



ALBERTA ASSOCIATION ON GERONTOLOGY

Vision 2030 for Seniors Services Symposium: Pre-Symposium Focus Group Consultation Report

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Executive Summary

To support the development of a vision for seniors' services in Alberta, the Alberta Association on Gerontology (AAG) set out to consult Albertans regarding their perceptions of seniors' services. Between March 20, 2019 and July 29, 2019, representatives from the Alberta Association on Gerontology met with a diverse sample of 115 Albertans from across the province to obtain their views of current seniors' services and their aspirations for seniors' services in the future. On average, 19 people attended each of six focus groups. Participants described seniors as a valuable resource and identified support services which would maintain their ability to continue to contribute. Concerns were raised including ageism, social isolation, and inaccessible services. Essential services were identified including affordable and accessible housing; comprehensive and integrated health services; and income security. In considering the implications of a future with increased diversity in the population and an expanded use of technology, participants identified both opportunities and challenges for service development. They agreed that individuals, communities and government should share responsibility for the development and funding of seniors' services. Participants of the focus groups also expressed a desire for increased accountability for seniors services and for the use of public funds.

Introduction

To develop a 2030 Vision for Seniors Services in Alberta, the Alberta Association on Gerontology (AAG) assembled a planning committee including diverse stakeholders to discuss important policy trends that are emerging in seniors services nationally and internationally. They identified the following important trends:

- Emphasizing wellness and independence for seniors
- Enhancing community capacity
- Integrating health and social care
- Shifting continuing care service priorities from facility-based care to community-based care
- Transforming the health system to meet future needs of older adults
- Addressing the cultural diversity of the future population.

Based on these trends, several approaches were used to inform the development of the vision for seniors services in 2030: a symposium, a literature review and focus group consultations. Over 250 people attended the symposium in November 2019, during which local, national and international speakers shared their expertise and experience in relation to the above policy trends. The literature review examined recent grey literature produced by governmental and non-governmental organizations in Alberta which addressed seniors' concerns. The focus group consultations directly solicited Albertans' views of current seniors services and their aspirations for seniors services in 2030. This report will summarize the focus group consultations and the comments and statements of the seniors participating in these consultations. Detailed reports for each focus group consultation appear in the appendices which provide specific examples to complement the following report summary.

Method

Process:

Between March 20, 2019 and July 29, 2019, representatives from the Alberta Association on Gerontology consulted directly with six groups of seniors. The intent was to obtain senior Albertans' views of current seniors services in Alberta and their aspirations for seniors services in 2030.

Although limited resources precluded the possibility of obtaining a representative sample of older Albertans, effort was made to obtain a diverse sample including: a range of ages, a variety of ethnicities and people from both urban and rural settings. Focus groups were held in organizations based in Strathmore (AgeCare), Calgary (Wing Kei), Edmonton (SAGE and Muslim Initiative for Aging Gracefully in Edmonton [MiAge]), Drumheller (Seniors Centre) and St. Paul (Seniors Centre). We asked the hosts of each focus group to advertise the focus groups to their members.

When participants arrived, they are providing their name and demographic information on a sign in sheet. Then they were invited to help themselves to the simple refreshments, provided by the host, and to find a seat. Two experienced facilitators were available to conduct each focus group: one asked the questions and facilitated the discussion; while the other recorded the participant responses on flip chart paper. Within a few days of the meeting, these recorded flip chart notes were transcribed into a Word document by one of the facilitators.

The consultation sessions focused on eight questions that were informed by the planning committee’s policy trends (Table 1). These questions elicited participants’ perspectives, experiences and thoughts for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta. The average duration of the focus groups was approximately 80 minutes.

Table 1: Focus Group Questions

	Questions
1	What do you see as major issues facing seniors’ services the next ten years?
2	What services are needed for seniors to remain healthy in the community?
3	Thinking about the future of seniors’ services in Alberta: a) What does a healthier population mean for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta? b) What does increased cultural diversity in our population mean for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta? c) What does expanded use of technology mean for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta?
4	Based on your personal experience and lifestyle, what do you see as “ideal” and “preferable” services for seniors in future to help them to age in place in the community?
5	What seniors’ services have you seen or experienced that you believe are essential services? Of this list of services, pick your top five most important services.
6	How should we go about building this “preferred future” for seniors?
7	What is the role of individuals, of communities and of the Alberta government in seniors’ services?
8	Do individuals have a role in paying for these “ideal future services”, or should government be responsible for funding all of them?

The information provided by the participants was organized according to the questions asked and then summarized to identify the participants’ most frequently occurring responses and comments.

Results

Sample:

An average of 19 people attended each of six focus groups. Three focus groups were held in rural Alberta (Drumheller, St. Paul, and Strathmore), and three were held in Edmonton (2) and Calgary. One group in Edmonton included the Muslim community (MiAge: Muslim Initiative for Aging Gracefully in Edmonton), and one group in Calgary included the Chinese Christian community (Wing Kei).

A total of 115 Albertans participated in the focus groups. The majority were women (64%) and lived in their own home (67%). The ages were approximately equally distributed between those younger than 65 years, those 65 – 74 years, and those 75 years and older.

Table 2: Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Category	Percent
Age (years)	55 - 64	32%
	65 – 74	32%
	75 – 84	30%
	≥ 85	6%
Sex	Male	36%
	Female	64%
Housing	Own home	67%
	Apartment / Condo	25%
	Supportive Housing	8%

Participant comments and responses to focus group questions are summarized under the following headings: Healthy seniors: a valuable resource; Major concerns, Essential services; Implications of increased diversity; Implications of expanded use of technology, Roles of individuals, communities and government; and Accountability.

Healthy Seniors: A valuable resource

Focus group participants were quick to emphasize the important contribution seniors make to society, often in volunteer roles and by providing various types of support to their children and grandchildren. They identified services that would enable them to continue to contribute into their later years including physical fitness opportunities; social, recreational and ongoing

learning opportunities; accessible and thorough primary care; psychological supports; education for aging transitions; service system navigation; and regular driving assessments.

