




Older Adult Strategy

Consolidated Report: Recommendations



The City of Guelph undertook the development of an Older Adult Strategy to provide a planning framework and implementation plan to ensure that the city is age-friendly as the population of the city ages.

A project steering committee, comprised of older adults, municipal staff, and representatives from organizations serving seniors, was formed to help guide the development of the strategy, using the World Health Organization (WHO) age-friendly cities framework.

The strategy development process was thorough and involved a review of documents using resources from the Corporation of the City of Guelph, community organizations, and various communities around the world.

An extensive community engagement process involving focus groups and stakeholder interviews provided opportunities for community members to provide input in a number of key areas relating to service and policy. Key community informants included representatives from the Poverty Elimination Task Force, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, The Drop-In Centre, Volunteer Centre of Guelph Wellington, the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network, Guelph Family Health Team, University of Guelph - Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition and City of Guelph staff from a range of departments.

This process informed the development of the Older Adult Strategy report, which articulated the goal, vision, and guiding principles for the City as it relates to older adults, and recommendations to undertake a broad set of actions over 10 years to become an age-friendly city.

Goal

Guelph is a great place to live and age well.

Vision

Guelph is an age-friendly community that:

- values and supports older adults
- optimizes opportunity for choice, independence, and quality of life
- celebrates diversity
- is inclusive of all, reducing inequities (is fair and just)

Guiding principles

The City of Guelph will ensure that all services, policies and programs are designed, delivered and resourced, where feasible, using the following guiding values and principles:


- participation and inclusion of all citizens
- respect and dignity
- active engagement in communication and decision making
- access to a safe living environment
- fairness and equity
- self-determination and choice

In November 2012, City of Guelph Council approved the Older Adult Strategy Framework and acknowledged its success is based on shared implementation across the community as stated in Recommendation #1, “THAT the City of Guelph commit to a comprehensive multi-year Older Adult Strategy to ensure the City is age-ready and can be designated age-friendly.” Council approved the Vision, Guiding Values and Principles of the Older Adult Strategy and directed staff to create a cross-departmental staff team responsible for the development of a corporate action plan based on the Older Adult Strategy to ensure Guelph is age-ready and age-friendly; and directed to report back on the plan, timelines and resource requirements.

In 2013 continuing into 2014, work began on implementing recommendations to help Guelph become more age-friendly.

- A Cross Departmental Action team comprised of municipal staff was formed to ensure that all policies, programs and services are developed and amended with an age-friendly perspective.
- An application has been submitted to the World Health Organization for the City of Guelph to join the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities
- The City of Guelph has worked with the University of Guelph Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship to develop an Older Adult Community Profile for Guelph. This will create a baseline assessment of the Guelph community to help to create informed, evidence based decisions to move forward with priority setting and implementation plans for creating an age-friendly Guelph community.
- The City of Guelph Emergency Medical Service has received provincial funding to develop a community paramedicine program to improve access to home care and support services for seniors and other patients with chronic conditions.
- Senior Services has joined a newly emerged Southern Ontario Age Friendly Networking Community to share information and support the age friendly movement

In September 2014, the City of Guelph received a grant from the Ontario Seniors’ Secretariat. This grant will provide support to develop a Community Older Adult Leadership Team (COALT). The Community Older Adult Leadership Team will help to set priorities and develop an implementation plan. It is envisioned that this team will be comprised of older adults, representatives of organizations serving seniors, business representatives, and municipal staff. Development of this team will create natural opportunities for collaboration across the community.



The following pages summarize the intents of the Older Adult Strategy, organized to mirror the WHO age-friendly dimensions. Each dimension is structured to outline its importance to the Guelph community, summarize the related feedback from the community engagement sessions, present a goal, and outline consolidated ongoing recommendations from the Older Adult Strategy. The WHO guidelines for each dimension are also included here for reference. This information will form the basis for the Community Older Adult Leadership Team to set priorities, targets and measurements, to create an age-friendly Guelph. General principles will include learning from other jurisdictions, ensuring alignment with other City initiatives, and building in regular monitoring and evaluation practices.

Outdoor spaces and buildings



To what extent does the natural and built environment in Guelph help older adults get around easily and safely and allow them to actively participate in community life?

