

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Strathcona County's Social Sustainability Framework (adopted in 2007) outlined the need to develop a comprehensive community older adults plan to identify high priority needs and develop strategies for the delivery of appropriate programs or services to ameliorate these needs.

In 2007, Strathcona County had 7135 residents aged 65 and older, comprising 13 per cent of the total population. By 2031, this figure is projected to increase to 25 per cent of the total population. This is a result of the baby boomer generation (those born between 1946 - 1964), who begin turning 65 in 2011. For the first time in our history there will be more older people than children and youth. In the same way we plan for the needs of children and families, we must plan for the needs of older adults, recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older people, anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences, while respecting decisions and lifestyle choices. In addition, we must protect those who are most vulnerable and promote their inclusion in, and contribution to, all areas of community life.

Older adults represent a unique population with specific strengths and challenges. While today's older adults are generally healthier, better educated and living longer than at any time in our history, they need a range of flexible options for housing, transportation, leisure activities and health care. Our policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment must be designed to reflect support and the ability of residents to age actively, to live in security, good health and continue to participate fully in society. The development of a comprehensive plan for older adults, reflecting the ongoing involvement and input of seniors, will facilitate the provision of these opportunities. The strategies in the plan focus primarily on older adults 55+ years, and reflect current and anticipated needs over the next 15 years.

Worldwide, the proportion of people age 60 and older is growing faster than any other age group and by 2025 will reach 1.2 billion.

Active Aging,
a Policy Framework

SENIORS ISSUES - GLOBAL ISSUES

1999 was International Year of the Older Person, and in 2002 the World Health Organization held its second UN World Assembly on Aging. These two events were held in response to increasing evidence of global aging and a recognition that not only will this put increasing social and economic demands on countries, but that older people are an incredible resource with the capacity to continue to make important contributions to society.

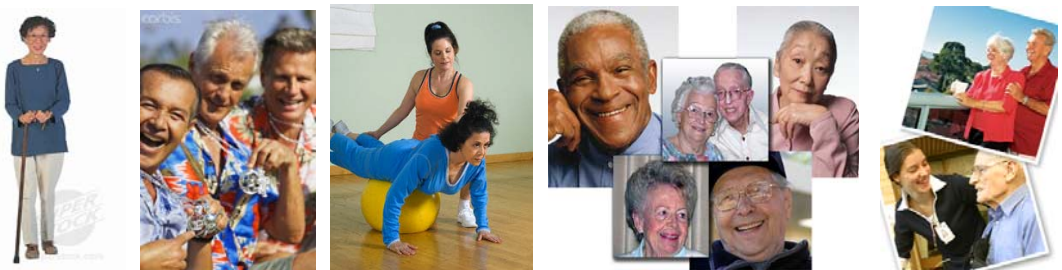


According to World Health Organization figures, there will be 1.2 billion people over the age of 60 worldwide in 2025. This will grow to 2 billion by 2050. In Canada, it is projected that 27.9 per cent of our population will be 60 by 2025.



For aging to be a positive experience it must be accompanied by continuous opportunities for physical, mental and social well-being. It must also allow for the maintenance of autonomy and independence which contribute to quality of life. The World Health Organization has adopted the term “active aging’ to describe the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

Active aging is not just being physically active or participating in the labour force, but also includes continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs. The goal of active aging is to extend healthy life expectancy and quality of life for all people as they age, including those whose health is failing, are disabled and those in need of care. A goal of active aging is to maintain autonomy, the ability to make personal decisions about living on a day to day basis, and independence, the ability to perform functions related to daily living.



CANADIAN SENIORS – A DIVERSE POPULATION

In Canada, about a third of older adults live in rural areas with the rest living in urban centers. Ninety-three per cent live in private households. About 20 per cent of adults aged 65+ have a post secondary education, while 60 per cent have not completed high school. Nationally, 75 per cent of older adults aged 65 to 74 rate their health from good to excellent, as do 66 per cent of those aged 75+, with 50 per cent reporting physical activity of 15 minutes or more at least 12 times a month. Almost 66 per cent of Canadians aged 80+ reported needing no help with grocery shopping, meal preparation, housework and personal care. Older adults have more leisure time and disposable income than members of other age groups.

