Engaging Older Manitobans in Active Lifestyles: A Plan for Action

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ABOUT THE ACTIVE LIVING COALITION FOR OLDER ADULTS



The Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA) strives to promote a society where all older Canadians are leading active lifestyles that contribute to their overall well-being.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF URBAN STUDIES



Founded in 1969 by the University of Winnipeg, the Institute of Urban Studies (IUS) was created at a time when the city's "urban university" recognized a need to address the problems and concerns of the inner city. From the outset, IUS has been both an educational and an applied research centre. The Institute has remained committed to examining urban development issues in a broad, non-partisan context and has never lost sight of the demands of applied research aimed at practical, often novel, solutions to urban problems and issues.



Introduction

A hard reality of aging is the isolation and loneliness many older adults are faced with when their social and care networks diminish. Recognition within the community, service sector, and policy sphere that social isolation is one of the greatest barriers to successful aging has led to the introduction of a range of interventions. It is believed that programs to encourage social connectedness and active living can address the negative impact of isolation on the health and well-being of seniors. However, these efforts are uncoordinated and social isolation remains a hidden issue for many as it is difficult to identify seniors who are isolated in their homes.

In the province of Manitoba, a need was determined to engage a range of stakeholders in assessing a more suitable approach to address social isolation and loneliness amongst the aging population. In an effort to initiate the development of an action plan on social isolation, the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA) of Manitoba organized a one-day roundtable held on March 13, 2008 at the Wellness Centre in Winnipeg. The overall goal of the roundtable was to discuss the promotion of active living and social engagement as key to healthy aging. The roundtable was attended by over 50 individuals including community seniors, members of senior-serving organizations, service providers, as well as municipal and provincial government representatives.

The ALCOA roundtable was organized around two framing questions:

- 1) What are the factors that contribute to social isolation amongst older adults?
- 2) What are effective interventions to address the isolation and loneliness experienced by seniors?



These two questions were facilitated through break-out sessions in the morning and afternoon of the roundtable that gave opportunities for brainstorming, discussion, and story-telling. Following the break-out sessions, the issues and ideas discussed were reported back to the larger group. Throughout the roundtable, the group discussions were recorded in both audio and written format to ensure that all perspectives on the promotion of active living and social connectedness were captured.

Based on the information that was gathered at the roundtable, three strategic priority areas have been formulated to encompass an action plan that addresses social isolation amongst older Manitobans. The strategic priorities form the basis of a coordinated process to encourage the participation of older adults in meaningful activities and social networks. The three strategic priority areas represent a starting point whereby specific actions can be identified and community partnerships can be developed to promote an active and socially connected older population in Manitoba.

The framework of the three strategic priority areas is outlined in this post-event summary report. These priorities are reflective of the categories assigned at the roundtable to those primary factors that contribute to social isolation including psycho-social issues such as poverty, the negative stereotypes of seniors, and barriers to community accessibility. Accordingly, the strategic priorities provide consideration of effective interventions to address those factors that can lead to social isolation and loneliness:

 Strategic Priority 1 promotes personal interventions that provide direct contact and support to older adults whose personal circumstances and psycho-social status leave them at risk of isolation.

- Strategic Priority 2 puts forward communication interventions to endorse more positive societal attitudes towards aging, and to encourage greater engagement of older adults in the community.
- Strategic Priority 3 supports the concept of livable communities and specifically endorses efforts to improve the transportation resources available to seniors in both urban and rural areas of Manitoba.

At the conclusion of the roundtable, it was agreed that in response to the followup report, participants would be asked to indicate their commitment to the three strategic priority areas. What follows is a description of the strategic priorities that outlines initiatives, actions, and partnerships relevant to each priority that were discussed at the social isolation roundtable.