Major Concerns

Concerns raised across all focus groups included:

- Social isolation
- Ageism
- Lack of awareness of seniors services
- Insufficient home support services
- Unaffordable, inaccessible transportation
- Inaccessible rural health care
- Vision, dental and hearing service costs
- Medication costs
- Insufficient family caregiver support
- Mental health challenges
- Dementia challenges
- Unavailable trustworthy assistance with finances
- Ineffective end of life care

Essential Services

- Accessible, comprehensive, integrated health services
- Home support services
- Affordable & accessible housing
- Accessible transportation
- Guaranteed living income
- Culturally, linguistically and religiously sensitive services
- Family caregiver supports

Implications of Increased Diversity

Many participants thought that the increased diversity of language, culture, religion and food in our population enriches life and offers learning opportunities; however, challenges were also identified. All groups noted the necessity of English classes for newcomers and cultural competence education for service providers. Differing opinions were voiced regarding the merits of integrating newcomers into existing communities, versus newcomers forming unique new communities.

Implications of Expanded Technology Use

There was consensus that the expanded use of technology provides many opportunities for service development, including opportunities for new health innovations and expanded communication modalities. The identified possibilities for health-related innovations were medical diagnostic and treatment technology, devices to monitor health, and health record access. Participants had already experienced improved communication opportunities and

information access: they thought these would continue to be expanded with advances in technology.

Although many participants used internet technology such as email; some were uncomfortable with computers and knew others who were unable to afford internet services. Participants in several groups commented that online connections often replace face-to-face connections which could result in increased isolation for some seniors. It was also noted that vulnerable people are at increased risk for fraud and abuse when using any type of communication technology. Furthermore, it was noted that infrastructure upgrades will be required to accommodate the increased technology use in existing health facilities.

Roles of Individuals, Communities and Government

The majority of participants in all focus groups agreed that seniors services were a shared responsibility for individuals, communities and government. Collaboration amongst agencies and sectors was suggested. The value of peer support was noted with “neighbours helping neighbours”. Community-government matching funds for various seniors services was identified as one method of sharing responsibility. Some spoke of cost sharing according to means. One participant emphasized the role of government stating, “The government has deeper pockets and has the power to create policies”. The engagement and participation of seniors was noted to be a means for seniors’ voices to be heard.

Accountability

Although not explicitly addressed by the focus group questions, in three of the six focus groups, participants expressed a desire for increased accountability. Emphasis in these discussions was on government accountability to the citizens of Alberta with respect to effective projection of seniors needs, ensuring consumer protection standards, and efficient allocation of public resources. In addition, there was a desire for seniors services be accountable through process and outcome measurement that is accessible to the public. Some advocated that the Auditor General should have unlimited access to performance data and that an independent agency be created to investigate and bring remedy to concerns.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a diverse sample of 115 Albertans participated in six focus group consultations during the spring and summer of 2019. Focus group participants emphasized the important contribution seniors make to society and identified services that would enable them to continue to contribute into their later years. Concerns were raised including ageism, social isolation, and inaccessible services. Essential services were identified including affordable housing; comprehensive and integrated health services; and income security. In considering the implications of a future with increased diversity in the population and an expanded use of technology, participants identified both opportunities and challenges for seniors service development. The majority of participants in all focus groups agreed that seniors services were a shared responsibility for individuals, communities and government; and identified ways in which seniors services could be developed and funded. Finally, participants expressed a desire for increased accountability in the development, operation and use of funds related to seniors services.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Seniors Pre-Symposium Consultation Report

Strathmore, Alberta

March 22, 2019

Introduction

This report gives a summary of the information gathered from seniors associated with AgeCare supportive living residence in Strathmore who came together to discuss the questions. Eleven (11) seniors participated in the discussion.

- 1. In view of an increased focus on wellness and independence for older people (more focus on eating well and exercising) (a healthier population), what does this mean for the future of seniors' services in Alberta?**
 - a. People will live longer but will still need services – just later
 - b. More help will be needed for day to day help (housekeeping, yardwork etc)
 - c. Emergency call systems will be needed (like lifeline)
 - d. Transportation, when people stop driving, will need to be affordable and available on evenings and weekends
 - e. Regular testing for safe driving
 - f. Older people will need to have options to continue to be engaged, active and maintaining a health lifestyle (exercise equipment, pool etc.)
 - g. Income support programs will need to continue longer
 - h. Services will still be needed (buildings , reduced MD wait times etc)
 - i. Opportunities for couples to live together – even with different care needs
 - j. Middle class people not qualifying for full supports may not have resources to pay for services

- 2. In view of an increased cultural diversity in our population, what does this mean for the future of seniors' services in Alberta?**
 - a. Immigration will increase need for more services/facilities
 - b. Offer English classes – important for everyone to be able to communicate in English
 - c. Education to promote understanding of various cultures
 - d. Maintain cultural practices in family & community BUT need to be a “Canadian”
 - e. Accommodation will need to consider meals and places to worship
 - f. Staff speaking other languages need to speak English while at work – or the language of the resident when caring for the resident

3. In view of the expanded use of technology (cell phones, personal computers, internet access) what does this mean for the future of seniors' services?
 - a. Stronger information network will be helpful
 - b. Need more accessible information about programs and services (hard to find now)
 - c. Older people will always need education about new technology because technology will always be changing
 - d. More technology may mean people are more isolated – less face to face contact
 - e. Buildings are not designed to accommodate the increased use of technology (google home, laptops etc)
 - f. People will be more informed about their health (medications etc)

4. In view of efforts to build community capacity (such as age-friendly cities) (such as integrating health and social care), what does this mean for the future of seniors' services in Alberta?
 - a. Bring schools and seniors together
 - b. Schools for other purposes after hours
 - c. Senior friendly parks and pathways
 - d. Improved parking accessibility
 - e. Transportation – use of volunteers (hard to find, insurance, managing wheel chairs)
 - f. Building connections vs isolation
 - g. Incentives for developers to build age friendly communities (aging in place)

5. In view of the desire of many people to remain in their own homes as long as possible, what does this mean for the future of seniors' services in Alberta?
 - a. Need improved accessibility for transportation
 - b. Affordable home maintenance help will be needed (repairs, yardwork, housekeeping)
 - c. Home adaptations
 - d. Having CHOICE about when to move will important
 - e. Affordability of community services (foot care, hairdresser, help with bathing etc)
 - f. Transportations from rural areas to cities for specialized health services (e.g. dialysis)
 - g. Need facilities that can accommodate all levels of services
 - h. Rural people may be more open to moving to a facility if educated about the benefits (enjoyable activities, no need to feel responsible for yard, accessible hairdresser etc.)
 - i. Need incentives for families to support someone to stay at home

- j. Can't shift too many resources to support people at home but don't have \$ to support / improve facilities (rural facility very much appreciated! Children looking forward to moving in!)

