



A Community
For All Ages

Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan

APRIL 2015

Acknowledgments

Niagara Age-Friendly Community (AFC) Network is a group of over 100 local citizens, mostly volunteers, who have joined together to learn about, take action on, and champion Age-Friendly Community principles, including those identified by the World Health Organization. Supported by several community partners, the Network's goal is to make Niagara "a community for all ages".

The AFC Network Leadership Council (members' names are in the full Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan project report) has overseen two projects:

2009: The first project to raise awareness of age-friendly principles across all 12 of Niagara's municipalities and promote local citizen action.

2014: The second project to produce this Aging Strategy and Action Plan.

The Network wishes to thank:

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) for funding both projects

Major partners associated with the OTF funded projects: Welland Seniors Foundation, City of Welland Seniors Citizens Advisory Council, Niagara Region, Niagara Connects, Brock University and Niagara College for their leadership and in-kind support

Members of the Aging Strategy Project Steering Committee, Planning Teams and Key Informants group (whose names are listed in the full project report) and the hundreds of other older adults and stakeholders who participated in the focus groups, community forums and the provider survey for providing their valued input that was incorporated into the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan report, and into the implementation template and tool kit

David Sheridan and Deb Ballak from SHERCON ASSOCIATES INC. for expertly facilitating the community engagement process and compiling all the report documents

Spritz Creative for design of this document.

Companion documents including the full Project Report, Implementation Template and Tool Kit are available at www.niagaraconnects.ca

For additional information, please contact Cathy Fusco or Dominic Ventresca, Co-chairs Niagara Age-Friendly Community Network at agefriendly@niagararegion.ca or agefriendlyniagara@gmail.com or feel free to visit: www.niagararegion.ca/living/seniors/agefriendly/default.aspx

Foreward:

Seniors in Niagara – An Opportunity and a Challenge

Niagara is facing a significant opportunity and a significant challenge. Much depends on whether we choose to take advantage of the opportunity or shrink from the challenge.

Niagara's population is aging. This is true of Canada and the rest of the industrialized world as well, but it is particularly the case in Niagara. In 2014 people aged 65 and over constituted 20.5% of the population of Niagara, and 15.7% of the Canadian population, and both of these figures will be increasing as the baby boom ages.

The opportunity is that seniors have a great deal to contribute to society in terms of expertise and life experience. They can and do volunteer their time to social causes or provide valuable support to their extended families as advisors and caregivers. Some seniors are relatively affluent with the financial wherewithal to contribute to the economy as consumers and donors to worthy causes.

The challenge is that seniors will be drawing on more public resources in areas like medical care and social services.

Niagara is at a crossroads of deciding whether to treat the increasing senior population as a challenge or an opportunity. The goal of the Niagara Age-Friendly Network is to help Niagara turn this challenge into an opportunity.



There are many seniors' organizations in Niagara ranging from local branches of large national organizations such as CARP (Canadian Association of Retired Persons) to small local groups and advisory bodies to local governments.

The Niagara Age-Friendly Network was formed to develop an overview of what seniors in Niagara are already doing and what they could do if provided the proper impetus and support. The Network received a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 2014 to engage in a major consultative exercise and prepare a report about the needs and opportunities for seniors in Niagara. The Network enlisted Shercon Associates, who have great experience in working with seniors group

to assist us in this endeavor. This report is a result of that grant, the extensive consultation process, and the helpful input of Shercon.

The earlier Niagara Age-Friendly Community Initiative solicited input from the community and developed the following vision statement:

A caring community that optimizes opportunities for overall well being to enhance quality of life as people age.

The Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan will advance this vision by pursuing five broad transformational goals related to older adults in Niagara, as developed by participants across the Niagara community.

The five goals are the following:

1. Elevate the profile, level of leadership and engagement of seniors in the community
2. Facilitate an active and positive lifestyle for all seniors
3. Optimize the health and wellness of seniors
4. Improve access and utilization of services and supports
5. Improve and maintain a supportive infrastructure.

Seniors are already doing a great deal to further their own interests. They have organized themselves in a large number of civil society organizations to provide services and to make

sure that their concerns are heard in the broader community. The list above is a statement of what needs to be done in order to further these interests. Seniors have shown that they are willing and able to go some distance in looking after their own interests and providing for their own needs. However, some of the items listed above require the assistance of the broader society. The purpose of the documents that were prepared as a result of the Niagara Age-Friendly Network's initiative is to identify how seniors' organizations can work with governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to further the interests of seniors and in doing so improve the overall condition of society.

