



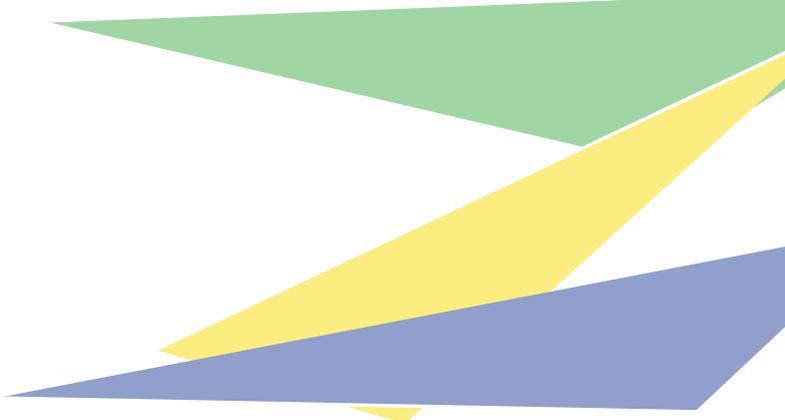
STRATEGIZING FOR POSITIVE AGING IN SASKATCHEWAN

Executive Summary



Older Adults Moving Forward

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Introduction

SSM (Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism) is the only provincial organization that brings together Saskatchewan seniors' organizations with the common vision of achieving a better quality of life for older adults in the province. SSM researches issues affecting older adults to provide empirical evidence for effective advocacy. With 30 years of experience in working with older adults, SSM represents a combined membership of over 100,000 older adults – 57% of older adults in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan's population is projected to grow over the next 25 years. The percentage of people over the age of 65 years in Saskatchewan is projected to increase from 14.4% to about 23% by 2038 (Statistics Canada 2016 census).

Long term planning is needed to respond to the needs this trend will create, and to recognize and appreciate the value of older adults in the province. SSM has taken the lead to advocate for older adults across Saskatchewan to ensure their voices are heard. Through forums, focus groups and surveys, older adults shared their concerns and their vision for the future. The key themes that emerged were transportation, community involvement, accessibility of services, financial considerations, healthcare, and housing.

Older adults are a diverse group of people who have different needs at different phases of the aging process. Taking a holistic approach to the aging process opens up opportunities for innovation and collaboration. Creating communities that support older adults so that they can stay in their communities as long as possible can increase the wellbeing of older adults and reduce the costs of institutional care.

The benefits of keeping older adults in their communities are tied to intergenerational interaction that provides purpose and increased feelings of wellbeing for older people and gives opportunity for sharing of knowledge with the younger generations. Intergenerational relationships increase mutual empathy and respect.

Policy decisions can facilitate positive social change with input from those who may be most affected. The incorporation of insights from older adults, and the space for active participation in decision-making, represents a shift toward meaningful consultation and inclusion.

A growing older adult population requires concerted and collaborative effort across communities, organizations, and all levels of government to devise innovative solutions and a comprehensive plan that will ensure older adults' quality of life.



Methodology

During 2018-19, SSM held 21 forums and focus groups with 656 participants across Saskatchewan, as well as presentations to regional gatherings of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA). The sessions sought the views of the attendees in an effort to describe a future community where positive aging would prosper.

These views were summarized and formed the basis for the development of a survey that was used to validate the findings from the forums as well as to prioritize the key themes. The survey received 2,044 responses from all regions of the province. Respondents were from a variety of age categories from younger than 55 years to older than 85 years. 67% were 74 years or younger. 57% were women, 43% were men, providing a reasonably gender balanced set of responses. 34% of the respondents identified themselves as living in rural communities.

Saskatchewan's Advantage

Participants repeatedly spoke about ensuring that attention is paid to the “advantage” Saskatchewan has because of its older adult population – a large, vibrant, experienced cohort to utilize now and into the future. Older adults can and will make a significant contribution to the growth and success of the province especially if supported and encouraged through strong government leadership.

Older adults are staying in the labour force longer than in the past. 53% of respondents indicated that they were still working for pay. With 24% of the respondents aged between 65-69 years, this result is not surprising. Even using the minimum wage and part-time participation, **the economic contribution of older adults exceeds \$500 million each year.**

Older adults make up a significant segment of eligible voters. In Saskatchewan, research has shown that 73.1% of older adults (65 years +) regularly vote in elections (compared with the overall average of 57%). In future elections, approximately 130,000 older adults are likely to vote – about 16% of eligible voters.