In Guelph, people said that they liked the green spaces; the parks, trails and recreation opportunities. They liked that new trails being built were following accessibility standards. People also told us that getting around Guelph did have some challenges. The City does do yearly inspections of sidewalks as legislated by the province, but the time waiting for a sidewalk to be repaired does cause barriers to getting around easily. Seniors have a fear of falling and shared concerns about sidewalk maintenance, curb cuts, street crossings and snow clearing practices. They said there was progress being made to make the built space 'senior friendly'; for instance the City centre was identified as being quite accessible with good curb cuts. Other areas of the city are not as far along.

Goal

Buildings and outdoor spaces in Guelph will be safe, accessible, and appropriate for older adults.

Guelph will make its buildings and outdoor spaces more age-friendly by:

- Improving the location, accessibility and availability of public seating
- Improving the availability, location and accessibility of public washrooms
- Making crosswalks safer, especially where older adult traffic is high
- Making sidewalks safer and more accessible, including consideration of shared safe use, snow removal and appropriate maintenance
- Promoting the use of Universal Design Principles in all construction
- Promoting the use and expansion of accessible public spaces

For further details, see recommendations 7-17, 36 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

“The WHO (2007) describes and defines age friendly outdoor spaces and buildings using the following criteria:

- **Clean and pleasant environment:** outside environment and public buildings must be clean and free from noise and unpleasant smell.
- **Public buildings and services:** accessible public buildings with accessible washrooms and services in close proximity to where older adults live, and specialized customer services. Public buildings must have the following features: elevators, ramps, adequate signs and directions, railings on stairs, non-slippery floors, adequate, and accessible public toilets.
- **Green spaces:** Safe and well maintained parks and public spaces with accessible and adequate public toilets and seating.
- **Walkways and pavements** are well maintained, non slippery, wheelchair accessible, and age friendly.
- **Roads:** Well designed, maintained, non-slippery roads with safe crossing, pavements and cycle paths. Age friendly pedestrian crossing lights with visual and audio signals, and allow sufficient time for older adults to cross safely (WHO, 2007, p.12).

Accessible and safe outdoor spaces and public buildings create an enabling environment and improved quality of life. In these spaces older adults feel safe, are more independent, are able to move freely, and are enabled to age comfortably (WHO, 2007). An age friendly environment should be free from violence, danger, crime, drugs and harm by others, and one where older adults can feel secure in their living environment (WHO, 2007, p.15).¹

¹ Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
City of Guelph Older Adult Community Profile

Transportation



Do older adults have ample opportunity to travel (safely and conveniently) wherever they want to go in the community?

In Guelph, people said that accessible, affordable transportation options were essential for older adults to maintain their independence and have a good quality of life. They generally agreed that they liked the Affordable Bus Pass program, mobility services, and community buses. Key themes of concern were walking distances between bus stops and destinations, adequate seating at bus stops, affordability, and timely access to bathrooms. There were concerns raised about the changes to bus routes and bus stop locations, and the communication of these changes to the public. It was noted that Guelph has received a 'Share the Road' award for being bicycle friendly. Transportation includes all modes of getting around the city and there was consistent concerns raised about how the various modes of transportation need to share the sidewalks, roadways, and trails. For instance there were concerns raised about how to safely share space with cars, bicycles, e-bikes, scooters, motorized wheelchairs, strollers, skateboards and pedestrians.

Goal

Older adults in Guelph will have access to a range of public, private and community-run transportation services that are accessible, safe and affordable.

Guelph will make its transportation system age-friendly by:

- Improving education about how to use the multi-modal transportation system
- Ensuring that City, community and mobility bus systems consider the needs of older adults
- Increasing the number of accessible taxis

For further details, see recommendations 18-25, 49 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Transportation

“The WHO (2007) suggests that accessibility, affordability, and availability of transportation services are key factors to building an age-friendly city. These factors help to ensure that older adults are able to engage in civic, social, community, and health services. The WHO Guide for Global Age-Friendly Cities (2007) identified the following areas as important to age-friendly urban transportation:

- Public transportation is affordable to all older adults, and transportation rates charged are consistent and well displayed.
- Public transportation is accessible, reliable, and frequent (including services at night and on weekends).
- Public transportation is available to older adults to access hospitals, health centres, social events, public parks, shopping centres, banks and seniors’ centres.
- Transport routes are well connected between the various transport options within the city, and between neighbouring cities (including the outer areas), and all areas are well serviced.
- Public vehicles are accessible, with lower floors, low steps, and wide and high seats. Vehicles are well maintained and clean, and have clear signage indicating vehicle number and destination.
- Sufficient specialized transport services are available for people with disabilities, and priority seating is available to older adults, and is respected by other passengers.
- Public transport is comfortable, not overcrowded, and safe from crime.
- Courteous drivers, who obey traffic rules, stop at designated transport stops and wait for passengers to be seated before driving off, as well as park alongside the curb so that it is easier for older adults to get off the vehicle.
- Designated transport stops and stations are located in close proximity to where older adults live, are clean, safe, and are provided with seating and shelter from the weather.
- Stations are accessible, with ramps, escalators, elevators, appropriate platforms, public toilets, and legible and well-placed signage.
- Accessible, affordable and priority parking available to older adults, subsidized and accessible community transport and taxis available to older adults to specific events and places (WHO, 2007, p. 20).²

² Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
City of Guelph Older Adult Community Profile

Housing



To what extent do older adults have housing that is safe and affordable and allows them to stay independent as their needs change?

In Guelph people said they wanted an array of housing options available for them to age in place, and that they were concerned this may not be available, accessible or affordable for them. People told us they were concerned that new housing being built may not meet the needs of an aging population. There was concern over lengthy waiting times to access housing they could afford, or long term care homes if their health required such living arrangements.

Goal

For older adults in Guelph, housing is available, affordable and supported sufficiently to allow them to choose where they will live as they age.

Therefore Guelph will:

- Ensure alignment between the Guelph Wellington 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, Guelph's Affordable Housing Strategy and its Older Adult Strategy
- Ensure zoning and planning regulations do not create unintended barriers to development of housing choices for older adults
- Expand the supply of affordable housing
- Expand the availability, appropriateness and accessibility of supports and incentives to allow older adults to stay in their homes

For further details, see recommendations 26-31, 33, 61 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Housing

“According to the WHO’s (2007) Guide for Global Age Friendly Cities, “housing is essential to safety and well-being, there is a link between appropriate housing and access to community and social services in influencing the independence and quality of life of older people” (p. 29). The WHO (2007) identified several factors as essential to creating housing and support that enables older adults to age comfortably and safely:

- **Affordability and Aging in Place:** Affordable housing and essential services are available to all older adults. Housing is located in close proximity to services and facilities.
- **Housing Design:** Housing is well structured and made of appropriate materials: to meet environmental conditions (appropriate cooling and heating); to have sufficient space to enable older adults move around freely; and is adapted for older adults with even spaces, wide enough passages for wheelchair accessibility, and accessible bathrooms, toilets and kitchens.
- **Housing Modifications:** Housing is modified and is affordable for older adults as needed, and there is a good understanding of how housing can be modified to meet the needs of older people.
- **Maintenance:** Maintenance services are affordable for older adults, public housing, rented accommodation and common areas are well maintained.
- **Community integration:** housing design facilitates continued integration of older adults into the community in which they live.
- **Housing Options:** A range of age-friendly, accessible and affordable housing options is available to older adults, and older adults are well informed of available housing options.
- **Living Environment:** Housing is not overcrowded and older adults are safe and comfortable in their housing environment. Housing is not located in areas prone to natural disasters and financial support is provided for housing security measures (WHO, 2007, p.35).³

³Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
City of Guelph Older Adult Community Profile

Respect and social inclusion



To what extent are services respectful of the diversity of needs among older adults and willing to accommodate older adults in all aspects of society?

In Guelph people told us there are great programs and services (i.e. clubs for cycling, canoeing, and subsidized recreation programs), and opportunities for cross generational programs that focus on function rather than age. Some retailers make seniors feel welcome and ensure ease of service (eg. with aisles wide enough for scooters). Gaps may exist for seniors who are frail, live with mental health challenges, have cognitive limitations, or are homeless.

Goal

In Guelph, all older adults will be treated respectfully and included fully in social life

Therefore Guelph will:

- Combat ageism by all means possible, including using a seniors' lens to assess all municipal initiatives, and training others to do so.
- Intentionally improve the inclusion of marginalized or vulnerable subpopulations of older adults, including those living in poverty, immigrant and cultural groups, frail and isolated seniors, those unable to engage with technology, and LGBTQ seniors.