The beginning point is the short Overview document. It provides a quick review of the consultation exercise, the needs identified, and the vision and goals that need to be handled to improve the condition of seniors.

The Project Report is a lengthier document that describes in much more detail the process that the consultant followed to obtain input, and the information derived from the consultation process. This also contains a list of previous material about seniors in Niagara.

The Implementation Template lists each of the goals and strategies identified in the Project Report and provides advice about specific deliverables, who should be involved in their delivery, and timing.



The Toolkit contains an extensive list of resources that are available in a variety of areas that are of interest to seniors and to groups that deal with seniors. Some examples of the material relate to how businesses can organize themselves to serve seniors, financial literacy, fitness, and elder abuse.

The Niagara Age-Friendly Network is proud of the work that it has done. We feel that the information we have gathered and the preparatory work we have done will assist Niagara in turning the challenge of the increasing number of seniors into an opportunity.

David Siegel

Professor, Political Science,
Brock University

Member of Aging Strategy and Action Plan Project
Steering Committee

“ Seniors engagement
with local municipalities:

We need to get
"eye of seniors on City Council"
and work with groups like
"Youth Eyes on City Hall".
We need to be the central
driving force of the "eyes".”

Community Participant



Background

Niagara has the fastest growing seniors population in the province and accordingly has the most compelling reasons to address the needs of this important group. Much good work has already been done to address the needs of older adults in Niagara through the efforts of the Niagara Age Friendly Community Initiative, Niagara Region, Niagara Connects, and numerous other dedicated groups, organizations and individuals across Niagara.

In early 2014 the Niagara Age-Friendly Community Network received a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to build on these initiatives by developing an Aging Strategy and Action Plan for Niagara. The project engaged the community of older adults, service providers and stakeholders from the business, non-profit and government sectors across Niagara to produce:

- A comprehensive aging strategy and action plan
- Tool kits to enable the implementation of the plan
- A sustainability model to ensure ongoing implementation across Niagara

“Encourage the integration of all generations with a common understanding of the benefits for all, and generate an integrated way of life so seniors do not age alone.”
Community Participant



Approach

Work commenced in April 2014 and was completed in March 2015. Steps in carrying out the project were the following:

- Previous work related to seniors in Niagara as well as other relevant information was reviewed and used to finalize the project methodology
- A Steering Committee and three separate Planning Teams were established to focus on different segments of the aging population based on ability levels: well/fit seniors; seniors requiring some assistance; and seniors requiring full-time support
- Fifteen focus groups were held across Niagara in June and August of 2014 successfully engaging over 200 participants, most of them seniors
- A needs assessment survey of more than 50 providers of services to seniors was carried out in July 2014
- Phone interviews were conducted with about 20 “key informants” including political officials, specialists in the field, service providers and other community leaders
- A lively full-day community stakeholder forum was held in Welland on September 11, 2014 and was well attended by over 100 participants, a dynamic mix of seniors, service providers and community officials
- A discussion paper describing the emerging plan was widely distributed and drew responses from another 52 members of the community
- A full-day implementation planning workshop was held on January 22, 2015, again well attended by over 40 seniors and service providers

“ Partner seniors with young adults so that goals can be achieved using the strengths offered by both age groups.

By working in groups of seniors alone we may indirectly fan the “ageism” flame by identifying this population as a “separate” group.

Community Participant ”



Next Steps

The Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan, released to the community in the spring of 2015 will become a “living document” and serve as a template for planning by service agencies, different levels of government, businesses and the community at large. A separate detailed implementation template and tool kit has also been produced and the project's Steering Committee is engaged in creating a sustainability model.

“Change the image of seniors from that of being ill, decrepit, consumers of health care dollars, confused and waiting to die, to that of vital contributors to the economy, and possessing knowledge, skills, and experiences that are untapped resources.”

Community Participant

Seniors' Needs

When discussing seniors' needs there was great consistency and convergence of views across the various groups engaged in the project. The participants from the local communities identified the following priority needs:

Transportation

- Expanded transportation between communities
- More public transit
- More special transit
- Sidewalk and lane improvements
- Scooter accessibility
- Volunteer, shuttle, and pooled driving options
- Improved parking in some municipalities
- Cost relief to defray transportation expenses

Housing

- Affordable retirement homes
- Appropriate housing – in terms of type, affordability (e.g. rent geared to income), size and location
- Home renovation and maintenance supports
- Facilities with a continuum of supports to enable “aging in place”
- More long-term care facilities close to home
- Supportive housing options
- Supports for transitioning to different types of housing

