

# CREATING AN AGE-FRIENDLY COLD LAKE



**Submitted to:**  
**City of Cold Lake Mayor and Council**  
**August 11, 2020**

**In fulfillment of Aging Well in Community Grant  
Seniors and Housing Ministry, Government of Alberta**

**Prepared by Diane Stonehocker, M.Sc.**



## Contents

### Creating an Age-Friendly Cold Lake – August 2020

Background .....	4
Population Context .....	5
Theoretical Framework .....	8
Terminology .....	9
Data Sources.....	9
Limitations.....	10
Introduction – What We Heard.....	11
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings .....	12
Transportation.....	14
Housing .....	16
Social Participation .....	18
Respect and Social Inclusion .....	19
Employment and Civic Participation .....	21
Communication and Information.....	22
Community Support and Health Services .....	24
Summary of Findings.....	26
Recommendations for Future Planning.....	27
City Council Actions .....	27
Conclusion .....	29
References.....	30



# CREATING AN AGE-FRIENDLY COLD LAKE

## Background

In 2018, Cold Lake and District Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) made application to the Provincial Government's Aging Well in Community Grant. At the time, FCSS had been working with the Age Friendly Cold Lake Society regarding the need for a strategic conversation about what services are available for Cold Lake and area residents as they age and how to move forward in addressing identified gaps.

The objective of the project was twofold: first, to engage community residents of all ages in conversations that would challenge the prevailing negative stereotype about getting older; and, secondly, to gain from those conversations information that would be used to identify needed changes to the community infrastructure, services, and supports.

The successful grant application covered one year of funding to complete a planning document for Cold Lake City Council that would be focused on positioning Cold Lake as a community supportive of all people as they get older. To that end, a contractor was engaged, and work began in March 2019, with the final report to be presented to City Council by March 2020. With the onset of COVID-19, the presentation was delayed until August 2020.

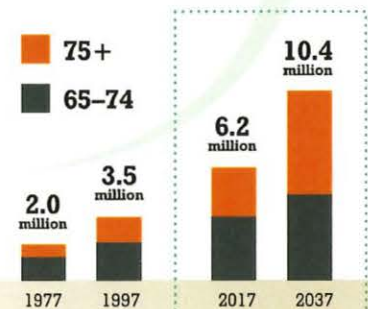
The Age Friendly Cold Lake Society played an advisory role to the work of the contractor to ensure community input throughout the project.

## Population Context

It is not news to anyone that worldwide, the population is getting older. As shown below, the Canadian Institute of Health Information estimates that over the next 20 years, Canada's senior population will continue to grow. <sup>(1)</sup>

### Canada's seniors population outlook: **Uncharted territory**

Over the next 20 years,  
Canada's seniors population  
is expected to  
grow by **68%**



This aging of the population has global implications that the world is not adequately addressing in strategic ways. Housing and health care services are not adequate for the current number of older people evidenced by long waiting lists for care beds and cuts to health care which disproportionately impact older people. While not strategically addressing these changes will lead to a crisis for older people, communities are beginning to see the need for, and the value of, focussing on the changes that can be made locally to not just provide basic services but to also promote wellness and ensure quality of physical, social and emotional well-being. Much of what will have to be mitigated later can be prevented with good planning now.

Globally and locally, a broadening of the outlook on aging is also occurring. Whereas getting older has largely been perceived as a negative experience due to ingrained ageist behaviour and messaging in every sector of our society, providing positive messaging and promoting social connection and activity have proven benefits in all areas of a person's life as they get older. This project spent most of the year having positive conversations about getting older in a variety of ways; rebranding aging became the cornerstone of our efforts.

## Local Population

Alberta is the second “youngest” province in Canada when measuring the percentage of the total population of people 65 years and over (12%). The only portion of Canada that is “younger” than Alberta are the northern Territories.

To no one’s surprise, Cold Lake is also a young community. The 2016 Census shows that of all the cities in Alberta with a population between 10,000 and 20,000, Cold Lake, Beaumont, and Whitecourt all have the lowest percentage of people who are 65 and over (6%).

