

Community Dispatch

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GROWING OLD IN BURLINGTON: A REPORT ON SENIORS TRENDS AND ISSUES

This edition of Community Dispatch presents the highlights of the Council's recent report: Growing Old in Burlington: A report on seniors trends and issues. This report was requested by the United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the community with a profile of Burlington seniors (persons aged 65 years of age and over) along with an overview of the issues that affect this group of people. The report outlines factors that seniors face that affect the quality of their lives and their participation in the Burlington community. The report is based on traditional social-economic indicators as well as information from study participants. The aim of the report is to inform discussion on the issues affecting this important segment of Burlington's population.

Context

Similar to the rest of Canada, the population in Halton is aging. The senior population is expected to increase more than any other age category over the next two decades. A Health Canada 2002 report, *Canada's Aging Population*, states:

"Seniors constitute the fastest growing population group in Canada.

In 2001, it was estimated that 3.92 million Canadians were 65 years of age or older, a figure that is two thirds more than in 1981.

During the same period, the overall Canadian population increased by only one quarter.

The proportion of seniors in the overall population has gone from one in twenty in 1921, to one in eight in 2001.

In fact, the growth of the seniors' population will account for close to half of the growth of the overall Canadian population in the next four decades." (Health Canada, *Canada's Aging Population*, 2002, p. 3)

The Ministry of Finance report *Ontario Population Predictions 1999-2028* predicts that by 2028, the number of Halton residents who are 65 or older is expected to increase 186.3% to 128,170 persons.

It is expected that 17.5% of Halton's population will be within this age group by 2021, increasing to 19.9% by 2028.

Seniors Profile

According to Statistics Canada 2001 Census data:

- Twelve percent of the Halton population or 44,770 persons are seniors (65 years of age or older).
- Compared to the other municipalities within Halton, Burlington has the highest percentage of seniors in its population at 14.1% (21,235 seniors).
- Over half (56.9%) of Burlington seniors or 12,080 persons are aged 65 to 74 years of age.
- The majority of seniors (57.1%) are female but the gender gap between males and females increases with age. In the 85 years and over age range, 69.6% are female.

According to Statistics Canada 1996 Census data:

- In Burlington, 60.0% or 10,150 seniors were born in Canada and 39.5% or 6,625 seniors are immigrants. The majority (95.7%) of Burlington immigrants aged 65 and over came to Canada before 1986.
- The majority of seniors (53.2% or 8,985 seniors) have incomes of less than \$20,000 a year and 17.7% (2,970 seniors) live below the low-income cut-off¹. Poverty is higher in Burlington for older seniors with 23.2% of seniors aged over 74 years of age with low incomes.
- The majority (67.7%) of Burlington seniors live as a couple, 25.7% of seniors live alone and 5.6% of seniors live with relatives.

People Speak

Interviews explored through the experience of selected individuals the condition of seniors in the community, the important issues they face and, particularly, how conditions may have changed for this population over the past 5 years.

Areas of Concern

Over the past five years, studies and research have identified areas of concern that affect the lives of seniors. Interviewees were asked to comment on these areas and indicate if they believe that they continue to be areas of concern.

Adequate Income

- All of the study participants feel adequate income is an issue for many seniors in Burlington. They pointed to the inadequacy of Canada's Old Age pension
- Most study participants believe income adequacy is strongly linked to the cost of living, housing in particular.

¹ The Low Income cut offs (LICO's) are published by Statistics Canada. Persons and families living below these income levels are considered to be living in "strained circumstances". There are different LICO's according to family size and size of community. They are more popularly known as Canada's poverty lines. Using the most recent 2001 figures, the LICO for a single person in Burlington is \$16,160.

Family Relations and Support

- Study participants identify family support as a major issue that affects the quality of life of older people.
- Discussion focuses particularly around the pressure families are under to provide elders in the family with the support they need.
- As well, the study participants raise the concern that many seniors have little or no family support.

Elder Abuse

- All study participants feel elder abuse is a very important concern.
- They feel that elder abuse can take many forms, not just physical, and that it is a hidden issue "that people don't like to talk about".
- Several study participants believe that there is no clear definition of elder abuse. They suggest that there are many different types of abuse and that the public, seniors, family members and caregivers need to be educated about such abuses.
- It is rather disturbing that several study participants not only feel abuse is very common but is growing as a result of the poor level of community supports which leave family members and caregivers overworked.

Widowhood

- Study participants feel widowhood is an issue for many reasons. The opinions of the interviewees focus on the reduction of income when widowhood occurs.

Home Care (includes personal services such as light housekeeping, bathing and nursing care)

- Those interviewed pointed to the inaccessibility of home care service for seniors that require these services but cannot afford to purchase them.

- They suggest that most seniors receive only an hour a week of care through the Community Care Access Centre. They believe that this is insufficient.

Home Support Services (includes services such as heavy housekeeping, odd jobs and seasonal maintenance)

- Study participants also believe home support services should be provided to seniors along with home care services as these services enable seniors to live in their homes longer.

Family Medicine

- Study participants agree that seniors' access to a family physician is a major problem. It is noted that many doctors in the community have retired and existing doctors are not taking new patients, especially seniors with multiple health concerns.
- Limited access to medical doctors who understand an individual's cultural roots and language acts as a barrier to care.

Prescriptions

- The cost of prescriptions is another issue pointed out by those interviewed. They indicated that the issue of affordability has been made worse by the removal of some drugs from the Ontario Drug Plan.

Dental Care

- Again inaccessibility to dental care is driven by cost. Programs such as the Halton Oral Health Outreach (HOHO) program is praised for helping seniors.

Hospital Care

- Early release from hospital without the proper supports in place for seniors, appears to be the main area of concern expressed by the study participants.

Residential and Long Term Care Facilities

- All identify residential and long-term care as issues. Cost is identified as one of the main barriers for seniors that need facility care.

- The second issue raised in the discussion about facility care is the need for additional home care and home supports services. Often seniors and their families do not have the necessary home supports, thus leaving them one option – facility care.

Affordable Housing

- Study participants identify affordable housing as one of the critical issues facing seniors in Burlington. Study participants comment not only on the lack of new subsidized housing for seniors but also the long waiting lists on the current supply.

Transportation

- All study participants see transportation as an important issue for seniors. They identify accessibility, cost and frequency as the most important limitations placed on seniors using public transit.

Security/Safety in the Community

- Most study participants believe that violence against ones' person is not an issue for Burlington seniors. The comment: *"I think seniors still feel relatively safe in their community"* is repeated. However, safety is discussed as an issue for some multicultural seniors.
- Several study participants also comment on the problem of 'scam artists' or strangers that approach seniors to defraud them.

Recreation

- Study participants have mixed views on the issue of recreation. With only one seniors' centre in Burlington, discussion focused around it. Some feel access to the Burlington Seniors Centre is restricted by cost (user fees) and access by public transportation. On the other hand, others feel recreation at the Centre is adequate for seniors.

Volunteerism

- Most study participants believe that seniors are active volunteers in community organizations. However, lack of transportation is identified as a barrier to full participation in volunteer activities.

Barriers to Participation

- Study participants identify poor access and lack of transportation as the two main barriers to active participation of seniors in the community.

Immigrant Elders

- Language and isolation are identified as the main issues for immigrant elders. Several study participants comment on the difficulties that immigrant elders have in communicating, even

with their own families, when they are unable to speak English.

- Physical isolation, when seniors are alone at home during the daytime, is also raised as an important issue.

For a full copy of *Growing Old in Burlington: A Report on Seniors Trends and Issues*, please contact the Council or visit our website: www.haltonspcvc.on.ca.

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