



Public Engagement Feedback Report

In Preparation for the Older Adult Plan 2019-2022



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Older Adults in Ottawa



Figure 1: Seniors are the largest and fastest growing segment of the Canadian Population

Seniors are the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian population. For the first time in Canadian history, there are more people aged 65 and over than children under the age of 15¹. In Ottawa, in 2016, there were 144,140 residents aged 65 and over, making up over 15 percent of the population. Projections indicate that by 2041, 1 in 4 Ottawa residents will be over the age of 65.

Ottawa's population of older adults is also becoming increasingly more diverse. Statistics Canada's projections of diversity show that in 2036, 28 percent of Ottawa's seniors aged 65 and over will be members of one of the ten visible minority groups², up from 16 percent in 2016. In addition, Ottawa was home to 23,000 Indigenous persons in 2016, including First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit people. The diversity of Ottawa is further reflected in the mix of the French and English populations with 61 percent having English as their mother tongue and 14 percent, French.

Increasingly, seniors in Ottawa come from many different backgrounds, and needs vary greatly between sub-groups of seniors. While seniors face many challenges as they age, some contributing factors such as low income and living alone are most commonly associated with an increase in vulnerability and, in turn, a heightened risk of poor health outcomes. Some groups, such as senior women, LGBTQ seniors, Indigenous seniors, newcomer seniors and seniors with disabilities, are more isolated and vulnerable to poor outcomes than the rest of the population³.

While most seniors in Ottawa are financially secure, about 132,000 seniors in Ottawa live in households classified as low income by Statistics Canada (5 percent of couples and 22 percent of seniors living alone). Most importantly, 9.4 percent of residents over 65 were living on low-income⁴ in 2016, which represents an increase from the 7 percent in 2011.

While the majority live in central areas of the city, suburban and rural areas are experiencing the fastest growth of older adults.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the demographic information is from the 2016 Statistics Canada Census of Population.

² According to the 2016 Census, the top ten population groups representing visible minorities in Ottawa are Black, Chinese, Arab, South Asian, Southeast Asian, Filipino, Latin American, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

³ United Way Ottawa. (2017, June). A Profile of Vulnerable Seniors in the Ottawa Region [PDF document]. Retrieved from <https://www.unitedwayottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/A-Profile-of-Vulnerable-Seniors-in-the-Ottawa-Region-EN.pdf>

⁴ Based on the Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT)

City of Ottawa Older Adult Plan

Since 2012, the City of Ottawa has been implementing an Older Adult Plan (OAP).

Goal

The goal of the Older Adult Plan is to take coordinated and concrete actions to contribute to making Ottawa an Age-Friendly community. We want our City services, facilities, and programs to be accessible and responsive to the needs of older adults now and in the future.

The Older Adult Plan contains actions under municipal responsibility. For more information about what is happening across the community, you can go to the Council on Aging of Ottawa's website Age-Friendly Ottawa page, "[Building an Age-Friendly Ottawa.](#)"

Reflective of Diverse Population

Over the past 8 years, the City has engaged extensively with older adults with diverse needs, such as ethnocultural seniors, Indigenous seniors, LGBTQ seniors, seniors living on low income, Francophone seniors, rural seniors, etc. This is important to ensure the voices of all seniors are heard and considered in the OAP.

A group of 20 older adults from diverse backgrounds make up the [Seniors Roundtable](#), who meet quarterly with City staff to provide feedback on the implementation of the OAP and inform us on emerging needs and issues important to older adults.

How we Engaged and Consulted with Older Adults in Ottawa

From April to June 2018, the City of Ottawa engaged with older adults in Ottawa to reconfirm their priorities and help identify potential actions for the Older Adult Plan 2019-2022.