For further details, see recommendations 3, 6, 34, 35, 38, 44, 45, 51, 52, 56, 60 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Respect and social inclusion

“The WHO suggests that “changing societal and behavioral norms, a growing lack of contact between generations, and a widespread ignorance about aging and older people” (WHO, 2007, p.44) contributes to the feeling of social isolation among older adults. Many of the older adults consulted for the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Guide reported that they often felt respected, recognized, and included; however they experienced a “lack of consideration in the community, in services and in family” (WHO, 2007, p. 44). The WHO (2007) identified the following areas as relevant for creating an inclusive age-friendly community:

- **Respectful and inclusive services:** Older adults are consulted by public, voluntary and commercial services on ways to serve them better. Service staff is trained to meet the needs of older people with services and products adapted to their needs and preferences.
- **Public images of aging:** The media include older people in public imagery, depicting them positively and without stereotypes.
- **Public education:** Primary and secondary students are educated about aging and older adults. Older people are actively and regularly involved in local school activities with children and teachers. Older adults are given the opportunity to share their knowledge, history, and expertise with other generations.
- **Community and economic inclusion:** Older adults are included as full partners in community decision-making affecting them as well as being recognized by the community for their past and present contributions. Economically disadvantaged older adults enjoy access to public, voluntary and private services and events.
- **Intergenerational and family interactions:** Community-wide settings, activities and events attract people of all ages by accommodating age-specific needs and preferences. Older people are specifically included in community activities for families. Communities regularly organize activities that bring generations together for mutual enjoyment and enrichment (WHO, 2007, p. 45)⁴

⁴ Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
City of Guelph Older Adult Community Profile

Social participation



To what extent do older adults have opportunity for developing and maintaining meaningful social networks in their neighborhoods? And do older adults have opportunity to participate fully in their preferred events and activities?

In Guelph people said there are opportunities to participate socially. The Guelph Wellington Seniors Association, the City of Guelph, the University of Guelph, and the Upper Grand District School Board continuing education all provide a range of services and programs for seniors. Some of these programs are at no cost, or have subsidies available. There was geographic inequity noted, with the north end of Guelph having more services for seniors, and the south end having minimal.

Goal

Guelph will offer facilities and programs that allow older adults to participate in recreational and social activities as they age

Therefore Guelph will:

- Continue to offer programs for older adults across the broad spectrum of services for seniors and ensure ease of access
- Improve geographic coverage of older adult programs to ensure programs are offered throughout the whole city, with a particular initial focus on the south and west parts of Guelph
- Explore using existing facilities more effectively to offer programs and services to older adults

For further details, see recommendations 5, 37, 39, 40-42 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Social participation

“The WHO (2007) suggests that participating in community leisure, social, cultural, and spiritual activities can help older adults to continue to exercise their competence, retain respect and esteem, and establish supportive relationships. According to the WHO’s (2007), the biggest concerns related to the social participation of older adults are affordability and accessibility, especially for older adults with disabilities. The WHO (2007) report outlines the following factors as important considerations when assessing older adult’s social participation:

- Accessibility of information and awareness of events and activities,
- Affordability of events, activities, and local attractions,
- Range of events and activities that appeal to a diverse population of older adults and encourage the participation of people of different ages and cultural backgrounds,
- Accessibility of facilities and settings to enable participation by older adults with disabilities or those who require care,
- Organizations make efforts to engage older adults who are experiencing social isolation (Example: personal visits and phone calls), and
- Community integration: facilities promote shared and multi-purpose use by people of different ages and interests (WHO, 2007, p. 38)⁵

⁵Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
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Communication and information



To what extent are older adults aware of the diverse range of programs and services available within their community? And is information readily available, appropriately designed and delivered to meet the needs of older people?

In Guelph people told us that it is important to communicate to the public in multiple formats. People liked personal service; for instance, they liked when phones are answered by people not machines. Different communication formats appeal to different people. Some people; but not all, like print media such as the newspaper or written publications, others like the radio, others like the Internet. There was a concern that as the Internet becomes the main tool of communication some seniors will be left behind, unable to receive the information they need.

Goal

In Guelph, older adults and those who care for them will have easy access to comprehensive, timely and clear information regarding services and supports relevant to them.

Therefore Guelph will:

- Remain committed to creating an effective communication system that targets older adults
- Communicate available services and supports to and for older adults and their caregivers using multiple communication modalities

For further details, see recommendations 4, 48, 50, 53-55, 57, 58 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Communication and information

“Access to information allows older adults to stay connected with events and people, and to get timely and practical information with which to manage their lives and meet their personal needs (WHO, 2007). According to the WHO (2007), older adults in cities in the developed world are able to access a variety of information from many different general and specialized media for older adults. However, older adults from cities across the world expressed fear of missing information and being left out of the mainstream. The effective distribution of information that is accessible to older adults with varying capacities and resources is crucial to active aging. The WHO (2007) notes that governments and voluntary organizations have a major role in ensuring that information relevant to the needs and interests of older adults is readily available. The following are characteristics of age-friendly communication and information systems in a city:

