



2023

Evaluation **Report** Older Adult Plan

City of Ottawa
Ontario, Canada



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The City's Older Adult Plan (OAP) aims to make Ottawa an age-friendly city. An evaluation of accomplishments and lessons learned has been undertaken to inform the future direction of the City's age-friendly approach. This report summarizes the results of the evaluation, the suggestions heard, and the recommendations towards a refreshed Older Adult Plan.

BACKGROUND

The City of Ottawa has been implementing an Older Adult Plan (OAP) since 2012. The latest and third iteration of the OAP retained the vision and long-term goals that were adopted as part of the first two Older Adult Plans:

Ottawa is an age-friendly and caring community that values the contributions of older adults, offers a broad range of opportunities for active living, and provides supports that are responsive to the diverse needs and choices of older adults.

The OAP worked towards making Ottawa an age-friendly community by making City services, programs, and facilities more accessible and responsive to the needs of older adults. Actions contained in the OAP were developed to respond to priorities identified by older adults and represent what is feasible and what can be accomplished under the City's mandate.

The latest [Older Adult Plan](#) committed to 24 actions organized around four (4) main strategic areas central to the provision of City services for older adults:

- Aging with Choice
- Transportation and Mobility
- Well-Being
- Communication

The OAP assigned responsibility for each action to a City Department, which had committed to its implementation within the stated timeline. The Community and Social Services Department provided the overall coordination and monitoring function for the OAP.

An Interdepartmental Staff Work Group (ISWG) communicated on a regular basis to review the progress of implementation quarterly. This group included representatives from eight (8) departments with lead responsibility for actions contained in the OAP.

The Seniors Roundtable (SRT) is comprised of residents of Ottawa 50 years of age or older reflecting the city's diverse population and urban, suburban, and rural areas of the city. The SRT represents key community organizations serving older adults in Ottawa. The Roundtable met quarterly to provide feedback on the implementation of the OAP action items, provide input related to City corporate and departmental programs, services, and infrastructure, and identify and share emerging issues of concern to older adults.

Half of the actions identified in the OAP were implemented without requiring OAP funding, the other half required funding from the existing OAP program budget for their implementation.

In 2012, City Council approved \$500,000 in the Community and Social Services Department annual operating budget for the implementation of OAP initiatives. The OAP program funding is subject to annual budget approval. In February 2020, City Council approved to permanently move \$150,000 from the OAP budget to the CSSD Community Funding budget for allocation to non-profit social service organizations serving older adults and vulnerable residents. As a result, the OAP program funding amount was \$350,000 in 2021 and 2022.

OAP funding is considered for new City program enhancements, services, infrastructure, and not for initiatives that are part of regular City operations. OAP funding aims to support temporary or specialized program costs outside of regular business.

An annual funding allocation process is required to ensure decisions are made in a manner that is transparent, fair, and evidence based.

As the last iteration of the OAP ended in December 2022, and 2023 marked the beginning of the evaluation, no call for proposals were made in 2023; the initiatives and funding amounts approved in the 2022 OAP allocation process were renewed for 2023, allowing City departments to continue to run programs and projects based on the approved priorities of the OAP.

The Older Adult Plan led to many accomplishments related to the City's infrastructure, programs and services, accessibility, communication, and access to supports for low income, vulnerable older adults. Please see [Appendix 1](#) for a list of accomplishments of the latest OAP.

DEMOGRAPHIC UPDATE

Ottawa's population is growing, changing, and aging, and seniors are the fastest-growing segment of the Canadian population. Ottawa's population of older adults is also becoming increasingly more diverse and needs vary greatly between sub-groups of seniors.

While seniors face many challenges as they age, some contributing factors such as low income and living alone are most associated with increased vulnerability and, in turn, a heightened risk of poor health outcomes. Some groups, such as senior women, LGBTQ seniors, Indigenous seniors, newcomer seniors and seniors with disabilities, are more isolated and vulnerable to poor outcomes than the rest of the population.

Older adults are also increasingly active and connected, and their needs are significantly evolving from generation to generation.

