



## INTRODUCTION

The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries (SPCCND) held its 5<sup>th</sup> annual Poverty Symposium on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at Cambridge City Hall. This event provided the opportunity to explore timely and pressing issues related to the health and well-being of our community. This year, the focus of the Symposium was “Creating Age Friendly Communities”. The need to explore this issue came out of consultations with community members and agencies that identified poverty and access to services among older adults as an area of concern. Approximately 65 people from social services agencies, governments, the private sector, and interested community members, as well as 11 presenters gathered to learn, discuss and to formulate collective community responses. One of the outcomes of the Symposium was the recognition of the need for continued collaboration in order to build a more age friendly community.

The “age friendly community” movement has its origins in 2005 with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) active ageing framework. The WHO has defined eight essential elements for an Age-Friendly City. These are:

1. *Outdoor spaces and buildings* – they are pleasant, clean, secure and publicly accessible
2. *Transportation* – is accessible and affordable
3. *Housing* – is affordable, appropriately located, well built, well designed and secure
4. *Social participation* – opportunities to participate in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with people of all ages and cultures
5. *Respect and social inclusion* – older people are treated with respect and included in civic life
6. *Civic participation and employment* – there are opportunities for employment and volunteerism that fit older persons’ interests and abilities
7. *Communication and information* – age friendly communication and information is easily accessible through a variety of mediums and venues

8. *Community and health services* – there is a continuum of easily accessible programs and services to meet older persons’ needs (WHO, 2007).

The need to actively build more age-friendly communities is an increasingly prevalent issue. Canada and other industrialized countries are experiencing an aging population. As the “baby boomers” (born between 1946 and 1965) age, the number of seniors (defined as those 65+) in Canada is projected to increase from 4.2 million to 9.8 million between 2005 and 2036. As this demographic shift occurs, there will be significant implications for the entire population (Statscan, 2006).

Studies show that poverty among seniors is most common when the individual lives alone, for women over 80, visible minorities and immigrants. Economic vulnerability is not only about insufficiency of income, but also loss of dignity and social inclusion. Until recently, the percentage of seniors in Canada with low incomes has been declining— it went from 21% in 1980 to 7% in 2003. But the National Council of Welfare points out that this catch-up period is over. Since the mid-90’s seniors’ income has reached a ceiling, and the gap between seniors revenues and those of other Canadians is now increasing (National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005).

Though progress has been made on decreasing elderly poverty with the institution of the Old Age Security program (OAS), the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), close to 7% of Canadian seniors still live under the Low-income cut off rate (LICO), based on the cost of food, clothing and shelter for a given region and family size, updated annually. People who spend more than 20% of their income on these basics than the average family are considered as living under the LICO.

The OAS program is funded through general tax revenues and provides basic income for Canada's seniors. Benefits available through the program include the basic OAS pension, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, the Allowance, and the Allowance for the Survivor. The OAS pension is available to all Canadians aged 65 and over who meet the residence requirements, but must have lived in Canada for at least 10 years. Low-income seniors may be eligible for other benefits at age 60. The GIS is a monthly benefit provided to low-income seniors who receive the OAS pension and who have little or no other income.

However, under-subscription to these programs is a problem. Lack of knowledge about eligibility and how to access these income supports inhibits many who are eligible from obtaining these sources of income. Close to 300,000 people entitled to the Guaranteed Income Supplement do not receive benefits, and many GIS beneficiaries are drastically cut off each year because of late renewal (National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005).

The situation in the Cambridge and North Dumfries community largely mirrors national and provincial trends. Firstly, the proportion of seniors as a percentage of the total population is increasing. In 1996, the senior population in Cambridge was 10,880, or 10.7% of the total population. In 2006, the senior population increased to 13,600 or 11.3% of the population. The total senior population grew by 25% from 1996-2006, compared to the 18.7% increase of the population of Cambridge as a whole. In North Dumfries, the senior population saw a 33.6% increase from 1996-2006 (Statscan, 2006).

In Cambridge, the wait for a subsidized 1 bedroom senior apartment is currently 6 months to 2 years. 88 people were on the waitlist in 2009. The Cambridge Shelter Corporation is also seeing increasing numbers of seniors utilizing services. In 2009, 88 individual seniors (68 males and 20 females) accessed the shelter. This represents a total of 2742 bed nights.

Informed by these national and community findings, the SPCCND polled individual seniors as well as representatives of community agencies that

provide services to older adults, with the goal of assessing perceptions, identifying gaps, and receiving input on what should be seen as ongoing community priorities in order to build a more age friendly community.