- Regular and reliable distribution of information by government or voluntary organizations, and information disseminated to reach older people where they conduct their usual activities of daily life;
- Accessibility of printed information;
- Accessibility of automated communication and equipment; and
- Access to computers and the Internet, at no or minimal charge, in public places such as government offices, community centres and libraries, and support for older adult users (WHO, 2007, p.60).”⁶

⁶ Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
City of Guelph Older Adult Community Profile

Civic participation and employment



To what extent do older people have opportunity to participate in community decision making? And do they have ample opportunity to contribute their experience and skills to the community in paid or unpaid work?

In Guelph people said there is a culture that supports volunteerism. There are many volunteer opportunities, it is easy to volunteer and there are great participation rates amongst older adults. Work opportunities for seniors in the current labour market are a challenge, even more so if you are a senior, new Canadian without experience, or not fluent in English. Of seniors working, some work full time and some part time and challenges come with working with different generations. Caregiving presents unique challenges. The alternate work arrangement program at the City of Guelph is a good example of a program that may be able to support someone balancing caregiving and paid work.

Goal

Guelph will be a place where older adults can contribute to the health of the economy and the community by actively participating in paid and unpaid work.

Therefore Guelph will:

- Continue to support and grow its strong base of volunteerism through encouraging expanded opportunities for older adults
- Work with employers to promote hiring practices and benefits packages supportive of older adults and caregivers
- Model being an age-friendly employer
- Communicate effectively regarding supports in place to engage older adults in the paid and unpaid workforce

For further details, see recommendations 37, 42, 43, 45, 46 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Civic participation and employment

“According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2007) an age-friendly community provides options for older adults to continue to contribute to their communities, through paid or voluntary work, and to be engaged in the political process. Older adults can contribute to their communities by volunteering and helping family and friends (WHO, 2007). In addition, some older adults face economic barriers to their retirement and must continue to earn paid employment (WHO, 2007). The WHO outlines the following factors as important considerations when assessing the civic participation and employment of older adults in a city:

- **Employment:** range of employment options for older adults, and protection from discrimination based on age
- **Volunteerism:** range of volunteering options, the skills and interests of older adults matched to positions, and volunteers well supported in their voluntary work
- **Accessibility:** opportunities for volunteer or paid work well-known and promoted, transportation should be available, and workplaces adapted to meet the needs of disabled people
- **Civic participation:** advisory councils and boards of organizations include older people, and support older adults to participate in meetings and civic events
- **Entrepreneurship:** self-employment of older adults is supported by the public and private sector through financing and other support
- **Pay:** older adults who are working are compensated fairly for their work, and volunteers reimbursed for expenses incurred while volunteering (WHO, 2007, p. 51)”⁷

⁷ Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
City of Guelph Older Adult Community Profile

Community support and health services



To what extent do older adults have access to the social and health services they need to stay healthy and independent?

In Guelph people felt very positive about many health and community services such as: Family Health Team, Community Care Access Centre, Hospice Wellington, St. Joseph's Health Centre, West End Community Centre, HELP (Hospital Elder Life Program), Emergency Medical Services, and walk-in clinics. People told us about good experiences they had with health services, but people also told us more could be done for those who require a greater degree of assistance to stay at home or to return home after a hospital stay.

Goal

Guelph will be a community known for offering health and community services that fully support the wellbeing of older adults

Therefore Guelph will:

- Ensure that those with contact with older adults (e.g. "gatekeepers", home visitors, EMS workers, postal carriers etc.) are trained and linked to promote seniors' wellbeing
- Work to create a policy environment that supports the health and community service needs of older adults, particularly in the areas of privacy regulations and health care provision

For further details, see recommendations 59, 60, 62-64 of the Older Adult Strategy Framework.

Community support and health services

“The availability of good quality, appropriate, and accessible care and support is vital to older adults maintaining health and independence in their communities (WHO, 2007). The following factors are seen as important considerations when assessing the age-friendliness of the community support and health services in a city,

- Accessibility of health and social services and residential care facilities,
- Quality of services for older adults and level of knowledge and training of service professionals,
- Voluntary support to assist older people in a wide range of health and community settings, and
- Emergency planning and care for older adults (WHO, 2007, p.66).⁸

⁸ Anderson M., Omar F., Robson J., Harrison B., 2014.
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For more information

T 519-822-1260 x 2684

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