Cold Lake’s population of 65 and over is also smaller than its neighbouring municipalities (Municipal District of Bonnyville and the Town of Bonnyville), as shown below <sup>(2)</sup>:

	<b>City of Cold Lake</b>			<b>MD of Bonnyville</b>			<b>Town of Bonnyville</b>	
	<b>55+</b>	<b>65+</b>		<b>55+</b>	<b>65+</b>		<b>55+</b>	<b>65+</b>
<b>Total</b>	14960			13575			5415	
<b>55-59</b>	850			1030			360	
<b>60-64</b>	470			720			275	
<b>65-69</b>	300	300		530	530		190	190
<b>70-74</b>	215	215		450	450		120	120
<b>75-79</b>	160	160		280	280		105	105
<b>80-84</b>	135	135		185	185		95	95
<b>85-89</b>	70	70		105	105		30	30
<b>90-94</b>	15	15		50	50		20	20
<b>95-99</b>	15	15		10	10		0	0
<b>100+</b>	0	0		5	5		0	0
	<b>2230</b>	<b>910</b>		<b>3365</b>	<b>1615</b>		<b>1195</b>	<b>560</b>
	<b>15%</b>	<b>6%</b>		<b>25%</b>	<b>12%</b>		<b>22%</b>	<b>10%</b>

Extracted from Census Profile, 2016 (Census [www12.statcan.gc.ca](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca))

In times of austerity, it would be tempting, and perhaps reasonable to focus priorities on the larger portion of the population. However, the following perspective on these statistics should be considered when prioritizing limited resources:

- There are currently 1320 people aged 55-65 who are either retired or planning retirement who will be deciding where they would like to reside in

their older years. While this decision will be based on many factors (e.g. family, interests, finances, etc.), underlying all of these issues will be the consideration of what Cold Lake offers its older residents.

- The current generation of “seniors” has exceptionally low expectations of what defines quality of life. The 55-65 age group have a different mindset and expectation about what getting older should include and opportunities that should be available to them. Current levels of service will not be sufficient to have them remain happily within the community.
- Within close proximity to Cold Lake are 4560 older adults who currently, or potentially will, access services within the city. How well those services meet their needs will impact their decision to “shop” here now or move here later if the need arises. Rural residents may need to relocate closer to support services. Such a decision will be impacted by the effort made in Cold Lake to provide the services they may need.
- The population worldwide, and in Cold Lake, is living longer. Enhancing services to support increased longevity will become important.
- While we have no statistics to demonstrate this, during our conversations, we discovered many older people who have moved to the area in order to be closer to their family, especially grandchildren. Underpinning the need to move to a community not necessarily of their choosing should be the knowledge that the new community will meet their needs, that they will not be considered as just an appendage to a younger family, and that they will receive the social and physical support they need while they are here.



## Theoretical Framework

In 2012, the World Health Organization (WHO), after several years of consultation around the globe, proposed eight components that are required to ensure that all older people can be safe and supported, and introduced the term “age-friendly” communities.

“In an age-friendly city, policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively by: recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older people; anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences; respecting their decisions and lifestyle choices; protecting those who are most vulnerable; and promoting their inclusion in and contribution to all areas of community life.” <sup>(3)</sup>

The WHO Age-friendly Cities framework, defined in [Global Age-Friendly Cities: a Guide](#), proposes eight interconnected and overlapping domains that can help to identify and address barriers to the well-being and participation of older people in community life. These eight domains are:

- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Respect and Social Inclusion
- Civic Participation and Employment
- Communication and Information
- Community Support and Health Services



The WHO global initiative was followed up in Canada by a working group of the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors and led to the production of an “Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide.” <sup>(4)</sup> Both guides, and in fact, most age-friendly community plans around the world, are based on the eight components originally designed by the WHO. The structure for what follows in this document is also based on them and will be discussed in further detail.



## Terminology

As mentioned, the initial focus of the one-year project was to reframe people's negative feelings about aging. To help with the discussion, we tried to refrain from using the word "senior" which conjures up a distinct image of a homogenous group of people who reach a certain age and then begin to all look and feel old. This image isn't relevant to today's reality and changing that image is the goal of global efforts to improve the life of people as they age. In an effort to help make this shift in perspective we made a shift in language from "senior" to "older people." This more-inclusive term suggests a continuum of age (rather than a specific age after which a person is considered old) and is used throughout this document. If the word "senior" is used, it will be in reference to those we typically think of as needing care in the community.

## Data Sources

During the one-year duration of this community discussion, we met with many people in a variety of settings: displays in retail settings, in the hospital lobby, at community events, at the movie theatre; through intergenerational activities in schools; presentations to church and community groups; focus group discussions with current support organizations staff and clients; and, countless one on one conversations.

