



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The Urban Age of Aging
Addressing the Multidimensional Barriers of Older
Toronto Residents

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Introduction	1
Issue & Evidence	3
a. Who is “older”?	3
b. Aging population	4
c. Multidimensional poverty	5
d. Food insecurity	7
e. Social isolation	9
f. Urban Changes: Gentrification	10
g. Urban Changes: Austerity Measures	12
Community Consultation and Interviews	13
Key Findings	15
a. Multidimensional poverty	15
b. Food insecurity	17
c. Social isolation	17
d. Urban changes	19
Recommendations	21
a. For Older People Themselves	21
b. For the Government of Ontario	22
c. For the City of Toronto	22
d. For Community Organizations	24
Impact	26
Conclusion	27
Bibliography	29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOAL:

This research aims to highlight some of the issues facing a growing older demographic in the City of Toronto, through the lenses of multidimensional poverty, food insecurity, social isolation and urban changes. In partnership with The Stop Community Food Centre, the results of this research aim to influence multi-level government actors in decision making around aging and older people, and develop ideas for meaningful community programming for this population.

METHODOLOGY:

Interviews were conducted with ten older adults in the Toronto districts of Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's where The Stop operates, as well as with three administrators of non-profit organizations across Canada, and one university professor. A group consultation was also conducted with older adults in the Toronto-St. Paul's district. All interviews and the consultation focused on gaining insight into the participants' thoughts on senior-related poverty, food insecurity, social isolation and community changes. Secondary, online research was also used to enhance understanding of the current state of the aging population.

RESULTS:

Participants identified various issues that are both a result of and contributor to multidimensional poverty, food insecurity, social isolation and urban changes. These include costs of transportation, inability to secure employment, housing costs, unaffordable food sources, lack of awareness of nutritional needs, a fear of judgement, language barriers, gentrification, and municipal ward changes, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government of Ontario: Develop a seniors' nutritional policy within the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility, so that seniors are healthy enough to benefit from other provincially-funded programs.

The City of Toronto: Partner their newly city-owned seniors' housing corporation with local community food organizations throughout the city to provide transportation to socially and nutritionally beneficial programs.

Community organizations: Implement frequent seniors-specific programming that promotes healthy aging, through covering various information topics on senior-specific needs and offering activities that build social connectedness and healthy communities.

INTRODUCTION

It should be no surprise that the entire world is experiencing a triumphant aging shift. As the Baby Boomers are reaching retirement age and advancements in healthcare are increasing life expectancies, the projected global population of those aged 65 and older will triple to approximately two billion by 2050.¹ In Canada alone, this age group is predicted to account for nearly 22 percent of the total population by 2030 - surpassing the number of those aged 15 and younger for the first time in Canadian history.² Moreover, the majority of these older Canadians are choosing to live in urban areas; in 2006, over 60 percent of seniors in Canada were living in a metropolitan city.³ Thirteen years later, one can only imagine how this percentage has skyrocketed in an increasingly urbanized era.

In Toronto - Canada's most populous urban area - the demographic shift is becoming progressively evident.⁴ As this dense and diverse city ages, it is critical to ensure that there are adequate resources in place to efficiently and appropriately embrace this triumphant change. In order to do so, an analysis into the current livelihood of older adults in Toronto is needed to understand existing challenges and what can be done to address them.

In partnership with The Stop Community Food Centre, this report aims to provide this necessary insight and analysis by examining issue areas faced by older

1 Arup, Help Age International, Intel & Systematica. 2015. *Shaping Ageing Cities*. Page 8.

2 Bohnert, Nora, Jonathon Chagnon, and Patrice Dion. 2017. "Population Projections for Canada (2013 to 2063), Provinces and Territories (2013 to 2038)." Statistics Canada.

3 Turcotte, M., and G. Schellenberg. *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada*. Page 16.

4 City of Toronto. 2018. *Toronto Seniors Strategy 2.0*.

adults in Toronto,⁵ with respect to three overarching topics: multidimensional poverty, food insecurity and social isolation.⁶ Although this research takes place in the city of Toronto, there will be particular attention to older individuals who reside in the federal electoral districts in which The Stop Community Food Centre operates: Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's. Within this context, the impacts of urban changes on older Toronto residents, such as gentrification and austerity-driven governance, are explored. The main goal of this project is to provide information for relevant stakeholders to create opportunities to best address and respond to the challenges faced by older adults and to foster social connectedness in the Toronto area. Thus, this research aims to provide answers to the question:

How can community programming and service delivery in the Toronto - St. Paul and Davenport federal electoral districts appropriately and efficiently address the needs of older adults, in terms of responding to urban changes that magnify issues of poverty, food insecurity and social isolation?

To develop answers for the main research question, two key sub-questions will be investigated:

- 1. What are the prominent issues older people are facing in the Toronto districts of Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's ?**
- 2. How are major community changes, such as austerity measures and gentrification, impacting the livelihoods of older adults in Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's ?**

⁵ For the purposes of this report, "older" will primarily refer to those who are over the age of 65.

