

Manitoba's seniors strategy will set the direction for Manitoba as a place to age and provides a guide to address the challenges faced by seniors and caregivers as well as support the province to realize the benefits of an aging population including celebrating and valuing the significant contributions seniors have and continue to make to Manitoba.

Manitobans deserve to live independent, vibrant, and fulfilling lives as they age, in a setting of their choosing, and have been clear that for the most part, they wish to age in their own homes, connected to their family and community. However, seniors' needs and desires are highly personal with service and support needs varying by individual preference and over time as types and levels of support needed change.

To understand the needs and aspirations of seniors in Manitoba, the Government of Manitoba launched a comprehensive public engagement process that reached seniors and partners across the province and incorporated diverse voices into the planning process. This included:

- Minister's tour with community roundtables in thirteen (13) communities, including rural and northern communities;
- forty-one (41) interviews and focus groups with seniors, caregivers, seniors serving organizations and thought leaders;
- thirty (30) volunteer Community Engagement Networks who facilitated sixty-one (61) focus groups and discussion in their communities engaging with nine hundred (900) Manitobans;
- public surveys on the EngageMB platform that received over ten thousand (10,000) respondents;
- relationship development with Indigenous governments and Indigenous-led organizations; and,
- workshops with partners from across government.

This document outlines how we approached this important work and the key themes that arose during the engagement process.

Read on for a view into how we collected and organized the information we collected, and an overview of the key issues seniors, families, caregivers, and service providers shared with us. If you would like to learn more visit <https://engagemb.ca/building-a-plan-with-manitoba-seniors> or <https://www.gov.mb.ca/seniors/>.

Who We Spoke With

To ensure we reached diverse individuals throughout the process who had a range of experience and perspectives we designed an approach that would engage with:

- older adults and seniors;
- caregivers and families;
- community-based seniors serving organizations;
- healthcare providers and clinicians;
- Indigenous governments, Indigenous-led organizations and Indigenous community leaders;
- community leaders and organizations focus on specialized populations (e.g., LGBTQ+, Francophone, new comers to Canada, and other ethnocultural communities);
- municipal and federal government representatives; and,
- thought leaders and academics who work on seniors issues.

Framework for Engagement

The Manitoba Seniors Strategy is intended to be a broad from across government that will empower Manitobans to age in a way that aligns with their desires and ambitions. Making this happen required engagement and involvement from citizens of all ages as well as the public and private sectors. The strategy will need to address many domains that impact people as we age, stretching across healthcare; social and economic policy, community services and supports; the physical environment, and opportunities for seniors to actively engage with communities. To ensure the engagement process collected perspectives on this range of topics, the Government of Manitoba based its engagement on a framework that included 16 topic areas as shown below. This framework was based on the National Seniors Strategy model, the Institute for Research on Public Policy’s (IPSS) report entitled Designing a National Seniors Strategy in Canada, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) 2009 Age-friendly Cities Framework and the United Nation’s (UN) 2021 Decade of Healthy Ageing Framework.

Table 1 Topic Areas for Engagement

Topic Areas for Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elder abuse and community safety • Ageism, social participation, civic engagement • Cultural safety • Financial security and affordability • Housing • Transportation • Age-friendly communities, physical environments and spaces • Wellness and prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medications, supports and medical equipment • Service awareness, navigation and communication • Care planning • Healthcare services for seniors • Workforce providing care and services to seniors • Service quality and accountability • Emergency and disaster preparedness • Support for caregivers

What We Heard

What follows are the themes which arose during engagement activities and a summary by topic area.