In addition to personal interactions, we also gathered input from the following sources:

### Past assessments

Various questionnaires and planning initiatives for older people have been undertaken within Cold Lake over the past number of years. The results of each of these data gathering processes were analysed for inclusion in this document.

### Online/Paper Survey

A Survey Monkey poll was available for residents to complete online over a period of 4 months.

### Literature Review

Information about other communities' issues and plans were reviewed for relevance to Cold Lake.

## Limitations

In spite of our best efforts, our respondents were primarily the older “senior” talking about what they need now, rather than the “younger older” thinking into the future about their current interests and potential needs. Changing the way people perceive something as emotionally charged as getting older will take longer than a year and require more sophisticated resources than were available for this project; therefore, we ended up with a narrower perspective than we’d hoped.

As part of this concern, and also of note, is that in all of our research methods, there was plentiful feedback about the more tangible of the eight age-friendly domains (e.g. housing, transportation, community support/health care, and building/outdoor spaces), but fewer comments about the less tangible (e.g. social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information). This should not be interpreted as satisfaction in those areas; it indicates a lack of awareness of how important those concepts are to the quality of life as people age.

### Full Disclosure

The contractor hired to do this project was at the time, and is currently, the chair of the Age Friendly Cold Lake Society, so is not a disinterested party. The bias towards the need for effective and comprehensive community planning for older people is blatant and unapologetic.

## Introduction – What We Heard

Cold Lake area residents had many positive things to say about living in Cold Lake as an older person. There was agreement that Cold Lake excels in three areas that are beneficial to people as they get older:

**PEOPLE** – Cold Lake is an inclusive, friendly community, where individuals and families feel safe. The “small city = slower pace” positive perspective was common.

**BEAUTY** – Cold Lake is a clean city, is close to nature, has good parks, the lake, nice trails, and gardens, all of which add to the experience of living here.

**AMENITIES** – While all acknowledge that there are gaps in offered services and amenities, people felt that there are many good opportunities for older adults in Cold Lake. Specifically mentioned were public transportation, the Seniors Drop-in Centre, Legion Hall, Energy Centre, public library, the new Cold Lake Lodge, etc.

While there is much that is good about living in Cold Lake, most of the people who provided comments had concerns and suggestions for change. A summary of their comments suggested the following, which is offered to provide context:

- Older people want to be independent and generally don't like to ask for what they don't have or for help they may need.
- Many, but not all, have an informal support system which helps them to remain independent longer, but this support can't be relied on for everything.
- Some are better off financially than older people used to be, but not all. Many older people in the community are living only on government old age support and are near poverty.
- Most service providers are doing the best they can with limited resources, but there are still important gaps that need to be filled.

The purpose of what follows is to summarize the comments we heard about the challenges older people experience living in Cold Lake. They have been categorized using the eight WHO age-friendliness categories. This section is not intended to be a list of recommendations for action, though some of them could be easily addressed. Recommendations for action are discussed later in the document.



# Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

## Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

The physical environment is an important determinant of physical and mental health for everyone. Creating supportive environments, including age-friendly outdoor spaces, and building design, can enhance physical well-being and quality of life, accommodate individuality and independence, foster social interaction, and enable people to conduct their daily activities.

Cold Lake's abundance of nature calls to people to spend time outdoors, and most who are able to, do so. Some are not able to because of issues that could be addressed with planning or vigilant maintenance, and/or enforcement of existing bylaws.

### WHAT WE HEARD:

Cold Lake's *public parks, playgrounds, and trails* could be more age-friendly if they included:

- Adequate benches, garbage cans, and public washrooms along the trails, in the parks, and at the beach.
- Playgrounds with structures that are designed for older adults or people with disabilities.
- More public parks and greater awareness of proactive maintenance including looking for possible hazards to older people. As an example, tree roots exposed above ground cause a tripping hazard for people with visual impairments or people with diminished mobility.

Cold Lake's *infrastructure* could be more age-friendly if there were:

- Effective ramps, curb cuts on all public streets, well maintained sidewalks, etc.



- Crosswalk buttons correctly placed for use by people with impaired movement or vision and that allow sufficient time for them to cross.
- Accessible and well-marked public washrooms downtown..
- Handrails on the stairs at the Energy Centre arena which would make the bleachers less hazardous for older attendees or people with disabilities.