6. What are some strengths of current seniors' services (health supports, social supports, economic supports) in Alberta? How can we build on these strengths?

- a. Blue Cross
- b. Alberta Health Care
- c. Hospital Services
- d. Help with income tax for low income seniors
- e. Home Care

7. What are some gaps in seniors' services in Alberta (health supports, social supports, economic support)? What can be done to fill these gaps?

- a. Staying in own rural community – not enough room in local hospital / facilities and so must leave to go to the city
- b. Lack of specialized health services in rural Alberta requiring trips to the city
- c. Transportation after hours doesn't exist
- d. Income support programs are good but information needs to be publicized and easier to find

8. What do you see as major issues facing seniors' services the next ten years?

- a. Environment (need walk in showers not bathtubs)
- b. Transportation
- c. Knowledge about seniors services
- d. Independent living support (sometimes not well but not sick enough to go to hospital)

Appendix 2
Seniors Pre-Symposium Consultation Report
Muslim Initiative For Aging Gracefully in Edmonton (miAge)
Edmonton, Alberta
April 27, 2019

Introduction

This report gives a summary of the information gathered from Muslim seniors in Edmonton who came together to discuss the questions. Twenty-eight (28) seniors participated in the discussion.

Question 1: What do you see as the major issues facing seniors' services in the next ten years?

- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Depression
- Alzheimer's disease
- Chronic health conditions
- Family caregivers
- Availability of special housing needs (disability accommodations)
- Specialized housing for Muslims
- Aging in place
- Refugees and Immigrants will have different needs
- Mental health, finances, no children to support them,
- Culturally, religious & linguistically sensitive services
- Transportation (lack of transportation contributes to loneliness & isolation)
- Financial security
- Financial Resources biggest barrier
- Health services
- Health subsidies
- Elder abuse / fraud
- Loss of autonomy
- Interactions in society

Question 2: What services are needed for seniors to remain healthy in the community?

- Mental and physical activity options
- More Services at Home: social, medical, acute care (e.g., dialysis at home)
- Isolated seniors need service providers who offer socialization/friendship and are sensitive to cultural, religious and language concerns
- Healthy meals (cultural cooking is complicated; culturally appropriate (HALAL)
- Housekeeping & personal care if children not available
- Family caregivers need support – grandmother becomes family responsibility
- Health system relies too much on family caregivers
- Help navigating the available health and senior services
- Superficial services are a political problem that the media is not reporting – not enough attention / voice

- Group living
- Meaningful work
- Transportation
- Health guidance
- IT learning, training, updating skills

Question 3a: What does a healthier population mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Seniors are a resource to society when they are healthy (volunteering) – Canadians need to know about this!
- Experienced human resource
- Less reliance/dependence on family & health system
- Less economic burden on governments
- Productive and experienced input for communities

Question 3b: In view of an increased cultural diversity in our population, what does this mean for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta?

- Language difference is a challenge
- There will be more diverse services centres serving diverse groups – an opportunity for economic development
- The infrastructure of the environment will change with a focus on cultural, religious and linguistic sensitivity
- Richness and learning from many cultures
- More targeted services to match needs
- Visible minorities will be in positions of responsibility and power

Question 3c: What does expanded use of technology mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Not affordable – people left out
- Seniors may not have knowledge of or be comfortable with technology use – people left out (“misfits in own family”)
- Another cause of isolation
- Can provide some services at lower cost
- A tool / flexible model for providing services in the future
- A tool for creatively integrating elderly newcomers (immigrants/refugees) into society
- Reduced dependency with more easily accessed information, procedures etc.

Question 4: Based on your personal experience and lifestyle, what do you see as “ideal” and “preferable” services for seniors in the future to help them to age in place in the community?

- Education
- Healthy food delivery
- Model healthy meal and snack preparation to avoid chronic illnesses

- Transportation (no transportation contributes to social isolation & inactivity; family too busy to offer rides)
- Social interaction
- Exercise / activity that can be done at home and in group settings
- Interacting with family – some seniors have no family or family is overseas – an ethnic issue: children especially important
- Teaching children in school about valuing / respecting seniors (Societal respect for seniors is disappearing)
- Income tax deductions for expenses
- Coop housing; pooling resources / finances
- Connection to a community
- Independent for as long as possible
- Free education about how to save money and avoid financial fraud
- Continue to provide old age security and pension for elders
- Services provided in community venues with culturally responsive information & services

Question 5: What seniors services have you seen or experienced that you believe are essential services? Of this list of services, pick your top five most important services?

- Prevention services to enhance mental health
 - Companionship / connection to community
 - Recreation (mental & physical health)
- Housing; transitional housing from own home to a group facility; subsidized seniors housing
- Government subsidies
- HOMECARE (affordable; culturally, religiously, linguistically sensitive; physical therapy; medical services when children not there) (x7)
- Address Ageism at community level – need to talk about aging stigma/taboo
- Exercise
- Health / Medical Care / pharmaceutical needs (based on age group; subsidized)
- Old age homes (ethnic; culturally sensitive)
- Knowledge of technology
- Hygiene / personal care / basic needs
- Transportation (x5) - especially during the Alberta winter; simple and affordable; free
- Dental health (not usually included)
- Global assessment (physical/mental health)
- Concern about fractured services – information unavailable
- Culturally appropriate day programs
- Meaningful learning opportunities
- Meaningful work / volunteering opportunities

Question 6: How should we go about building this “preferred future” for seniors?