While these are some general Canadian statistics, it is important to note that seniors of all ages have varying life experiences and personal characteristics resulting in a broad range of values, beliefs and opinions. The world view of someone who was born during the Depression years is bound to be very different than that of the baby boomer, as well as the impact of urban or rural roots, ethnic origin, educational level and socio-economic status.

In addition, there are changes that accompany aging including sensory changes such as visual and hearing acuity, and physical changes which may include flexibility, strength, and eye-hand co-ordination. Agility and mobility can be affected by disease such as arthritis. Changes in cognitive functioning are a normal part of aging. Social and emotional changes may result from the

“Old age is like a minefield; if you see footprints leading to the other side, step in them.”

George Vaillant,
MD



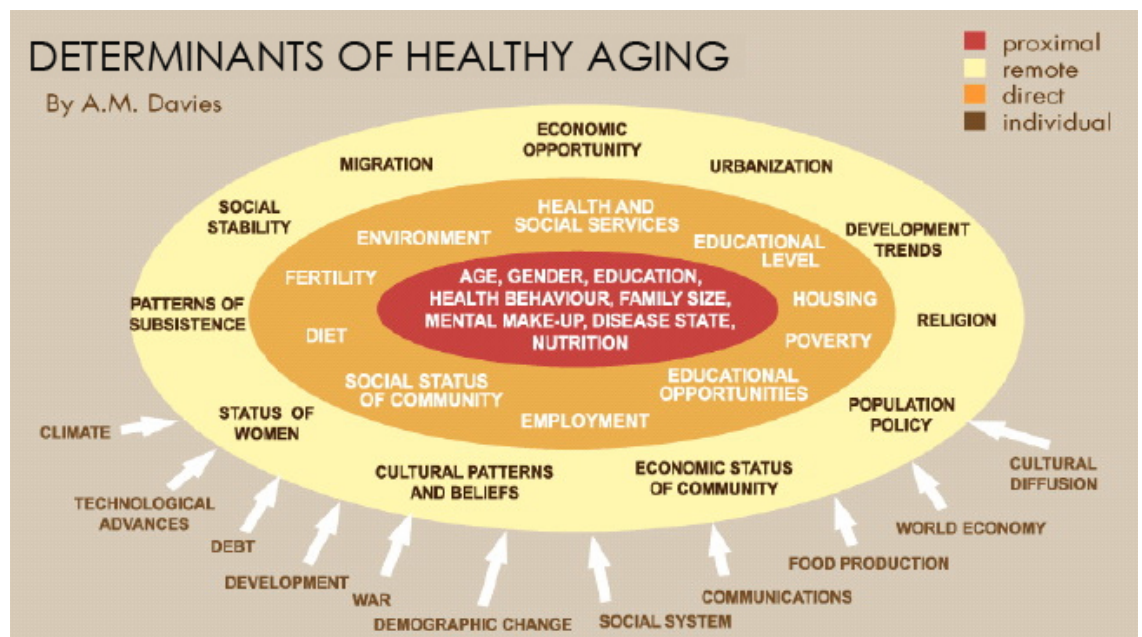
adjustment of changes associated with retirement or other major life changes. The potential for limitation on driving may reduce access to recreational and social activities.

