



United Way
British Columbia

Working with communities in BC's
Interior, Lower Mainland, Central
& Northern Vancouver Island

NEWS RELEASE

June 28, 2023

United Way British Columbia commends BC's air conditioning initiative to aid vulnerable people

The non-profit organization provides crucial assistance to seniors living in isolation during climate-related crisis in BC



(Photo from United Way BC archives, photographer: Pardeep Singh)

Burnaby, BC - United Way British Columbia (United Way BC) – working with communities in BC's Interior, Lower Mainland and Central & Northern Vancouver Island, welcomes the provincial government's investment of \$10 million over three years to provide free air conditioning for vulnerable individuals and is raising public awareness around the need to assist older adults during extreme weather events in BC.

United Way BC offers support to nearly 38,000 older adults across BC through its [Healthy Aging](#) programs, which are developed in collaboration with community agencies. Program coordinators have witnessed the devastating consequences that extreme heat events can have on vulnerable and isolated seniors who live alone and suffer from chronic health conditions.

Kahir Lalji, the Provincial Director of Government Relations & Government Programs at United Way BC, highlights the increased risk of injury faced by older adults who live alone with significant health challenges during extreme weather events. "By making cooling units more accessible and available to medically vulnerable and low-income individuals, including older adults, we can ensure the protection of BC's most vulnerable population as climate emergencies become more frequent and severe."

During the unprecedented heat dome experienced in 2021, the Community Connectors from United Way BC's Social Prescribing program collaborated with health officials to deliver water, fans, and air conditioning units to at-risk older adults across the Fraser Health region, mitigating heat-related injuries.

Tragically, more than 600 people lost their lives in BC during this extreme weather event. [According to the BC Coroners' Service](#), the majority of the deceased were older adults with compromised health due to

multiple chronic diseases, living alone. The report also revealed that 67% of the deceased were 70 years of age or older, over half of them lived alone, and the majority resided in homes without sufficient cooling systems like air conditioners or fans.

This devastating event underscored the urgent need for community agencies, the government, and other stakeholders to establish a coordinated response to extreme climate emergencies. Implementation of prevention and risk mitigation strategies is crucial to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

United Way BC's Healthy Aging programs, which include Better at Home, Navigation and Peer Support, and Social Prescribing, play a significant role in supporting seniors during climate emergencies. Various services are provided, such as transporting seniors to cooling spaces, conducting wellness checks via phone, and personally visiting older adults to ensure their essential needs are being met.

In collaboration with community partners, United Way BC is preparing to release an Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Guidebook, which will serve as a valuable resource for older adults creating emergency plans.

Furthermore, the non-profit organization provides an Emergency Preparedness and Response Grant to Community-Based Seniors' Services (CBSS) sector organizations to assist older adults in the aftermath of extreme weather events. Lalji emphasizes that more must be done to ensure the safety of isolated and vulnerable seniors during emergencies.

"The Emergency Preparedness and Response Grant has funded initiatives such as the creation of emergency kits, emergency planning and communication tools, and the development of multilingual resources for training volunteers," says Lalji. "We are also building a collaborative approach to emergency preparedness with partner agencies to create a centralized hub for information and resources to ensure that older adults are prepared and can stay safe in the face of an emergency."

To learn more about United Way BC Healthy Aging programs, visit www.uwbc.ca/healthyaging.

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About United Way British Columbia – working with communities in BC's Interior, Lower Mainland and Central & Northern Vancouver Island

United Way supports healthy, caring and inclusive communities by strengthening vital connections that support people in need. Representing the six regions of Central and Northern Vancouver Island, East Kootenay, Lower Mainland, Southern Interior, Thompson Nicola Cariboo, and Trail and District, our organization serves a population of more than 4 million people, with a focus on kids and youth, seniors, poverty, mental health and food security. www.uwbc.ca.

Interviews are available with Kahir Lalji, Provincial Director of Government Relations & Government Programs, United Way BC.

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