- Models of services flexible enough to meet the increased number of older people but still useful when past this period of increase numbers of older people
- No single solution
- Family can play a role
- Build housing attached to services (e.g., places of worship)
- Family sponsored newcomers have no pension or government subsidies – challenges to families who agreed to this sponsorship arrangement (family reunification)
- Longer term immigrants lacked education about value of RRSPs and now continue to be financially vulnerable (even after 20+ years in Canada)
- Means test would help to ensure those who are really in need can access health & basic services
- Income tax deductions for health services
- Focused immigration policy
- Strict vigilance for religious organizations
- Individuals planning early (downsizing, modifications and adaptations to existing housing)
- Public education about what is involved with aging and how to prepare and save (government funded education)
- Adequate pension to maintain stress-free lifestyle
- Exercise and social engagement to delay onset of chronic conditions
- Government funded programs with community funds in a matching process
- Public needs to know about the contributions of seniors AND the prevalent issues affecting an aging population (loneliness, chronic diseases, chronic pain, senior fraud ...)

Question 7: What is the role of individuals, of communities, and of the Alberta Government in seniors’ services?

- Individuals are responsible for staying healthy: education could help this
- In addition to government, individuals, and communities; families also have a role
- Need to focus on government because government has deeper pockets and has the power to create policy
- Looking to the future, need to focus on education in schools – to develop a caring society
- Need to coordinate AHS & Blue Cross because coverage is not adequate, depending on age group, for unexpected needs like dental care
- Older people can convert their homes to group homes for people with same sensitivities: address isolation – an alternative to other housing solutions
- Community role to develop cohesive (not divisive) values
- Neighbors helping each other
- Increased availability of trained community volunteers

Question 8: Do individuals have a role in paying for these ideal future service, or should government be responsible for funding all of them?

- Government should not fund everything
- Individuals have a role based on ability to pay
- Funding to community organizations
- Savings plans for seniors – like education funds for children (different way to think of insurance)
- Registered plan for housing with matching contributions
- Seniors need to feel secure that there are supports / a safety net

Appendix 3
Seniors Pre-Symposium Consultation Report
Wing Kei
Calgary, Alberta
May 8, 2019

Introduction

This report gives a summary of the information gathered from Calgary seniors who came together to discuss the questions. Twenty-three (23) seniors from the Chinese Christian community participated in the discussion.

Question 1: What so you see as the major issues facing seniors' services in the next ten years?

- funding may not be used properly. Gov't may not provide
- more services to support seniors staying in the community.
- lack of manpower, lack of workers: lots of seniors need help
- maintain mobility; look forward to self-driving car!
- how can technology support senior services
- availability of housing
- not enough homecare
- mental health services insufficient
- insufficient knowledge of seniors care
- need better projection of supply & demand
- is gov't willing to provide more services to seniors?
- better training in gerontology
- quality of life important
- prevent dementia; reduce disability with dementia

Question 2: What services are needed for seniors to remain healthy in the community?

- create more mobility to allow for more companionship
- do more to educate now and invest now
- lack of staff to look after seniors
- community network is important
- need to support access to services
- need to train peer support volunteers
- consider healthy services in Hong Kong
- need resources to encourage young people to join helping professions
- who will decide what is needed with diverse views?

Question 3a: What does a healthier population mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Government needs to establish a senior ministry.
- The environment needs to be more senior friendly.
- myth that senior is a burden; healthy, active seniors will not be a burden to society
- switch resources to do more prevention
- transportation will need to increase
- more choices

- people will be more active and have time to engage
- financial aspect (CPP) could be an issue
- will there be an estate for the children to receive?
- what happens when one spouse has to care for the other spouse?
- if people are healthier, we can use them and their knowledge in the workforce

Question 3b. In view of an increased cultural diversity in our population, what does this mean for the future of seniors' services in Alberta?

- Bilingual staff are difficult to find
- cultural diversity is a plus
- means maintaining individuality and strengths – not a melting pot
- cultural education and competencies needed for service workers (e.g., bus drivers)
- need more choice and diversity
- can be positive or negative
- some families will look after sick individuals, but others cannot
- services need to respect preferences for language and food
- some seniors like to experience new cultures
- learning about Canadians and other groups

Question 3c: What does expanded use of technology mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Can we deliver personal care with technology?
- Can we monitor seniors with technology? (e.g., ADL) Do more than call bells?
- need to build facilities with technology
- how can we bridge the old buildings with low technology?
- can help seniors to age in place (e.g., robot to shovel snow)
- survey data available from Philip Chang, Vice Chair of the Board
- technology can help with care delivery
- will increase expectations (e.g., use Alexa to create recreation)
- technology can replace some tasks
- need to educate clients to be mobile – not sit with technology too long
- can help with translating languages
- can be used for recreation & pleasure (e.g., visit great wall of China)

Question 4: Based on your personal experience and lifestyle, what do you see as “ideal” and “preferable” services for seniors in the future to help them to age in place in the community?

- adult day program to promote seniors independence
- dementia friendly
- senior friendly coop housing – share services – like a village – I live with my friends
- the healthy culture
- relatives are financially challenged when seniors do not qualify for gov’t subsidies
- community services nearby to reduce transportation issues
- need quality homecare
- caregiver needs to understand need of client (e.g., a substitute spouse)
- like primary care networks, should access many types of professionals
- age well in the community – active, satisfying engagement

Question 5: What seniors services have you seen or experienced that you believe are essential services? Of this list of services, pick your top five most important services?

