

# AGE FRIENDLY LONDON



## Report to the Community

Age Friendly City Working Group  
June 2010



# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

**Dear Fellow Londoners,**

What is it like to live in London? How easy is it to get where you want to go? What is there to do? How welcome do you feel?

The answers to questions like these probably depend on your particular circumstances, especially your age and stage in life. A crack in the sidewalk may be a reason for chanting and skipping at age eight; at eighty it may be a safety concern and barrier to mobility.

Let's face it: none of us is getting any younger. And that is true for the city as well.

Our senior population is growing rapidly. Over the last decade, while London's overall population was increasing by less than one percent per year, the number of persons over the age of 60 increased by 11,605, or nearly 22%. This trend is likely to continue as more and more of the baby boomers enter their 60s.

The aging of our city brings with it both challenges and opportunities. Needs for health care and support services are likely to increase. But today's older adults are also healthier and more active than ever before. That makes them a vital resource to the community.

That's why City Council's Creative Cities Committee became interested in the World Health Organization Age Friendly Cities initiative and launched a working group to evaluate London's age-friendliness using the WHO checklist with respect to housing, public spaces, transportation and other factors in daily living. How does London measure up?

London has a good reputation for being attractive to seniors. A number of organizations have ranked us as one of the best cities in Canada in which to retire. But those organizations based their rankings on objective criteria such as crime rates, health services and weather. They didn't ask the older adults who live here what they think are London's strengths and weaknesses.

A year ago, London hosted an Age Friendly conference to listen to residents 60 and over identify what they think is great about London and what needs to improve. They discussed the increasing need for public transit, for housing that keeps them connected to the community, for easier access to shopping and services, for sidewalks free of impediments, and for more places to sit and rest before moving on to the next event in their busy lives.

That conversation continued by way of surveys, letters and emails, and focus groups. We heard from Londoners across the city from all walks of life. Some were life-long Londoners, others more recent newcomers. Almost all agreed that London is a good place to live. Almost all had suggestions about ways we can be even better.

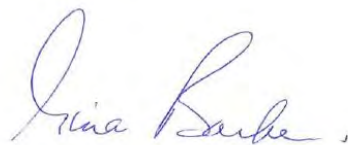
The working group has collated and analyzed your input and responses. This is what we heard from you: what you like and don't like about our city; what works and what needs to be changed; what makes it a great place to live and what would make it even greater.

This report has taken the first steps in identifying priorities that face our residents. It will now be circulated among our various city departments for comments, suggestions and direction, and form the basis of an action plan to be submitted to Council for its approval.

Thank you to all who responded to surveys, participated in focus groups, invited me to your gatherings, and sent me letters and emails. Your participation has made this initiative possible. Your criticisms and suggestions will inform the foundation for future directions.

Thank you too to all the members of the working group who gave so freely of their time and energy to attend meetings, to facilitate discussions, to offer information and resources, and to gather and analyze data. Special thanks to Kathy Smith, Jean Knight, Ellen Cannon, Robin Armistead, Laurie Spence Bannerman, Vilia Zoccano, and Kate Graham for the many hours spent on the preparation of this report.

And thank you to the administration and staff in many departments without whose assistance this report could not have been completed.



**Gina Barber**

Chair, Age Friendly City Working Group  
City of London

[gbarber@london.ca](mailto:gbarber@london.ca)

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## What is an age friendly city?

**An age friendly city is a place that encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. It is a place that works to improve the livelihood of people of all ages (World Health Organization, 2005).**

The concept of an age friendly city was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). In 2005 the WHO established the Age Friendly Cities Project, a partnership between 35 cities around the world aimed to make communities better, healthier and safer places for older adults to live and thrive. To date, hundreds of cities around the world – including the City of London – have focused on making their communities more age friendly.

According to the WHO, an age friendly city provides the policies, services, settings and structures that enable people to age actively by recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older people, anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences, and promoting their inclusion in and contribution to all areas of community life.

The benefits of an age friendly city extend far beyond the senior population. Smooth, well maintained sidewalks encourage walking by old and young alike as well as persons with disabilities and parents with strollers. Women and children have greater freedom in safe, secure neighbourhoods. Consistent high quality care for those who require it at all ages reduces stress for family caregivers. The employment and volunteer services provided by and to an aging population unites and benefits the whole community. The patronage of business and the arts benefits a whole economy. By being friendly to seniors, we are being friendly to persons of all ages.

# 1. Introduction

The City of London's Age Friendly Cities Working Group was established by the Creative Cities Committee in October 2008. The mandate of the Working Group is to establish London as a more age friendly city, using the variables outlined by the WHO.

The Working Group is comprised of volunteers representing a number of community organizations and city departments that have undertaken research relating to seniors or provide services to them. These include the Alzheimer's Society, the Dearness Home, the University of Western Ontario, the Seniors Community Association, Over 55, and the City of London's Culture Office and Community Services and Planning Departments.

Our age friendly initiative is based on the work of the WHO which undertook focus-group based research in a number of cities of varying sizes around the world to develop a checklist of characteristics of an age friendly city. The items contained in the checklist were then grouped into eight broad categories from public spaces to health care services. Our working group gathered information on these eight key variables from older adults in London.

**This report summarizes the observations made by seniors in London as we engaged them in conversations about the benefits of living in London and identifying ways in which we can improve to become an even more age friendly city.**

We hope that this report will generate awareness and public discussion about our findings and proposals. Our aim is to recruit the support of the city and its partners in the public and private sectors in finding ways to overcome obstacles and barriers to full participation in the community that aging residents may experience and to determine how we need to change our current practices to accommodate and celebrate an aging population.

## 2. Trends and Demographics

The Age Friendly Cities Project is a product of global awareness of two concurrent demographic processes: an aging of the population as both mortality and fertility decline, and the urbanization of the population. Although these shifts are worldwide phenomena, they are more advanced in the developed countries of Europe and North America. Already in Canada, over 80 per cent of our population lives in towns and cities of 10,000 or more. London, as Canada's tenth largest city, housed 352,400 of Canada's 31,612,897 population in 2006.

Similarly, development has led to significant population stability and aging in many countries of Europe. In Canada, the age structure of the population has been significantly impacted by the "baby boom" generation, those born between 1947 and 1965, most of whom are now over the age of 55 and looking at joining the ranks of the retired.

London is no exception to this trend. Over the past ten years, the number of residents aged 60 and over has grown from 53,000 to over 64,500. The over 60 population is growing at twice the rate as the population as a whole. Today, nearly one in five Londoners is in the "older adult" category.

### **Elderly, senior, older person or just mature?**

The Age Friendly Cities Project, while recognizing the need for cities to be friendly to residents of all ages is focused on the implications of an aging population. In order to be consistent with the WHO initiative, we limited our research primarily to those aged 60 or over. But what to call them?

