of Health. The report states the following:

“The Seniors Advocate continues to hear from seniors about concerns with access to affordable, safe housing. While this is a concern for many British Columbians, it is particularly challenging for seniors with low to moderate incomes who cannot afford the rising costs of rent, home maintenance and home adaptations. The BC Housing Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) and Seniors Subsidized Housing programs are not keeping pace with inflation and a growing seniors population.”

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council endorse the following resolution for submission to the 2024 UBCM convention for the consideration of the membership:

² The CMA paper cited Canada’s National Shelter Study, which estimated the proportion of adults aged 50 years and older among people staying in shelters rose from 13.5% (n = 19 179) in 2005 to 24.2% (n = 33 011) in 2014, with those aged 65 years and older doubling from 1.6% (n = 2244) to 3.2% (n = 4332). People older than 50 years were the only age group to have increased shelter use over this time.

RESOLUTION

MOTION: SAFER Funding for Seniors

WHEREAS the Province of British Columbia's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) program is intended to help make rents affordable for BC seniors with low to moderate incomes;

AND WHEREAS the Office of the Seniors Advocate has identified that the BC Housing Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER) and Seniors Subsidized Housing programs are not keeping pace with inflation, the growing seniors population, and changing market conditions, including a notable lack of culturally appropriate supports and inclusive care environments for 2SLGBTQ+ residents:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that UBCM call on the Provincial Government to increase funding and resources for the SAFER Program and Seniors Subsidized Housing programs, including affordable seniors housing projects, to reflect current market conditions, meet the needs, and improve the quality of life for seniors and older persons across the province.

* * * * *