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The Rural Development Network



Photo taken by Veronica Reist



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RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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Introduction

How do you interact with your community? If you've never or seldom thought about the sidewalk, transportation, a heavy door, or the closest washroom, chances are you navigate your community fairly well. You can choose your level of engagement and that level isn't challenged by the structures in place.

With that in mind what is an age-friendly community? The Government of Alberta says "age-friendly communities promote healthy and active aging. People in age-friendly communities are supported in maintaining their independence and have access to the community supports and services they need." There are eight domains of community life that can be more age-friendly:

- 1 Outdoor Spaces and Buildings**
- 2 Transportation**
- 3 Housing**
- 4 Respect and Social Inclusion**
- 5 Social Participation**
- 6 Communication and Information**
- 7 Civic Participation and Employment**
- 8 Community Support and Health Services**

"Design for the young and you exclude the old, design for the old and include everyone." - World Health Organization



In 2012, the Community Lifestyles Committee (CLC) hired Barbara Pedersen Facilitation Services Inc., who prepared a document titled: 'Social trends Research for Olds', Alberta which was accompanied by the document 'Town of Olds Demographic Information Component'. The demographic information indicated that Olds had "...a significantly higher number of older adults aged 60+ than in the province of Alberta". The author made the observation: "The significant number of older adults aged 60+ in Olds will be important to consider when assessing social trends and services." The chairperson at the time became aware of the Alberta Health Age Friendly initiative. The CLC decided to support the concept.

The Olds community is positioning itself as a leader in building an Olds Age-Friendly community. In October 2015, the Town Council passed the following resolution:

"Whereas older persons are an important part of our community, and whereas it is our community's interest that these citizens continue to live active lives and participate fully in the activities of the community; Therefore be it resolved that the Age-Friendly Initiative of the Olds Institute's Community Lifestyle Committee be endorsed by the Town of Olds to support participation and healthy active lifestyles for older adults and all citizens."

Since the passing of the resolution Olds Age Friendly Committee volunteers have accomplished the following:

- Developed a Terms of Reference (which was reviewed and revised in August of 2018).
- Created a survey which had 210 participants and compiled results from that initial survey.
- Reported back to the community through seven newspaper articles on the seven elements of the survey in 2017.
- Held focus groups with community agencies and other stakeholders.
- Held a “Recognizing Senior Abuse” workshop.
- Reported the results of the survey to Town Council on February 20th, 2018.
- Reported the results of the survey to the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development on February 20th, 2018.
- Redacted the comments from the community survey at the request of the Olds Institute.
- Organized and held a Canadian Mental Health first aid for Seniors workshop October 25th and 26th, 2018.
- Met with the Town of Olds to discuss the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) definition for affordable housing, resulting in the definition of “affordable housing” being put into the Municipal Development Plan.
- Met with housing developers during an open house for the Municipal Development Plan and provided input from information harvested from the survey.
- Organized, in conjunction with the Town, a wheelchair challenge held on September 12th, 2018.
- We surveyed 82 citizens regarding housing at the Community Showcase in September 2018.
- A member of the committee was invited by Alberta Health to be part of the Alberta Age-Friendly Community of Practice.
- Surveyed 103 Citizens on Transportation at the Community Showcase in September 2019.

- Hosted a focus group on Social Participation Respect, Social Inclusion, Communication and Information on November 25th, 2019. The Focus group was attended by community stakeholders, members of Town Council and the Mayor.
- A member of the committee is active on CORE Alberta which is a knowledge hub for community-based seniors serving (CBSS) organization staff, volunteers, and allied professionals engaged in efforts to support and promote healthy aging.

Members of the Committee have:

- Participated in webinars put on by the International Federation on Aging.
- Participated in a Town Hall Teleconference with Dr. Deena Hinshaw and the Honorable Josephine Pon, Alberta's Minister of Seniors and Housing.
- Written articles and submitted weekly newspaper articles for seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Developed and submitted a submission to the Affordable Housing Review Panel in August 2020.
- Discussed the Affordable Housing submission with M.L.A. Nathan Cooper in September 2020.
- Met with the Chair of the Affordable Housing Review Panel M.L.A. Mickey Cooper.
- Attended four Grey Matters Conferences from 2015 to 2018.
- Regularly attended Interagency meetings.