***Bylaw development and enforcement*** impacts Cold Lake's age-friendliness in the following ways:

- If bylaws are not enforced, the impact on most people amounts to annoyance; for older people, however, non-enforcement of bylaws can limit their ability to leave their homes and move safely about the community, increasing isolation. For example, snow removal on sidewalks is critical for people with diminished mobility. Snow removal from city streets can keep older people at home or put them at greater risk if they do go out.
- If there are not enough handicapped parking stalls, or existing infractions not penalized, older people may not be able to access needed services.
- Not trimming trees and bushes that overhang onto public sidewalks creates a hazard and difficulty for older walkers.
- Sump pump discharge that runs over sidewalks also creates a hazard and difficulty for older walkers.



# Transportation

## Transportation

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Whether driving a car or taking public or private transportation, access to transportation allows older people to participate in social, cultural, volunteer and recreational activities, as well as enabling them to carry out such daily tasks as working, shopping or going to appointments.

Affordable transportation is essential for maintaining independence and health. Without a reliable way to get to a doctor's appointment or to buy food and household supplies, older people can't realistically remain in their homes as they age. Being unable to easily leave your home also can lead to social isolation, which can lead to loneliness, depression and a diminished quality of life and has been shown to contribute to earlier death.

### WHAT WE HEARD:

We received minimal feedback regarding barriers that may exist for older drivers in Cold Lake. As previously discussed, those that did comment stated that Cold Lake could be more accessible to older drivers with better snow removal on city streets and sidewalks, and enforcement of handicapped stalls. Also mentioned was the difficulty parking to the Energy Centre due to the distance to the building from the parking lot.

For those who no longer drive, transportation has been shown to be one of the most significant barriers to wellness facing older people in any rural or smaller urban centre at a distance from major services.

Cold Lake residents spoke about three key concerns relating to transportation:

1. **TRANSPORTATION TO OUT-OF-TOWN MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS** is a major barrier to accessing good health care. Anecdotally, we heard that people are having to pay significant amounts of money to pay friends or having to rely on family. There is no doubt that some are simply not going as they do not have the resources to pay or the ability to work out the details.
2. **TRANSPORTATION TO IN-TOWN APPOINTMENTS AND SERVICES** is also a barrier for some. Issues accessing public transportation, or special transportation if needed, were reported as there are issues with each for some residents. While a full review of each service was not undertaken, most frequently



*It only costs \$2.50 / trip.*

mentioned issues related to timeliness of service, access to service, when needed, and cost. "Why is public transportation free, but the handi-bus costs money," was a question asked in every discussion. Whatever the rationale for the decision, to them it is an indication that priority is being given to the young vs. the old. Taxi services are considered to be expensive, which make them inaccessible to many.

3. **TRANSPORTATION FOR OLDER PEOPLE LIVING OUTSIDE OF THE CITY LIMITS** who would like to access city services, or for city residents who want to travel outside of the city limits, does not exist. This might include activities in other communities (i.e. Riverhurst or Cherry Grove), attending church or other important family or community gatherings. This is thought to be a barrier for both city and non-city residents.

# Housing

## Housing

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Adequate and safe housing is essential to well-being as people get older. Most people feel it is important to live in their own homes as long as possible (also referred to as "aging in place"). The ability to have that independence, or the support needed to extend that independence, is key to health and well-being.

In Canada, 92% of people over the age of 65 live in private dwellings. Most own their own homes which will tend to be older than those owned by younger people. Along with the possible need to adapt a home for an older person, the cost of maintaining older homes is generally higher. All of these combined can cause an older person to have to give up their home and move to a place that may or may not be suited to their needs at that time.

### WHAT WE HEARD:

Housing is of great concern to older people in Cold Lake in the following areas:

There are not enough affordable options for people who may have to, or wish to, leave their homes but are not in need of congregate care, the key words being affordable and options. Suggested options with varying degrees of affordability that could exist, but do not, include home sharing, co-housing, housing cooperatives, assisted living, etc.

Housing for older people in Cold Lake is in private homes, market-rate apartments or condos, subsidized apartments (Lakeland Lodge and Housing), or congregate care facilities (Cold Lake Lodge, Pointes West Living, Long Term Care). Living with family is an option for some, but not always their first choice.