Our working group participated in several vigorous debates on the terminology to be used to identify the segment of the population we were examining. There is still significant stereotyping and stigma attached to aging in a society that is obsessed with staying young and appearing youthful and vigorous. Those entering their sixties are healthier and wealthier than at any previous time in our history. Although many are retiring at earlier ages, they are not about to live a quiet existence. The boomers have been a major market force throughout their lives and they are not about to stop now. They are looking forward to many more years of active involvement in the community, perhaps in second careers or various leisure pursuits previously unavailable to them. At the same time, many are looking after their own elderly parents and are well aware of the changes in lifestyle that may await them. They want something better.

Recognizing that one word will not cover all the possibilities for those over 60, we decided to have some variety in nomenclature. The term “elderly”, once a favourite in social science literature, seemed particularly inappropriate for anyone who is not a centenarian. “Senior” was similarly rejected for seeming too old and decrepit, although senior’s discounts seem to carry few negative connotations. “Older adult”, a term preferred by Mississauga’s initiative, had some fans among the members of our working group, but was found to be awkward if used too frequently. After all, it is “seniors’ centres” not “older adult centres” that receive favourable reviews! Other terms that were suggested included “silver” and “zoomers”. In the end, we decided to use “seniors” for the most part since it is consistent with much other research in the area but to vary the terminology from time to time to emphasize our perspective that we are dealing with a vibrant and diverse segment of the city’s makeup.



### 3. Findings: What We Heard from Londoners

#### Methodology

Starting in June 2009, the Age Friendly City Working Group gathered input from older adults regarding their experiences and opinions about living in London. We have engaged the responses and input from approximately 450 adults mostly over the age of 60, although a small number of residents under the age of 60 who were family members and caregivers for elderly older adults also contributed. Participants and respondents came from all areas of the city and from all walks of life.



We began this effort with a full day conference in 2009, an event attended by 80 participants organized

into small focus groups with specially trained volunteer facilitators and note-takers. The results from the focus groups were used to generate a short survey consisting of closed and open-ended questions relating to the variables and themes identified by the WHO. The survey was distributed in hard copy form through meetings and events involving older adults and through organizations serving senior populations. The survey was also available in an online version which was distributed through various email lists available to the working group. In total, 303 individuals responded to the survey. The respondents were also asked if they would be interested in participating in a focus group. This generated several more focus groups. Additionally, a number of housing complexes requested that focus groups be held in their common rooms for ease of input.



While the sampling methods used for the survey were not scientific and therefore did not generate a representative sample of the senior population in London, the results were useful in identifying common themes and concerns, as well as creating awareness and promoting public engagement in the issue. Additionally, they were helpful in generating more focus groups, a “bottoms-up participatory” approach encouraged by the WHO. Inviting older adults to discuss and analyze their situations and suggest practical solutions to common problems provides richness of detail and creative problem-solving as well as a sense of social inclusion and civic engagement, two of the main ingredients of an age friendly city.



### **Finding #1:**

#### **Older adults like living in London.**

One of the key findings from our research is that, generally speaking, older adults consider London a great place to live. London is described as a friendly place that is affordable, that has good social services and helpful volunteers, is neighbourly and “not too big.” One respondent summed it up well: “Where you live, people are good to you. If you fall, some person or people will help you.”

### **Finding #2:**

#### **The things that older adults most enjoy about London are its excellent health care, seniors’ centres and green space.**

Seniors indicated an overwhelming appreciation of the excellent health care services we have: the hospitals, the practitioners, the clinics, the Community Care Access Centre, the Victorian Order of Nurses. Health care of one type or another drew rave reviews from 84 respondents. Secondly, Londoners love their seniors’ centres which provide them with activities, recreation and fitness, and companionship. The Boys and Girls Club received several specific mentions as did the Kiwanis Forest City Seniors Centre. Almost as popular as the seniors’ centres are the parks which older adults enjoy for their trees, their paths and their walkability. Springbank Park, with its proximity to the river, was nominated for special praise, as was Victoria Park for its many summer festivals.

### **Finding #3:**

#### **Seniors generally feel safe living in London, but feel safer during the day than at night.**

Nine out of 10 respondents felt safe walking about in their neighbourhoods in the daytime but only half shared that view about going out at night. One in four felt unsafe and the remainder were unsure because they hadn’t tried it. Women and the over eighty felt less safe, especially at night. Parts of downtown, especially the Richmond and Dundas area were identified as causing uneasiness. In the words of one of the respondents: “London is the safest town I have ever lived in.” Others, however, were made uneasy by the presence of “street people” and “beggars” as well as bicycles on sidewalks and various motorized bikes and wheelchairs.

**Finding #4: Most older adults are able to travel from A to B relatively easily.**

Two-thirds of the respondents agreed that they could get around easily, with nearly three-quarters using their own vehicles. Just one in 10 relied on family and friends, almost one in five used public transit and the remainder used a variety of other means including taxis and biking. Driving one's own car declined to two-thirds after age 80 with an increasing reliance on friends and relatives for transportation. Men were less dependent than women on public transit or getting rides from others. Fully three-quarters drove their own vehicles.

Transit of all types was identified as a positive for London, both London Transit Commission and Paratransit. Community buses to seniors' centres and shopping were greatly appreciated by many respondents. Improvements in accessibility were noted with special appreciation for "kneeling" buses and recorded announcements of bus stop locations. Thoughtful bus drivers also were praised. In the words of one respondent: "I find London Transit is very helpful when I've been shopping and they will lower the bus for me to get my grocery cart off the bus."

**Finding #5: Seniors reported that housing in London is affordable, and staying in ones own home is desirable but can be a challenge over time.**

Almost nine out of 10 agreed that their homes were reasonably comfortable and affordable, although several bemoaned what they perceived as high taxes and condo fees. London also ranked high with its senior residents in terms of diverse forms of housing. The increasing number of apartments, retirement homes and condos are viewed as offering good accommodations, but the greatest praise was reserved for the Cherryhill Apartments with its mix of young and old, its easy access to shopping and services and its friendly community atmosphere. Several respondents also identified Wortley Village as a great place to live. Walkability is seen as a major plus for both these locations.

Although most were satisfied with their current housing arrangements, fewer than four in 10 believed that they could remain in their homes should they become disabled and over one-quarter were sure they could not. Especially problematic were steps and two-storey houses. "I have no adaptations for disability, which I found out when I broke my ankle two winters ago," said one woman. Only one-third were confident that they could get help to remain in their homes, but despite the perceived difficulty, many were adamant about staying there. One respondent summed it up bluntly: "[...] but I will go out in a body bag!"

**Finding #6: Older adults feel well informed about what's happening in their community, but this information should be made more accessible.**

Two-thirds of survey respondents agreed that they found it easy to get information about what is happening in their community although some found difficulty in this area. Size of print in communications, lack of reporting about local events in the media, loss of Information London, lack of a one-stop resource particularly for older adults were all identified as being problematic. On the positive side, Spectrum, the Londoner, the London Free Press, and local television channels were all identified as good sources of information. Some found the city website difficult to use. Online newspapers were not seen to be particularly helpful in providing information about what was happening in the community. Women found it easier than men to find out what was going on.