Summary of Themes

Overall, across all the engagement activities, several key themes emerged:

- Over the next 20 years, Manitoba's older adult population is expected to rapidly grow, and systems and supports are already under pressure due to demand and ways of working that are unsustainable and not ready to meet growing demand in the future.
- Manitobans want to live independent, vibrant, and fulfilling lives in their own homes and communities, for as long as possible. This is unique to each individual and family; some want to stay in their home, others with family, and for some it's about staying connected to a larger community.
- Life is getting more expensive for seniors who are dealing with compounding issues of inflation, fixed income and affordability of services and supports. Some of the biggest pressures identified throughout the consultations included medication and assistive/mobility devices, support to enable people to stay in their homes, housing costs, and access to transportation.
- There are serious gaps in the continuum of services and supports for Manitobans as they age, especially in rural, northern and Indigenous communities. Some of the biggest gaps that were identified include transportation, homecare, seniors housing outside of personal care homes, wellness and prevention services, rehabilitation, and end-of-life care. Additionally, culturally specific care and supports were identified as a gap across all types of services and supports.
- Despite the commitment and best efforts of seniors-serving organizations, services and supports are challenging to access and navigate and can sometimes operate in silos. While many communities have programs and services available, finding and navigating those services often falls to seniors and their caregivers which can be confusing, since the information is not in one place, is not always available in accessible formats, and is often not descriptive enough to help determine what is available or will meet the needs of an individual.
- As Manitobans age they may experience increasingly complex care and support needs related to dementia, mental health and other chronic conditions which may strain health system resources that are already under pressure.
- Most care and support is provided by unpaid caregivers (family and friends) who are increasingly challenged to manage the complex needs of those they are caring for.
- While many seniors talk about how they are valued, ageism and ableism exist and should be reduced.

Elder Abuse and Community Safety

Elder abuse can include financial, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as intentional and unintentional neglect. Participants shared the following on elder abuse and how it may be addressed going forward:

- Abuse may not be recognized and reported in many instances because of lack of awareness of the issue and because seniors often have intimate relationships with their abusers.
- While elder abuse can happen to anyone, many vulnerable and marginalized populations such as people with disabilities, racialized communities including Indigenous peoples, and individuals with low incomes are at increased risk to experience elder abuse.
- While there are some evidence-based prevention programs in place, Manitoba lacks an integrated province-wide and government led framework on elder abuse.
- Where programs and services are available, they are not well known.
- Service providers and caregivers are not always aware of how to recognize and report suspected cases of elder abuse.

We heard that Manitobans want additional and better integrated community supports, and a province-wide approach for the prevention of elder abuse. They also want more support for seniors to access appropriate representation, services, and supports within the justice system if necessary.

Ageism, Social Participation, Civic Engagement

“I hate the term “silver tsunami”. It is used to describe the unprecedented increase in the number of older people in the world. A tsunami is a large wave that results in vast destruction and is something to be feared. Our culture needs a paradigm shift away from negative images and stereotypes of older people to one that values and celebrate aging as a normal phase of life” – Interview participant

Social engagement and participation are often seen as one of the most effective ways to combat ageism and so these concepts have been linked together. Participants shared the following on ageism, social participation and civic engagement and how these areas may be addressed going forward:

- Manitobans reported experiencing ageism in terms of accessing services, peoples’ attitudes and behaviours, and ageism in policy and program design. Participants also identified internalized ageism as an issue that can limit opportunities for seniors.
- Manitoba has strong and active community groups and not-for-profits (e.g., churches/legion/seniors centres/cultural organizations) that offer recreation, social connection opportunities, and support services. Many of these organizations struggle with financial sustainability against rising demand for services.
- Many programs include increased use and reliance on digital models which may re-enforce barriers to seniors’ engagement, especially for those living in northern and rural communities with poor internet connections or for seniors who are unfamiliar with digital tools.

It's clear that Manitobans want to see a more proactive approach to reducing ageism in society and there be sufficient opportunities for social, cultural, and civic engagement as people age.

Cultural Safety

Connection to culture is important as people age, both as a contributor to their wellbeing as well as to ensure that programs and services are respectful, inclusive and meet the needs of those receiving them.

Participants shared the following on cultural safety and how this may be addressed going forward:

- Aligning programs and services with culture included a number of dimensions like food, language, cultural norms and traditional practices (e.g., tobacco, smudging), communication style, etc.
- Cultural awareness and communication with service providers can contribute to or negatively affect a sense of cultural safety, many participants felt this could be improved.
- Historic and current discrimination of seniors faced by different communities has led to distrust of many traditional service providers and a strong desire for more community-based services in settings that people feel comfortable and welcome, as well as the adoption of trauma-informed care/service approaches.
- Many Indigenous participants and participants from racialized or ethnocultural communities reported challenges finding programs that are specific to certain cultural or linguistic needs and wanted increased support for community-led cultural and social programs that align with traditional practices and linguistic identity (e.g., francophones)
- Many participants suggested a community-led approach and that meaningful relationships and collaboration need to be the starting point.