- LTC and dementia care
- coordinated services
- special care services for dementia
- affordable housing
- accommodation
- medical care
- navigating the system
- problem with gaps in services
- accommodation x2
- medical support
- mobility
- seniors to connect with society
- mental health
- social isolation
- help equip/train family & caregivers
- prevention
- safety
- food
- financial support
- social support systems
- financial security from gov’t
- family caregivers need training & financial support when give up job to care
- end of life care / palliative care (avoid repeat visits to acute care)
- holistic health care
- supportive living
- IT support
- LTC & supportive living to alleviate acute care
- seniors mental health
- transportation
- navigating services
- coordinated personal care
- health support services

- family and friend support services
- good end of life care
- service navigation
- support for caregivers
- preventive services
- home care
- LTC
- respite care
- dementia care
- accommodation
- mental health (x2)
- social services for LTC residents
- prevention
- housing
- emotional and spiritual health support
- all seniors should have basic needs met (home care to facility care)
- appropriate level of care
- financial support
- health services sensitive to language needs
- health care
- accommodation

Question 6: How should we go about building this “preferred future” for seniors?

- efficient resource allocation (e.g., acute care beds – discharge to first available bed)
- better coordination
- wise utilization
- financial incentives to be healthy
- define “preferred future”; what is my preferred future?
- transition to aging; retirement planning; social & psychological issues; specific to the person
- how to cope with changes
- What can the individual do vs. what can the gov’t do
- What would you like to do as an individual?
- better collaboration among agencies
- better use of resources
- better communication to gov’t
- walkable, accessible resources
- shared cooperative
- need different components to help build (individual, family, community)
- affordability
- look at preferred future in different ways

Question 7: What is the role of individuals, of communities, and of the Alberta Government in seniors’ services?

- well individuals are responsible; if increased care needs then public funding
- Chinese seniors should have a voice
- partnerships between individuals and community
- justification needed that money is well spent

Question 8: Do individuals have a role in paying for these ideal future service, or should government be responsible for funding all of them?

-Both

-Need to know what is the bottom line, government can't do everything

-Chinese seniors need to have a voice to tell gov't what we need; shared responsibility

-individuals can prepare for themselves (financial planning, education, identifying caregivers)

-communities help seniors to build more accessible services

-gov't needs to ensure best buck for services (e.g., transportation)

Appendix 4
Focus Group Report
SAGE Seniors Association
Edmonton, Alberta
May 21, 2019

Introduction

This report gives a summary of the information gathered from Edmonton seniors who came together to discuss the questions. Seventeen (17) seniors from the SAGE organization participated in the discussion.

Question 1: What do you see as the major issues facing seniors' services in the next ten years?

- Appropriate housing for seniors
- Housing to accommodate & integrated handicapped people
 - Housing throughout various communities not focus in specific areas
- Independent agency to investigate and bring remedies; not limited in any way, record publicly
- Smoke free Seniors' housing
- Housing for LGBTQ Seniors
- Climate change will affect everything
 - E.g. senior's medications/Pharmacare will increase costs
- Care available in any setting (community) – continuous, comprehensive & integrated
 - All care universal and appropriate to the person, not just the provider
- Permission to have pets; need to consider those with allergies
- Zoo-therapy
- Increase corporatization of seniors' services –
 - e.g. ala carte services in addition to regular accommodation costs
- More housing for senior to meet expectation of baby boomers
- Transportation to increase accessibility to services
- Clear statement of purpose for seniors' services; measuring performance and outcomes
 - Do people have better outcomes given care they receive
- Adequate supports, including financial support for families and informal caregivers
 - Respite care for family/other caregivers

Question 2: What services are needed for seniors to remain healthy in the community?

- Exercise for seniors
 - CHOICE program – for example
- Good access to primary care and comprehensive primary care – including rehab services & preventative services
- Drug benefits for seniors – eg. not have to pay when you are 65 yrs, need full access to medications
 - When on AISH. Drugs and other benefits covered but discontinued when AISH recipients turn 65 years

- 20% of Canadian seniors cannot afford prescription (study)
- “Fine line” between affordability and not – including many areas of need
- Vision/ABC – really Alberta Seniors Benefits managed by Blue Cross; benefits not increase for years
- Free assessment for specialist treatment
- Include hearing aids
- Blue Cross only administers seniors’ benefit program, don’t receive Blue Cross coverage
- Transportation: driver education about allowing time for seniors to be seated before moving
- SAGE & similar organizations need to promote themselves more: helps socially mentally
- Social inclusion and socialization important

Question 3a: What does a healthier population mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Less health care costs
- More inclusive democracy – more participation from seniors
- Don’t see doctor as often or with critical care
- Decrease in emergency care
- More proactive, inclusive and getting out into the community
- Independence
- Volunteering
- Seniors can share “resident body of knowledge” – reservoir of knowledge
- “Enriches” the population
- Young people should be taught older people are “not stupid”, reservoir of knowledge
 - Seniors expect respect
 - Address “ageism”
- Consider learning opportunities for seniors
- Continuous learning for seniors; include tuition-free courses for seniors; eg. U of T – later in life learning at university level but not a degree program; U of A offers ELLA (need to pay; limited enrolment)

Question 3b: In view of an increased cultural diversity in our population, what does this mean for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta?

- Becomes challenge when new Canadians form own associations
 - Need to figure out how to live together
- Creates challenge although makes life more enriching, include Aboriginal population
- LGBTQ
- Languages – including bilingualism (English/French)
 - “ can result in Cultural ghettoism”?
- Citizenship training important; help others integrate; integration of cultures
- Pay attention to all types of diversity: languages, religion, food

Question 3c: What does expanded use of technology mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Enables access and efficiency – eg. use of email
- Enables learning – eg. internet but need others/courses to learn how use technology; free courses
- May isolate those who do not use technology or take shortcuts in communication
- Physician reliance on technology may limit their knowledge of the person and their concerns
- Also benefits to increased communication: greater connections
- Technology allows to ignore older persons
- Drawbacks: scams; taking advantage of vulnerable people
- Too much reliance on use of technology – eg.. constantly on iPhones/mobile phones; not talking to anyone
- [Demographic shift peaks at 2030]
- Physician-assisted dying enabled for those who choose this option
- Expand “lifeline” technologies; ability to contact seniors of no one is checking on them
- Reduced human contact with increased technology
- Technology decreases the number of choices about personal contact, but increase the amount of knowledge
- Lack of information about how to use technology or how to get help using technology
 - Wants individual teaching, not group teaching
- Seniors should advocate against call centres with long lists
- Reading newspapers online is good
- Cautious of online information that’s biased, manipulative...becoming easier to do this – “fake news”

Question 4: Based on your personal experience and lifestyle, what do you see as “ideal” and “preferable” services for seniors in the future to help them to age in place in the community?