**Finding #7: Seniors are busy people!**

There is a lot to do in London for older adults. One favourite place to go is the public library, especially the Central Library, with its collections of books, accessible technology and diverse programs. Educational programs, such as the Senior Alumni Lecture Series and

Seniors Learning in Retirement, also have enthusiastic supporters. London is seen as a great place to shop, although malls are preferred to big box shopping centres, especially as the former are seen to be a great place to sit and have a coffee or a chat with friends. Equally high on the list of attractions are music, theatre and dining out in the fine restaurants. Seniors are active volunteers in the community with organizations such as Meals on Wheels, Dearness Home, Parkwood Hospital, the Boys and Girls Club, as well as fundraising for charities and political organizations.

## What did we learn?

**The Age Friendly City Working Group heard many positive things about London as a place for older adults. The Londoners who participated in this research indicated that there are a lot of great things about living in London.**

Our research also showed us that London's seniors have a lot of great ideas about how we can make London an even better place for older adults, and a more age friendly city in general. Participants were asked to provide feedback and ideas on the eight key areas used in the WHO's age friendly city framework.

The next section will provide a summary of what we learned from London's older adults about what they like and would like for the future in these eight areas:

1. Public Spaces
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social Inclusion
5. Social Participation
6. Civic Participation and Employment
7. Communication and Information
8. Community Support and Health Services

# PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces are the places in our community that are for everyone to use. This includes outdoor environments like parks and sidewalks, and indoor facilities such as public buildings, libraries, recreation centres and washrooms.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	• Poor pedestrian safety	• Lack of benches
	• Lack of accessibility	• Lack of washrooms
	• Layout	• Litter, graffiti
	• Inadequate signage	• Noise

## What Londoners told us

Both survey respondents and focus group participants are appreciative of London’s public spaces. London was described as a very pretty city, clean, well maintained and safe. The green spaces of parks and open spaces are dear to Londoners hearts and they want more of them, especially neighbourhood parks that are easy to access. Being able to get around Springbank Park was a concern for some since much of it is not open to vehicular traffic. More washrooms, clean and open year round, are wanted. The many benches in the parks are appreciated. Seniors wish more of them were available downtown.

**“Seniors should not have to contend with bikes, blades etc. when out walking in the parks. There should be separate pedestrian paths, more seating, more places like Cherryhill Mall.”**

- Survey Respondent

Downtown itself drew mixed reviews. While many appreciated the ongoing improvements to the downtown area, others still feel uncomfortable and unsafe there, citing vacant storefronts, the presence of panhandlers and criminal activity, and inadequate lighting in the evenings. Smoking in some areas, litter and graffiti were also viewed as a drawback to going downtown. More foot patrols were seen as important to a greater sense of safety downtown. Those who live downtown as well as those who are contemplating doing so, pointed out the need for a grocery store.

Although the Covent Garden market is appreciated for its diverse offerings and opportunities to socialize, it doesn’t meet the needs of many shoppers for a wide array of basic household items.

More walkability to services and amenities and greater connectivity between streets and neighbourhoods was also seen as desirable. Many of the newer suburbs lack these. The need to have services closer together and decentralized was stressed. One 90 year old participant pointed out that in order to get to the post office she had to walk more than three kilometres uphill without sidewalks along a major arterial road. Meanwhile, in a neighbouring part of the city there are three outlets no more than half a kilometre apart!

Since most residents rely on their personal vehicles for transportation, the need for an adequate supply of parking close to amenities was frequently mentioned. Consequently, many respondents find themselves in superstores and big box stores for shopping. Unfortunately, although these provide a wide selection of goods at reasonable prices, they are unfriendly to pedestrians and transit riders and involve long line ups at checkouts while not offering a place to sit. Many seniors preferred indoor malls which provide protection from the elements, seating, refreshments, clean washrooms and opportunities for socializing. Both Wortley Village and Cherryhill Mall were identified as great places for seniors, the former for its walkability and personal service from independent merchants, the latter for its specialized services and opportunities to get together.

Finally, some areas of the city were seen as being in greater need of bylaw enforcement with respect to property standards. Abandoned buildings which attract illegal activity, absentee landlords, low income housing “ghettoes” and graffiti were seen as problems for seniors.

**“Sidewalks, especially to get to the mall, are treacherous in the winter. I wish you could walk with me to Masonville Mall and see what I mean.”**

- Survey respondent

## What you said about public space:

### Roads and Walkways

- Traffic lights need to provide more time for crossing the street!
- Streets should be used for social gatherings.
- Kids shouldn't play in driveways, or skateboard on the road.
- Rear laneways – are they safe?

### Parks and Green Space

- We need parks – small, local ones that are easily accessible.
- Replace port-a-potties with year round, accessible, clean washrooms.
- More public gathering places in summer, a public square.
- More trees, gardens, green spaces!
- Plow the parks for winter use.
- Why not an area for featured artists in park?
- More pavilions or covered spaces, benches and paved walkways!

### Commercial and Public Facilities

- Government offices need to be close together, and easy to access.
- Schools should be community hubs for social activity.
- Renovate public buildings to be more senior friendly and accessible.
- Local retail should be within walking distance.
- No big superstores! No big box stores!

### Other Concerns

- More spaces to gather with friends.
- Safety in the downtown.
- More and better lighting.
- More benches, benches in the parks, benches in the downtown!
- More raised flower beds.
- Parking to access fountain at the forks.

*“The best idea I would like to see is to close off Dundas between Talbot and Wellington and turn it into a pedestrian mall with shops and restaurants and real trees. Maybe even a street car running from one end to the other. European cities all have these kind of things, Ottawa has a wonderful one on Sparks St. If London wants a better downtown that is attractive to visitors, this is the way to go.”*



# TRANSPORTATION

Transportation includes walking, biking, public transportation, roadways, taxis and parking. Providing a variety of available, affordable and accessible means of transportation is a key to supporting the mobility, activity and participation of older adults.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inconvenient timing or routes on public buses</li><li>• Lack of accessibility</li><li>• Distances between bus stops</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Courtesy of drivers to pedestrians and other drivers</li><li>• Need for separate lane for bicyclists</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

Although seniors value the transportation options available in London, this was also highlighted as an area which requires significant improvement. Several suggestions were made of ways that the London Transit Commission’s services could be more suited to older adults – routes with better access to hospitals, shopping, and cultural events and facilities, better discounts or free passes for low income seniors, at-the-door pick up from residential locations with a large senior population. Although many drivers are helpful and friendly, riders have found some to be rude and impatient. Refresher courses on customer service would be helpful in those cases.

Making transportation more accessible for seniors includes more than just bus routes and fares. More benches and shelters along bus routes and better posting

**“I think our older adults are very lucky to have the Paratransit system [...] however, it sometimes takes a very long time to get through to the phone line. Perhaps a similar system for older adults, not necessarily disabled, would be a good thing.”**

- Survey Respondent

of schedules would make public transport more usable for older adults. The recorded announcement of stops and streets were welcomed by seniors, but it was noted that sometimes the bus driver turns the feature off due as they grow tired of listening to it. Several areas with a high concentration of seniors have no access to transit at all. A number of focus group participants stated that they had never ridden on a city bus.