Strategic Priority 1: Personal Interventions

Socially isolated seniors represent a hidden population that is difficult to identify. A strategy is needed to reach out to older individuals who are isolated in the community and may not be known to service providers. By identifying seniors atrisk, linkages can be made to resources that promote activity and social engagement. The first strategic priority promotes interventions that are directed at personal assistance to individual seniors. Personal interventions encompass a broad range of initiatives including improved identification of isolated seniors, greater accessibility to programming, and income support.

The personal interventions are necessary to ameliorate the many psycho-social factors that contribute to the isolation of older adults. Based on the discussions of the break-out groups at the roundtable, such factors include:

- Poverty is a major factor as the cost of social engagement is a barrier for many seniors who may be subsisting on low-income pensions or may be experiencing financial difficulties on fixed-incomes.
- ◆ Communication difficulties including lack of English and computer literacy create barriers to accessing information in the community.
- **Living alone** increases vulnerability to isolation for both men and women.
- Care-giving responsibilities can cause social isolation.
- Inadequacy of support services, e.g., homecare scheduling that requires an elderly individual to go to bed in the early evening.
- ◆ Loss is a reoccurring experience in old age that includes:
 - Loss of identity, e.g., neither working nor belonging to a faith-based or community group.



- Loss of health, including mental and functional capacity.
- Loss of confidence resulting in disempowerment, fear and vulnerability.
- Loss of relationships and social networks due to death and other factors such as residential relocation.
- Loss of transport options, particularly when driving is no longer possible.

A range of personal interventions to address these psycho-social factors were discussed at the roundtable. A synopsis of these interventions is provided in Table 1 which outlines 1) types of initiatives, 2) specific actions related to each initiative, and 3) the identification of potential stakeholders and participants to be involved in each initiative. These initiatives include:

- Identification of Social Isolation: It is imperative to reach out to those seniors who are not connected to the community. Actions under this initiative include partnering with health care providers and senior-serving agencies to identify and engage socially isolated seniors.
- Awareness and Outreach: For seniors who lack access to information about activities and social engagement, the Seniors Information Line can be used to raise awareness. In addition, outreach programs are necessary that go to private homes and apartment residences to encourage activity within the home, as well as the larger community.
- Programming: Discussion at the roundtable was rich in examples of effective programs and services that encourage seniors to be active and socially engaged. This programming includes community-oriented activity programs, opportunities for lifelong learning, programs to build confidence and capacity in older adults, multi-cultural activities, peer-led programs, as well as instruction in active living leadership.

- Resource Manual: The challenge of the action plan will be to determine which types of programming would be most effective in endorsing active living and social connectedness among seniors. The development of a resource manual that contains a comprehensive inventory of available programs would contribute in two ways: 1) as a resource for community seniors and service providers; and 2) to gain a greater understanding of what gaps exist in programming.
- Income Support: As poverty was identified as one of the major contributing factors to social isolation, specific actions are needed to address inadequate income and its effect on active living. Such actions include advocating for the subsidization of programming for seniors, tax credits for volunteering, and tax credits for seniors who choose to be active.
- Policy Evaluation: In addition to specific actions to enhance programming for isolated seniors, longer-term objectives of the action plan must include consideration of policy development that will contribute to an active and socially engaged older population.



Table 1. Strategic Priority 1: Personal Interventions			
Initiatives	Actions	Potential Stakeholders/Participants	
Identification of Social Isolation	 Identify who is socially isolated through home visits. Identify seniors who are not connected to other agencies. Build on homecare model: Utilize primary home care workers to identify isolated seniors. Provide basic social connectedness and active living counseling by primary health care providers (doctors, physiotherapists, chiropractors) to older adults (change physician fee structure for this to be possible). 	 Senior-serving agencies Service providers Home care workers Primary health care workers Regional Health Authorities Manitoba Health 	
Awareness and Outreach	 Advertise the Seniors Information Line (204- 945-6565). Develop outreach programs that go to residences (single dwelling and apartments) to encourage social connectedness and activity. 	 Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat Non profit groups, seniors-serving organizations Seniors Resource Councils 	
Programming	Develop community- oriented activity programs that are both physical and social in scope including intergenerational activities, lifelong learning, walking	 Non profit and seniors- serving organizations City of Winnipeg, Recreation and Leisure Branch Educational facilities Seniors Resource 	