The older homeowner is more vulnerable to the fluctuations in the Cold Lake economy. They may not have the time to wait for the next boom that will increase the value of their home enough to provide them with adequate retirement funds. The same market fluctuation impacts their ability to renovate/maintain their homes. The perceived inability to find ethical, affordable contractors is a great concern to them.

A municipal tax discount for older people was suggested. Some cited other communities that have similar benefits. The Alberta Government's Seniors Property Tax Deferral Program was known to some, and not of interest to many as it is a loan with interest.

Another housing gap was identified for people who are under 65 years of age but who cannot live independently. There are people with the physical effects of acquired brain injuries who require physical support but who are not age-appropriate for Long Term Care.

The wait time to be admitted to Long Term Care is also a housing issue with significant negative health consequences. Though not easily solved, it is worth keeping high on the list of important issues that should be addressed.



# Social Participation

## Social Participation

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Social participation is strongly connected to good health and well-being throughout life. Participating in leisure, social, cultural, and spiritual activities in the community, as well as with the family, allows older people to continue to exercise their competence, to enjoy respect and esteem, and to maintain or establish supportive and caring relationships.

### WHAT WE HEARD:

While giving full credit to the Cold Lake Seniors Society and the Energy Centre, many comments indicated a desire for a wider variety of options that appeal to a wider age group, and that are offered both in the daytime and in the evening.

Older people have a diverse range of recreational interests that are not being addressed by current services. When asked what would be of interest to them, a long list of suggestions was generated from dances, to music lessons or music groups, to workshops with guest speakers, wood working classes, the chance to travel together, craft guilds, movie nights, humanitarian volunteer work, etc.

Sports activities at the Energy Centre were deemed to be too difficult for some older people, but is being used by the younger-older people who do not have physical impairments (i.e. pickle ball, walking track, stretch classes, etc.) As mentioned previously, parking for older people is deemed to be difficult at the Energy Center.

A better system of informing older people about activities that are available to them would be beneficial. Our survey asked specifically about the range of programs available to older people and the predominant answer was "Not sure." The need for clear communication and information sharing will be discussed later in this document.

Since the onset of COVID-19, opportunities for social participation have diminished significantly with unknown consequences. The long-term impact of this forced social isolation bears watching and addressing.

# Respect and Social Inclusion

## Respect and Social Inclusion

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Older people want to do more than simply continue to reside in their communities – they want to be able to contribute to, and benefit from, community life. Active and involved older people are less likely to experience social isolation and more likely to feel connected to their communities. There is a strong link between social isolation and cognitive decline, depression, and heart disease, and while isolation does tend to increase as people age, communities that promote and make possible social participation and inclusion are better able to protect the health of their citizens. <sup>(5)</sup>

There are conflicting types of behaviour and attitudes towards older people. On the one hand, many feel they are respected and recognized; but they also experience lack of consideration in the community, in services, and in the family. This conflict is explained in terms of a changing society and behavioural norms, lack of contact between generations, and widespread ignorance about aging and older people.

### WHAT WE HEARD:



Many commented that there could be more activities that bring the generations together or suggested that older people be included when community events are being planned (e.g. routing of the Canada Day parade past the Long Term Care and the Cold Lake Lodge so that their residents could enjoy the parade, family activities

include accessibility planning for older people, etc.).

There were a few outlier comments that likely represent specific interactions that didn't go well, but in general terms, there were no strong comments that older people feel disrespected.

That said, during group discussions or presentations with older people, without exception they recognized ageist, dismissive behaviour when it was pointed out to them, but they were more likely to accept it as just part of getting old, and to dismiss it as "just the way things are." This aspect of getting older is less

tangible than transportation or housing, so less likely to be an issue of concern to the generation who responded. It will, however, be an issue of larger concern to the rising generation of older people who have different cultural expectations around fairness and inclusion.

The people we spoke to would not be considered socially isolated. Older people with physical and/or mental and emotional challenges are more likely to be in their homes and invisible to the rest of the community. Many of the people we spoke to indicated concerns for their neighbours or relatives who “don’t get out enough.” More attention needs to be paid to preventing and mitigating social disconnection, especially during the current pandemic situation.



# Employment and Civic Participation

## Employment and Civic Participation

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Older people do not stop contributing to their communities on retirement. Many continue to provide unpaid and voluntary work for their families and communities. In some cases, economic circumstances force older people to take paid employment long after they could have retired. An age-friendly community provides options for older people to continue to contribute to their communities, through paid employment or voluntary work if they so choose, and to be engaged in the political process.