Traffic and road conditions also impact the mobility of older adults. As noted earlier, most survey respondents and focus group participants drive their own vehicles. Reducing traffic congestion, improving road

surfaces, synchronizing traffic lights, not varying the activation of left turn signals and more accessible parking were also identified as important to seniors.

Many participants and respondents identified conflicts among different modes of getting about as problematic. London drivers were seen by some as being “the worst on the planet”, too impatient and too distracted to show courtesy to pedestrians of any age. Similarly, many seniors found it difficult to deal with bicycles on the sidewalk although they acknowledged that they themselves felt uncomfortable riding on the street. Separate bike paths, like those along Wonderland Road, were proposed as a good solution.

Getting around on foot is sometimes not that easy either. Although about half of those surveyed stated that most things they need are within easy walking distance, many found winter conditions made sidewalks treacherous and access to transit difficult. Better snow clearing of sidewalks and at bus stops was frequently identified as essential. Without this, a significant number of elderly seniors as well as those with mobility challenges experience isolation and deprivation for several days at a time.

Because Londoners are so dependent on their personal vehicles for transportation, driver testing at age 80 is a looming concern. Several respondents indicated that they believed that there is generally less tolerance for errors made by older drivers. Some gradually stop driving in the evening, in bad weather, or on freeways. Several focus group participants described the turmoil and conflict that resulted from depriving an elderly parent of a driver’s license. Losing one’s driver’s license is seen as losing one’s independence and autonomy, especially in areas with limited alternative means of transportation.

Finally, one Londoner suggested looking into a system of car sharing for those living in apartments or condos. This would make a car available for occasional use through a sign up system rather than everyone owning his or her own vehicle thereby reducing parking requirements and costs of vehicle ownership or taxis in areas not serviced by public transit or for out of town excursions.

**“I still drive, so I have no problems with public transportation – yet!”**

- Survey respondent

## What you said about transportation:

### Roads and Parking

- Larger street signs, clear signage, signs on houses and streets!
- We need to be able to drive through Springbank Park.
- Cars should have more mirrors.
- Everyone should be tested at age 80, or only those who have had an accident.
- Snow clearing. Putting snow into driveways means I can't get out!
- Long term parking at airports, bus stations, train stations for out of town visits.
- Parking in public lots – too much money, too little time!
- New drivers should be trained to look out for pedestrians.

### Public Transit

- Free bus around Springbank Park.
- Privately operated minibuses.
- Post bus schedule in bus shelters!
- More bus shelters, heated bus shelters, bus shelters with seats, more lighting.
- Lambeth needs bus service.
- Assistance should be provided regularly, be affordable.
- Older adults bus pass for off peak hours.
- Free bus passes! Subsidies for bus passes!
- Stops are too far apart.
- Drivers should provide better customer service.
- We need a downtown bus terminal.
- More places to buy a bus pass.
- Clear snow from the bus stops first.
- Large print for information about transit. Send it out with tax notices.
- Audio is good but bus driver sometimes turns it down.

### Other Modes of Transportation

- Cyclists should use warning bell.
- Bicyclists should not be on the sidewalk or the road – need separate bike paths.

### Sidewalks and Pathways

- More walkability, more sidewalks!
- Separate walking and bike paths.
- Plow the sidewalks, don't damage them. More winter maintenance.
- Ramps for scooters during construction.
- Sidewalks are not level and not properly maintained.

### Other Comments

- More emphasis on safety, more enforcement of rules.
- Information on how to get to various stores.
- Need public awareness about courtesy seating, travel and trip planning.
- More publicity for older adults services and drivers (Meal on Wheels, etc.).

# HOUSING

Housing is essential to the safety and well-being of everyone, not only seniors. Throughout our adult lives, the roofs over our heads have been our major investment and ongoing expense of money, time and energy. Where we live is more than just a residence. It's a home. It is familiar and loved, and most of us want to stay there forever.

Aging, however, results in changed needs for accessibility and convenience as well as reduced financial and physical resources to provide maintenance for a home that once housed a family. Shoveling the driveway is not as easy at 80 as it was at 30. Basement stairs become a challenge. Paying utility bills and property taxes for a three bedroom home on a modest pension is not easy. Living alone in a single detached family home in the suburbs may be lonely.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of housing choices within neighbourhoods</li><li>• Affordability to a wide range of income groups</li><li>• Maintenance of home and property</li><li>• Lack of knowledge about tenant rights</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retrofitting homes for accessibility and safety</li><li>• Walkability, access to shopping</li><li>• Access to services to remain in home</li><li>• Lack of information about services</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

Although most participants and respondents indicated that their current housing was relatively affordable and comfortable, many were clearly apprehensive about the future. Some were concerned about the lack of housing options available, some worried about having to move out of their homes, while others voiced anxieties about increasing costs on a limited income. Housing emerged as a key

**“I will go out in a body bag!”**

- Survey Respondent on wanting to age in her own home

concern for many seniors and one that impacts several of the other categories in this report – social participation, social inclusion, transportation, and community services, and more.

To illustrate:

- One participant was looking around in her neighbourhood to relocate but could find “nothing to go to”.
- Another was concerned about her 90 year old mother living in a studio apartment in a retirement home costing \$2500 per month. The mother retired 22 years ago and her money is running out. “What is the alternative?” wondered the daughter. “How do I bring mother to live with me in a two-storey house and keep my house?”
- Spouses with different housing needs may be housed in different locations increasing the costs of housing and transportation for visiting while reducing companionship.

Key communities that were highlighted as being good locations for seniors were Cherryhill and Wortley Village. Some apartment buildings downtown and on Springbank Drive, Berkshire Drive and on Grosvenor Street were identified as offering good accommodations as well as a sense of community. Respondents

also highlighted retirement communities and facilities as being healthy and supportive places to live. At the same time, they expressed concern about the tendency to locate these on the outskirts of the city away from public transportation and connection to the city and the affordability of these to the majority of seniors.

**“Housing needs to be safe for the average responsible person looking for a decent place to live that is not just a concrete box.”**

- Survey respondent

Although housing prices and rates were generally regarded as being affordable, a common concern for those still in their “own homes” was property taxes. Many survey respondents suggested lowering the property taxes, or offering tax breaks for qualifying seniors.

For low-income participants, the choices are very limited as market rents are difficult to meet on basic government pensions. Many seniors are also unaware of their tenant rights or reluctant to claim them. Repairs and maintenance suffer as a result. Lack of affordable housing for people of all ages means that public housing seniors’ buildings are no longer for seniors only. Some seniors become intimidated by the behaviour and lifestyles of younger persons in the building and become fearful of going out.

Aging in place was a common theme. Most older adults indicated that they wanted to remain in their homes for as long as possible, but some were concerned that this would be a challenge in the future. Suggestions to assist independent living included increasing the number of volunteers and health professional visits, and providing subsidies for home care supports.

It was also noted that having family supports was a critical element that allows seniors to age in their own homes; indeed, some of the participants were providing care for aging parents at the same time as they were dealing with their own retirement and relocation concerns.