Older adults contribute to their communities through volunteering, and in turn benefit from an increased sense of satisfaction and overall better health. The community benefits through increased social interactions and creation of social networks that build resilience.

In the survey, 71% of respondents indicated that they were volunteering up to ten hours per week with their family and in their communities. From an economic development viewpoint, **this is providing close to \$400 million annually to the life of the province.**

Older adults are very involved in caregiving, often providing inter-generational care to others. 23% of the survey respondents indicated that they were actively providing care to family or friends. This is an economic contribution that potentially amounts to **about \$25 million annually in unpaid labour**.

The appointment by the Government of Saskatchewan of a Minister for Seniors is a positive step towards recognizing the importance of older adults in the province.

SSM anticipates opportunities to provide advice and counsel to the Minister. SSM is well positioned to be the voice of older adults across Saskatchewan and the primary resource that the government can look to as a key partner to respond to the interests of older adults.

Based on the research and consultation, SSM believes the foundation for a “made in Saskatchewan” plan for positive aging needs to build on the advantages we have. Saskatchewan needs a policy level strategic direction that is sustainable and affordable, a “made in Saskatchewan” strategy.

SSM Research Results

Respondents were asked to rank on a scale from 1 to 3 (1 = Most important; 2 = Important; 3 = Somewhat important) the importance of issues related to transportation, accessibility, finances, housing, healthcare, and community involvement.

Sample means were examined to determine the importance assigned to each issue, and as respondents were able to leave blank any issues that did not concern them, response number for each category and issue varies. For this project, the *higher* the sample mean (\bar{x}), the *less* important the issue is to respondents.

Transportation

Addressing transportation challenges is especially imperative in rural Saskatchewan. The SSM survey indicated that almost 60% of the respondents are concerned about transportation for such basic needs as getting to medical appointments or getting groceries, prescriptions and other essential needs.

Individual comments suggest that the current approach is too ad hoc, scattered, expensive and incomplete to meet the needs of all rural residents. Leadership is needed to work with stakeholders from business and community groups to address this issue. Too often SSM is hearing that people are feeling forced to relocate, as they cannot find acceptable, affordable transportation options.

Issues	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
To get to medical appointments	1,369	30.0	1.53	0.71
To get groceries, prescriptions, or other essential needs	1,345	29.5	1.78	0.75
To visit family and friends	1,030	22.6	2.65	0.76
To participate in community events and activities	823	18.0	2.78	0.89

Housing

Older adults want to have housing options and affordable services available so that they can have choices about where and how they live.

Currently, there is some support for people in their own homes (e.g. homecare) and support at the point at which people need long term care. There is some subsidy (Personal Care Home Benefit) for lower income people in personal care homes. However, there is a significant gap in affordable housing and services for people who need increasing assistance, can no longer stay in their own homes, and are not yet ready for long term care. Private companies that offer services and assisted living are filling this gap, but at a cost not affordable to many. Respondents shared stories of their friends and neighbours having to spend all their financial resources to pay for care and running out of money as their needs became more severe. Too many stories were also shared

about elderly relatives having to relocate from preferred accommodations to less desirable locations/facilities to reduce their financial bleeding. Addressing this gap will require much collaborative effort from all levels of government, communities, and organizations.

Issues	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Having affordable services available to enable me to stay in my own home until I die	1,164	20.5	1.69	0.95
Being able to choose where and how I live”	1,139	20.1	1.94	0.94
Being able to ‘age in place’ - move from level of support to another while staying in the same location	1,144	20.1	2.26	1.00
Access to a variety of types of housing that are affordable and appropriate to my needs	1,227	21.6	2.29	0.97
Access to a variety of types of housing so I can stay in own community as my needs change	1,006	17.7	2.39	0.92

Available and Affordable Services

As older adults adjust to the changes related to aging, provision of accessible and affordable services enables better physical and mental health.

Issues	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Homecare to assist with medical and personal care	1,333	27.8	1.63	0.79
Clear and accessible information about what services are available and where	1,249	26.1	1.78	0.95
Assistance with yard work and home maintenance	1,119	23.4	2.37	0.87
Assistance with housework	1,088	22.7	2.49	0.76

Healthcare

Access to primary health care in their community, timely access to specialists and procedures, and affordability of all aspects of healthcare, including prescription drugs, are of the most concern. However, there was also a significant emphasis on having needs taken seriously, no matter what the person’s age – a reflection of the ageism older adults often face.



