



MEDIA RELEASE
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Why Doctors are “Prescribing” Food, Exercise, and the Outdoors *Beyond Pills: United Way BC highlights how community care is strengthening seniors’ health on Social Prescribing Day*

Central Office, Burnaby, BC - What if a healthcare provider could prescribe more than medicine?

Across British Columbia, they can, and they do. Today, social prescriptions are helping people access things like food security programs, exercise classes, housing support, and even time in nature. These “non-medical prescriptions” are improving health in ways a pill never could.

It's called social prescribing, and United Way British Columbia is marking Social Prescribing Day by celebrating the meaningful impact it's having on seniors across the province.

Social prescribing connects people with the everyday supports that help them stay healthy, active, and socially connected. These supports can include transportation, housing help, nutritious food, social programs, or opportunities to move their bodies – all of which play a major role in overall wellbeing.

In 2024-25, United Way BC's Social Prescribing Program helped 6,597 seniors through 56 community agencies, delivering 51,382 non-medical services.

“Social needs affect our health just as much as medical ones,” says Bobbi Symes, Director of Healthy Aging, United Way BC. “Social prescribing connects people to community supports for better health and wellbeing, not just managing illness.”

A New Prescription for Nature

Alongside social prescribing, United Way BC is also championing a prescription for nature.

Through a new partnership with PaRx, Canada's national nature prescription program delivered by BC Parks Foundation, United Way BC is helping people connect with the outdoors in ways that support mental and physical health. Together, the organizations are creating simple, meaningful outdoor experiences, from guided activities to accessible ways to enjoy local parks and green spaces.

“Nature is a powerful, evidence-based tool for health,” says Jennie McCaffrey, Vice President, Health & Education at BC Parks Foundation. “Through PaRx, licensed healthcare providers can prescribe time in nature to improve patients’ mental and physical health. Community connectors, including those working with United Way BC, will help people turn that prescription into something real in their daily lives. As this work grows, it's shifting how we think about care, recognizing nature as a fourth pillar of health, alongside nutrition, exercise, and sleep.”

Social prescribing continues to grow as a powerful way to improve health, reduce isolation, and support independence – especially for older adults. United Way BC is proud to lead this work in communities across the province.

Significant investment

This momentum aligns with a recent \$6.3 million provincial investment by Health Research BC, which is strengthening impactful programs in BC including United Way BC's existing partnership with Fraser Health to expand evidence-based social prescribing for seniors across the province.

To learn more, visit: uwbc.ca/healthyaging

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About United Way British Columbia

United Way BC helps build healthy, caring, and inclusive communities across our province. We strengthen vital connections that support people in need with a focus on emergency response, kids and youth, seniors, mental health, and food security.

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