From April to June 2018, The City engaged with **1,703** community members. The methods of engagement included a bilingual online survey and in-person focus groups hosted in collaboration with the City's Seniors Roundtable and community partner organizations. An Equity and Inclusion Lens was applied to the planning in order to obtain perspectives from various sub-groups of seniors, including Francophone seniors, rural seniors, ethnocultural seniors, isolated and vulnerable seniors, LGBTQ seniors and Indigenous seniors.



Figure 2: Age-Friendly Components

The online survey was open from April 27 to May 25, 2018 and distributed through the City of Ottawa Older Adults e-distribution list and through community partners. The English survey had **1,139** respondents, and the French survey had **76** respondents.

The following community partners hosted **488** people who participated through **11** in-person sessions: Centre de services Guiges, Centretown Community Health Centre, Club Casa de Los Abuelos, Council on Aging of Ottawa, Good Companions, Kanata Seniors Council, Nepean Rideau & Osgoode Community Resource Centre, Rendez-vous des aînés francophones d'Ottawa, Sikh Community Services Ottawa, Social Planning Council of Ottawa, and Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre.

What We Heard

The following sections present the findings from these community consultations as we heard them. Together with the research and process review, the consultation findings will inform the development of the next City of Ottawa Older Adult Plan 2019-2022.

Some of the findings or suggestions for action include things the City is already doing, and some fall outside the City of Ottawa's mandate. In these cases, the feedback will be communicated to the right organizations or City departments for their information. Other priorities reflect the work done in the previous two OAPs and confirm that previous actions were not only relevant, but continue to be important. These suggestions will also be shared with the relevant City departments and will be used in building the new Older Adult Plan. New information or suggestions for action that have not been identified in previous consultations will also be considered in the development of the new Older Adult Plan.

The following three sections will present highlights from the online survey, specific concerns and priorities of equity-seeking groups, and overall feedback grouped in four categories: aging with choice, transportation and mobility, wellbeing, and communication.

In addition, overarching themes emerged from the community consultations, including respect and inclusion, support for vulnerable seniors, and accessibility⁵, affordability⁶ and availability⁷ of programs and services tailored to the diverse needs of older adults.

⁵ Accessibility refers to the quality of a program or service that is being able to be reached, of being easy to obtain or use, and/or of being easily understood or appreciated.

⁶ Affordability refers to the ability to be afforded within one's financial means, being able to buy.

⁷ Availability refers to the presence or absence of a program or service.

Highlights from Survey

The majority of respondents were female (70%) urban (85%) older adults (88%) between the ages of 65 to 74 (48%) with a household income between \$50 000 to \$74 000 (27%). The same priorities and concerns were identified in the results from the French and English surveys.

The top three priorities for respondents of the online survey were:

- Access to community support and health services to meet their needs;
- Housing that best meet their needs and choices; and
- Safe and easy travel in Ottawa.

Eighty-percent of survey respondents identified eight age-friendly features as “Important” or “Very Important”. They were:

- Supports to enable aging at home;
- Safe sidewalks;
- Safe intersections;
- Supports for older adults who are vulnerable or socially isolated;
- Sensitive service providers;
- Information about programs and services;
- Programs that promote healthy and active aging; and
- Accessible transportation close to home.

What We Heard – Grouping the Feedback

What we heard from the consultations to prepare for the OAP 2019-2022 was very similar to suggestions and feedback received from previous consultations. In order to make analysis easier, we have grouped the feedback we received this round into four categories: aging with choice, transportation and mobility, wellbeing, and communication. See Figure 3 below:

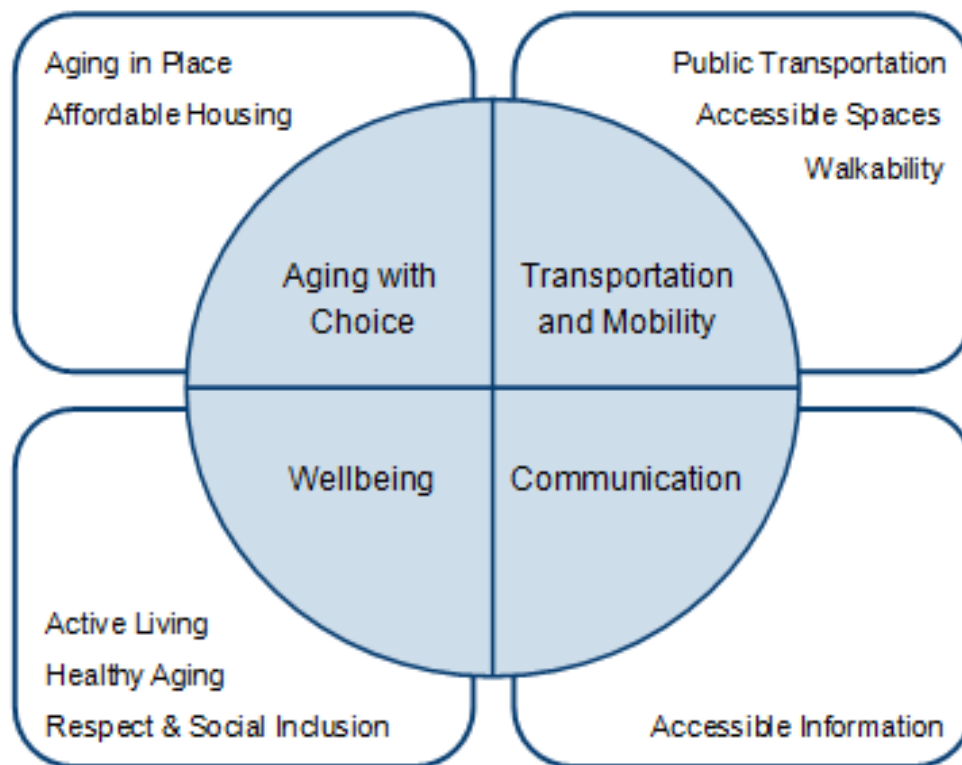
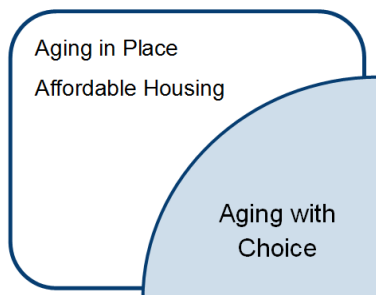


Figure 3: Four Categories of Feedback

Aging with Choice



Aging with Choice includes aging in place and affordable housing. It refers to maintaining one's ability to make choices and live independently, or in a communal environment, in a respectful and dignified manner.

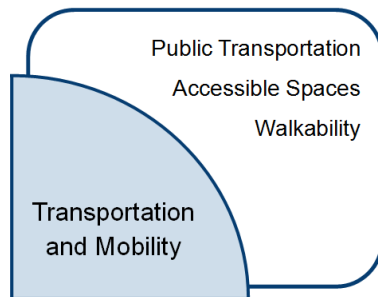
Aging in place includes the desire to live in the same home or community safely, independently, and comfortably, as we age. This includes being able to access needed, appropriate services and supports over time as needs change.

What we heard:

- ✓ Offer more community support services to keep people healthy in their home and in their own communities, such as home improvements;
- ✓ Provide more affordable home support services, such as a geared to income programs for services in the home and tax deferrals;
- ✓ Improve availability of personal support workers and home supports in rural areas and for francophone seniors;
- ✓ Increase the number of affordable housing units for seniors, especially for senior women and seniors with disabilities;
- ✓ Improve local, affordable housing options for rural residents so that they can age in their communities;
- ✓ Offer more subsidized rents for middle and low income seniors;
- ✓ Increase the availability of affordable retirement homes and long-term care facilities; and
- ✓ Explore innovative solutions, such as co-op housing for seniors and home-sharing.



Transportation and Mobility



Transportation and mobility refers to public transportation, walkability and pedestrian safety, as well as accessible spaces and buildings.