According to the 2021 Census, in Ottawa:

- There are 172,150 older adults over the age of 65, or 17% of the population.
- There are now more older adults than children under 15.
- By 2030, seven years from now, it is estimated that one in five adults will be aged 65 and over.
- The highest percentage of population change between 2016–2021 was among those 65+ with an overall population increase of 19.5%

- Due to gender differences in life expectancy, there are more older women and there are more than double the number of women aged 90+ than men.
- In rural Ottawa areas, there is an expected 183% increase in older adults between 2011–2031.
- Ottawa's older adults are an important part of the workforce. One in five of those 65+ work part-time or part-year work.
- One in five people aged 15–64 are close to retirement. As the population ages and the working population decreases, it is predicted that by 2050 there will be a 30% decrease of close family members that could act as caregivers for older adults.
- 23% of Ottawa's older adults have a language other than French or English as their first language with 20% speaking a non-official language at home. 14% of Ottawa's older adults identify as a member of a visible minority group.
- In the next 20 years, 28% of Ottawa's older adults will be members of one of the ten largest visible minority groups.
- More than 5% of older adults identify as LGBTQ2S+. One in five of these older adults live in rural areas.

EVALUATION OF THE OAP

The evaluation of the latest OAP had the objectives of identifying the successes and lessons learned through the years of implementing the OAP and sharing ideas and suggestions on how to improve its design and delivery in its future iterations. Responses received are used to inform the future direction of the City's age-friendly approach.

Methodology

- In September and October 2023, the City convened two separate bilingual engagement sessions, one involving external stakeholders and one with internal stakeholders.
 - A Summary Report and discussion questions were forwarded to all who participated in the external and internal reviews and provided a starting point for discussion.
 - These sessions were held virtually.
 - All materials, presentations and discussions were provided in both English and French.
- City staff captured discussion points which are compiled in this Evaluation report.
 - Individuals and agencies unable to attend the engagement sessions were invited to share their feedback via an online survey.

The **external review of the OAP** accomplishments and lessons learned during the last three years involved the Seniors Roundtable members and community agencies serving older adults.

Questions for discussion included:

1. How did the structure of the OAP help to move Ottawa towards being an age-friendly city?
2. How well did the OAP address the needs and concerns of older adults?
3. Was the SRT effectively and meaningfully engaged in all relevant aspects of the OAP? Could the model be improved?
4. Was the annual allocation process effective? Did the funded projects yield the desired results?
5. How well did the OAP contribute to the City's response to COVID-19?
6. What are your suggestions for improving or advancing the future OAP?

The **internal review of the OAP** with respect to mainstreaming an age-friendly lens in City planning and operations included the Interdepartmental Staff Workgroup (ISWG), comprised of representatives from City of Ottawa Departments/Branches, most with lead responsibility for current initiatives contained in the Older Adult Plan. All City departments, including Ottawa Public Health and Ottawa Public Library, were represented at this engagement session. Questions for discussion included:

1. How did the structure of the OAP contribute to mainstreaming an equity lens in programs and services across the corporation?
2. How well were the operational, programming, and strategic needs of your department addressed by the OAP? What have been the most impactful outcomes?
3. Was the ISWG effectively and meaningfully engaged in all relevant aspects of the OAP? Could the model be improved?
4. Did the annual allocation and funding process allow for innovation and filling gaps in services?
5. How well did the OAP contribute to the City's response to COVID-19?
6. If OAP funding is not renewed in 2024, what programs are at risk? What are the risks? The costs? and the possible solutions or mitigations strategies?

Feedback from this engagement is summarized in the next section.

What We Heard from the Seniors Roundtable and Community Partners

1. The OAP was essential in creating an Age-Friendly Ottawa.

- Members of the Seniors Roundtable (SRT) agreed the OAP made significant contributions towards making Ottawa increasingly age-friendly, notably regarding transportation and mobility.
- The OAP contributed to the City's use of an older adult lens in its COVID-19 response, including transportation support for seniors, the coordination of outreach and services for seniors through the Human Needs Task Force, and concrete actions to reduce social isolation. Several OAP funded initiatives were adapted to be delivered virtually, which helped to reduce isolation for older adults during the pandemic and beyond.
- Members suggested to raise awareness of the successes and accomplishments of the OAP to highlight the importance of addressing challenges faced by older adults in our community.