Peer Led Programs	programs, recreational and social outings such as dance nights, as well as computer-oriented activities. Include nutritional interventions that encourage socialization. Examine feasibility of programming to raise self-efficacy (self-confidence) and capacity. Ensure programs are culturally appropriate and diversified. Promote multi-cultural senior centres. Encourage computer literacy to facilitate social inclusion. Gain corporate commitment to activity programming for retired employees. Build capacity in seniors organizations while decreasing program costs. Develop a buddy system for activities. Utilize older adult "champions" to help increase confidence.	 Councils Corporations Individual seniors Organization members Non profit organizations and Coalition groups Educational facilities (Lifelong Learning Courses)
Active Living	 increase confidence. Identify successful peerled programs. Offer leadership courses 	Individual Seniors
Leadership and Instruction	that are framed for older adults at senior resource councils, church groups,	Faith based OrganizationsNon profit OrganizationsManitoba Fitness Council





	rural community recreation directors, etc.	City of Winnipeg Leisure Guide
Resource Manual	Develop a comprehensive inventory of available programming resources based on specific categories for seniors (recreation, transportation etc) and share it with individual seniors, health providers and care providers.	 Regional Health Authorities Senior Resource Councils Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat Travel Manitoba
Income Support	 Obtain subsidization for seniors programming. Provide tax credits for seniors who volunteer and provide care-giving. Provide tax credits for seniors who choose to be physically active through programming, instruction, incentives, events, etc. Tax exemptions for adaptive aids such as walkers and hearing 	 Public Health Agency of Canada Canada Revenue Agency Human Resources and Social Development Canada Province of Manitoba Manitoba Fitness Council
Policy Evaluation	 Re-examine existing policies and their effectiveness in addressing social isolation, e.g., challenges of homecare scheduling. Examine potential policy development to address factors that contribute to social isolation. 	Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat



> Strategic Priority 2: Communication Interventions

Societal level factors that contribute to social isolation in the older population include perceptions and cultural norms that fail to recognize the value of older persons and the need to keep them engaged in the community. Alternatively, a lack of knowledge of existing resources may be a significant barrier for seniors to become active participants in society. Given these dimensions of social isolation, a second priority strategy is recommended to promote communication interventions. Various communication outlets are necessary to address stereotypes of aging, as well as to send the message to seniors that there is support and programming available that will help them to feel more engaged and appreciated.

To strengthen communication, the initiatives proposed for Strategic Priority 2 include:

- Train Caregivers: As a first point of contact, caregivers can be educated about programming and resources for the senior(s) they are caring for, as well as for themselves.
- Intergenerational Education: Programming that joins seniors with young persons is an ideal way to dispel myths about aging and to engage older adults in broader community activities.
- Older Adult Promotion and Awareness: A senior marketing strategy is needed that utilizes different media outlets to promote positive images of aging and the value of the senior population.
- Enhancement of Existing Programs: Current programming can be enhanced by amending curriculum to be age-friendly and to promote social connectedness and active living.



- Supporting Enrollment: Actions are needed to encourage older adults to enroll in activities and programs, to obtain reduced rates or subsidies for programming, and to address attrition in programs that promote active living and social connectedness.
- Professional Development Workshop: The creation of a professional development workshop on social isolation and aging would educate professionals about the issue, as well as provide information regarding existing programming for seniors.

