

Issues for Edmonton Seniors

Transportation helps to keep a senior from becoming isolated, but for those that no longer drive (or never drove) and who live on a low income, private transportations options are too costly

The Public Transportation System

- A senior must be able to speak English to understand the transit system which means that many immigrant seniors cannot access the public transportation system without assistance
- Winter street clearing results in windrows of snow between the bus stop and the bus and many seniors cannot navigate over the piles of snow
- Seniors who use the bus system rely on clear sidewalks to get to the bus stop and sidewalks that have not been shoveled and are icy present a risk which often forces the senior to stay home
- Many sidewalks do not have curb cuts at intersections which makes it difficult to use the sidewalks if you have a wheelchair, scooter or a walker
- The public transportation system can be intimidating for a senior to use without guidance and in Edmonton there is only one ETS staff person that provides travel training
- Many seniors express concern for their safety on ETS--they are afraid of falling when walking to their seat with the bus moving, and they are intimidated by loud, aggressive young people (They are thankful drivers have had to take Senior-Friendly training, but there are still instances when buses move before seniors are seated)
- DATS cannot travel outside the boundaries of Edmonton and many seniors have loved ones in care centres in the Capital Health Region and are dependent on family or friends for rides to see their loved ones
- Many crosswalks in Edmonton do not allow enough time for a senior to get across
- Bus schedules often do not support evening programs at senior centres
- Buses can't get close to senior centers and in many situations seniors must walk across busy roads and icy parking lots in order to get from bus stops to a senior center

Volunteer Driving Programs

- For those that have mobility concerns, it is often difficult to get to a bus stop therefore they must rely on a low-cost ride alternative such as a volunteer driving program
- There are long waiting lists for obtaining a ride from a volunteer driver program, due to shortage of volunteers
- More public awareness is needed to attract volunteers for helping seniors i.e. by offering rides, by shoveling their sidewalks etc.
- Often a frail senior requires not only a ride, but an escort to stay with them and those volunteers are hard to find

- Seniors are not aware of all the transportation options available to them—there is not a single point of entry for information on transportation
- Volunteer driver programs are useful to help with rides for low-income seniors who cannot take buses, but the service model cannot sustain growth in demand
- Volunteer driving programs give priority to finding rides for medical appointments so requests for rides to visit spouse in long-term care, getting groceries, recreation and social outings often go un-met

Other Transportation Issues

- Transportation is not covered in funds for SAFE Housing, yet these clients need assistance to get around
- There is not consistency in medical assessments for driving—many seniors feel they were forced to give up their license too early, yet some seniors are still driving that probably shouldn't be driving

Housing is quickly becoming the top concern among seniors, right along with the lack of suitable transportation

- Many local seniors have had to move within the last year because their rent has increased or their apartment building is being turned into condominiums and they cannot afford to buy their apartment
- There is a shortage of safe housing so seniors coming out of shelters have very few affordable options
- The number of homeless seniors has increased over the last year
- Many seniors cannot afford assisted living facilities and there is a long waiting list for subsidized seniors housing facilities
- There is a shortage of affordable housing facilities that can take both husband and wife when only one requires higher level care, therefore families are being split up
- Because of housing costs in Edmonton, many seniors are finding their adult children coming to live with them—especially those with drug addiction and alcohol problems and this has impact on safety of the senior
- Often a couple's income cannot support both long-term care for one and another housing option for the other
- Many seniors housing facilities will not take pets so seniors refuse to leave their homes even when they require higher levels of care
- Seniors move from their homes for a variety of reasons: loneliness, inability to keep up with the maintenance, health deterioration, death of a spouse, not eating properly, pressure from family, the cost is no longer affordable
- Knowing when it's time to move is tricky—who judges when it's no longer safe for a senior to stay in their home?

- There is a shortage of affordable service providers to do yard work, snow shoveling, light housekeeping, repairs and maintenance-- more funding is required for aging in place to allow seniors to remain in their homes as long as possible
- Seniors are fearful of hiring people they don't know to perform housework, yard work etc.— they want their community agencies to find them someone reliable and affordable
- Many of the home service programs require that the senior has their own equipment i.e. shovels, lawnmower, ladders etc. and this can be a barrier for the senior (i.e. keeping up maintenance of a lawnmower)
- There is no affordable moving service for low-income seniors
- Some seniors can't afford devices that would make it safer to remain in their own homes i.e. the telecare or life-lines
- It is very difficult to complete the necessary forms to access home-adaptation program funding—many seniors give up, or don't bother because it's too complicated

Other Issues

- Many seniors complain they cannot get enough homecare and their loved ones are burdened. They cannot afford to hire additional care support
- There are waiting lists for adult day care and this means families that would benefit from having some respite to caregivers are not getting a break from care-giving
- Many seniors are caring for a loved one at home and there is a shortage of respite care available to give them a break—burnout and deteriorating health result for caregiver
- Communities are expected to pick up more care-giving obligations and with families at a distance or working this may be an unfair burden
- There are not enough doctors taking new patients so seniors often experience stress and anxiety trying to find a new physician if their old physician moves or retires
- Very few visible minority seniors use senior centers—barriers such as language, costs, suitability of programs etc.
- There is a shortage of reading material in other languages for immigrant seniors—very few agencies translate information on their services
- There are few places where immigrant seniors feel comfortable to gather and speak their own language and there are very few seniors housing facilities that can offer culturally appropriate food or staff that speak their language
- Immigrant seniors are not educated as to the laws of the country and women especially are falling victim to unfair will settlements
- Many seniors are care-taking their grandchildren, especially seniors from diverse cultures and so programs must take child care into consideration in order to keep these seniors from becoming isolated
- Seniors want a place to go to meet people of their own age—they do not favor having to go to a multi-use recreation facility, they value the social aspects of gathering and you don't get that by

attending a class at a large recreation facility. These large inter-generational facilities don't encourage seniors to stay and connect with each other, like at a senior centre