2. SRT members desire to be actively and meaningfully engaged.

- Though the SRT remained actively involved throughout the many versions of the OAP, members agreed their role could have had a greater influence on governance and better utilization of their experience and talents could have resulted in better outcomes. Revising and elevating the role of the Seniors Roundtable would ensure that important stakeholders are not only consulted but that their opinions and concerns are considered by decision makers.
- There is a need to have a consistent and full-time staff dedicated to the Older Adult Plan as a step in the right direction towards ensuring consistency and sustained engagement opportunities for representatives from key community groups and organizations.
- The structure of the SRT allowed for both francophone and anglophone members to engage as desired and to have the same experience of the OAP. Any engagement with stakeholders or the community and any reporting or publications need to continue to be available in both official languages.

3. The annual funding allocation process was effective and can continue to be improved.

- SRT members agreed the annual allocation process was effective. However, they did not think results were always balanced in terms of priorities and geographical distribution.
- They suggested different ways in which the City could ensure a better distribution of funds, for example, allotting a percentage of funds to specific types of projects or geographical locations as part of a decision matrix supporting the allocation process, or determining the priorities before a call for proposal, in collaboration with the SRT and staff leads.

4. The OAP should build on its equity lens and make programs more accessible.

- Some groups may not have equitably benefited from OAP initiatives, such as older adults living in rural areas or belonging to Indigenous, Black, and racialized groups.

- With inclusion, equity, and accessibility in mind, SRT members recommended implementing mechanisms addressing such inequities explicitly in future iterations.
- More representation of intersectional older adults was recommended such as bilingual older adults, older adults with disabilities, older women, and those representing diverse older adults — indigenous, multicultural, 2SLGBTQIA+. Their lived experience is also needed in the membership of key City advisory committees and boards, such as, but not limited to the:
 - Accessibility Advisory Committee
 - Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee
 - French Language Services Advisory Committee
 - Ottawa Board of Health
- The OAP should continue to focus on topics of accessibility and affordability of social and physical activity programs for older adults in Ottawa. Regular social and physical activity for older adults is extremely important for them to maintain health, prevent falls, and remain socially connected.

5. The OAP scope could be broadened to include policy development and should adapt to emerging and evolving priorities.

- Advocacy, policy development and interventions on some specific issues affecting older adults, such as homophobia and anti-ageism. Many agreed this role should be included as part of the mandate of the SRT working with staff and Council Liaisons on making Ottawa age friendly.
- The OAP could focus on adequate housing and assisted living solutions in future iterations. This would help improve older adults' quality of life both in their own homes and in long-term care when that time comes and to relieve pressures on certain programs and services.
- Supporting Ottawa Public Health's Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs represent an innovative and responsive service delivery model that could support the needs of older adults including access to existing services such as vaccinations, social services, dental screening, mental health, diabetes screening.
- Working across departments might be needed to develop strategies to address some of the major and complex issues older adults are facing in the community.

What We Heard from City Departments

1. The OAP increased staff understanding of older adults' key issues and opportunities.

- Staff across departments reported the value of the lived experience of older adults in shaping OAP programming. This helped staff establish relationships with older adults in the community and gain a better understand key issues affecting them, both essential in addressing equity gaps.
- Staff suggested that the model provided by the OAP could be used in other contexts for programs geared to other priority populations.

2. The OAP created opportunities for collaboration and planning.

- The OAP created a space for departments to define their approach to working with and for older adults. Its structure created opportunities for collaboration across City departments and for developing new community partnerships.
- Staff highlighted the importance of continuing to engage older adults and responding to their needs during this review to avoid losing momentum.
- Staff suggested exploring how the Seniors Roundtable could be enhanced and impacting decisions at a city level. They also showed interest in being more involved with the Seniors Roundtable and in developing mechanisms to gather and share broader population feedback on key issues affecting older adults.
- City staff working on OAP initiatives recommended that management be more involved in high-level discussions regarding the OAP to help better define the scope and direction of collaborative initiatives and leverage City resources to their full potential.

3. OAP Funding is critical for new initiatives to be piloted.

- The OAP funding allowed City staff to pilot initiatives tailored to older adults' needs that wouldn't have been possible otherwise. Future iterations should continue to include funding for City departments to enhance their capacity to address the evolving needs of older adults.
- The last iteration of the OAP was particularly challenging due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery. Pandemic response, staff turnover and portfolio realignments led to instability of the OAP rollout since 2020. Some could not run programs at all due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- Staff also commented that the funding allocation could be done much earlier, the year prior, to allow for planning and a full year of execution.