**“We need more reasonably priced apartments for low income seniors. We have to get rid of the 7 year wait list.”**

- Focus group participant

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) found that most seniors in Canada want to age in place.

This was also what we found in our conversations with older adults, most of whom were adamant about remaining in their current homes. The CMHC study also found that 25% of person between 65 and 74 have a mobility problem; after the age of 85, fully half do so. Staying in the family home may require difficult and expensive renovations and the social and medical supports will also be costly. It may also be quite isolating when the only source of social stimulation is a visit from a health care worker.

A number of participants suggested seniors’ group homes in which several individuals could share a house with a full or part-time caregiver. This could be an alternative to nursing homes or long-term care facilities offering safety, affordability and companionship to an aging population.

**“Unfortunately, poor planning in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has left London with sprawling suburbs, which are unattractive and cold. People get very lonely living there and the city can’t afford to service its sprawl – therefore, transit, libraries, fire, police and health care is hard to provide for these areas.**

**These suburbs are not people friendly much less senior friendly.”**

- Survey respondent

## What you said about housing:

### Locations and Neighbourhoods

- Retirement and nursing homes should not be located far from community, family and friends!!
- Older adults shouldn't be isolated – we need diversity.
- No cookie cutter subdivisions!
- Diversity - what is there for immigrants or those with language barriers?
- Apartment living gives you more neighbours – isolated in single family home.
- Mixture of generations, not all older adults in neighbourhood.
- Cherryhill is a great neighbourhood, so is Wortley Village! Green spaces, libraries, lots of transit.
- Lack of knowledge about tenant rights when moving from house to apartment.
- Ability to age in place - more choice within existing neighbourhoods.
- I want to stay in my own neighbourhood but there is nothing there for me.
- More adult day programs!

### Design and Layout

- Everything on one floor, no stairs.
- Short driveways for easy winter maintenance.
- Supports in bathroom, wider doorways, motion sensors.
- More green spaces around apartment buildings.
- Smaller neighbourhood communities.

### Affordability

- Needs to be affordable to ordinary older adults!
- City needs to ensure that retirement homes are affordable.
- Cap on rental rates for seniors.
- Still a stigma attached to living in affordable housing.

**”More senior residences down town! I notice a nursing home going up [outside of downtown]. This is not a very good place for a nursing or retirement home. It is not accessible for visitors who may not be able to drive. Older adults still like to have their friends visit! It is also not desirable for the older adults in the retirement home who may want to walk out onto a pedestrian friendly street and enjoy the shops.”**

# SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion is the extent to which older adults are able to participate in the social, civic and economic aspects of their community. It includes things like being treated with respect and being accepted by everyone in society.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of seniors</li><li>• Stereotyping</li><li>• Lack of intergenerational connections through schools and community programs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of public awareness about disability and mental health challenges</li><li>• Lack of respect and courtesy</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

Social inclusion is very much influenced by health, family status and where you live as well as how long you have lived there. A number of participants and respondents in our research were recent arrivals and were finding it difficult to be included. Everyone seemed to have his or her own circle of acquaintances and “breaking in” is no easier at 70 than it is at 15. Some had recently lost a partner through separation or divorce and found that they had divided up their friends as well as their assets. Widowhood may bring many initial contacts of condolence but often the social overtures are not sustained over time as those still coupled continue to socialize primarily with other couples.

For many, previous employment provided a significant contribution to feelings of self-worth but retirement removes that source of status.

Children and grandchildren are sources of intimacy for many seniors, but families are smaller, busier and more mobile than ever. Those with siblings may find themselves becoming closer friends as family obligations decrease.

**“I am friendly and respectful to clerks in stores and they are friendly to me. I’ve worked in the past in stores so I know what it’s like.”**

- Focus group participant

Tenants reported that their requests for service and repairs were ignored.

Although eight out of 10 survey respondents stated that the clerks in stores were friendly and respectful, others suggested that they were rude, impatient and dismissive.

Generally, the older the respondent, the more



clerks were seen as being friendly and respectful. A few retailers were cited for having particularly helpful and friendly staff, while others were cited for ignoring customers with disabilities. Several participants objected to excessive familiarity or condescension on the part of clerks who addressed them as “dear” or “hey lady”.

Disrespectful behaviour of youth on the street and on public transportation was also mentioned. The City itself was cited for not caring about seniors as evidenced by the poor state of repairs of some of the public housing buildings, the accepting of persons with behavioural problems or addictions into seniors’ buildings, and the lack of response to complaints.

To deal with these concerns, suggestions were made for hiring more seniors as staff, introducing customer service training for staff persons who deal with seniors on a regular basis, and introducing a program in schools that would bring students and seniors together to increase awareness and understanding.

**“If people in general had more respect and friendliness toward seniors, things would be better.”**

- Survey respondent

Survey respondents were also asked about feeling welcome at community events. A similar pattern was observed with eight out of 10 feeling welcome and younger respondents feeling less welcome. Men were more likely than women to report feeling disrespected or unwelcome and also indicated that they were less likely to attend such events.

### **What you said about social inclusion:**

- There is a generally negative attitude towards seniors from the public.
- Single people feel more isolated than couples.
- London is not generally very warm or welcoming.
- Increase awareness and assistance for older adults needs.
- The city needs to remain family friendly.
- All ages are welcome at the library sale and Old South Community Organization events.
- I’ve not explored [community events] yet as I’m fairly new to the city.
- Students should be more respectful to seniors.
- All around respect for older adults who put London on the map must be appreciated.
- I can’t think of any community events that I go to.
- They seem mostly to be lame, hippy love-ins (Sunfest and Car Free Day).
- Remember, we were here when decisions were made!

# SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The WHO affirms that social participation is strongly connected to good health and well-being at all stages of life. Participating in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with family members and other people in the community allows older adults to continue to exercise their competence, develop respect and esteem, and maintain supportive, caring relationships.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accessibility of community events</li><li>• Affordability</li><li>• Transportation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited social interaction</li><li>• Need for more educational opportunities for seniors</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

Many of London’s older adults are active members of the community. Seven out of 10 survey respondents and nearly all of the focus group participants reported being active in service organizations, books clubs, sports and athletic clubs and church groups.

A few of these were singled out as being especially friendly to seniors. The Boys and Girls Club/Horton Street Senior’s Centre is a place of high levels of participation. It provides excellent athletic facilities, programming, instruction, special events, refreshments and transportation at very modest prices at hours when it is not needed for youth activities. The atmosphere is friendly and all are welcome. One member who had joined only three weeks earlier said: “I’ve tried different health clubs, but here I feel like I belong, with people who look like me.” In fact the membership is quite diverse, from 55 to well over 80, both men and women from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and in all shapes and sizes. Some who join for the athletic facilities go on to volunteer for the youth programs.

Educational programs are also popular with seniors. Seniors Learning in Retirement offers opportunities to participate in seminars on topics of interest chosen by the participants. UWO conducts a monthly lecture series for Alumni and interested guests. There is a wide range of programs, activities and presentations offered by the public library. One participant is pursuing the possible establishment of a college for seniors using retirees from UWO, Fanshawe College and the many high schools and elementary schools as volunteer lecturers with facilities provided by retirement homes and libraries.