- Native seniors have had many changes in their medical coverage in last couple of years and therefore they are having to apply for assistance from government programs for things that they used to get automatically—it requires lots of staff assistance to apply
- Because the pay is low for many home-service providers, there are many workers from other cultures who do not speak English and seniors cannot understand them
- Seniors are interested in lifelong learning opportunities—sometimes classes are not affordable-no scholarships
- Many seniors are afraid they will outlive their retirement savings
- Pensions are not keeping past with the increase in the cost of living
- Income support is a huge issue for hard-to-house seniors

Issues for Edmonton Senior-Serving Organizations

- Senior centers are community hubs and seniors connect and help each other through these agencies—they play an integral role in the community
- Many seniors' organizations do not receive enough funds to pay staff competitive wages or benefits and therefore they are having trouble recruiting and retaining staff
- Some smaller agencies have no staff at all and feel their seniors would really benefit from having some outreach staff who could check how they are doing—many of their seniors have no family here
- Utility costs have risen as having costs of operating a facility—funding has not kept pace
- Providing programs and services to seniors puts agencies in an insurance category of serving the vulnerable and therefore risk management and general insurance concerns have increased along with costs
- There is really no core funding for senior services in community—many agencies rely on FCSS, casino, grants, and membership monies to keep going—some agencies cannot access FCSS money and are unable to grow and expand without a solid funder
- Most senior-serving agencies can't afford to hire a fundraising director
- Funders are demanding more and agencies are finding reporting requirements necessitate more staff
- Trying to find funds is also a big job now—it almost requires one full time person to be able to go after all the various grants because there is no core funding
- There is no pot of money for professional development for senior-serving employees-no bursaries
- There is a shortage of skilled executive directors that are willing to work for wages that senior-serving organizations can pay

- Dedicated volunteers stay, as do staff, but once they burn out there's no one willing to take on those responsibilities for those wages
- The volunteer pool is diminishing and with difficulty attracting volunteers, many community-based senior-serving agencies have problems getting skilled board members
- Agencies that lack skilled board members can become very unstable and this can put staff and seniors/clients at risk
- Facilities are aging
- Many senior-serving agencies wish they had a van for transporting seniors, but express concern that at present funding levels they could not afford to pay for the insurance and gas to keep the vehicle mobile
- Average age of members is increasing and therefore demand for service provision increases in the area of transportation, home help, visitation
- Inner city agencies are seeing more and more drug-addicted seniors—staff aren't trained to deal with this at senior's facilities
- One seniors drop-in rents a Catholic church basement and they are worried that if the church is closed they will have to move
- One seniors' center is a tenant in the General Hospital and they may be asked to moved for hospital renovations
- One volunteer driving agency has outgrown their two-room space and need to find a central location with lots of parking and reasonable rent
- There is a need for reasonably priced office and program space for senior-serving organizations
- There is not a high level of understanding in the community about the needs of aging population and services/supports that will assist them
- Seniors transportation is difficult to fund because it is not covered in preventative social service programs, not funded by seniors ministry, or by transportation ministry or by health ministry—no department is willing to step up to deal with the issue and private funders are also reluctant to fund transportation programs
- There is a new senior center that is occupying one-third of a program room in Mill Woods Recreation Centre, but the space is limited and they do not yet have staff to get the center off the ground. They have no storage space if they want to run a program
- With a shoestring staff contingent and low resources, senior-serving agencies are having difficulty providing services for unmet needs—they are unable to grow and expand under present economic conditions and demand for their services is growing
- Agencies that provide yard help, snow shoveling registry etc. can't keep up to the demand and with the booming economy they are having a hard time trying to hire laborers who will go out to provide this service to seniors at a rate the senior can afford
- Raising money to add onto facilities is a huge job for senior volunteers
- There is a lack of funds for translations of information for non-English speaking seniors

- There is no standardized data system for senior services-not a level playing field because larger agencies are able to get better systems in place
- Finding instructors for seniors programs is becoming more difficult—training is onerous and expensive and yet younger seniors are expecting a lot higher quality programs for their money

This information was gathered by the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) in recent visits to its 38 member agencies. We asked staff what issues their seniors were experiencing and then asked about issues for the agency itself. This handout is not meant to contain statistics, only qualitative information which was related to us by these community-based senior-serving organizations.

The ESCC is a not-for-profit agency that was set up following a comprehensive Edmonton Task Force on Community Services for Seniors (2002-03). The role of the Council is to be the communication hub for the senior-serving sector and to facilitate joint planning and resource sharing among agencies. The six priority areas for ESCC are: 1) community supports 2) diversity 3) fitness and recreation 4) personal safety 5) transportation and 6) health and wellness.

For further information about ESCC or the information on this handout, contact executivedirector@seniorscouncil.net or call Sheila Hallett at 423-5635. You can also visit our website at www.seniorscouncil.net