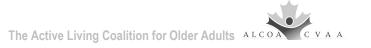


Table 2. Strategic Priority 2: Communication Interventions			
Initiatives	Actions	Potential Stakeholders/Participants	
Train Caregivers	As they have the first point of contact with seniors, it is important to train caregivers to impart information to older adults in simple mediums, in small amounts of time while recognizing the challenges in the multiethnic and multi-mobile status of seniors.	 Senior-serving organizations Regional Health Authorities Community Respite Services 	
Intergenerational Education	 Develop specific seniors programs that may connect with school aged and post secondary students. Offer programs such as Seniors are Cool. Highlight programs that work such as a pool program offered to seniors and children. Develop partnerships between the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for Seniors. 	 Public School Divisions Senior Resource Councils Educational facilities Province of Manitoba Department of Education Healthy Living Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat 	
Older Adult Promotion and Awareness	 A senior marketing strategy using new language and positive perceptions that educate the public about older adults. Use positive icons and language and avoid negative stereotypes. Use different media 	 Marketing firms Public Radio TV Channels Church Groups Seniors Organizations Public Schools TV Channels MLA Administration 	





	outlets for marketing campaign including MLA newsletters, school notices, television announcements, bill inserts, internet banners, newspapers, church bulletins.	
Enhancement of Existing Programs	 Partner with existing organizations to promote social connectedness and active living with older adults and enhance current curriculums to be more senior focused and friendly. 	 Winnipeg In Motion Manitoba In Motion Heart and Stroke Foundation Manitoba Fitness Council MSOS Participaction
Supporting Enrollment	 Take the extra step to help seniors enroll in programs and activities that are of interest to them. Help seniors obtain funding subsidies if appropriate. Examine approaches to reduce attrition. 	 City of Winnipeg- Leisure Guide Manitoba Fitness Council Senior Resource Councils Non profit organizations
Professional Development Workshop	Develop and host a community connection workshop so that different professionals and health care providers can learn and work together to help promote social connectedness and active living.	 Seniors-serving organizations Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat



> Strategic Priority 3: Transportation Interventions

Environmental factors that affect the social connectedness of seniors relate to the inaccessibility of community resources as a result of the low density design of both rural and urban centres. In particular, the roundtable identified transportation to be an overriding contextual issue that is paramount in diminishing social isolation. Transportation is critical for maintaining independence and quality of life. It is a means by which older people can maintain friendships and awareness of the larger community. The transition from driving is a particularly difficult issue for seniors: when driving is no longer an option social isolation becomes a risk factor.

There was strong consensus at the social isolation roundtable that the lack of mobility options is one of the largest barriers to the social connectedness of older adults. Conversely, the provision of appropriate, adequate and affordable transportation resources is one of the key actions to enhance the experience of aging. There were many suggestions at the roundtable on how to improve the mobility of Manitoban seniors. The transportation interventions that were put forward include:

- Escorted Service: A key aspect of mobility for older adults is their need for assistance and assurance when traveling. A buddy system for seniors would provide assistance for them to take the bus or a taxi.
- Education and Training: Two types of training are recommended to enhance transportation for seniors. First, senior-oriented driver training is needed to raise awareness amongst bus and taxi drivers of the specific needs of older adults. Secondly, transportation training for seniors would improve their knowledge of the multi-modal options that are available. In addition, safe driving courses should also be promoted.

- ◆ Ameliorate Transportation Costs: Strategies must be explored to ensure affordable transportation is available to older adults in both urban and rural areas of Manitoba.
- ◆ Transportation Inventory: A comprehensive inventory of transportation resources that are available in both urban and rural areas of Manitoba would be valuable as a resource to both seniors and service providers.
- Legislation: There are a range of legislative initiatives that should be considered to enhance transportation for seniors including liability issues for volunteer drivers, as well as tax credits for volunteer drivers.
- Policy Evaluation: There was overriding consensus that a provincial seniors strategy is needed that includes a province-wide transportation campaign. Such a strategy at the provincial level is essential because without coordination at the provincial level, any initiatives would be applied in a piecemeal fashion and would not result in true universal accessibility for all Manitobans.