The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Olds Community on successful areas of age friendliness and offer insights into areas that can be improved. The responses analyzed for this report are from the survey completed in 2018 and multiple focus groups held in the community since then.

It is recognized that surveys cannot capture every opinion, however, the hope is the report provides a well-rounded view that the community of Olds can use to become a designated age-friendly community.

Next steps:

1. Community consultations on the recommendations and report.
2. The results from the community consultations will be used to develop an action plan with a cost benefit analysis of the recommendations.
3. The Volunteers for the Age Friendly Initiative will Present the Action Plan to the Board of the Olds Institute and the Town of Olds.
4. Age Friendly Committee will apply to Alberta Health Services to have Olds recognized as an Age Friendly Community.



Community Profile

We would like to acknowledge that this survey was conducted in The Town of Olds which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region of Alberta which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda Nations as well as the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

Olds is located in central Alberta and is 61 km south of Red Deer. It began as a settlement in 1890 during the time of the railway construction and became a village in 1896, then a town in 1905. It is situated in the region of Mountain View County with a population of 9,592 as of 2019; it is the major population center within the County. As of the 2016 Canadian Census, roughly 22% of the population is over the age of 65 with the median age of the population being 42. The population has slowly been rising with an annual change of 1.15% and is expected to grow further as more and more people chose to age in place in their home community. Based on this trend, it is expected that individuals over the age of 65 will increase significantly.

The median after-tax household income is \$69,945 according to the 2016 census and the median after-tax income among individual recipients is \$34,593, a number comparable to that of the province.

The most common occupations are in sales and service (23%), trades, transport, and equipment operator and related occupations (19%), and business, finance, and administration (12%). Olds is considered to be a major agribusiness hub and a well-established base for several oilfield services and light industrial manufacturers. Some of the main economic drivers include: Olds College, Community Learning Campus, Olds Regional Exhibition, and the Cornerstone Development.

The 2016 Canadian Census indicates that Olds consists primarily of 2-person household families, usually married couples. Over 90% of residents speak English as their first language with a smaller proportion of residents speaking other languages namely Tagalog, German, and French. The unemployment rate in Olds is approximately 9.10% as of 2016, a 4.10% increase from that of 2011 and slightly higher than that of the province.



Age-Friendly Survey

In September of 2015, volunteers for building an age-friendly community conducted a survey to examine the community trends within Olds as well as evaluate how age-friendly the community is. The results have been separated into their respective categories and are examined below. A total of 210 surveys were completed or partially filled out.

Respondents were given the option of replying “Yes”, “No”, “Not Sure”, or “Not Applicable” to each question. Where the number of respondents who picked “Yes” far exceeded the numbers of responses for all other categories, this was deemed to be a situation where Olds performed well. If the number of responses that said “Yes” were lower than the combined total of the other possible responses, this was deemed to be an area that needed further examination. Finally, if the number of responses that said “Yes” were lower than those that said “No”, this was deemed to be a place where the community could improve. For general purposes, the demographic breakup and profile of respondents are displayed below:

Personal Information	Count
Gender:	
Male	72
Female	99
Age:	
<65 years	34
65 - 74	51
75 - 84	52
85 and over	10
Relation to Seniors:	
Family member	58
Caregiver	19
Neighbour	14

Table 1

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

An age-friendly community features wide open green spaces that are conveniently located, well-maintained and safe. This includes protection from inclement weather, adequate seating, toilet facilities, smooth pavements, low curbs, safe pedestrian crossings, walkways free of cyclists, and obstructions. An age-friendly community has accessible public buildings, with ramps, adequate signage, non-slip flooring, wide doorways, rest areas, and accessible toilets.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Sidewalks, pathways, and trails are:				
Accessible	122	22	13	1
Well maintained	100	35	17	1
Cleared of snow and ice	75	52	26	1
Public restrooms and rest areas are:				
Accessible and can accommodate people with disabilities	60	52	19	
Have appropriate signage	70	51	25	3
Benches are accessible and easily located in rest areas	83	37	31	4
Public buildings:				
Have easy to open doors	73	57	20	4
Have accessible washrooms	82	43	49	1
Have appropriate ramps	72	36	42	5