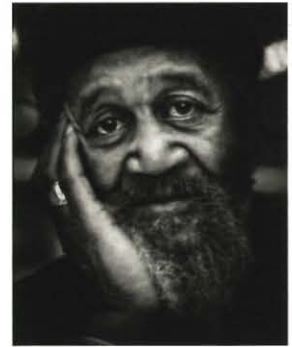
### WHAT WE HEARD:

It is unclear how many older people in Cold Lake are currently working past retirement. Our survey indicated that 46% of the people who responded fully intend or are "very likely" to put off full retirement and work as long as possible. Whether this is by choice or from necessity was not asked in the survey.

In our discussions, we heard about older people who use the Food Bank as often as allowed and some who go to the Friendship Centre for meals or for help with groceries. Some respondents indicated that their finances are tight with little room for more than the necessities; others have more than enough due to a good career and/or good planning for the future.

As to civic participation as a path to staying involved and contributing to community life, many indicated that there are ample opportunities for involvement, from volunteering at schools to working on municipal councils or volunteer boards or committees. Perhaps all that is lacking is an invitation and encouragement, and a recognition that there is still a valuable contribution that could be made by the older people in the community.

There are many volunteer opportunities for people of all ages in Cold Lake. Some factors that discourage older people from volunteering are transportation, awareness of need, a preference for daytime opportunities, fear of not being capable of contributing, etc.



## Communication and Information

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Keeping older adults informed of community events and broader community information allows them to be better connected to their community and helps them access and participate in their daily activities. Often the support is available, but they cannot access what they do not know about.



### WHAT WE HEARD:

We discovered that older people do not have a solid grasp of what is going on that is relevant to them in the community. They rely on each other (i.e. word of mouth) to hear about services and community news, which can be either incomplete or inaccurate in its details.

Those who answered the survey stated that they would most likely seek information from Cold Lake and District FCSS, the Cold Lake Seniors Society and Respect Newspaper. All three organizations provide good information to the older people in the community who know to look there for information, but there are many who do not know. Socially isolated people are at risk of knowing little of what is available and important for them to know.

Additionally, government information and resources can be difficult to find and understand. Cold Lake and District FCSS and the Friendship Centre have staff who help older people access government programs and services, but the person has to know that help is available. FCSS developed and widely distributed a "Seniors Guide" that provides information about programs, services and businesses that are applicable to older people.

According to Statistics Canada <sup>(6)</sup>, 81% of people between 65 and 74 use the internet. Use decreases to 33% by 85+ years but is still remarkable. However, these numbers indicate that many older people cannot or choose not to use, or do not have available to them, the tools needed to remain informed in this way. As organizations move more and more towards providing their information online, more and more older people are being left uninformed.

Additionally, some older people reported have reading and/or vision related issues that limit their access to important information. Language barriers exist for some older immigrants who have accompanied their children to the Cold Lake area.

Another area of concern for older people can be trusting those who provide them with information, worrying about scams and crime.



## Community Support and Health Services

### WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Whether or not older people are able to age-in-place depends upon a number of factors, including the availability of community-based services that meet their varying needs. These include professional services, such as medical and personal care, as well as support for daily tasks they can no longer accomplish without help (i.e. housekeeping, home maintenance, etc.). Effective health care delivery is also critical to the well-being of people as they get older.

### WHAT WE HEARD:

When analyzing the many comments, six key concerns emerged:

**ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE** - While accessing timely medical care is a concern for all local residents, older people are especially concerned about the lack of access to doctors and needed health care, a problem that continues to get worse. Medical care of older people can be more complicated due to the possibility of chronic co-morbidities (i.e. more than one chronic condition at a time), a reality our under-funded, siloed health care structure does not address in the least effectively.

Access to specialists is also a concern to all, but especially for older people due to wait times and the added complication of needing transportation.

**COLD LAKE HEALTHCARE CENTRE** – While many appreciative comments were made about care received at the hospital, there were multiple comments describing negative experiences that suggest insufficient staff training regarding ageism, aging in general, and dementia. The significant damage done to older people by spending months in acute care waiting for a Long-Term Care placement was also reported along with concern about the inadequate time taken in the ER when older patients are required to make critical decisions about their emergency and ongoing care. What happens in the Cold Lake Healthcare Centre may reflect the larger health care situation in Alberta but perhaps could benefit from local planning and action.