Helping to enhance connections to culture and improve cultural safety will help to enhance the overall wellness of people as they age as well as improve the equity, experience, outcomes of programs and services.

Financial Security and Affordability

Given that most seniors are on a fixed income, affordability was reported to be a high priority by engagement participants. This included dealing with inflation and the rising cost of living, staying feeling empowered to stay in the workforce as long as one desires, and proactively planning for the costs of aging which can be difficult to navigate.

Participants shared the following on financial security and affordability and how this may be addressed going forward:

- We heard that seniors facing discrimination in the workplace, health issues, or caregiving responsibilities can leave the workforce earlier than planned and often find it difficult to re-enter the workforce. Participants felt that employers could be

better supported to become age-friendly workplaces with tools, knowledge and incentives.

- Inflation and the rising cost of living was a significant concern.
- Many people, at all different ages, reported not feeling financially prepared for aging and many did not know the specifics on how to proactively plan for their finances as they age.

Housing

“I don’t want to put my mom into a personal care home, but she needs more support than we can get her at home ... it’s no longer safe but there doesn’t appear to be another option that’s close enough that we could still visit” – Caregiver focus group participant

The concept of home arose throughout many of our engagement sessions and housing is a key component of creating a home.

Participants shared the following on housing and how this may be addressed going forward:

- Participants shared that they desire to stay in their homes or with their families as they age but may be challenged by the costs of retrofitting/renovating their homes.
- We heard that there are gaps in the types and availability of some types of affordable and safe seniors housing options in Manitoba, especially in rural, northern and Indigenous communities. Manitobans want to see more incentives to develop, build, and operate these options.
- There is lack of clear policy guiding the types and quality expectations of seniors housing, lowering participants confidence in the safety and appropriateness of different housing options.
- Participants expressed a strong desire to have options - among safe, accessible, and affordable housing environments – from independent housing solutions to multi-generational villages – that meet their needs and that can be called home.

Transportation

“Since Greyhound left there has really been no real options in our community. Our handi-van is too expensive to use to get to Winnipeg, people on fixed income can’t afford hundreds of dollars for a single trip.” Minister’s roundtable participant

Transportation is critical for seniors to be able to engage with their community and access essential services (e.g., healthcare).

Participants shared the following on transportation and how this may be addressed going forward:

- The geography of Manitoba, distances between communities, population density, infrastructure, and lack of public transportation options in rural and northern regions make getting around especially challenging for seniors who no longer drive.
- Where they do exist, public transit systems are not built around the needs of seniors and service options are limited.
- Accessible transportation programs face significant financial sustainability challenges and yet are many people's only option to engage with their community and access services. Participants suggested there needed to be greater policy attention/oversight and funding to improve services for people in rural and northern communities.
- The cost and availability of medical transportation for non-urgent medical needs and the responsiveness and wait time for urgent medical transportations can be a problem.

Age-Friendly Communities, Physical Environments, & Spaces

Accessibility allows seniors to remain independent, engaged, and able to access the help they need and activities that keep them engaged in their community.

Participants shared the following on accessibility and how this may be addressed going forward:

- The Age-Friendly Communities funding program has been used by several municipalities in the province to improve accessibility. In addition, Accessibility for Manitobans Act includes accessibility standards and a process to remove barriers.
- While there are more than 90 communities in Manitoba that are certified under the Age-Friendly program, participants reported variable satisfaction with the program suggesting that it needed to be refreshed to look beyond infrastructure and focus more on implementing the social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services pillars of the Age-Friendly framework.

Wellness and Prevention

Wellness and prevention programs improve health outcomes and delay the need for care, allowing people to remain independent and engaged with the society as they age.