Transportation and mobility, including accessible and affordable public transport, are key factors influencing active aging. In fact, transportation and mobility is a key theme that runs through many other age-friendly dimensions, partly because being able to move around the city determines our social and civic participation.

Walkability and pedestrian safety are also key factors that influence healthy aging and influence other age-friendly areas such as civic participation and access to community and health services. Ottawa is a northern city, so enhancing walkability and safety in the winter is essential for preventing falls and reducing barriers for vulnerable pedestrians (such as people who use mobility aids such as walkers, wheelchairs and scooters) to safely leave their homes.

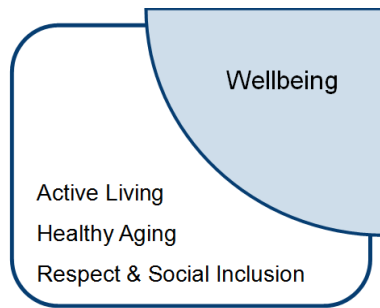
Accessible public buildings and outdoor spaces significantly affect the mobility, independence and quality of life of older adults, as well as their ability to age in place.

What we heard:

- ✓ Offer more free transportation options for seniors;
- ✓ Increase transit services in rural areas and improve rural-to-rural transportation services;
- ✓ Make on-street bus stop accessibility and safety improvements, such as shelters, washrooms and benches;
- ✓ Enhance winter maintenance and snow ploughing at bus stops, the sidewalks leading to the stops, and the connecting streets around the stops;
- ✓ Review Para Transpo services, specifically simplifying the booking system and improving rural services;
- ✓ Increase support to community agencies to make community transport service more available and more affordable;
- ✓ Enhance ice and snow removal on sidewalks and pathways, and give priority to hot spot areas, such as around seniors' residences and seniors' centres;
- ✓ Improve the condition of sidewalks in hot spot areas and ensure that curb cuts allow people with mobility aids to safely traverse from street to street;
- ✓ Improve safety of roads, pathways and trail systems through educational campaigns and other strategies;
- ✓ Continue to investigate and extend intersection crossing times as needed in hot spot areas and those identified in community age-friendly walkability audits; and
- ✓ Install more accessibility features in City buildings and public benches.



Wellbeing



Wellbeing includes active living, healthy aging, and respect and social inclusion.

Active living is a combination of physical, recreational and cultural activities to encourage a healthier lifestyle. It includes everyday activities such as walking, housework, swimming, cycling and many others.

Healthy aging is the development and maintenance of optimal mental, social and physical wellbeing and function in older adults. This is most likely to be achieved when communities are safe, promote health and wellbeing, and use health services and community programs to prevent or minimize disease.

Aging with respect means to age without experiencing ageism⁸ and with services tailored to our needs and preferences. Social inclusion, the act of making all groups of people within a society feel valued and important, depends on the relationships people have with others, on how people come together and interact in a social circle of family and friends. Social inclusion is key to wellbeing.

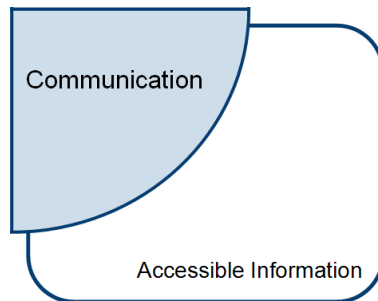
What we heard:

- ✓ Make recreational programs more affordable for low and moderate income seniors;
- ✓ Facilitate easy access to spaces at low or no cost for seniors groups to host their recreational and cultural activities;
- ✓ Promote physical activities for older adults and encourage walking;
- ✓ Increase the availability of recreational programs for older adults across the city, specifically in rural areas and in French and other languages other than English;
- ✓ Encourage preventative health programs especially in areas of mental health and physical activity;
- ✓ Expand the availability of health and wellness programs in rural communities and to Francophone older adults;
- ✓ Provide financial assistance for dental, eye and hearing care;
- ✓ Offer more services and education to support people living with Alzheimer's and dementia;
- ✓ Offer more support for caregivers, such as respite and education;
- ✓ Offer more support to isolated and vulnerable older adults, including women living alone, older adults living with a disabilities, and newcomers;
- ✓ Offer more support to seniors living on low and moderate incomes;
- ✓ Promote respect for older adults through raising awareness about ageism and the rich diversity and contribution of seniors; and
- ✓ Consider the needs of diverse groups of older adults in program and service planning and delivery.



⁸ Ageism is a form of prejudice and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age.

Communication



Communication means receiving and having access to practical information about events, services and resources when we need it.

Access to information is essential for active and healthy aging and to access services and programs.

What we heard:

- ✓ Distribute information on programs and services for older adults in many forms (newsletters, print, presentations, fairs);
- ✓ Partner with community organizations to pass on the information to their communities of interest;
- ✓ Ensure that 211 and 311 services have knowledge of the needs of older adults, especially related to rural programs, services and challenges;
- ✓ Include more information on programs and services in French in publications and communiques;
- ✓ Increase access to the internet through computer training geared towards seniors; and
- ✓ Facilitate translation and interpretation services in multiple languages, and offer information guides to services in different languages.



Specific Concerns and Priorities of Equity-Seeking Groups

This section presents concerns and priorities heard from specific equity-seeking groups.

Francophone Older Adults

Francophone older adults expressed concerns about supports from the City, such as funding for Francophone community organizations. Participants expressed a general sense that there were less activities and civic opportunities for Francophones compared to Anglophones in Ottawa. Participants in the consultations emphasized that the issue of equity is strongly linked to respect and social inclusion.

Participants mentioned that they greatly appreciate and benefit from programs and services delivered in French. Bus drivers, phone operators and home support workers were named as examples of roles where communicating in French is important. Participants expressed that access to services and programs in French is about dignity and respect.

Priorities as we heard them

- ✓ Equity of access to programs and services between the two official languages;
- ✓ Availability of programs and services delivered in French;
- ✓ Ability to “Age in French”; and
- ✓ Greater representation of Francophone older adults at the Seniors Roundtable.



Older Adults from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds

Access to information is a key concern for older adults from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, and language is a main barrier. Having access to information in languages other than French and English, or access to a reliable translator, are of great help to this group. Participants suggested further engaging leaders of ethnocultural seniors groups in sharing information about programs and services to their members. Information only or primarily available online was also named a challenge, as many seniors from this group do not have access to a computer.

Accessibility and affordability of services are main barriers, as many seniors from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds are living on a low income, compared to the city’s average. The cost of renting and the inconsistency of available meeting spaces, difficulty with booking systems, affordability of programs and services were named as barriers to accessing services and to social participation in general. Being able to participate in social and civic life was said to be a matter of equity, and respect.

Priorities as we heard them

- ✓ Access to physical spaces to meet at low or no cost; and
- ✓ Barrier-free opportunities to celebrate their cultures and to participate in social activities.



Older Adults identifying as LGBTQ

Experiences of discrimination or not being visible as an individual or as a group who face barriers were named as main concerns. Participants commented that LGBTQ seniors are often left out of conversations on diversity and inclusion, and pointed out that when LGBTQ older adults are not explicitly included, they are implicitly excluded. Respect and social inclusion were key issues for several older adults belonging to this group. Specifically, LGBTQ older adults recommended training and education of staff and residents in retirement homes and long-term care facilities so that LGBTQ seniors feel safe, respected, visible and included.

Priorities as we heard them

- ✓ Visibility;
- ✓ Safety; and
- ✓ Respect to age with choice.