4. The OAP supported the City's COVID-19 Response.

- With older adults being more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus, it was important to adapt OAP initiatives to the rapidly evolving pandemic situation to keep them as safe as possible despite isolation requirements and health concerns.
- The OAP played a pivotal role in launching virtual programs to make sure older adults could still access programming during this difficult time. In some cases, virtual programming has now become permanent to ensure consistent access to programs for older adults who are unable to attend in-person.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Keeping What Worked Well and Building on What Can Be Improved

1. Continuing funding for older adult programs and services.

- Access to funding to deliver on the OAP has been an instrumental factor of success over the years. Moving forward, the future age-friendly strategy should ensure that funding is maintained or increased to respond to the increasing demand.
- A review of the allocation processes and criteria should be undertaken and consider the following elements:
 - Equitable distribution of funding, population based and geographically based.
 - Alignment with evolving communities and organizational priorities.

- Assess the opportunities to allocate funding to initiatives that reflect active collaboration and partnership within the city and community stakeholders.
- Effective and timely reporting of funding outcomes for accountability and transparency.

2. Fostering meaningful engagement between elected officials, staff, and community.

- Engage and partner with older residents and community agencies to develop, implement, and evaluate a robust Older Adult Plan to be monitored by the Seniors Roundtable and the Council Liaisons for Older Adults.

3. Continuing to promote an older adult lens and inter-departmental collaboration.

- Active promotion of an Older Adult lens across all City departments is needed. The changing demographics and expectations of older adults require enhanced resources to support new strategic initiatives. Improved internal and external reporting of programs and projects that focus on Older Adults is recommended, and achievements should be celebrated.

4. Building equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

- The updated OAP should include mechanisms to ensure increased equity, inclusion, and accessibility. An Indigenous lens and an anti-racism and women and gender equity lens should be built into all stages of planning and implementation of any new strategy to help improve older adults' quality of life regardless of geographical location, ethnocultural background or socioeconomic status.

5. Keeping the Bilingualism and enhancing programs and services in French.

- Though the OAP had an equitable approach to official languages around engagement of the Seniors Roundtable, communications, and reporting, special attention should be brought to ensuring equitable access to francophone program offerings as part of the next age-friendly strategy. Consider requesting programs and services aligned to the OAP to consistently be offered in both official languages.

6. Keeping up and engaging with evolving priorities.

- The following issues were brought up as requiring increased attention and coordinated resources from City departments:
 - Affordable Housing
 - Assisted Living and Aging in Place
 - Reduce the Burden of the Cost of Living
 - High-level advocacy and interventions (ex: homophobia, anti-ageism)
 - Social Inclusion
 - Anti-agism education
- Recommendations included exploring innovative senior living arrangements, enhancing socialization and recreational activities.
- Improving the lives of Ottawa's older adults requires action on traditional municipal services such as affordable and accessible housing, transportation, and outdoor spaces and buildings. As an Age-Friendly City, health and community support services, respect and social inclusion, social participation, civic engagement, access to information and communication, as well as income/financial security are also important factors to address.

Recommendations for the Renewal of the Older Adult Plan

Older Adult demographics, needs, and resources have changed considerably since 2012. The Evaluation highlights several areas where the OAP will need to be updated to meaningfully address current expectations.

The lingering effects of COVID-19 and the development of new plans and strategies at the city, the emergence of Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and the expansion of the Oasis Program across Ontario are just a few of the influences converging on this rapidly increasing segment of Ottawa's population.

Based on the feedback from both the external and internal reviews, staff are recommending that the next iteration of the City Older Adult Plan consider changes in the City's demographic and consider new emerging priorities.

Staff recommend revising the approach and the structure of OAP to ensure that representation of community members is meaningful and impactful, that priorities are monitored and addressed in a timely fashion, that actions include the development of programs, services, as well as policies that support the needs of older adults within the City.