All of these factors contribute to the diversity of the senior population. It is important to note that the population of persons aged 55+, which was used as the basis for this plan, is a very heterogeneous population in terms of health, abilities, attitudes, needs, wants and desires. While statistical information was gathered as part of the survey based around specific age groups, life circumstances and situations of older adults varies significantly across and within these age groups.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT AGING

The well-being of older adults is determined by a broad range of interconnected factors known as the determinants of aging. Determinants are factors that influence the aspects of aging. These include cross cutting determinants such as culture and gender, social determinants such as social supports, education and learning opportunities, physical environment determinants such as affordable housing, accessible and affordable transportation, economic determinants such as income and social protection, behavioural determinants such as physical activity, healthy nutrition and tobacco and alcohol use, and health and social services determinants such as health, long term care, mental health and outreach services. Active aging is also impacted by the availability and quality of health and social services, as well as a number of personal determinants including genetics and psychological factors. These determinants of healthy aging interact throughout our lives and are the accumulation of a lifetime of effects. They don't fall under the responsibility of any single sector so collaboration across many sectors is vital to successfully address them.

The realities of aging are very different today from pre World War II. The direction of public policy and social policy in particular must be changed to reflect these changes and enable healthy active seniors to continue to develop and achieve both personal and social goals.



A STRENGTH BASED APPROACH



*They say
"Beauty is
in the eye of
the beholder."
Well,
BEHOLD!*



Our society sees old age as a time of problems, as a time of letting go - of jobs, friends, strenuous recreation, and life itself. Age does bring loss - the death of friends and loved ones, the ambivalent experience of retirement, risk of financial dependence and often the necessity of moving from familiar homes or neighborhoods.

Less recognized is the potential of elders. Our whole society benefits when older adults, with their wisdom and lifetime of experience, are given opportunities to further develop and transmit their skills and perspectives through initiatives based on their strengths. A frequently unacknowledged contribution is that of the expertise of life transmitted to other generations. We rarely emphasize the wealth of knowledge, experience and wisdom that is available from older adults which can serve as role models for future generations.

The Special Senate Committee on Aging in "Embracing the Challenge of Aging" in March 2007 stated "The Committee views population aging as a success story and seniors as a rich and vibrant part of our country. As we increasingly draw on seniors to meet labour force requirements strained by decades of low fertility, our society has new motivation to value seniors as contributing members of society, and not as burdens to be problematized." They went on to recognize that while the final years of life present many challenges to individuals, families and the health and social systems, this is the case whether the final years occur in youth, middle or the senior years. New approaches are emerging to address the strengths of older people from well to frail, and across abilities in a number of key areas. These include lifelong learning, civic engagement, creative aging as well as programs in long-term care that focus on resident strengths.

These represent important steps in changing a culture that devalues people once their peak earning years are past. It is essential to advocate for community education and public policies that challenge these assumptions. The reality of being an older adult has changed - people are living longer and in better physical, mental and economic health. Seeing chronological age as an indicator of dependency no longer reflects the reality of aging today.

Building and nurturing strengths provides older adults with a buffer against problems that diminish their health and well-being. Services that promote



and support strengths enable older adults to age well, reducing the need for costly services in the future. Individual effort is not enough to ensure that one ages well. It takes a vibrant, elder-friendly community that addresses basic needs, promotes social and civic engagement, optimizes physical and mental health and well-being, maximizes independence and supports caregivers. A vibrant community builds upon the strengths of individuals, families, and the community itself. Likewise, a vibrant community builds strengths in its residents and increases the likelihood that one will age well.



*How old
would you be
if you didn't
know how old
you are?*

Satchel Paige



LEADING REPORTS

1) The National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide 1998

In recognition of the upcoming Year of the Older Person (in 1999) ministers responsible for older adults at all levels of government in Canada met and developed Principles of the National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide (NFA). Its vision was similar to that of the World Health Organization (WHO) and stated that “Canada, a society for all ages, promotes the well-being and contributions of older people in all aspects of life.”

The report identifies issues facing Canadian seniors as well as those interconnected factors that impact on well-being. These factors, similar to the WHO determinants include gender, income and social status, social support networks, personal health practices, coping skills, physical and social environments and health services. These factors are cross-sectoral and emphasize the importance of cross-sectoral planning in program development and decision making.