Older Adults who are isolated and/or living on low incomes

Older adults who live on low incomes or are isolated spoke about being able to live in a clean and affordable place as a priority and a matter of dignity. Participants mentioned that wait lists for affordable housing are too long. Those who do not qualify through government programs as low income, but do not make enough money to afford market rent spoke about not having enough housing options.

Free transit one day a week was repeatedly said to be insufficient. Para Transpo was also noted as a service they suggested needs to be improved. Participants commented that they do not feel physically safe in the Para Transpo buses because there are not enough bars to hold on to. They also spoke about the booking processes being cumbersome, the service running late, and having to wait too long for a return trip.

They suggested that the City work in closer collaboration with community agencies that are already connected to them to help share information. Reaching them where they are and using various ways of communicating information was a proposed strategy, as many individuals in this group do not have easy access to a computer.

Priorities as we heard them

- ✓ Access to safe, clean, and affordable housing;
- ✓ Affordable public transportation; and
- ✓ Access to information.



Older Adults from Rural Areas

Participants mentioned that it is very difficult for rural older adults to leave their communities and relocate to assisted living facilities or seniors' homes in other areas of the city. Most rural older adults stated that they wished to remain in their respective communities with their friends and families. Participants stressed that rural seniors are particularly vulnerable to social isolation due to geographic distances, the lack of available services compared to the urban and suburban areas, and the dependence to a car to access basic amenities and services.

Expanding the availability of community and health supports, such as home support workers and health prevention programs in rural areas, was identified as a strategy to prevent social isolation of rural older adults.

Priorities as we heard them

- ✓ Accessible and affordable transportation, especially improving rural-to-rural public transport and Para Transpo services; and
- ✓ Aging in place.



Indigenous Older Adults⁹

For Indigenous older adults in Ottawa, aging well means having a connection to their culture(s) through access to traditional or country food, expressing their First Nations or Inuk identity, having knowledge of and speaking their Indigenous language, and attending cultural activities and events. They speak about priorities that are similar to other older adults such as maintaining good emotional and mental health through social supports, safe, secure, and affordable housing in a safe neighbourhood, and good physical health and independence. Many Indigenous older adults want a sense of purpose achieved through participating in meaningful activities and teaching and sharing knowledge with others, including youth. Inuit older adults also indicated aging well meant having financial security, despite living in an urban environment that limits financial security.

Priorities of Indigenous Older Adults

- ✓ Housing specifically for Indigenous older adults;
- ✓ Available and accessible health and community services and programs that support Indigenous older adults;
- ✓ Safe, accessible, flexible, and affordable transportation; and
- ✓ Respect and recognition of the Indigenous population in Ottawa and the role of Elders.



Older Adults with Disabilities

Older adults with disabilities want to remain independent. They also often required their friends and families to help with accessing the support and care services needed. Older adults with disabilities asked for a greater level of support for themselves and their caregivers by providing more frequent home visits, more initiatives to support retrofitting, more day centres, and easier access to adapted-living facilities. Accessible transportation was also the main priority for this group.

Priorities as we heard them

- ✓ Accessibility and safety of public spaces;
- ✓ Reliable accessible transportation;
- ✓ Accessibility and safety of their own homes; and
- ✓ Greater level of caregiver support.



⁹ As presented in "Aging Well from the Perspectives of Indigenous Older Adults in Ottawa: A Report for the City of Ottawa's Older Adult Plan" by Lauren A. Brooks-Cleator, PhD Candidate, University of Ottawa. 2018.

Conclusion

Findings from these community consultations will help the City to reconfirm the priorities of older adults in Ottawa and identify potential actions for the Older Adult Plan 2019-2022. Specific concerns and priorities from equity-seeking groups, as presented in this report, will be considered in the development and implementation of the plan.

A sincere thank you to everyone who participated or supported the Older Adult Plan community consultations!

For more information on this report or the City of Ottawa Older Adult Plan, please contact olderadults@ottawa.ca or visit [Ottawa.ca/olderadults](https://ottawa.ca/olderadults).