Participants shared the following on wellness and prevention and how this may be addressed going forward:

- There are some good examples of wellness and prevention programs in place in the Winnipeg area (e.g., falls prevention) and we heard there would be benefit of

expanding these programs to rural and northern communities in a sustainable way.

- There was recognition that the current system is reactive and there could be more focus on prevention and rehabilitation to support early interventions and re-enablement.

Medications, Supports and Medical Equipment

Medication, supports and medical equipment are both costly to many seniors and the cause of injuries if not used correctly.

Participants shared the following on medications, supports and medical equipment and how this may be addressed going forward:

- People often use more prescription medications as they age and it's estimated that as much as half of seniors medication is taken incorrectly or are overprescribed, increasing the likelihood of adverse drug reactions and interactions. Seniors and caregivers reported challenges managing multiple medications and so many are on medications that they may not need any more.
- Participants reported that the cost of medication is a challenge for seniors when they or a particular medication is not covered by provincial programs and/or they do not have private insurance.
- Many participants struggled to pay for mobility supports and medical equipment that are not covered.

Service Awareness, Navigation and Communication

Having service and program capacity is important, however, seniors and their families and caregivers need to be able to find and access programs.

Participants shared the following on service awareness, navigation and communication and how this may be addressed going forward:

- Participants found it very challenging to find and navigate services because information is often only online, it's not in a centralized space, is often out of date, and hard to determine whether an individual would be eligible/appropriate and how to access it.
- Participants valued the previous seniors guide, especially because it was available in a printed format.
- Seniors centres, seniors resource coordinators and other community organizations are often the local hubs for accessing different services and support, but they are challenged by capacity, financial sustainability and lack of awareness. Participants across the province felt that these organizations could play a greater role for seniors, if they had the appropriate resources and their role was clarified.

Care Planning

“What’s going to happen to me when I can’t live here any more. My kids don’t live in Manitoba and I’m not sure what’s next for me.” – Minister’s roundtable participant

Care planning allows people to plan and prepare for future needs including goals and aspirations for aging, financial planning, legal decisions and documentation, programs and service needs, preferred care settings and methods.

Participants shared the following on care planning and how this may be addressed going forward:

- In Manitoba, advanced care planning programs are mostly focused in Winnipeg and are very focused on medical or palliative care needs rather than proactively planning for aging.
- This can mean that decisions about the programs and services a senior accesses are often made without direct input from the senior or their caregivers. In addition, seniors reported that navigating the existing system of supports is not easy.
- What we heard was that seniors and caregivers want more input to decisions that pertained to their future. They want help finding information and more guidelines, standards, and tools that cover more than acute medical needs. This would also include information for seniors, caregivers, and service providers, and the public on how to do care planning and where to go for best practices and tools

Healthcare Services for Seniors

Healthcare services are critical to support maintaining health and wellness and to addressing acute and chronic healthcare issues as people age.

Participants shared the following on healthcare and how this may be addressed going forward:

- Participants felt that systems of care were paternalistic (focused on organization risk management and liability) and often didn’t empower seniors to live with autonomy and be able to take on and live with risks and incorporate their preferences or caregiver preferences into decision-making and concerns are not addressed in meaningful ways.
- Participants valued that home care services were completely publicly funded but recognized it was not achieving the outcomes needed to enable seniors to stay in their homes and homecare redesign is needed including governance and accountability, funding, workforce capacity and service models.
- In cases where seniors are not able to safely remain in their homes and need intensive care support, Manitobans expect the quality of personal care homes to be high and want to see improvement in this area through continued

implementation of the Stevenson Review recommendations and enhanced governance and accountability and workforce capacity.