- Integrated – eg. being able to age in one place; avoids [personal] disruption
- Loss of VON who did care in the home
- Rethink segregation of services – not profit driven
- Profit becomes the motivation for service delivery
- Aging in place challenging especially rural and northern area; services segregated by settings; not working for people
 - Many of these services are “privatized/corporatized” ... they don’t build where it’s not profitable
- Transportation: accessibility – wait long hours; affordability of private driving options (many companies getting into the seniors’ market but people can’t afford them
 - Increase public affordable options
- Have a seniors’ advocate in municipal governments
- Good food services (ie. Healthy nutrition)
 - Food security
- Seniors should get same protection as children and animals

Question 5: What seniors services have you seen or experienced that you believe are essential services? Of this list of services, pick your top five most important services?

- “Guaranteed” income (more than GIS)
- “Guaranteed” living income (basic necessities)
- Safety and security
- Health services
- Transportation – affordable [taxable income driven]
- Enable CPP pay at 60 years – increase income 60 – 65 year
- Primary care advocate – anyone who’s caring for you day-to-day and following-up
- Elect governments @ all levels re: finances
- Affordable medical services: medication; vision
- Increase mobility around city for use of scooters; maintained sidewalks, trails/paths without bumps
- Access to information thru computers/internet
- Enhance services for hard of hearing such as writing while talking

Question 6: How should we go about building this “preferred future” for seniors?

- Concern about impact of P3/privatization
- Political action- support systems for seniors
- Advocacy, especially strong seniors’ advocacy groups including online groups
 - Online advocacy by multiple seniors (individually & by groups) – issues going directly to the public
 - Direct the decision makers
- Work with media: newspapers, TV
- Communicate – let people know about the problem – eg. SALT, Public Interest AB
- Educate social workers on what services are available (service access)
- Get government service providers to be transparent
 - Provincial Seniors Advocate not viewed as effective
- Ways to increase information about services and supports available – get it to the people who need help
 - Need system navigators

Question 7: What is the role of individuals, of communities, and of the Alberta Government in seniors’ services?

- Government: Provide resources, only involved when telling what’s good & bad; define the policies
- Individual: each person to get involved and participate in community and government. Have a say in what governments can do
 - Expect government to be accountable
 - Encourage individuals to speak up
- How to get government to respond rationally?

- Government: Long term reliable services (not short-term)
 - Should pay for all services (individuals pay taxes, expect to be treated with dignity)
- Distinguish between government & community
 - Community is the collective and have a role in advocacy, working with others
 - Don't view government as separate entity; pay more attention to the community
- Encourage other seniors to speak-up/work together
- Individuals have a role to take responsibility – if able
- What is individual's role in paying for services?
 - Should be shared but government pay for most of it; some people have higher needs
 - Need to distinguish between people who were employable but now retired; those never employable
 - Government should pay for necessities, but not holidays

Other Comments

- To little affordable housing – increase housing in future for everyone
- More quality doctors, specialists, nurses, teachers so everyone get good care they deserve
- Consumer protection standards (provided by government) needed – eg. care
- Better use of research in providing care – eg. PT using in care setting
- Better consistency in level of care
- Divergence of facility care from “Kings and Queens” to “Urine smelly” – government should provide same standard of care across all settings
- Accountability – Auditor General should have unlimited access
- Safety and security of seniors' facilities
- Avoid “sanitization” of seniors living requirements – eg. denying pets in accommodation

Appendix 5
Focus Group Report
St. Paul, Alberta
June 19, 2019

Introduction

This report gives a summary of the information gathered from St. Paul seniors who came together to discuss the questions. Sixteen (16) seniors participated in the discussion.

Summary of Responses by Question

The summary of responses is given by each question asked of the participants.

Question 1: What do you see as the major issues facing seniors' services in the next ten years?

- **Health care/service limitations:** increasing cost of drugs, lack of facilities (especially seniors residences, assisted living), lack of/limited home care, lack of hospital space
- **Ageism:** dismissive attitudes around aging, assuming all seniors are the same, devaluing seniors
- **Poor rural access to specialists:** poor access to specialists now and anticipated the access will keep getting worse
 - Family physicians do not have sufficient education in geriatrics
- **Local integration of Indigenous peoples into health care:**
 - Increasing number of Indigenous peoples in seniors' homes; integration challenging due to cultural differences
 - Differing cultural value systems that affect hospital visiting privileges (e.g. hospitalized Indigenous peoples tend to have multiple visitors at a time)
 - Some community attitudes towards Indigenous peoples make it difficult to discuss cultural concerns without appearing to be racist
- **Increasing multiculturalism challenges:**
 - How to integrate multicultural people into communities
 - How multiculturalism affects employment opportunities
 - How employees can relate to people of different cultures, especially in continuing care. Values and spiritual needs vary in different cultures.
 - Leadership is challenged to address concerns related to different cultures
- **Mental health challenges:**
 - Limited availability of program supports to deal with mental health issues such as dementia
 - Challenges are compounded by different languages/English as a second language (ESL)
- **Limited supports to help people stay in their homes,** especially for those who are single
- **Limited transportation options,** especially for seniors who no longer drive or no longer have cars
 - Creates difficulties in getting groceries, getting to medical appointments
 - Hinders overall independence
 - Creates a financial burden for surviving spouse
- **Medically Assisted Dying (MAID) challenges:**
 - Parameters around MAID are too narrow and inhumane

- Need to be able to make choice sooner not when a person has dementia
- **Medical management of chronic conditions:**
 - Changes in medications make it difficult for seniors
 - Overuse of pharmaceuticals to address seniors' problems

Question 2: What services are needed for seniors to remain healthy in the community?