Table 2

Summary of Outdoor Spaces and Buildings Responses

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Sidewalks, pathways, and trails are considered to be relatively accessible.
- A significant proportion of surveyed respondents do not have confidence in the town's ability to clear trails of snow or ice.
- Many respondents surveyed consider public washrooms and rest areas to be inaccessible with a common concern being that they are unable to locate the washrooms.
- Another recurring comment was that washrooms were not wheelchair accessible or have hard-to-open doors.
- Benches were considered to be too few and far apart. Since the survey the Town has been able to install significantly more benches.
- Public buildings were noted to be inaccessible with many of them lacking ramps, railings, and button-operated doors.
- Many buildings do not have or are not in close proximity to easily accessible washrooms.
- Many buildings do not have or are not in close proximity to easily accessible washrooms.

Recommendations are:

- It is important that any sort of natural hazard on the sidewalks and pavement be cleared as soon as possible. If there seems to be a limitation with community resources or time, it may be reasonable to close specific trails until work is completed.
- Public washrooms in outdoor spaces could be made accessible through the installation of automatic or button-entry opening doors. Public washrooms could have at least one wheelchair accessible stall using appropriate size, safety, and ease-of-use considerations. Hand bars could also be installed.
- Buildings could be made more accessible through the installation of automatic or button- controlled doors and ramps.

Transportation

An age-friendly community allows people of all ages to participate in activities that keep the community healthy and encourage economic stability. It is a place where older persons can easily stay connected with others and remain independent.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Roads				
Pedestrian crosswalks allow adequate time for people with a variety of disabilities to cross	60	69	27	3
Parking				
There are sufficient number of parking spots for seniors and persons with disabilities	79	60	22	2
Parking and drop-off areas are safe and sufficiently marked	63	46	32	6
Transportation Services				
Transportation is accessible and available for persons with a variety of disabilities, including mobility challenges	50	43	41	17
Affordable and accessible community transportation services are available to take citizens to appointments and events	34	38	52	16
Information				
Information about the range of transportation services is available in alternate formats to seniors and persons with disabilities	21	49	57	14

Table 3

Summary of Transportation Responses

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Crosswalks have accessibility issues as the crossing button is too high for wheelchair users, and the lights do not last long enough.
- Some areas do not have enough parking spaces for seniors and persons with disabilities.
- There is limited accessible transportation for out-of-town appointments.
- There is limited accessible transportation in the evenings, weekends and holidays.
- Private transportation for out-of-town appointments is expensive and prohibitive for many.
- The taxi is not wheelchair/walker accessible and expensive.
- There is limited information and marketing regarding the availability of transportation options.

Recommendations are:

- Pedestrian crosswalks could be made more accessible through the use of louder auditory signals, the use of more accessible push-buttons (tactile buttons, buttons at lower levels of height, etc.) and crossing signals that are more visible for those with visual impairments.
- There should be periodic analysis done to determine the need for expanded disability parking spaces.
- Information regarding transportation options could be made widespread across a number of different media including social media, newspapers, in-person through local community boards and groups.
- Volunteers will work to build an age-friendly Community by continuing to engage other communities on affordable accessible and sustainable transportation.

Housing

In an age-friendly community, the physical and social environment and the policies and services provided by the municipality help residents of all ages and abilities live well in all types of housing that is accessible and welcoming.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Housing Options				
A range of appropriate and affordable housing options are available	46	58	40	5
Aging in the right place				
Home supports (e.g., home maintenance and personal care) are available for seniors and those with disabilities	62	27	56	10
Housing modifications and available and affordable	19	41	64	12
New housing is built to accommodate individuals and families at different life stages and/or to allow people to adapt their homes to meet changing needs	32	38	56	7
Information on financial assistance programs for home modifications are readily available and easily accessible by those who need it	28	37	61	7

Table 4



Summary of Housing Responses

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Finding housing that is appropriate, affordable and accessible is a challenge.
- It is difficult to find qualified and certified maintenance people to do home modifications.
- Modifications to encourage aging in place become the responsibility of the homeowner.
- It is difficult to source funding to make necessary modification in order to age in place. It is too easy to fall between being eligible and non-eligible.
- There is a lack of awareness that housing modifications are available.
- It's challenging for many to find appropriate information in plain English.