The next iteration of the OAP should be broader in scope and nimbler to evolve in conjunction with the changing needs, priorities, and expectations of this generation of Older Adults. This would entail:

1. Conducting a fulsome environmental scan of best practices in other jurisdictions to bring new and proven ideas to the table.
2. Creating a robust engagement plan to help inform the direction of the next Older Adult Plan.
3. Integrating an anti-racism, women and gender, and Indigenous lens in the development of the plan and purposefully reaching to representing communities.
4. Revising the mandate and membership of the Seniors Roundtable to increase representation of equity deserving groups and increase meaningful contribution, engagement, and transparency.
5. Updating and maintaining a structure for City interdepartmental staff to connect and collaborate on issues affecting Older Adults and age-friendly initiatives.
6. Diversifying ways to allocate funding targeted to emerging needs of the aging population. This would include partnering with the seniors Roundtable to establish priorities and criteria.
7. Leveraging the role of Council Liaison for Older Adults, approved by Council on June 12, 2023, to lead the Seniors Roundtable and champion the new iteration of the Older Adult Plan.

Appendix 1 — Accomplishments of the latest OAP

More than

180

on-street bus stops were rehabilitated through OC Transpo's annual improvement program to enhance accessibility for older adults and persons with disabilities. Upgrades included the installation of new level bus pads, shelters, exterior accessible benches, connections to adjacent sidewalks and pathways, larger boarding areas, and curb ramps where no adjacent connections existed.

Launched

My Para Transpo

online services to all Para Transpo customers in April 2022. This initial set of services included online Para Transpo trip booking and cancellation, and ride tracking.

1,203

clients served for transportation access to COVID-19 testing or vaccination clinics.

2,104

sidewalk repairs were completed in areas highly frequented by older adults.

37

intersections adjusted with signal timing for crossing times.

102

intersections with newly installed accessible pedestrian signals and pedestrian countdown timers.

66

road safety initiatives, which included community presentations, outreach events, workshops, and education sessions.

20

of which are related to the OAP, with a focus on cycling and safety.

31

locations equipped with temporary "Wind signs" to promote safe sharing of pathways between cyclists and pedestrians.

City staff instructed the e-scooter providers to install stickers on their e-scooters that say, "No Sidewalk Riding".

31

completed installations at City facilities frequented by older adults were installed with age-friendly and accessible door openers and operators.

35

accessible benches were installed,

15

pads were constructed, and

3

accessible picnic tables were installed at existing City facilities to increase accessibility at public spaces.

700

participants in online courses with over

720

wellness supply kits distributed as part of wellness programs to promote healthy aging.

Beach friendly wheelchairs were purchased to allow for beach access in the summer and tablets for older adult fitness programs were purchased as part of the Older Adult New Fitness Initiatives.

6

programs developed and delivered to facilitate active living, recreational and cultural opportunities for over

800

older adults living on low-income and moderate income, including:

- Inuit Elders' Gathering
- Indigenous cultural experiences
- virtual creative arts programs
- free outdoor theatre performances
- quilting workshops storytelling
- performances held in-person and virtually

5

new fitness, health, and wellness, cultural, and arts programs developed and piloted targeting

196

older adults from priority groups, including:

- Workshops in traditional craft skills and cultural knowledge for Indigenous older adult participants
- virtual reality program content and equipment
- arts-based welcome center led by Inuit older adults for Inuit in Ottawa
- free outdoor dance performances
- social recreational programs
- art workshops led by artists with disabilities for older adults with cognitive/developmental disabilities

Mayor's office awarded Jane Dobell the Ontario's Senior of the Year award on June 24, 2021.

76

new affordable housing units specifically geared towards seniors were completed between 2020 and 2022.

216

new affordable housing units geared towards a mixed population, including seniors, were completed and occupied between 2020 and 2022.

1,381

affordable and supportive housing units are currently under development and once complete, will serve a variety of client groups, including seniors.

Ontario Renovates Program approved and provided funding to

37

senior households to cover the cost of essential repairs and/or accessible modifications, thus, fostered independent living and aging in place.

111

new and approved applicants to the Property Tax Deferral Program.

Collaborated closely with the Human Needs Task Force to reach out to isolated seniors and address COVID related needs.

9,424

subscribers in English and

750

subscribers in French to the Older Adult Newsletter, established to increase awareness of programs and services.



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