- **Better access and quick response to medical care:**
 - Wait times for doctors' appointments can be as long as one (1) month
 - Wait time in doctors' offices can be as high as three (3) hours
 - Wait time in emergency departments can be as high as eight (8) hours
 - Better triage is needed in emergency departments
 -

Programs to keep physically active:

- Programs need to be organized for seniors
- Availability of fitness/health/spa centres geared to seniors are needed along with staff who can provide appropriate instruction for exercises and how to use equipment, including a spa-like experience with soaker tubs as an example
- More information on staying healthy
- Consider fitness centres in seniors centres

Question 3a: What does a healthier population mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Seniors will live longer and die healthier so services will be needed for a longer period of time
- More opportunities will be needed for increased social interaction to avoid social isolation

Question 3b: What does expanded use of technology mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- Lack of familiarity and knowledge about how to use technology; seniors will need help in understanding technology
- Some technology such as robotics will help people to be more independent
- Medical technology will help people have more access to services such telecare; interactive technology, non-invasive surgery
- Devices that will help to monitor health:
 - Avoid driving long distances for health monitoring services
 - Use of Fitbit devices
- Need for more dialysis services in rural hospitals to avoid driving frequent long trips to access services

Question 4: Based on your personal experience and lifestyle, what do you see as “ideal” and “preferable” services for seniors in the future to help them to age in place in the community?

- Health spa for seniors such as “swim night” and other programs to bring seniors together for both physical and social benefits. Could also include educational programs on management of chronic conditions.
- Primary care network that offer exercise and other health programs that are sustained. Current primary care network in St. Paul closed its exercise program which was felt to be due to lack of physician reimbursement for such services.
- Sustainability of new programs offered through Alberta’s health system. For example, programs dealing with palliative care and pain management have been closed.
- Financial services provided by trusted friends/family and other organizations to assist seniors when needed.
 - Includes advanced health planning and estate planning
 - Access to banking services for those who can’t get to the bank
- Meals on Wheels for nutritional food delivered on time
- Transportation to get to appointments
- Adequate home care (e.g., services every two days to meet needs, such as bathing)
- Home support services such as snow removal and grass cutting
- Home designs appropriate for seniors needs
- Services to help those dealing with social isolation, such as friendly visitors. Discussion included:
 - Liability issues and safety risks related to abuse for both seniors and the visitors
 - Building intergenerational relationships with younger people; expanding beyond the seniors’ peer groups
 - Special consideration of the needs of widowers who often find it more difficult to get involved in activities
 - “Couples can grow old at the same time but not grow old the same way”
 - Need to talk about aging and its impact on seniors lives. Involves both personal responsibility (looking inwards and reaching out to others) and community responsibility (need supports to deal with issues of aging), need a desire to reach out and intentionally invite/include others in activities.
 - Need to know about community activities; volunteers could help

Question 5: What seniors services have you seen or experienced that you believe are essential services? Of this list of services, pick your top five most important services?

- Health services: home care, assisted living
- Housing
- Transportation
- Social/psychological/physical supports
- Ongoing learning opportunities
- Senior connectiveness across the province

Question 6: How should we go about building this “preferred future” for seniors?

- Be aware of services needed
- Plan how to organize

- Need proper tools
- Need financial supports
- Not just the government's job but also community responsibility to meet basic needs such as social needs
- Need to link senior citizen centres across Alberta. Numerous senior citizen centres operate across the province and could help in getting information out, providing opportunities for people to get out (socialization), providing games such as pickle ball, cribbage, etc.
- Overall need more connectiveness of seniors across the province

Question 7: What is the role of individuals, of communities, and of the Alberta Government in seniors' services?

Government Responsibilities:

- **Quit making rules;** deregulate "stupid" rules such as need for annual kitchen inspections
- **Reduce taxes on utilities** to make seniors facilities more affordable. Taxation on water/swage services is considered too high
- **Provide subsidies to reduce facility rental/insurance costs** so events are more affordable

Shared responsibilities between governments, communities, and individuals:

- **Transportation:** shared through local government services and individual personal fees (current situation with Action Bus in St. Paul)
- **Volunteer transportation** is more challenging given insurance needs. Need someone who can organize drivers to volunteer without charging a fee (when fees are charged by drivers, the service is viewed as being commercial)

Question 8: Do individuals have a role in paying for these ideal future service, or should government be responsible for funding all of them?

- Users should pay but user pay can become expensive. Cost sharing arrangements are required.
- One financial obstacle faced by some seniors is the belief that they need to leave an inheritance for their families, which may restrict spending their money on themselves and their own needs.

Other Comments

- More affordable and more appropriate housing such as assisted living
- More education with access to university courses, libraries, along with knowledge of existing services so more seniors could take advantage of them.
- Less government interference
- More people caring about others

Appendix 6
Focus Group Report
Drumheller, Alberta
July 29, 2019

Introduction

This report gives a summary of the information gathered from Drumheller seniors who came together to discuss the questions. Twenty (20) seniors participated in the discussion.

Summary of Responses by Question

The summary of responses is given by each question asked of the participants.

Question 1: What do you see as the major issues facing seniors' services in the next ten years?

