

Older and Wiser: Rising cost of living to affect seniors the most, says advocate.

BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie talked on senior living amidst the housing crisis.

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Seniors will be hit hardest by rising cost of living, BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie said during a presentation in North Vancouver

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Did you know that 95 per cent of British Columbia seniors aged 65 and older live independently, while 77 percent aged 85 and older live independently?

As well, 80 percent of seniors 65+ are homeowners.

But did you know that the 20 per cent who don't own a house are renters and are extremely vulnerable to cost of living increases? Did you also know that, for 14 per cent of seniors in British Columbia, the mean income is \$32,990 and the average income is \$47,660?

I learned these facts and statistics and more after hearing a talk by Isobel Mackenzie, the BC Seniors Advocate, who came to the North Shore to talk about current issues for seniors. Her talk was at times very funny, and always informative.

Ms. Mackenzie reflected that Canada cares very much for seniors and has been spending more on supporting seniors.

However, she says there will be difficult issues ahead for older people. As we are all aware, the cost of living is increasing, and for some this will mean serious hardships as they try to pay their bills on a fixed income.

It is perhaps why 14 per cent of older people still work.

Mackenzie also reflected on current myths about older people and debunked some of these.

A major myth is that seniors are all the same. As Mackenzie says, seeing seniors as a homogeneous group with no differences stereotypes them in a negative way.

In their younger years, a senior woman could have been a stay-at-home mom raising a family, or they could have been a hippie living an alternative lifestyle. Though they may look more similar now, seniors continue to maintain their differences with their own way of being and doing things, and their own aspirations, values and hopes.

Planners often think older people need the same services, however, which is why older people that are housed in care facilities can expect uniformity despite there being major differences in what different individuals expect.

In terms of life expectancy in B.C., seniors can expect to live a long life. Mackenzie says prepare to live a long life, most of it independently.

In terms of older people's mental health as a population, she says that only six per cent of the population aged 65+ are diagnosed with dementia, and this rises to 20 per cent for seniors 85+.

This, Mackenzie says, indicates that dementia is not an inevitable part of aging.

Mackenzie also contended that immigration is essential as we move forward in supporting seniors. She said that many health-care professionals come from other countries, and, as statistics show, we are currently dealing with worker shortages in all facets of health care.

A major challenge will be to find affordable housing for the newcomers when they arrive.

The seniors advocate office has many resources online and by phone. To reach them online visit seniorsadvocatebc.ca or phone 1-877-952-3181.

The office monitors the provision of services, analyzes systemic issues, provides information and referrals to seniors and their families, and (most importantly) reports to the minister and to the public on issues affecting seniors, and provides recommendations to the minister and other service providers.

Mackenzie is an engaging speaker, well worth your time if you have a chance to hear her. Unfortunately, she will be leaving her position in March next year, so check her website for other speaking engagements if you missed this one.

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 52 years and has worked for and with seniors for twenty-seven of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome – email lions_view@telus.net.