Key Principles

The NFA process included consultation with seniors and resulted in five key principles (see Appendix VIII for definitions) that reflect the core values of seniors:

1. Dignity
2. Independence
3. Participation
4. Fairness
5. Security

A series of general policy questions and specific questions for each principle were developed to facilitate the development of policies and programs that meet the needs of seniors in each of the core respects. They facilitate decision-making in a similar way to the Service Delivery Decision Model developed by Strathcona County as part of the Social Sustainability Framework. These specific considerations will be incorporated into our process when moving into program development for older adult programs in Strathcona County.

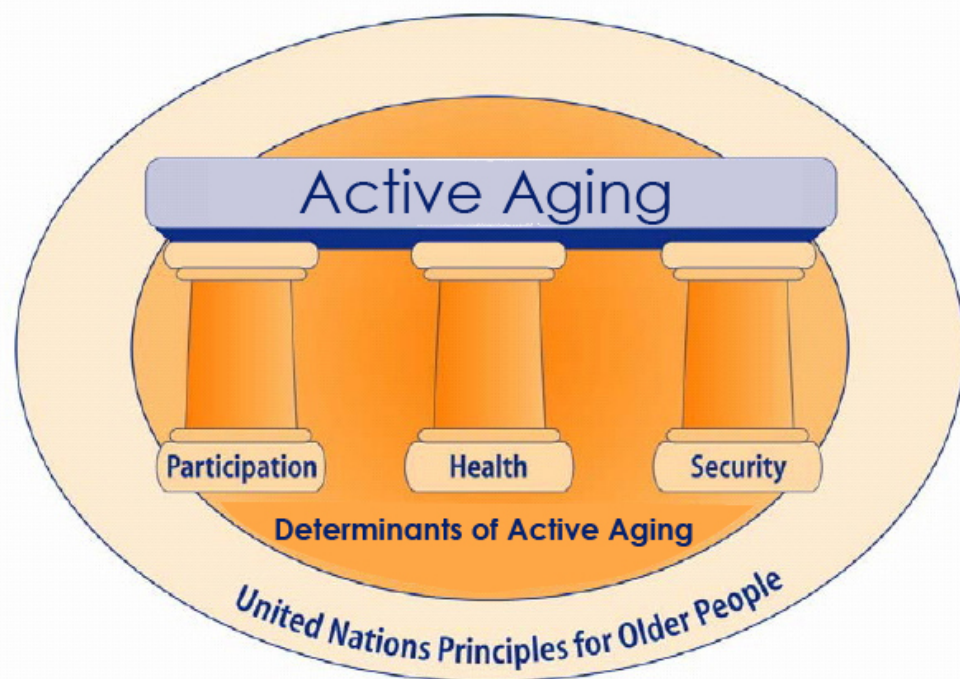
*“Whether we live
to a vigorous old
age lies not so
much in our stars
or our genes
as in ourselves.”*

George Vaillant



2) Active Aging: A Policy Framework - World Health Organization (2002)

The Policy Framework outlines three pillars for action: participation, health, and security guided by the UN Principles for Older People - independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity. Policy and program decisions should be based on an understanding of how the determinants of active aging influence the way individuals and populations age. The framework puts forward the concept of active aging described earlier. It does not just refer to the ability to be physically active or to be part of the workforce, but to continually participate in social, economic, cultural and civic affairs. It allows people to realize their potential for well-being throughout life and participate in society according to their needs, desires and capacities.



This framework recognizes the importance of maintaining both autonomy and independence as one grows older and emphasizes that aging takes place within the context of friends, family, neighbours and work associates. It stresses the importance of interdependence and intergenerational solidarity as important tenets of active aging - that is, two way giving and receiving between individuals as well as generations.



Active aging depends on determinants that surround individuals and affect well-being, onset of disease and how people cope with illness and disability. They are interconnected. For example, poor persons (economic determinant) are more likely to have inadequate housing (physical determinant) and not eat nutritious foods (behavioural determinant).



