

October 15, 2020

An open letter to B.C. political party leaders,

As we approach the provincial election, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. invites you to share our vision for a dementia-friendly British Columbia. We are committed to raising the voices of people affected by dementia across the province and sharing their ideas on how the next government can take meaningful action to support people living with dementia. We have identified three priorities for dementia support in British Columbia:

1. A commitment to a dementia strategy for British Columbia.

There are an estimated 70,000 British Columbians living with dementia and within a generation we know this number will more than double. Our province needs to be prepared with a comprehensive plan to effectively support people living with dementia and their families from diagnosis to end-of-life. The *Provincial Guide to Dementia Care in British Columbia* (2016) outlined key priorities for dementia care. These commitments must be supported by a system-wide implementation strategy to ensure meaningful improvements in how British Columbians affected by dementia are supported throughout their journey with the disease.

2. Ensuring a health-care system that meets the needs of British Columbians affected by dementia.

People living with dementia have been hit particularly hard by COVID-19, which has highlighted the many challenges they experience throughout the continuum of care. The majority of residents in B.C.'s care homes are living with dementia and are experiencing high degrees of isolation, profoundly affecting their quality of life. Now more than ever, provincial standards for best practices in person-centred dementia care must be adopted across health settings. This includes dementia-specific training for staff, sustainable increases to staff capacity and recognizing families as essential members of the care team.

3. Continued access to the programs and services available through First Link® dementia support, a partnership between the Ministry of Health and the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

Jointly funded by the BC Ministry of Health and the Alzheimer Society of B.C., First Link® is the Society's suite of programs and services available to anyone affected by dementia, anywhere in the province. Recognized as a best practice in dementia care, First Link® programs and services are designed to help families affected by dementia develop the skills and confidence to maintain the best quality of life possible. Working alongside the Provincial Government, the Society raises the voices of people with lived experience and helps inform policies of importance to people affected by dementia. The continuation of this partnership is integral to the sustainability of First Link® and the essential support it provides to British Columbians affected by dementia.

Thank you for your attention to items outlined above. This letter, along with official party responses will be shared on our website so people affected by dementia can stay informed as we approach the election. The Society looks forward to working with the next government of British Columbia to make meaningful strides towards a dementia-friendly province: where no one who is affected by dementia walks alone.

Sincerely,

The Alzheimer Society of B.C., on behalf of families affected by dementia in British Columbia.