Recommendations are:

- It is essential that housing be kept at affordable prices and with an adequate supply made available to older persons.
- It is essential to have a diverse housing landscape.
- There needs to be more information in plain English available on how and where to access information on housing modifications and home maintenance.
- There needs to be ongoing conversation, information and education regarding the benefits of intergenerational programming and housing.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Age-friendly communities foster positive images of aging and intergenerational understanding to challenge negative attitudes.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
All citizens are treated respectfully	84	52	43	2
Programs are available to children and youth that focus on how to treat other members of the community with respect and empathy.	32	19	104	2
Citizens of all ages and abilities have the opportunity to provide their input on community matters, and are encouraged to participate in community dialogues and conversations.	72	26	82	1
People who provide services to the public including health care, commerce, and public services are courteous, helpful and attuned to all citizens' needs.	96	25	39	2

Table 5



Summary of Respect and Social Inclusion

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Ageism and systemic beliefs need to be challenged.
- Lack of transportation to attend events in evenings, weekends or holidays creates exclusion.
- There is a need for older persons to be accommodated with dignity and respect to prevent potential elder abuse.
- Need a way to identify/communicate with people who are at risk or lonely.
- There is a lack of opportunity for seniors to provide input.
- Communication is not always timely, accessible, or senior friendly.
- Some older persons don't know how to address concerns and they feel they are treated as though they're not as smart because of this.
- Some seniors are afraid that services will be withdrawn if they express concerns.

Recommendations are:

- An awareness campaign on ageism is required as it could go over what ageism is and what it looks like to help community members better understand how they can respond to it. Moreover, highlighting stories from older community members would help would bring attention to their strengths.
- In terms of overall community-based respect, seniors may require additional accommodation when it comes to matters such as services, transportation, and other areas where assistance is needed.
- The promotion of intergenerational events and sessions to encourage collaboration between youth and seniors, such as the Cyber Seniors program.

Social Participation

An age-friendly community allows people of all ages to participate in activities that keep the community healthy and encourage economic stability. It is a place where older persons can easily stay connected with others and remain independent.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Events and Activities				
There is a range of events and activities (e.g., physical and recreational activities, spectator sporting events, church and school related events, cultural events, etc.)	108	22	29	1
Community activities are well-publicized to all community members through a variety of methods including those appropriate for persons with disabilities.	83	36	44	1
Preventing Isolation				
People who do not or cannot leave their homes receive visits from community agencies, organizations or volunteers.	27	35	100	3
There are ongoing outreach efforts to include people who are at risk of social isolation.	25	31	87	3
A culture of inclusion and neighbours helping neighbours is promoted in the community.	54	26	74	1

Table 6

Summary on Social Participation

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- There is an expectation that all people in all communities have access to and the ability to use computers and social media.
- There is no accessible transportation available in the evenings, weekends or holidays.
- Some seniors like their independence and may not enjoy being herded together for a group activity.
- There is a need for activities to be personalized by acknowledging and respecting the interests, needs, experiences and culture of older adults.
- Some people may appear isolated yet are not experiencing loneliness. Some people may be socially active and actually feel lonely.
- It is difficult to identify individuals who are at risk of social isolation.
- Marketing of activities and events is not always effective.

Recommendations are:

- It is crucial to engage seniors. It takes a community to keep seniors engaged.
- Within the community events and activities, there could be a focus on group participation and fostering shared social interaction.
- It is important to encourage and promote intergenerational programs such as Cyber Seniors.
- It is important to create community awareness on what social isolation is and its impact on health and wellness.

Communication and Information

An important part of ageing is ensuring that seniors have the necessary tools and information. For some seniors, this may mean growing accustomed to new technology and forms of media. It is important for the community to publicize events and news across a wide range of media sources to ensure everyone has access to these resources and information.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Widespread Communication				
There are regular and reliable mechanisms of and distribution of information about community events and programs with contact information to citizens who are socially isolated.	39	31	65	2
Accessible Information				
Written communication is clearly printed in alternate formats and is available to all.	50	33	50	1
Telephone answering services give clear and concise messaging to callers and provide an option to speak with a real person.	42	55	50	2
Access to computers and the internet is available at a local centre open to the public (e.g., library).	112	7	24	1

Table 7

Summary of Communication and Information

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Many older adults lack skills or computers. Most organizations disseminate information electronically or via social media.
- There is also mistrust and fear in many older persons to utilize technology.
- Frustration and feelings of hopelessness with the inability to communicate with a real person on the telephone is a strong sentiment among seniors.
- International call centers create language barriers.
- It is difficult to navigate services with centralized information centres.
- There are often no options available for sensory impaired individuals.