- **Insufficient people to provide necessary seniors' services**
 - Transportation assistance was given as an example for seniors who no longer drive or have a vehicle. Public transportation options are expensive.
 - More affordable transportation options are needed.
- **Insufficient continuing care facilities** for those who are unable to care for themselves:
 - Number of new facilities being built is not keeping up with the growing aging population.
- **Insufficient affordable housing/independent living facilities such as manors and cottages**, especially for those with limited retirement income and dependent on OAS, most notably women who stayed home and raised their families and do not have retirement savings plans, or pension plans.
 - Currently facing a two-year waiting list in Drumheller
 - Some of the proposed independent living facilities are unaffordable
 - Difficult to get subsidy assistance for rental accommodation as many do not qualify given the eligibility criteria
- **Lack of facilities that can house couples** together and keep them in the community.
- **Poor access to specialist services**, requiring transportation or drives to Calgary and Red Deer, which is compounded by the transportation concern
 - Would like to see more specialists travelling to and providing services in Drumheller to avoid people needing to drive to Calgary or Red Deer.
- **Long waits to access local physician services**, up to three months reported. One participant comment: "We're old but not dispensable".
 - Walk-in clinics are already booked early in the day. In some cases, people have used the local emergency department to get the medical services they need.
 - Automated phone systems used by some physician offices can create confusion, and, in particular, expectations to make appointments using a computer are unrealistic as many seniors do not feel tech-savvy.
 - **Note:** other participants noted their satisfaction with their local physician and pharmacy services.
- **Insufficient home care staff** to enable people to live in their own homes.
- **Lack of respite care for informal caregivers** so caregivers can have some relief in caring for their loved ones, which, in turn allows their loved ones to stay longer in their own homes, rather than be moved to a continuing care facility.

- A related issue was the **need for support groups** such as dementia support groups. An example was given of a dementia support group where spouses took turns caring for each other’s loved ones so the caregivers could go shopping.

Question 2: What services are needed for seniors to remain healthy in the community?

- **Meals on Wheels (MOW)**. MOW used to be available through the hospital in Drumheller but was discontinued due to the lack of volunteer drivers.
- **Affordable home support services** such as housekeeping, assistance with grocery shopping, snow removal on sidewalks, grass cutting, household repairs/handyman, assistance with gardening
 - Helping Hands is an organization in Drumheller that offers these services, but participants stated they were expensive (quoted \$25/hour).
 - Note: A Seniors Service Coordinator hired by the town was often noted as a valuable resource to help seniors get the services and/or information they need.
- **Podiatry services** are needed.
 - Used to have podiatry services but podiatrist discontinued the service as too few people were using the service.
 - An LPN provides footcare at one of the clinics but participants noted that the footcare clinics could not offer the level of footcare that a podiatrist could.
- **Suggestion**: provide more mobile services like the mobile “Man Van” to offer services such as podiatry (for both men and women).

Question 3a: What does a healthier population mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- People will live longer so more services will be needed creating higher costs for government
- More access needed to affordable vegetables and fruit
- More meaningful activities and socialization will be needed as seniors will be more active
- Gerontology services are needed, especially one who could be available for consults in Drumheller, (part of the larger challenge regarding access to specialist services)

Question 3b: What does increased cultural diversity in our population mean for the future of seniors’ services in Alberta?

- **Expectation that cultural diversity will increase** in community with an overflow from the cities. Participants expressed the need to:
 - Work and associate with different cultures in learning more about each another’s cultures
 - Accept each other
 - Be tolerant with a “coming and blending” together
- Concerns expressed about **special treatment** being given to “gay” and First Nations peoples. One participant comment: “Let’s all just be equal.”

Question 3c: What does expanded use of technology mean for the future of seniors services in Alberta?

- **Less invasive surgery** so people could live longer
- **Use of social media** and its impact on socialization; will it increase/decrease socialization?
- **Improved transportation** with driverless cars and enhanced access to services.

Question 4: Based on your personal experience and lifestyle, what do you see as “ideal” and “preferable” services for seniors in the future to help them to age in place in the community?

- **Home care services with sufficient staffing to provide the services on a timely basis.**
 - Home care hasn’t increased staffing over the years and is limiting the amount of time staff can spend in their homes. Staff need to stay in home longer for socializing.
 - One participant noted a frustration with home care staff who “don’t show up, especially on long weekends”.
- **Socialization through a range of support services is critical.**
 - Volunteer visitors
 - Consider other groups who can support seniors in their homes that are not paid services.
 - Promote seniors centre
- **Financial viability of programs and services for seniors** is a concern. Related to this concern was the amount of “red tape/hoops that seniors need to jump through” to access government grants, e.g. home repairs
- **Affordable legal services** are needed in Drumheller.
 - Some legal aid is available through articling students in some of the lawyers’ offices.

Question 5: What seniors services have you seen or experienced that you believe are essential services? Of this list of services, pick your top five most important services?

- **Home support services** as noted earlier. (x4)
- **Affordable Meals on Wheels** (x2)
- **Support group for socialization** (x2)
- **Community-based Seniors Services Coordinator**
- **Affordable housing**
- **Improved transportation**, especially in rural areas
- **Availability of continuing care**
- **More localized medical diagnostic testing**
- **Adult day care/ respite** for caregivers
- **More doctors for easier accessibility**

Question 6: How should we go about building this “preferred future” for seniors?

- **Create support groups** to provide services to seniors; only costs are their time, not money
- **Create senior loans at preferred rates.**

- **Subsidize entrepreneur(s) to provide meals** rather than having meals on wheels.
- **Make use of volunteers**
- **Provide affordable housing** using partnerships such as governments and community service organizations

Question 7: What is the role of individuals, of communities, and of the Alberta Government in seniors' services?

Generally, participants felt:

- Community needs assessments would be helpful
- Everyone needs to do their part (according to their financial means):
 - Contributions help preserve seniors' dignity, but seniors also want to see value for what they contribute. A sentiment expressed: "seniors want to be part of the solution not just for the benefits".
- Participants expressed the view that as seniors they represent a large part of the population so their opinion counts.

Question 8: Do individuals have a role in paying for these ideal future service, or should government be responsible for funding all of them?

- See responses given to question 7.

Other Comments

Other queries and ideas mentioned as part of the wrap-up:

- **Increasing cultural diversity among care providers** where cultural practices and English as a second language could be challenging.
- **Potential for "tiny house" phenomena** to have an impact in smaller communities.
- Questions raised:
 - What could be learned from Hutterite Colonies about caring for elders? **Note:** there are three Hutterite Colonies in the Drumheller area.
 - Why so few seniors take part in the local seniors centre?
 - Why some of the medical care being provided in Red Deer couldn't come to Drumheller?