**IN-HOME SUPPORT** - In-home care supports were also of concern. While the comments were generally positive about the staff providing homecare nursing support through Alberta Health Services (AHS), they generally felt that the system didn't allow enough time. Additionally, many would be able to remain in

their homes longer if they had assistance with housekeeping or meal preparation. Home shopping services were also indicated as potentially helpful.

**PRIVATE MEDICAL SERVICES** - Private medical services filling the gap for limited public medical services was noted but inaccessible to many due to the cost. For example, physiotherapy services provided by AHS are only available for post-hospital/surgical care and not for people experience chronic, but treatable pain. People with these conditions are sent for private care which can be expensive without an added medical plan, which older people generally do not have.

**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES** - Mental health services for older people, as well as support for caregivers of older people, is of significant concern. Many older people believe that depression is just another difficult part of getting older and will spend their last years “down in the dumps.” “He’s just grumpy because he’s old” was heard often. They are not aware that depression is not a necessary part of aging and can be effectively treated. That said, AHS-Mental Health does not market to older people and local service availability is limited and does not prioritize care for older people. One older caregiver of a spouse with dementia said, “I am depressed every day.” Mental health services provided by the government are focussed primarily on the young who need care at significant rates. But prioritizing the young over the old leaves many older people without options and living in unnecessary depression.

**HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION** - Health promotion for older people is available but is limited in its scope and often not communicated in a way that older people will access. A large percentage of the chronic conditions that are more prevalent as we get older, and that are so costly to the health care system, can be prevented with better lifestyle choices. A greater investment in promoting good health and preventing disease would pay big dividends.

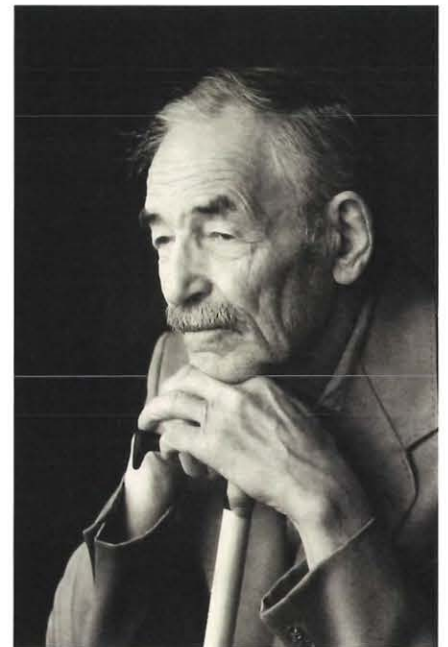




## Summary of Findings

The people who provided us with feedback are, by and large, not dissatisfied with life in Cold Lake, and appreciate the good the community has to offer. However, all have experienced challenges in their day to day lives which impact their health and happiness. While some of these challenges are due to policy and services controlled at provincial and federal levels, some could be effectively addressed with local planning.

It is worth restating that the current generation of older people (70+) have low expectations for their older years, and are less demanding, having come through tougher times than these. For planning purposes, it is safe to assume that the aging Baby Boomers, for whom plans will be made going forward, have higher expectations for their older years. How well these expectations are met will have a significant impact on whether they move to, or remain in, Cold Lake as they get older. The heightened awareness of positive aging and the negative impact of ageism, initiated by the Baby Boomers, will change the landscape for older people everywhere, and communities will need to prepare.





## Recommendations for Future Planning

Creating an age-friendly community is everyone's responsibility; however, the focus of this document is on actions that Cold Lake City Council, Administration, and Staff can take to facilitate the development of a city that is supportive in meaningful ways to people as they get older. While some of the responsibility for planning and meeting the needs lies with different levels of government through health and social development policy and planning, preparing for an increase in the number of older people as well as planning for their health and well-being comes down to community level action for much of what defines quality of life.

Some of the needed changes are big, some are small; some can be accomplished quickly, some will take time; some will require large financial investment while some need only a change in perspective; and, some are clearly beyond the scope of a local municipal council. But all require a simple commitment to begin.

Bringing the focus of these recommendations down to steps that can be taken by this Council does not mean that the rest of the community does not play a key role; the intent is to show that this Council can take the leadership, inspire, and support the needed changes, and thereby lead by example. As one of our respondents recommended, the City should "get their own house in order" on these issues.

In that spirit, the following recommendations are divided into what the City can do "in house" as well as assist the larger community to become age-friendly.