Many seniors form their own informal groups, getting together for coffee daily or weekly at restaurants and shopping malls. Some pointed out the need for more gathering places for seniors. Retrofitting schools scheduled to be closed was suggested as a means of repurposing community hubs that reflect an aging population with changing needs and interests.

London's seniors are also enthusiastic consumers of the performing arts, enjoying music and theatre at the Grand, Centennial Hall, Wolfe Performance Hall, London Music City, the London Music Club and the Palace Theatre as well as the John Labatt Centre. There was high praise for the Aeolian Hall for its diversity of entertainment and its affordability.

Affordability is a major concern for many retirees. Although they have more time for leisure pursuits, the cost of tickets and transportation, especially for live performances which they particularly enjoy, are sometimes prohibitive.

A recent welcome addition to the entertainment scene has been the provision of opera in high definition, live or recorded, at a number of movie theatres. When first introduced, the response was so overwhelming that in spite of the addition of a new viewing room, seniors arrived more than an hour ahead of time, picnic lunches in hand, to ensure snaring a good seat.

**“I am so busy now that I don't remember how I could have worked. Social gatherings, swimming every other day, volunteering .... ”**

- Focus group participant

### **What you said about social participation:**

- Free or low cost courses should be offered at UWO and Fanshawe.
- University for Seniors – staffed by volunteer retirees.
- Not as a rule, I have a personal “social” group, however I do some volunteering.
- Wish I did.
- Need entertainment at an affordable level – day trips, shows, etc.
- Discounts and better transportation to local theatres and events.
- Boys and Girls Club has \$3/event door-to-door bus transportation.
- Older adults should work more with the young – workshops, community centre events, etc. The young have so much to learn from older adults.
- Too hard to get out and too expensive.
- London is in dire need of a performing arts centre to support our arts community.
- More opportunities for meeting new people.

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Older adults make significant contributions to their communities. Many retired older adults are active volunteers that provide essential supports to community organizations, family members and friends. An age friendly community provides options for older people to continue to contribute to their communities through paid employment or voluntary work if they so choose, and to be engaged in the political process.

Nearly one in five individuals over the age of 65 is in the paid labour force, either on a part-time or full-time basis. While for some, this continued participation is voluntary, providing continued contact with colleagues, for others it is a stark necessity resulting from inadequate pensions and limited savings. For employers, older workers are often welcomed for their reliability, work ethic and skills although wages are often well below those of younger workers.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficult to find ways to make a meaningful contribution</li><li>• Accessibility challenges</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Challenge for newcomers to find ways to participate</li><li>• Scheduling</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

In London, seniors are to be found in a myriad of volunteer organizations giving rides to doctors' appointments, delivering meals to shut-ins, organizing fundraising events for worthwhile causes, serving on committees, providing usher services at concerts, selling raffle tickets and engaging in volunteer recruitment. Orchestra London, Aeolian Hall, the Palace Theatre, the Grand Theatre, hospitals, Meals on Wheels, and service clubs like I.O.D.E., Lions and Optimists could not survive without the many senior volunteers who staff tables and events, plan rummage sales and run errands.

Seniors are active politically as well, having high voter turnout, joining political parties and movements, signing petitions and participating in demonstrations and protests. Seniors write letters to the editor and to their political representatives, forward political messages to their email contact lists, and campaign for political candidates. Seniors are frequently better informed about issues and personalities in their community at all levels of government than are youth or middle-aged adults.

Survey responses indicate that seniors in London take an active interest in their community and civic administration. Many positive remarks were shared indicating people's feelings of satisfaction and good fortune. It was equally clear that although older adults recognized the merits of living in London, they had definite opinions on what could make life better for seniors.

Economic factors provide some of the greatest motivation for civic involvement. Respondents recognized that if older adults' issues are to be listened to at City Council, their participation will be necessary. The need to ensure senior representation on planning and development committees was noted, to ensure that older adults concerns are addressed. There was a suggestion that a city-wide Seniors Advisory Committee would be beneficial to advise city officials. In general, feedback indicated that better communication with older adults on all city services and activities would be appreciated, which again would have the effect of helping older adults to feel more engaged and considered in civic life.

Arising from concerns around financial security, numerous comments indicated that older adults are not all retired and there is an ongoing interest in training and a range of employment options. Many recommended recognizing and utilizing the skills and experience of seniors. In addition to volunteer opportunities, intergenerational programs were recommended to share older adults' abilities and capitalize on the talents and enthusiasm of the younger generations.

**“Since I come from a large family, have a long standing circle of friends, am involved in a political organization, do some volunteering, have an adequate pension, and am very independent, as a citizen of London, I am quite content.”**

**“My cup runneth over!”**

- Conference participants

## What you said about civic participation and employment:

### Civic Involvement

- Public meetings are very important.
- Have seniors representatives on committees and task forces – they have a lot of knowledge and experience to contribute.
- Need to get more voices at the table.
- Greater integration of seniors groups into decision making.
- More partnerships with younger groups.

### City Administration

- City Hall needs to be innovative to deal with new issues.
- Councilors should focus on planning for the future.
- City officials need to communicate better with older adults.
- We need to control city taxes because when one retires their income becomes fairly set with little increases.
- Our city taxes cause me to feel that in time we will not be able to afford to live in our house in London.

### Employment

- Boomers are the “sandwich generation” – some caring for both children and older adults.
- Need to continue working to support self, aging parents or children.
- Loss of pension income in economic downturn.

# COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Access to information about events, activities and programs is a key determinant of how active older adults are able to be active participants in the community. Older adults require current, accurate and accessible information about what is happening around them in order to be engaged. Communication is also a key way for people to stay connect, build and maintain relationships, and feel that they are able to reach out to people around them.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of accessibility of print and electronic information</li><li>• Challenge of learning to use new technology</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No “one stop” place to find community information and events</li><li>• Can be difficult to access automated services</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

68% of survey respondents felt that it was easy to find information about what was going on in the community, with women reporting finding information more easily than men. Participants felt that information was available, but not always easily accessible. As one respondent stated, “I usually find out about events after they have already happened.”

Many people missed Information London as a one-stop access point for information about organizations and services in the community. Although some were aware that the Healthline maintained by Community Care and Access Centre had replaced this service, most were not. It was also noted the Healthline is regionally based rather than being focused specifically on London. As well, seniors are interested in accessing information about many organizations, not just health care.

**“Our city offers a lot of activities. You need to get the word out more. There is lots of stuff out there for people to do.”**

- Focus group participant

Many seniors reported use of the internet and social media sites for information and for maintaining contact with family and friends. Several were motivated to acquire computer skills in their 60s, 70s, and 80s in order to keep in touch with grandchildren. One senior known to the Working Group learned to use a computer in her nineties so that she could write her Christmas newsletter and send it electronically! Courses in computer skills

offered through the library and seniors' centres were appreciated by those who used them.

Not all seniors are computer savvy. Many also referred to print media, television and radio as key sources of information. Affordability was once again raised as a concern with suggestions for discounted subscription rates for seniors to local papers.