3) The Findings Report of the Demographic Planning Commission - 2008

The Alberta Government released The Findings Report of the Demographic Planning Commission in December 2008. This report was based on consultations with Albertans to help guide the development of an Aging Policy Framework and included 10,000 completed internet surveys and involved 100 stakeholders. The framework will ultimately help the province plan programs and services to meet the needs of the aging population.

This report took into account previous studies including the 1997 Broda Report on Healthy Aging, the 2000 Alberta for All Ages: Directions for the Future and the 2004 Public Survey about Health and the Health System in Alberta.

Today's Seniors Ranking	Future Seniors Ranking	Issue
1	1	Being able to afford the cost of living
2	3	Being able to stay in the home
3	5	Affordability of pharmaceuticals and health care aids
4	4	Affordable cost of home ownership
5	2	Finding a family doctor or getting access to health care

The report identified ten policy themes which can guide the Alberta governments' development of their Aging Population Policy Framework. These include:

1. Enabling seniors to remain in their own homes
Encompasses the concept of 'aging in the right place' and recognizes the value of maximizing the amount of time seniors are able to stay in their homes.
2. Providing services to seniors in the community
This theme includes the growing demand for home care, home support and personal care services and home adaptation supports. It recognizes the role of the not-for-profit sector in the delivery of these types of services and the need to ensure their continued strength.
3. Better connecting seniors with services
In addition to better connections, this area recognizes the need for improved coordination of programs, consistent eligibility criteria and locating services in a community where they can be brought to the individual. Collaborative planning and implementation is emphasized across levels of government.





4. Building the workforce

This theme looks at the ongoing labour needs in fields of seniors care and recognizes the need to help seniors remain in the workforce when desired.



5. Undertaking appropriate transportation and capital planning

This area points out the role of municipal governments in planning that affects seniors and recommends a number of strategies that will consider the accessibility, mobility and transportation needs of seniors and encouraging a greater range of housing options.



6. Meeting the health needs of seniors

There is acknowledgement of the need for a strong and sustainable health care system as well as a range of services to meet health care needs of future seniors. It also emphasizes the importance of strengthening prevention efforts today in reducing future demand on the health care system.



7. Determining how to provide government support

This theme examines not only the role of government in financing senior years, but the need to establish and communicate the roles and expectation of individuals, families and the private sector. Further research is indicated as necessary.



8. Supporting the role of the family, friends and neighbours

The report acknowledges the key roles of and need for support for care-givers including such things as transportation, home maintenance, meal preparation and house cleaning as well as financial and emotional support.



9. Fostering respect and dignity toward seniors

Once again the role of municipal government in creating senior friendly communities is emphasized while the province looks at education systems to promote involvement of seniors with the broader community. It acknowledges the importance of recreation in keeping seniors involved and suggests the health system may need to become more sensitive to seniors needs.



10. Raising awareness among future seniors

Policy makers need to consider how to encourage and support individuals and their families in preparing for their senior years from financial planning, planning for where they will live, what they will do with their time and who will care for them.



STRATHCONA COUNTY'S VISION

Strathcona County is a safe, caring and autonomous community that treasures its unique blend of urban and rural lifestyles while balancing the natural environment with economic prosperity. Through strong, effective leadership, the County is a vibrant community of choice.

The Capstone Policy from a Community Development Perspective focusing on Social Sustainability has the following three goals:

- Strathcona County is a safe community for residents and visitors
- Strathcona County is a caring community
- Strathcona County offers a broad range of opportunities for healthy lifestyles

The Social Sustainability Framework, developed in 2007 as part of the three pillars of community sustainability, identifies four guiding principles for the development of programs and services (see Appendix VII for definitions):

1. Social inclusion
2. Community connectedness
3. Social responsibility
4. Health and well-being

The Older Adults Plan for Strathcona County is consistent with the County's vision and the guiding principles of social sustainability. It is based on significant and ongoing input of older adults. It will provide a blueprint for action in Strathcona County that facilitates the development of policies and programs which enables residents to live in our community according to their capacities and preferences as they grow older. The plan considers the unique challenges facing older adults and also their strengths and assets.