Social, Recreational, Cultural and Educational

- More and expanded recreation centres
- Youth engagement and intergenerational programs
- Home visiting/outreach to engage more seniors
- Educational opportunities for seniors
- Increased information and awareness re: services available



Health Care

- More home care and in-home support
- Transportation to specialized services
- Cost relief for dental, vision and hearing
- Information and ease of navigation through the health care system
- Dementia care
- Mental health supports
- Advocacy support for seniors accessing services

Community

- Leadership and profile raising on seniors' issues
- More retail in some areas
- Increased youth engagement
- Safety and security
- Financial support and cost reduction

The Vision

A vision statement describes the “preferred future” of a community and its stakeholders. The earlier Niagara Age Friendly Community Initiative solicited input from the community and developed the following vision statement:

A caring community that optimizes opportunities for overall well being to enhance quality of life as people age

The Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan will advance this vision by pursuing five broad transformational goals related to older adults in Niagara, as developed by participants across the Niagara community. The five goals are the following:



1 Elevate the profile, level of leadership and engagement of seniors in the community. Achieved by:

- Providing system leadership and advocacy on seniors issues
- Increasing engagement of seniors in all aspects of community life
- Fostering positive attitudes towards older adults and aging

2 Facilitate an active and positive lifestyle for all seniors. Achieved by:

- Maintaining and growing recreational opportunities
- Expanding educational opportunities
- Leveraging technology as a lifestyle enabler
- Expanding health promotion

3 Optimize the health and wellness of seniors. Achieved by:

- Increasing mental health services and supports
- Increasing in-home supports to enable aging in place
- Improving safety and security
- Optimizing health care
- Increasing the availability of palliative care

4 Improve access and utilization of services and supports. Achieved by:

- Reaching out to isolated areas
- Reaching out to diverse groups
- Providing resource relief for seniors in need
- Increasing provider coordination and collaboration

5 Improve and maintain a supportive infrastructure. Achieved by:

- Increasing transportation options within and between municipalities
- Providing affordable, accessible and appropriate housing with necessary supports
- Expanding long-term care accommodation options
- Ensuring all neighbourhoods meet World Health Organization criteria for active transportation infrastructure

“Seniors overwhelmingly want to live in their home communities as long as possible, or “age in place”.”

Community Participant

Moving Forward

The five goals in the Niagara Aging Strategy identified by the community are supported by 20 objectives that will be achieved through the execution of 70 suggested strategies. An implementation template, supported by a tool kit, has been developed that identifies over 100 actions to execute the strategies and this number is expected to double as the plan is built out further.

It is important to recognize the following unique features of the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan:

- The needs and solutions in the plan are based on extensive bottom-up input from hundreds of members of the community and as such have significant legitimacy
- This is not a conventional plan but rather a template that enables use by government, non-profit organizations and businesses in their own strategic and operational planning processes to improve their service to older adults
- The plan should ultimately be cost-neutral and even cost reducing due to the coordination efficiencies it will achieve

Experience from other jurisdictions has shown that community aging plans require some form of a permanent organizational structure in order to ensure successful ongoing implementation, monitoring, revision and evaluation of goals and objectives. Successful models have been examined by the Steering Committee and have the following characteristics: Incorporated not-for-profit organizations with formal constitutions; some form of dedicated staff support; a sponsoring host agency; multiple sources of financial and in-kind support from private and public sources; and appropriate infrastructure.



“Knowing who to call for help can be very frustrating and complicated – put on hold forever, given the run around or not having computer access or knowledge. Just a nice smile, a listening ear and guidance in the right direction could be very helpful for many people, whether senior or not. Knowledge is very empowering.”
Community Participant

Functions of such a group or organization include raising the profile of seniors in the community, identifying service gaps and shortfalls, advocating with funders and government, communicating initiatives, brokering partnering opportunities, tracking key deliverables against outcome measures, and continually updating the action plans to keep it a “living” document.

The project's Steering Committee is remaining in place beyond the project term to oversee the initial roll out of the plan and development of the sustainability model. Champions of each goal are being designated and community partners will be recruited. Sources of start-up funds for the sustainability model are being identified and accessed. The model will then be implemented and secured by ongoing support from municipalities, community foundations, local businesses, corporations, granting agencies and other sources.

Companion Documents are available on Niagara Connects website www.niagaraconnects.ca:

- Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Project Report
- Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Template
- Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Tool Kit

“Families need to speak up at the hospital about what supports they need when sent home.”

Community Participant





Facilitated by the Niagara Age-Friendly Community Network
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