Recommendations are:

- It is important that information distributed avoid stereotypical ageist language.
- Active effort could be taken to engage seniors that would otherwise be socially isolated.
- Written communication needs to be supported across various forms of media, using a variety of fonts, colours and language.
- It is important to create advocacy to encourage simplification of centralized telephone centers. It may be necessary to have more live service agents.
- Continual repetition of information in various forms of media has proven to be effective.

Civic Participation and Employment

In an age-friendly community older people gain fulfillment from active involvement in voluntary activities or work, and a wide range of volunteer and employment opportunities that caters to seniors' diverse preferences, needs and skill sets.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Civic Participation				
Citizens of varying ages, abilities and backgrounds are well represented on councils, boards and committees.	59	19	84	4
Employment				
Hiring policies encourage diversity in age and ability as well as skills and experience	33	17	83	3
Workplaces offer flexible work scheduling options such as part-time or seasonal employment, job sharing and/or compressed work weeks.	35	15	80	3
Retirement programs and policies support the participation of all citizens, regardless of age, should they choose to remain in the labour force	40	14	83	3

Table 8



Summary of Civic Participation and Employment

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Some organizations do not understand or appreciate the benefits of having older adult volunteers or workers and underutilize the skill set of seniors.
- There seems to be a lack of recognition that as seniors live longer, they may need to supplement their retirement income or savings to meet expenses.
- Employers do not always understand or take into consideration the varying abilities of seniors which may lead to unrealistic expectations.

Recommendations are:

- Senior civic engagement within the community could be promoted through the use of local councils and committees.
- Seniors may provide a unique perspective to address the various issues of the day and could be involved in the decision-making process.
- All input needs to be valued in order to gather diverse opinions from citizens of various ages, genders, and backgrounds.
- Accessibility needs to be considered and accommodated to encourage inclusion.
- Opportunities should be made available that have accommodations such as flexible work hours, lighter workloads, part-time opportunities, and/or the chance for seniors to work on smaller projects using their already acquired skills.
- Legislation, policies, and safeguards could be put in place to ensure that workplaces are treating senior employees fairly and equitably.

Community Health and Support Services

Age-friendly communities promote healthy and active aging. People in age-friendly communities are supported in maintaining their independence and have access to the community supports and services they need.

Personal Experience	Count			
	Yes	No	Not Sure	NA
Home health and support services				
An adequate range of health and community support services are offered for promoting, maintaining and restoring health.	85	33	21	1
Affordable and available health and home support services (e.g., personal care, housekeeping, home maintenance) are in place and available in a timely manner.	56	38	35	1
Affordable meal options are available in the community (e.g., Meals on Wheels, church associations, etc.)	80	17	55	1
Facilities				
Health and social services are conveniently located and accessible by all means of transport.	50	36	39	0

Table 9



Summary of Community Health and Support Services

Significant survey results and qualitative comments

- Sufficient home care is not readily available to meet seniors' needs.
- There is no compromise within home care to accommodate the various needs and desires of the senior population.
- Health and Community service facilities are not readily accessible. The parking lot is too far away.
- There are systemic challenges to health care that are unique to the Olds community.

Recommendations are:

- There is a need for expansion to accommodate the growth in senior health services because of growing older demographics.
- There is a need to decentralize some health services. For example, seniors have to drive from Olds to Red Deer for health aids. Decentralization of services could also decrease the transportation needs for out-of-town medical appointments.
- The systemic challenges to health care that are unique to the Olds community must be addressed.
- Health and Community Service facilities need to be accessible.



Going Forward

This report outlines many recommendations, based on the information provided and comments from the survey.

With all this information, what are the next steps? In a perfect world with unlimited funding and people power, each recommendation could be put into motion.

As a more realistic next step, the volunteers working on the Age-Friendly Initiative will release and present the report to the Province of Alberta, Alberta Health, Alberta Seniors and Housing, the Town of Olds, Mountain View County, the Olds Institute, and community stakeholders.

In addition, there will be a community consultation process to review the report and prioritize the recommendations.

Acknowledgments

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