Table 3. Priority Strategy 3: Transportation Interventions			
Initiatives	Actions	Potential Stakeholders/Participants	
Escorted Service	 Develop a buddy system for seniors to access both taxi and bus service. 	Winnipeg TransitTaxi Cab BoardPrivate Transportation companies	
Education and Training for Drivers	 Senior oriented driver training for Winnipeg Transit and Taxi Cab drivers. 	Winnipeg TransitTaxi Cab BoardSenior Resource Councils	
Education and Transportation Training for Seniors	 Develop a transportation workshop for seniors to explore and encourage the use of multimodal options (bus, taxi, handi transit, volunteer drivers, cycling, walking etc). Promote safe driving courses such as the Mature Driver. 	 Winnipeg Transit Safety Services Manitoba Manitoba Public Insurance Taxi Cab Board 	
Ameliorate Transportation Costs for Seniors	 Examine a reduced fare structure for seniors and potential for offering free public transit travel for seniors over the age of 65. Evaluate the potential for cost-sharing of transportation resources for seniors in rural areas. For example, the financing of a van could be based on the equal contribution of user fees, cost sharing, and fundraising. 	 Seniors Transportation Working Group (STWG) Senior Resource Councils Community Organizations- non profit, coalitions, membership groups, associations. Funding agencies Winnipeg Transit City of Winnipeg Municipal governments Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs Taxi Cab Board 	
Transportation Inventory	 Provide an inventory of transportation options 	STWGCity of Winnipeg	





	that presents a broad scope of available public, private and community mobility resources.	Senior Resource CouncilsRural municipalitiesResearch unit/institution
Legislation	 Develop legislation that addresses liability issues for volunteer drivers. Provide tax credits for volunteer drivers. 	 STWG Department of Infrastructure and Transportation Canada Revenue Agency Rural Secretariat Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat Non-profit organizations and coalitions such as Manitoba Society for Seniors
Policy Evaluation	 Develop a Provincial Seniors Strategy that includes a province wide transportation campaign to promote a coordinated transportation system consisting of a range of modal resources, as well as the provision of subsidized fares for older adults that works on a graduated scale. Promote age-friendly community design to ensure access to transportation. 	 Intergovernmental Affairs Seniors Secretariat Manitoba Health Healthy Living Community Groups Research Units/Universities City of Winnipeg Association of Rural Municipalities



Summary

The goal of this post-event report was to propose a framework for the development of an action plan to address the issue of social isolation amongst older adults in Manitoba. The strategies presented here were based on discussions held at a one-day roundtable organized by ALCOA. The three strategic priorities include personal, communication, and transportation interventions. Based on these interventions, the report outlines a range of initiatives, actions, and partnerships that could be fostered to promote active living and social connectedness.

It should be noted that the approaches taken to implement these strategies will differ. In some cases, initial steps must be taken to identify who will take the lead in moving the initiatives and actions forward. In the case of transportation for seniors, rather than developing a new entity, support is needed for the community coordination and organization that is already occurring.

Engaging Older Manitobans:A Tip Sheet to Promote Active Living Amongst Isolated Seniors

Tip 1: Identifying older adults who are isolated in their homes is the first step to encourage active living.

- Are you making efforts to identify isolated seniors?
- Have you thought about how you can reach seniors that are not participating in current programming?
- Have you been able to identify frontline workers who may be able to assist in identifying isolated seniors?

Tip 2: Creating awareness about isolated seniors allows the community to become involved in promoting active living amongst the older population.

- Are you creating awareness in the community about seniors that may be isolated?
- Have you thought of ways to promote the importance of active living, as well as the availability of programming for seniors?
- How can we encourage greater interaction amongst generations that will lead to more understanding about the importance of active living for isolated older adults?

Tip 3: By promoting participation in social and activity programming for older adults, isolated seniors will have opportunities for participation.

- Can you identify programming that encourages active living particularly amongst seniors at-risk of isolation?
- Have you thought of ways to support continued enrolment of older adults in active living programming?
- Have you considered developing programming that raises self-confidence and capacity amongst seniors?

Tip 4: Transportation and accessibility are key to participation and active living amongst older adults.

 Have you considered ways to become involved in current efforts to improve the mobility of older Manitobans?

