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OMBUDSPERSON RELEASES FIRST REPORT ON CARE OF SENIORS

VICTORIA – Today Ombudsperson Kim Carter released the first of two planned reports on her ongoing systemic investigation into the care of seniors in British Columbia. The report contains ten recommendations on rights for seniors in residential care, access to information about residential care and the role of resident and family councils.

Key recommendations in *The Best of Care: Getting it Right for Seniors in British Columbia (Part 1)* include:

- Creating a bill of rights for seniors in residential care (Recommendation 1a) and posting this document in a prominent location in every facility (Recommendation 1b)
- Creating a single provincial website containing comprehensive, comparable information on residential care (Recommendation 2a)
- Entrenching an expanded role for resident and family councils in legislation (Recommendation 3a) and supporting the development of regional family councils (Recommendation 3d).

The Ministries of Health Services and Healthy Living and Sport have fully accepted four of the Ombudsperson's ten recommendations (1a, 1b, 2b and 3b) and have already taken steps to implement Recommendation 1a through the creation of a bill of rights for seniors living in residential care — the *Health Statutes Amendment Act (Residents' Bill of Rights), 2009*.

"A legislated bill of rights for seniors in residential care facilities is an important step," Ms. Carter said. "When the *Residents' Bill of Rights* comes into force, seniors and their families will have greater certainty about their rights and therefore will be better able to exercise them."

Although the ministries have indicated they accept the intent of the other six recommendations (1c, 1d, 2a, 3a, 3c, 3d), after considering the ministries' proposed actions, the Ombudsperson believes they fall short of what is needed to remedy the problems her office identified.

For example, the Ombudsperson recommended that a single provincial website contain comprehensive, comparable information about all individual residential care facilities, including direct care hours provided per resident per day, per diem health authority funding, personal care policies and how any complaints have been handled (Recommendation 2a). The ministries have not committed to creating a single provincial website containing this type of information. They have indicated they intend to "build on and leverage current structures" to improve the accessibility, quality and consistency of information and that they will consider which details they will make available through the mechanism they select.

"I made this recommendation because it should be easy for people to find out information about the services each residential care facility offers, how much they cost, and what living there is like. But the reality is that when seniors and their families are faced with the daunting task of finding an appropriate facility for themselves or a loved one, it can be difficult and frustrating to collect these basic facts in a timely fashion," Ms. Carter said.

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The Ombudsperson launched her systemic investigation into the care of seniors on August 21, 2008. The second and final report on this investigation, which will address a broader range of seniors' care options, is planned for release in the spring of 2010.

The Best of Care: Getting it Right for Seniors in British Columbia (Part 1) is available at www.ombudsman.bc.ca.

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