## City Council Actions

The most important step that any municipal council can take on behalf of its older residents is to become "champions" of their cause. This can be accomplished by pursuing four pillars of action that will frame the needed work throughout the community.

### COMMIT TO ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS AND PLANNING

1. Schedule a discussion for all Council members and senior Administration that would focus on current issues and trends for older people in this community and globally as well as the need for, and benefits of, age-friendly planning.

2. Instruct Administration to provide training for all staff regarding age-friendly practices and complete an assessment to determine what changes could be made to address any gaps that may be identified. The assessment could begin with the items of concern identified in this document that are under city control, including infrastructure and public spaces, transportation, information systems, employment practices, fitness and recreation, event planning, etc.
3. This organization-wide assessment would lead to an action plan of specific steps City staff could take over time to improve Cold Lake's age-friendliness that would fit within organizational timelines and budget priorities.
4. Include a commitment to age-friendly design and operations for all formal planning undertaken in the future. This commitment would help inform planning processes and ensure that all sectors of the community are included in the City's future vision of itself.

## **FACILITATE A COORDINATED COMMUNITY APPROACH TO PLANNING**

As stated, not all of the concerns raised in our community conversations are within the City's control, but they are not outside of the City's influence and would benefit from the City's non-financial support.

5. Support the establishment of a community advisory committee that would bring together interested younger and older residents and representatives from senior-serving organizations to assess, design, advocate for, and act together in ways that would enhance the quality of life for older people and improve the community overall. To have the committee sanctioned by City Council and report to Council regularly (e.g. quarterly), would raise the visibility of older people and their concerns, provide valuable insights to Council that would aid in City planning, and demonstrate City Council's commitment to ensuring older people and their issues remain a priority.

## **ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY AWARENESS**

6. City Council making a public commitment to age-friendliness and encouraging other sectors of the community to similar action would move the age-friendly agenda forward in significant ways.

Age-friendly business practices benefit older people and the businesses which are providing them services. Age-friendly workplaces are good for the still-employed older worker and the businesses employing them as they benefit from their experience, commitment, and wisdom. Age-friendly communication and information sharing in all sectors can make the difference between isolation and active community participation, and lead to greater uptake of services. Age-friendly schools encourage intergenerational connections which have been proven to improve health for both the young and the old.

7. This awareness raising and encouragement could be facilitated through City social media channels, through hosting community forums about age-friendly policy and practice, sponsoring age-friendly awards, etc.

### **MAKE APPLICATION TO BE FORMALLY DESIGNATED AS AN AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY**

Positive changes for older people are needed everywhere but many of those changes will happen one community at a time. This fact has been recognized provincially, nationally, and globally, and each level of government has developed a system of encouragement and recognition of action at a community level. The Age Friendly Alberta Recognition Award <sup>(7)</sup> includes ministerial acknowledgement, national and international recognition of the commitment, and membership in the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. The City of Cold Lake would join a small group of Alberta communities who have made this public commitment to change.

## **Conclusion**

Creating an age-friendly community is not just the right thing to do, it is good planning. An age-friendly community is also a disability-friendly community, a family-friendly community, a diversity-friendly community and has implications for all aspects of good municipal planning. Land use planning that includes consideration for factors that impact quality of life for older people is good planning. Economic development planning that includes recognition of both the older consumer and the older worker is good planning. All planning is made better by recognition of the needs and interests of all a community's residents, including its older people.



## References

1. Infographic: Canada's seniors population outlook: Uncharted territory, Canadian Institute of Health Information. <https://www.cihi.ca/en/infographic-canadas-seniors-population-outlook-uncharted-territory>
2. Census Profile, 2016 (Census [www12.statcan.gc.ca](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca))
3. Global age-friendly cities: a guide, World Health Organization, 2007  
ISBN 978 92 4 154730 7
4. Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide, 2006
5. Gilmour, Heather and Ramage-Morin, Pamela L., Social Isolation and Mortality Among Canadian Seniors, June 17, 2020. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/82-003-x/2020003/article/00003-eng.pdf?st=LceTkUfB>
6. Seniors on Line Infographic, Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2019024-eng.pdf?st=gnmVQDdw>
7. Age-friendly communities, [www.alberta.ca/age-friendly-communities.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/age-friendly-communities.aspx)

Note: All images used in this document are licensed for publication.

What was the sample size?  
No details of the survey results themselves