More accessible media came through as a key requirement. Larger print in newspaper ads and circulars, large print signage and clearer content were requested. Many found planning documents and reports impossible to comprehend and wanted clearer descriptions of the impact of proposals on the community. Although many complained about the sensationalistic tone and direction of the local paper, it was often the only comprehensible report of events and decisions of city council.

## What you said about communication and information:

### Community Information

- Reintroduce Information London or another one-stop place for information about community events.
- Some older adults cannot access community information.
- City wide seniors committee to tell seniors what's going on.

### Use of Technology

- Not every senior has a computer!
- Facebook, other social media being used by seniors.
- It would be hard to stay in touch without email.
- Makes finding out what's going on a lot easier.
- City website and online spectrum registration should be more accessible – need a separate section for seniors to access.

### Print Media

- A newspaper subscription is necessary to know what's going on.
- Seniors should get discounted rates for local newspapers.
- Better advertisements of programs in the paper.
- Monthly flyer with a calendar of events.
- Paper is hard to read – too fine print.

### Other Media

- More local information on radio and television.
- Radio stations should provide a specific time to talk about community events and information.



# COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND HEALTH SERVICES

Health and support services are essential to maintaining vitality and independence for older adults. London is renowned as a national leader for health facilities, but it is critical that these services are accessible and available to older adults.

<b>Common Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceptions of seniors</li><li>• Stereotyping</li><li>• Lack of intergenerational connections through schools and community programs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of public awareness about disability and mental health challenges</li><li>• Lack of respect and courtesy</li></ul>
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## What Londoners told us

The need for and access to primary health services dominated the feedback received regarding improvements recommended for community and health services. Repeatedly, older adults commented on the availability of their family doctor as being the key to accessing the range of medical services they need.

Many acknowledged that they are requiring more medical services as they age and the time and expertise of their health care providers have not increased proportionately. People described limited access to their primary care physicians as a significant factor in getting their health care needs met and compromising their ability to self-advocate for the services they need. Wait times for emergency services and medical specialties were consistently raised as issues. Some of the barriers identified to health services included affordable transportation, clinic hours and physical accessibility of facilities.

Access to affordable home care was identified as the key requirement to living healthy and independent lives. Numerous comments were made that home care must be maintained and improved. The limitations of the current Community Care Access Centre funding were mentioned. Affordability and reliability of home support services was the critical issue identified. Suggestions for improvement included the need for more agencies providing such services, the need for staff to be professional and trained, and the opportunity to use more volunteers to assist people to remain in their homes.

In general, people made positive comments about the city's community services. Many people were familiar with and used the resource centres and felt that more

were needed. Suggestions for programming were wide and varied. Most respondents recognize the need for fitness and exercise programs, but an equal number indicated support for more cultural opportunities, including a performing arts centre. The need for community grocery stores was mentioned frequently as a core essential service as one ages. Suggestions regarding intergenerational programming and delivering services in the home also had appeal and support.

When commenting on needed community services, people noted those things that inhibited their enjoyment and participation. Affordability again was a significant factor, as was the availability of community information and better communication of those services. Finally, public safety and the recognition of elder abuse were noted as ongoing concerns for older Londoners.

## What you said about community health and support services:

### Home Care Services

- Need for free services to keep older adults in their own homes – cleaning, lawn cutting, snow shoveling.
- Funding for assistance with home upkeep.
- More services for people who are shut in to their home.
- Pet and music therapy for shut ins.

### Health and Community Services

- More services to help older adults stay in shape.
- Expand aquatic facilities and seniors' centres.
- Programs for grandparenting – helping families who need support.
- More seniors' centres.
- Safe walking routes to health and community services.
- Exercise clubs should offer older adults discounts.
- More older adults centres in the north end.
- More day programs!

### Medial Professionals

- Improved access to doctors and health care is needed.
- More doctors and nurse practitioners specializing in gerontology.

### Other Comments

- Need more awareness of elder abuse.
- Better transportation needed for doctor appointments.
- Hospital parking is very expensive.

## 4. Challenges and Opportunities

There are several important factors that need to be considered in the context of an aging population. Each of these presents both a challenge and an opportunity. An age friendly city must respond to the challenges and leverage the opportunities in order to better position itself and its citizens for the future.

### **Economic Climate**

Until recently, poverty among seniors had been declining significantly. Across Canada, the incidence of low-income among those 65 years of age and over after taxes fell from 21.4 per cent in 1980 to 5.4 per cent in 2006. The drop in London has been equally dramatic, with the incidence of low income declining from 13.4 per cent to 2.3 per cent. This decrease, however, masks a number of troubling observations.

First, although the overall incidence and prevalence of poverty has declined, it has been rising since 2005 and the disparity in incomes among seniors has been increasing. Secondly, the rates of poverty among senior women are nearly double the rates of senior men, and single senior women are the poorest of all. A single senior woman who is fully dependent on Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement will have an annual income of approximately \$14,000, about \$4,000 below the poverty line. Living on \$1100 per month, even in a city with relatively affordable rents, provides very few options in housing, meals, personal care, entertainment and transportation.

The past year has also not been kind to those whose pensions or savings were invested in the market as a means of providing for their silver and golden years. For some, it will mean retirement is indefinitely postponed; for others, it will mean a significant change in lifestyle.

Lastly, although many older adults today are financially better off than were previous generations, as a category they still have lower incomes than almost all other age cohorts. The global economic downturn of 2008 has had a significant impact on pensions and investment earnings. Seniors may enjoy discounts at many places from drug stores to government services, but the systemic economic disparity of this population group needs to be more adequately addressed in the future.

This is a significant challenge that will require a joint effort from all levels of government; however, the opportunity and potential benefit is also significant given the sheer spending power and economic impact of this growing demographic.

## Demographics

The aging population is not the only major demographic shift facing cities. As natural increase declines, immigration and the ethnic diversity that accompanies it will become increasingly important in the composition and growth of our city's population. Statistic Canada predicts that London's immigrant population will grow from 21 per cent of the total population in 2006 to 23 per cent in 2031; during the same period, the proportion that is composed of visible minorities will double to 22 per cent.

Many of these immigrants will come from Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa from countries which may have distinctive traditions regarding expectations of family obligations to aging parents. Those who arrive in their later years may also have difficulty in mastering a new language. Many will want to be housed in communities of people like themselves with whom they share a common culture and language.

In our research, we found it difficult to recruit members of minority groups, especially those who are recent immigrants. We need to find a better means of outreach. Newcomers, especially seniors, are not likely to feel comfortable outside of their own groups. More outreach workers and service providers with diverse ethnic origins and fluency in minority languages will be a key component of successful engagement of these groups. A number of resource centres, such as the one in White Oaks, provide activities for seniors within their own ethnic communities while the Boys and Girls Club's Senior Centre attracts a somewhat diverse membership. More facilities for members of ethnic minority groups, perhaps within existing resource centres, may be required in the future.

Also, London continues to be a destination for refugee claimants. Already, it has the highest number of refugees relative to population in Canada. These new citizens will have special needs to enable them to age successfully in our community.