- Manitobans also want more options for settings with care including assisted living and supportive housing models and non-residential programs (e.g., day programs).
- Physical environments and spaces in seniors housing options are often outdated, not designed for individuals with dementia, and rooms are not equipped for medically complex needs.
- Participants were concerned with lack of access to primary care providers, specialists and allied health professionals, this was most commonly reported in rural and northern communities but was reported as an issue across the province.
 - Interdisciplinary primary care teams were highly valued by participants who desired greater access across the province.
 - Participants were eager for the adoption of more virtual and telephone services, as long as they were accessible to seniors
 - Participants preferred programs to bring specialists to rural and northern communities (e.g., ophthalmology clinics) rather than patients have to travel
- Mental health and addictions programs were lacking for seniors including:
 - Lack of tailored programs for seniors to proactively address issues such as depression and support early intervention leads to a decline in overall functioning and quality of life.
 - Lack of mental health and addictions capacity in home care and seniors housing models where there is a service component. This includes design elements and workforce training/capacity.
- Lack of communication and information across the health system continues to be a challenge for continuity of care and communication

Workforce Providing Care and Services to Seniors

The workforce that supports seniors includes a broad spectrum of individuals including volunteers, community service providers, and healthcare providers.

Participants shared the following on the workforce serving seniors and how this may be addressed going forward:

- There needs to be more training in place to train all service providers on providing services to seniors and mechanisms in place to ensure sufficient skills and competencies.

- While health workforce capacity is a significant challenge in all care settings across the province, the challenge is particularly challenging in rural and northern settings.
- Health system professionals told us we can improve the size and capability of the workforce by adding training requirements, improving work conditions and provider/client ratios, and reviewing compensation for clinicians (such as nurses) and service providers.
- There is also a need to focus on nurturing and training more service professionals (e.g., nursing as a specialty in long-term care through a system of mentorship).
- Finally, collaboration and coordination between the existing care providers by increasing interdisciplinary models of care and removing institutional and jurisdictional barriers to coordination is needed.

Service Quality and Accountability

Setting standards for quality and holding service providers accountable is a key role of government in supporting the seniors service ecosystem.

Participants shared the following on service quality and accountability and how these may be addressed going forward:

- A key part of any strategy is an effective measure of results. Engagement participants recommended improving Manitoba's assessment practices to understand shifting needs and how the system is performing related to seniors' quality of life and other outcomes.
- We also heard that parties with oversight for the various care settings, such as home care, acute care, and long-term care, would benefit from better transparency and written criteria for performance. This includes defining the scope of service and quality standards.

Emergency and Disaster Preparedness

Seniors are particularly vulnerable in disasters, and emergency and disaster preparedness plans need to include special considerations for them. This is becoming increasingly important with the affects of climate change, as extreme weather events that can impact Manitoba are increasing.

Participants shared the following on emergency and disaster preparedness and how these may be addressed going forward:

- Recently, The Stevenson Report made numerous recommendations around emergency preparedness regarding pandemics. However, more needs to be done in this regard, with specific plans for support and evacuation for seniors in various settings.

- Participants suggested identifying at-risk or vulnerable populations, proactively sharing information across communities, enhancing safety measures inside congregate settings (such as smoke alarms), and leveraging service providers to communicate information to seniors. In addition, there is a need to have a response and evacuation plan in place for all residential facilities and other facilities offering programs and services to seniors.

Support for Caregivers

“On Monday morning my mom fell getting out of bed. Unfortunately, she fractured her hip so it will be a long road to recovery. I’m not sure how we are going to manage, especially with my dad’s Alzheimer’s getting worse. I’m not sure what’s next and how we are going to manage, even when my mom gets home. She’s my dad’s primary caregiver but now she also needs help and my parents both want to stay at home. Help!” – Family and Caregiver Focus Group Participant

Family members and unpaid caregivers provide a significant amount of care for seniors.

Participants shared the following on support for caregivers and how this may be addressed going forward:

- They are a diverse group with diverse needs, yet most caregivers are facing stress and insufficient supports in place to help their efforts, train them, support their financial and mental health needs, help them navigate the system of supports, or give them respite when needed to carry on daily activities or go to work. These issues are across the province but are more pronounced in the northern and rural areas.
- Manitobans wanted more supports for caregivers, including more effective communication and information sharing, a central source of information, engaging them in care plans, including caregivers’ needs in assessment plans, and more financial and respite supports.

Engagement mediums

Overall, the key themes identified above represent over 10,000 pieces of input from participants across the province. Manitobans were clear about what they are looking for and expect in the future to support Manitobans as they age. This information and the more detailed findings served as a key input into the development on Manitoba’s seniors strategy.