

# Changing role of elders has taken toll, Point says

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When he grew up, elders were the people's educational system and highly regarded by all.

"Elders did all the teaching of hunting, cooking, picking berries and delivering babies. And if there was a conflict in the community, like over fishing places or rights to a name, elders would be called upon to resolve the conflict," said the 53-year-old.

He said the younger ones learned their culture "through stories passed on late into the night as to where they came from, how mountains were formed and how things of nature were named.

"When the elders grew old, the younger ones would feed them and care for them, and where they spent their last few months is where they would be buried."

The settlers, too, lived on farms with families spanning several generations, and their elderly were cared for at home, he said.

But that has all been removed from communities with a move from tribal lands and farms to communities and "the changing role of elders has taken a great toll on our people," he said.

"We've moved to modern nuclear families, where both parents work during the day and more centres are being created for elders."

With responsibility for elders shifting from families to the state, Point wonders if we value elders in the same way.

"Maybe we can sit down and evaluate or even have a hand in these changes."

He said with the aging population expected to double and health-care costs expected to rise, "we have to think about how to foresee the care of the elderly over the next 10 to 20 years.

"When you wrap your mind around issues of the aging, their treatment and medical services, keep in mind — equal treatment for everyone. Lend an ear to listen to them on how they are receiving these services.

"Looking into the future, I hope we can improve services to our elderly with proper care facilities and affordable housing, and that our awareness about their needs continues to grow.

"Their role has changed, and if we can understand that, maybe we can make some changes for the better."



Citizen photo by David Mah

**B.C. Lt.-Gov. Steven Point laughs with the group at the Aging Well seminar at the Civic Centre.**

## Conference looking at issues among seniors

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"The saddest part is, although we can answer their questions or refer them, they have problems accessing the information needed, or they get locked up in what I call telephone hell.

"I'm concerned about the stigma associated with getting older and the attitude shown by young people and caregivers towards seniors."

She said seniors are often blamed "for living too long" and taking up beds in hospitals.

search that needs to be done and consider what action to take for the future.

Caring for an aging population in remote and rural areas is a relatively new territory for northerners, Northern Health CEO Cathy Ulrich told the 85 participants.

"Unfortunately, past research has focused mainly on high-population areas" so research is needed in areas like Prince George, she said.

She added in the North "where we're aging faster than in other areas," the

home support as to how to best use the resources we have and adding day-care spaces, respite beds, palliative (end-of life) care services and clinical services.

Since little is known about these areas, the challenge is to find creative ways to allocate them, Ulrich said.

She added Northern Health is forever striving to improve primary care for seniors by ensuring access to physicians, identifying problems early and applying best practices to reduce sickness and hospital time.