## METHODOLOGY

Two different surveys were created. Survey A, "Exploring the Perspectives of Seniors in Cambridge and North Dumfries" was directed towards older adults, while survey B, "Exploring the Perspectives of Service Providers" polled representatives of community agencies. The surveys utilized various types of open-ended, categorical, scale ranking and multiple choice questions. Both survey A and B were approximately 20 questions in length and took about 20 minutes to complete. Surveys were initially distributed to all attendees at the Social Planning Council's Poverty Symposium as well as through the SPCCND electronic mailing list. Because the respondents were largely those who had attended the Symposium or are interested in the ongoing work of the SPCCND, this may represent a sampling bias toward those who are particularly concerned with this issue compared to the population at large.

A process of open coding was used for qualitative data to generate common themes by evaluating responses to open-ended questions and identifying emerging themes across participants. Questions posed in the surveys focused on both the individual seniors and service providers' opinions of the *availability, quality, accessibility and variety* of social agencies in Cambridge and North Dumfries. The survey asked participants to share ideas and strategize ways to make the local community more age friendly.

## SURVEY RESULTS

### Overview of Responses

A total of forty-four surveys were completed. Twenty seniors responded to survey A. Of the seniors sampled, 41% were male and 59% were female. The average age of respondent was 63 years old, the majority retired.

Twenty-four representatives of community agencies responded to survey B. The majority of survey B respondents indicated they had a fair level of knowledge on senior services in order to refer

people to the resources available in the community.

### Who is a Senior?

When asked to select the most appropriate age range to classify an individual as being a senior, there was no consensus among respondents. Among community agencies, responses ranged from 55- 70+. In comparison, most of older adult respondents considered the range of 60-65 years old to be appropriate.

This indicates that though the Statistics Canada definition of a “senior” is someone who is 65+, in reality self-identification varies depending on the individual. The term “older adult” is broader and has no fixed definition, but has been used to define individuals 55 years of age and older (Region of Waterloo Public Health, 2010). In this paper, the term older adult and senior are used interchangeably to denote the fluid nature of these terms and individual identities.

## PERCEPTIONS OF OLDER ADULTS— SURVEY A RESULTS

When older adult respondents were asked to identify their main concerns regarding aging, 82% stated a lack of reliable transportation, followed by: safety, accessing health professionals and finding affordable housing in Cambridge and North Dumfries.

### Information

Older adults indicated the best type of social support the community can provide is information. Approximately one-third of older adult respondents reported they had no knowledge of services for seniors in Cambridge and North Dumfries. The top five areas that seniors were interested in looking for information about were: medical services, seniors social centres/clubs, long-term care or home care services and reliable forms of transportation.

The older adult respondents indicated that they received information from various sources, however, senior’s centres were the most often cited source of information. Respondents indicated they were also equally likely to receive information at social service agencies, government or doctor’s offices. Several respondents identified their pref-

erence would be to receive information via postal mail or a workshop.

“No public transport in North Dumfries”  
-Survey Respondent

### Services

*Availability of Services:* The lack of presence of particular services in the community was identified as an area of concern by respondents. The majority, (79%) believed there were services missing in Cambridge and North Dumfries, they include: seniors day care, public buildings for seniors groups in Ayr, exercise facilities specifically for seniors, supportive and subsidized housing and specialized senior counsellors. The most dominant theme that emerged across respondents was the lack of reliable transportation in the community, especially to the rural areas.

*Quality of Services:* 41% of older adults disagreed with the statement that they are satisfied with the quality of services provided to seniors.

*Accessibility of Services:* As a whole, the perception of access to services was split, as 56% of older adults who completed the survey noted that they have never encountered an issue of being unable to access services in Cambridge or North Dumfries. When asked if senior services were equally distributed across Cambridge and North Dumfries, the vast majority disagreed or were neutral.

*Variety of Services:* When asked whether the variety of community services in Cambridge and North Dumfries adequately addressed seniors’ diverse needs, most respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

“Engage the senior community by being highly visible to ask for their feedback on what they want”  
-Survey Respondent

## PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS— SURVEY B RESULTS

Service providers also indicated that there are gaps in the services needed in Cambridge and North Dumfries and challenges to delivering needed services and programs.

“Creating age friendly communities starts with breaking down barriers such as ageism, looking at policies and planning at the city level to create communities that are inclusive of all, looking at accessibility and not just public buildings, but outdoor spaces “

### Services

*Availability of Services:* When asked whether Cambridge and North Dumfries provides a sufficient amount of senior services, 37% disagreed, while all others were either neutral or in agreement.