While this diversity will create some challenges, most seniors welcome the contribution of immigrants to the vitality of London, citing the many cultural

festivals, ethnic restaurants and food products, and talents and skills that a diverse community has to offer.

## **Accessibility Legislation**

In 2005, the Ontario Government passed a new law called the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. Unique in Canada, this law provides for the development and enforcement of accessibility standards for customer service, employment, information and communications, transportation and the built environment. Once these standards become law, all public and private sector organizations in Ontario will be required to comply. The cost of complying with new accessibility requirements is expected to be in the multi-millions of dollars for municipalities, so it will be a significant challenge to finding financing in already tight budgets. The opportunity, however, is also significant because accessibility benefits older adults, people with disabilities, and everyone in the community.

## **Health and Wellness**

People today are healthier and living longer than ever before in history. The steady increases in the average life expectancy for both men and women is a testament to improved nutrition, public sanitation, and advancement in medical technologies. However, seniors still face health challenges as they grow older and will become more reliant on health care services over time. Research has found that regular activity can help to reduce this dependence and keep seniors healthier for longer. The Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging – located in London at the University of Western Ontario – is undertaking some of this important research on how to effectively integrate activity into the lives of older adults, and the impact that this has on overall health.

## **Technology**

Although today's older adults grew up without computers, the internet or cell phones, they are now the fastest growing customer group for computer sales and internet services. Technology can enhance the lives of older adults by providing opportunities to maintain contact with family members and friends, and increase independence. The challenge lies in ensuring that new technologies are made available and accessible for older adults.

## 5. Is London an Age Friendly City?

As a place for seniors, London gets high marks from outside assessments, usually listed high among the top ten cities in North America for retirement. Affordability, safety, amenities, entertainment venues, access to high quality health care, ease of transportation, location, even reasonably moderate weather are all selling points. But the real test is what do London's elderly, its seniors and older adults, its boomers and zoomers think about London.

Senior Londoners, with few exceptions, think London is a great place to live. They love it for its high quality, accessible health care. They love its heritage buildings, its parks and pathways, its seniors centres, its robust arts and culture, its restaurants and libraries, its diverse established neighbourhoods, its university and colleges. They like its size and location. They like its low crime rates.

### Can London be even more age friendly?

**“I love London!”**  
- Survey respondent

Absolutely. And seniors have great ideas about what we can and need to do better if we want to attract seniors and the economic benefits that they bring. Seniors are the fastest growing age group. We have a unique opportunity to plan ahead to meet the needs of an aging population, to benefit from the skills and resources they bring to our community, to engage them in the economic, social and cultural life of London.

But to do that, we need to take seriously what we heard from our older residents. They want to be actively engaged in the community, not put out to pasture. They want choices in housing that connect them to the community and its amenities and services. They want clean, attractive public spaces that allow them to be active, but still provide a place to rest. They want some alternatives in transportation, sidewalks and pathways that can be used year round, traffic lights that don't switch to yellow the moment they step off the curb. They want the opportunity to connect with all age groups, but they need to be able to live and congregate among themselves in seniors' buildings and seniors' centres. They want to be able to stay connected with family members, but not be dependent upon them. They want to be respected and included in community. They don't want to stand in long line-ups or walk for miles to locate an item in a grocery store. They want to remain physically and mentally active. They want access to programs and facilities that allow them to do that.

Most of all, they want to be kept informed and involved in the decision-making. That is the challenge as we move forward.

Can we meet the challenge? We not only can, we must.

## 6. Next Steps for London

An age friendly city is a people friendly city. Healthy neighbourhoods are safer for children, youth, women and older adults. Community supports and services benefit newcomers, young families and older adults. An age friendly community benefits people of all ages.

This report summarized and synthesized the concerns and observations made by older adults over the past year as the Age Friendly City Working Group engaged them in conversations about living in London. These comments have been compiled into this report in hopes that they will be used to make London an even more age friendly city.

We recommend that this report be used in several ways.

**Recommendation 1:** That this report, *Age Friendly London: Report to the Community*, be submitted to the City of London's Community Service Department, together with other city initiatives, for consideration in the updating of the 2005 *Seniors Community Action Plan*.

**Recommendation 2:** That this report be distributed to City Council, administrative departments, and relevant community groups so that the comments and suggestions of Londoners can be considered in future planning and decision making.

**Recommendation 3:** That City Council give consideration to identifying a means of ensuring that the voice of seniors continue to be heard as we adapt our facilities, programs and services to an aging population.

A main objective of this process was to generate awareness and public discussion about our findings and proposals. With the support of the city and its partners in the public and private sectors, we can find ways to overcome obstacles and barriers to full participation in the community that aging residents may experience, and to determine how we need to change our current practices to accommodate and celebrate an aging population.

# Acknowledgements

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This report was made possible by the dedication and commitment of numerous individuals and groups. Acknowledgement with appreciation is extended to:

## WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Robin Armistead, Culture Office  
Laurie Spence Bannerman, Dearness Home  
Gina Barber, City of London Controller  
Gregg Barrett, Planning Department  
Izabela Bielaska, University of Western Ontario  
Dr. Michael Borrie, St. Joseph's Health Care  
Ellen Cannon, Alzheimer Society  
Magdalen Carter, Alzheimer Outreach Services  
Paul D'Hollander, Community Services  
Iris Gutmanis, St. Joseph's Health Care  
Marita Kloseck, University of Western Ontario

Jean Knight, London Seniors Community Assoc.  
Bonnie Kotnik, St. Joseph's Health Care  
Betsy Little, Alzheimer Society  
Laurie McKellar, Nurse Practitioner – Primary Health Care  
Robin Kish, Victorian Order of Nurses  
Kathy Smith, Marketing Consultant  
Harold Usher, City of London Councilor  
David Winninger, City of London Councilor  
Aleksandra Zecevic, University of Western Ontario  
Vilia Zoccano – Secretary

## CONFERENCE SUPPORTS:

### Facilitators

Ben Benedict  
Jane Bigelow  
Magdalene Carter  
Paul D'Hollander  
Larry Ducharme  
John M. Fleming  
Sean Galloway  
Andrea Halwa  
Jean Knight  
Kathy Smith  
Jay Stanford  
Louise Stevens

### Note Takers

Linda Amaral  
Isabella Bielaska  
Meghan Cannon  
Ashley Jane Ho  
Navian Kaushal  
Amro Mohammed  
Nancy O'Regan  
Angelica Ortiz  
Tamra Steinmann  
Penny Wearne  
Rosanna Wilcox

### Other

Dennis Siren – Video  
Wendy Saby – Photography  
Bill Brady – Entertainment  
The Rhythm Sisters – Entertainment

## PRESENTERS TO THE WORKING GROUP:

Gregg Barrett  
Paul D'Hollander  
Ross Fair  
John Fleming

Patrick Fleming  
Ron McNish  
Jennifer Miller  
Marvin Simner



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For more information on the  
City of London's services and programs for  
older adults, please visit:

[www.london.ca](http://www.london.ca)

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