Issues	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Access to primary/basic healthcare in the community in which I live	1,064	15.1	1.65	0.97
Timely access to specialists and medical procedures	1,278	18.1	2.05	0.88
Having my needs taken seriously and addressed no matter what my age	872	12.4	2.09	1.06
Affordability of all aspects of healthcare e.g. prescriptions	1,205	17.1	2.21	1.01
Greater emphasis on preventive measures and wellbeing of the whole person	646	9.2	2.56	1.13
More specialists in the area of seniors' physical and mental health	666	9.4	2.72	1.09
Access to affordable respite care so caregivers can have a break	482	6.8	2.79	1.14
Education of health professionals on the particular needs of seniors	568	8.1	2.80	1.16
Access to multi-lingual services when needed	270	3.8	3.20	1.12

Finances

Older adults often experience a decline in income after retirement. The ability to supplement income becomes more difficult because physical limitations may increase and ageism can limit employment opportunities. Knowing that needed services are, and will continue to be, affordable, and that there is a secure and adequate income now and into the future are primary concerns.

Issues	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Ensuring all services are affordable for those with lower incomes	1,319	23.3	1.92	0.96
Reduction in taxes for seniors	1,209	21.1	2.07	0.97
Increases to public income supports (pensions, social assistance, etc.) to provide adequate income	1,243	21.9	2.08	0.90
Legislated protection of private pension and benefits plans	1,149	20.3	2.13	1.05
Providing financial support or tax credits for unpaid caregivers	807	14.1	2.61	1.02

Community Involvement

Safety in home and community was identified as a key issue. This includes everything from emergency response time, to well cleared streets in winter, to addressing older adult abuse.

Preventing and addressing older adult abuse and neglect is one area where Saskatchewan needs to focus more energy and resources. Consideration should be given to establishing a dedicated 24/7 phone response line staffed by trained people who can respond with more than just information.

It is also clear that older adults are aware of the risk of isolation and want to be involved in the life of their communities in meaningful ways. Reducing isolation contributes to mental and physical wellbeing.

Issues	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Being safe in my home and community	1,365	21.8	1.59	0.85
Reducing the possibility of becoming isolated	950	15.2	2.17	1.02
Affordable and accessible recreational and educational activities in my community	962	15.4	2.25	0.97
Effective supports to prevent or address physical, financial, emotional, and sexual abuse of older adults	869	13.9	2.30	0.98
Access and ability to use technology	644	10.3	2.50	1.05
Community awareness of the contributions and needs of older persons	743	11.9	2.61	1.03
Opportunities for intergenerational activities	486	7.8	2.67	1.10
Opportunities to participate in bilingual activities	232	3.7	3.38	0.91

Government Structure

Government structure is needed to address seniors' issues at a provincial level and support strategies for positive aging. SSM research indicated a preference for a Seniors Advocate. The provincial government's appointment of a Minister for Seniors is a step forward, but adequate allocation of financial and human resources within government will be needed. Consideration should be given to appointing a Seniors Advocate, independent of government and also able to identify issues and make recommendations to government. A Seniors Advocate could also have the ability to assist in directing older adults to needed services.



Options	N	Percentage	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
Seniors Advocate	1,357	33.3	1.57	1.14
Minister for Seniors	928	22.8	1.91	1.02
Seniors Secretariat	1,011	24.8	2.13	0.90
Advisory Committee on Seniors	783	19.2	2.43	1.03

Older adults expressed high levels of frustration about not being able to locate the information they need to make decisions. Navigating various websites, programs and understanding complicated forms were examples of the frustration being felt. Sadly, this often results in older adults giving up on their efforts to locate information and resources.

The critical need is for a single point of entry and someone available to help in navigating the information highway.

Conclusion

Saskatchewan needs to strategize for positive aging. A provincial strategy requires collaborative planning and the input from multi-sector partners, including communities, governments and older adults themselves.

SSM is not coming forward with a ready-made strategy but with the message that one is needed. As the provincial seniors organization and a key voice of older adults, SSM is willing and able to continue to provide both leadership and insight into the development of planning for positive aging as we work toward achieving our vision of “quality life for all older adults in Saskatchewan”.

The leadership and commitment of the Government of Saskatchewan is imperative in developing a Saskatchewan Strategy for Positive Aging.



Older Adults Moving Forward