*Quality of Services:* Opinion was split on the quality of services available – 38% of agency providers were not satisfied with the quality of services provided to seniors in Cambridge and North Dumfries, whereas 33% held a neutral position and 29% felt services were adequate.

*Accessibility of Services:* Most service providers felt that services were unevenly distributed across Cambridge and North Dumfries. When asked if the services provided for seniors in Cambridge and North Dumfries were accessible, the majority either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

*Variety of Services:* When asked if community services in Cambridge and North Dumfries adequately address seniors’ diverse needs, 4% of service providers strongly disagreed, 46% disagreed, 38% were neutral and 12% agreed.

### Challenges for Service Providers

The three biggest challenges identified were: funding, accessing marginalized populations such as cultural and rural communities and obtaining volunteers or staff to support their initiatives. In addition, respondents acknowledged that there needs to be a “one-stop shop” where seniors can access resources, and media outlets should be utilized more to educate the public.

### BUILDING AN AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

Both surveys (A and B) asked respondents about their perceptions of what makes an age friendly community. 36% of older adult respondents considered Cambridge and North Dumfries to be an

age friendly community and 29% did not feel they had the knowledge to answer this question. In comparison, 48% of community agency respondents considered Cambridge and North Dumfries to be an age friendly community and 38% did not.

When asked about strategies that could be used to move towards an age friendly community, there was alignment in the responses to the 2 surveys. The majority of older adults stated the community needs to acknowledge seniors’ contributions, their expertise and actively engage them in planning processes. The majority of community agencies suggested the most effective way to connect with seniors is to take more time to develop relationships.

The overall consensus among agency respondents was that the entire community to work as a cohesive unit to research international initiatives to determine how to eliminate ageist policies in institutions. Until preconceptions around the aging process are altered, changing communities to be more age-friendly will be a difficult course of action.

“I think more public knowledge needs to get to the seniors in Cambridge and North Dumfries. It's hard to break into North Dumfries but there are many seniors there who need community services. There needs to be more public forums and more events to promote programs “

### CONCLUSION

Issues presented in this paper highlight the importance of listening to community members and representatives of agencies that represent and work with the senior community.

These findings indicate a need for increased collaboration across sectors and between levels of government. The need for additional information on what services are available to them and knowledge of how to access these services was the primary concern expressed by the older adult respondents.

Service providers indicated a willingness to listen to the community and adapt to community needs,

but identified several barriers to providing comprehensive services such as a shortage of funding and resources, especially in the nonprofit sector.

The results of these surveys offer a useful snapshot of current perceptions. This is only a first step in identifying common issues and perceptions and engaging the broader community to formulate strategies for making Cambridge and North Dumfries more age friendly.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The SPCCND will continue to work with the community to address gaps in services and the lack of awareness in the community of issues identified by older adults. To adequately address the issues and concerns highlighted in this paper, we recommend that a more comprehensive study of community assets and strategies for collaborative action should be undertaken in Cambridge and North Dumfries. An example would be the development of a “Master Ageing Plan”, an approach that has been undertaken in other municipalities. This is an invaluable tool that would provide a roadmap for the delivery of a comprehensive and coordinated set of community services for older adults who have a wide range of needs, including access to healthcare, transportation, housing, recreation, safety and other community services. This proposed plan can aid in both identifying and planning for the reality of an ageing population and to ensure an inclusive and accessible community for all.

## NEXT STEPS

The SPCCND will endeavour to bring these issues to the attention of the appropriate policy-makers, as well as the general public.

Please visit our website:

[www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org](http://www.socialplanningcouncil-cnd.org) to stay informed of the progress we are making to ensure our community is inclusive and provides opportunities for all residents.

The SPCCND will forward copies of this paper to appropriate governing, policy and funding bodies for their use. Individuals and groups interested in the work of the SPCCND will receive this report through our distribution list.

## RESOURCES

### **Age Friendly Communities: Tools for Building Strong Communities**

<http://afc.uwaterloo.ca/introduction.html>

### **Government of Ontario– Ontario Seniors’ Secretariat**

<http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/seniors/>

### **Public Health Agency of Canada, Division of Aging and Seniors**

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/index-eng.php>

### **National Advisory Council on Aging**

*Seniors in the Margins* (2005)

### **National Council of Welfare**

<http://www.ncwcnbes.net/>

### **Region of Waterloo Public Health**

*Older Adults Health Status Report* (2010)

<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/fmFrontPage?OpenForm>

### **Statistics Canada,**

*A Portrait of Seniors in Canada* (2006)

<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/>

### **World Health Organization**

<http://www.who.int/ageing/>

*Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* (2007)

*Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities* (2007)

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