



## Age-Friendly Communities: A Focus on Home & Community Supports

Most older adults want to age in their community, with access to the supports and services needed to live safely and independently in their home. However, many older Nova Scotians find this difficult to do. Many older adults live in sparsely populated areas that are underserved and in homes that do not meet their needs. Family members are often a source for social support and assistance in later life. However, outmigration trends, and changing family configurations and commitments leave many older adults in Nova Scotia without this support.

The Nova Scotia Continuing Care Strategy has resulted in an expansion of the supports available to seniors needing in-home and community-based services. In addition to home support services such as basic house cleaning, meal preparation, assistance with personal care, and respite, older Nova Scotians can access support for yard maintenance/snow removal, technologies such as personal alert systems or medication dispensers, home adaptations, health equipment, and funding to support caregivers. In addition, many communities have accessed grants from the Department of Seniors to support projects or programs aimed at enhancing the lives of older adults in their community. Communities are increasingly interested in being “Healthy Communities” and “Age-Friendly Communities” in which all citizens, regardless of age, are valued and enjoy an optimum quality of life. However, challenges remain with providing the supports older adults need.

**Did you know?**  
Most older adults in Nova Scotia live in private dwellings, and those living in rural areas typically live in older homes. Only 1/3 of them have made the modifications necessary to make their home accessible. (Atlantic Seniors Housing Research Alliance)

## How to support older adults to remain at home

Nova Scotia is one of several jurisdictions that is working to become more “age-friendly”. The information gathered through the provincial Age-Friendly Communities initiative offers valuable insight into the needs of older Nova Scotians. ([www.novascotia.ca/seniors](http://www.novascotia.ca/seniors)) The information provided here is intended to help individuals working in different sectors at the provincial, regional or community levels become more aware of the concerns about home and community supports. As well, opportunities are identified in which different players – older adults, elected officials, government, business leaders, service providers, and community leaders - can work independently or collaboratively to address these concerns.

## What we know...

### Home Repair, Maintenance, and Adaptation

Less than half of participants in age-friendly communities’ consultations said they could age in place; 25% said they would have to move. Some participants indicated that making their (typically) large and older home accessible would require not only retrofitting, but significant and costly repairs. During discussions about loans and grants, a number of older adults indicated that they had not applied for assistance because they did not meet the income criteria. Participants stated that it was difficult to find someone in their community to do such work. In addition, hiring someone to travel to a rural community to do repairs meant paying extra to cover fuel costs, and there were also issues related to finding someone who was trustworthy and who would charge “a fair price”.

Many of the older adults were quite knowledgeable about provincial grants for repair and adaptation and how to access them. However, others were not and there was confusion about which department or level of government that administered them, the nature of the grants, criteria for accessing them, and who to contact. Moreover, just the process of finding the information and filling out the required forms was in itself a daunting prospect for some individuals.

Similar concerns were raised about two other provincial services - Access Nova Scotia’s Property Tax Rebate for Seniors and the Heating Assistance Rebate Program. There was also a common perception that information related to government grants and rebates was online and, therefore, inaccessible to many older adults.

### Yard and Property Maintenance

Yard and property maintenance emerged as two other major concerns for homeowners. Participants described the challenges they encountered in trying to get someone to do lawn mowing and snow removal. In many rural communities, outmigration has left few younger people to assist with such tasks, but even if able bodies were available to do the work, many seniors could not afford to pay the going rate, and some could not pay at all.

AN AGE-FRIENDLY  
COMMUNITY is a community in which the policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help seniors “age actively.”  
(Public Health Agency of Canada)

“My house is old ...[the] windows are old, bathroom leaks, hard to get out of the tub. I can’t afford to fix it.”



“You can’t hire anyone, because there’s nobody available to hire.”

## Home Supports

Though the publicly funded home care program offers many supports, a range of needs are still not addressed by existing services. One service provider observed that “most people who are living alone, can sweep the floor and do dishes, make meals, but they can’t do all the other stuff,” such as scrubbing floors, removing and cleaning drapery, or cleaning the cupboards, fridge and stove. Another service provider highlighted the need for “in-between services” such as “meals, meds and light supervision”. Service providers from several communities shared their concerns that the nutritional needs of older adults in their area were not being met. While Meals-on-Wheels can provide assistance, it is not available in all communities.



## Errands & Appointments

In many communities, the only services being accessed by older adults were provided through staff from home care agencies. These services are greatly appreciated and highly praised. Many older adults expressed the need for “in between” services not covered by Continuing Care such as drives to medical appointments or day-to-day errands including mail retrieval. Participants noted that grocery stores once provided delivery service for a small fee, but with their closing and the opening of larger chains, this service had come to an end. In many communities, pharmacies offered delivery services, but this was not the case in all.



Publicly funded services exist, but many needs are still unmet.

Underpinning these challenges is the need for reliable transportation, however, even where transportation was available, a support person may be required to accompany some individuals.

## What are other factors to consider...

**Accessing Services** – Often, there is a need for clearer and more accessible information in particular when describing programs for home repair and adaptation, and rebates. Some older adults also need help navigating various systems and applying for assistance. In addition, a number of older adults and some service providers have highlighted the need for a person who acts as a system navigator and/or advocate who assists older adults access the information, resources, and services they need.

**Problematic Assumption** - An underlying assumption of our current health care system is that “family, friends and community” are available, able, and willing to help seniors with many of the activities of daily living, and with support in and around the home. However, for some older adults this is simply not the case. Finding assistance with non-eligible household chores, or with other tasks not covered by the publicly-funded program such as yard and property maintenance and transportation, can be challenging.

“There can be all the services in the world, but if the senior either does not know they exist, or...cannot afford due to fixed incomes... then they may as well not exist.”

**Importance of Advance Planning** - While a considerable number of seniors (e.g., 30% of survey respondents) indicate that they have already made adaptations to their home in anticipation of future reduction in capacity, many had not. This failure to plan ahead was sometimes linked to a reluctance to ask for, or admit the need for, assistance. A service provider commented that many of her clients did not think of making adaptations to their home until they had fallen.

## Here's what you can do...

There are opportunities for a range of stakeholders (public, private, voluntary) to identify and work on solutions to the concerns raised. Here are a few examples:

### Home repairs, upgrades or modifications:

You could initiate a discussion amongst municipal leaders, local voluntary and/or non-profit organization(s), local contractors, and the Nova Scotia Community College, about how to offer a pool of skilled workers.

### Errands, household chores, yard maintenance:

You could provide outreach to older adults by developing a service that addresses these needs not covered by the publicly-funded program. Church groups, student placement programs, local businesses could be involved in the delivery. Voluntary groups, municipalities or district health authorities could be considered as potential funding sources.

## Here's what is working...

Many communities are creating solutions to address needs such as the ones highlighted here.

The Mahone Bay Centre Seniors' Project has launched the Seniors Helping Seniors program. Partnering with community groups, business and different levels of government, the program helps with tasks such as errands, yard clean-up, house hold chores, and picking up the mail.

Several district health authorities are supporting clients with funding for lawn care and snow removal, wood preparation and expenses related to transportation.

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The information presented in this document is based on work that the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging and the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors has completed through working with a number of municipalities in Nova Scotia to assess their age-friendliness. Between May of 2011 and December of 2012, more than 900 Nova Scotians – most 65 and older - from 13 rural municipalities provided input as part of their Age-Friendly Community consultations.

## Did you know?

Financial assistance is available through some health authorities in Nova Scotia to support instrumental activities of daily living.



For more information on this project or the age-friendly communities initiative in Nova Scotia, contact Nova Scotia Centre on Aging, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
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