⁶ For more information on The Stop Community Food Centre: www.thestop.org.

By exploring these questions, this research hopes to target various actors that can create opportunities for positive change. The Government of Ontario plays a vital role in developing policies and providing funding for municipal and community level services. The City of Toronto is responsible for ensuring its residents are safely taken care of and supporting civil society. Community organizations can provide accessible services for older community members to use to their benefit. Furthermore, the community at large has the capacity to alter general attitudes regarding older people and to create positive narratives about their fellow community members. Therefore, many stakeholders are involved in creating a supportive community for seniors - but how can they achieve it?

ISSUE & EVIDENCE

Who is “Older”?

In an aging society, it is important to note who is considered “older.” Although people may not identify to be or feel old as they age, the Government of Canada considers those aged 65 and up to be seniors or older people.⁷ The 65th year in a Canadian’s life is when they are eligible to receive full pension benefits from the federal government, thus resulting in 65 being the most common age to classify as a “senior.”⁸ Yet, it is difficult to classify seniors as a homogenous group, as every individual has unique and diverse needs.⁹ Furthermore, there is extreme circumstance variety within the senior age group, as those aged 65 may have very different needs than those who

⁷ Turcotte, M., and G. Schellenberg. *A Portrait of Seniors in Canada*. Page 7.

⁸ Ibid. Page 8.

⁹ Stern, Louise. June 25, 2019. Personal interview. Nanaimo, BC.

are 85.¹⁰ Despite lack of homogeneity, for the purposes of this report, the terms “seniors” or “older” will refer to people who are over the age of 65.

Aging Population

It is also critical to indicate that aging is not the issue; the increasing aging population is a shift worth celebrating, as our friends, neighbours, family members and fellow community citizens are living longer and playing meaningful roles in our lives and general society.¹¹ Moreover, seniors bring lived experience and knowledge to the wider community.¹² The issue, however, is that resources and services may not be in place to adequately serve the growing needs of the seniors’ population.¹³

In Toronto, the current number of people over the age of 65 is the highest recorded in history, accounting for nearly 16 percent of the city’s total population.¹⁴ In the district of Davenport, the 65 and older age group represents approximately 13 percent of the area’s population.¹⁵ The district of Toronto-St. Paul’s has an even higher percentage of older adults: over 19 percent, which is seven percent higher than the number of people between the ages of 0-14.¹⁶ As the city’s overall older population is expected to double by 2041, it is likely that the percentage of seniors in Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul’s will increase as well.¹⁷ Thus, establishing resources and services

10 Kembhavi, Rohan. 2012. “Canadian Seniors: A Demographic Profile.” Page 1.

11 National Seniors Strategy. 2019. <http://nationalseniorsstrategy.ca/>

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Toronto, City [Census subdivision]. Statistics Canada.

15 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Davenport [Federal electoral district]. Statistics Canada.

16 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Toronto - St. Paul’s [Federal electoral district]. Statistics Canada.

17 Ibid.

directed toward older adults within these districts is crucial in attending to the needs of this growing segment of the population.

Multidimensional Poverty

The term multidimensional poverty is used to provide a comprehensive look at the concept of poverty, as it is usually more than just a lack of money.¹⁸ People living in poverty often suffer from various disadvantages simultaneously, including poor health, malnutrition, lack of clean water and social capital, and low education, among others.¹⁹ These disadvantages and other barriers tend to intersect and perpetuate one another, requiring a multidimensional approach when evaluating poverty.

Considering the income component to poverty, approximately 17 percent of Toronto seniors are low-income based on the low-income measure, after tax.²⁰ Within the Davenport area, the statistic is the same: 17 percent.²¹ In the Toronto-St. Paul's district, about 12 percent of people over the age of 65 are considered low income, based on the same measure.²² Though the Toronto-St. Paul's district has a higher percentage of seniors, there is a higher percentage of older adults who are low-income in the Davenport area.

Sources of income for older Canadians range between employment, personal savings and pension benefits.²³ Thus, for those who spent most of their lives unemployed or low-income, a reliable income over the age of 65 in Canada is difficult to

18 Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative. "Multidimensional Poverty."

19 Ibid.

20 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Toronto, City [Census subdivision]. Statistics Canada.

21 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Davenport [Federal electoral district]. Statistics Canada.

22 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Toronto - St. Paul's [Federal electoral district]. Statistics Canada.

23 Financial Consumer Agency of Canada. 2019. "Sources of Retirement Income".

secure. Statistics Canada shows that private pensions distributed the most income to older Canadians in 2017, approximately \$76 million in total.²⁴ In comparison, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) distributed approximately \$42 million in 2017, and Old Age Security (OAS) dispersed approximately \$49 million.²⁵ However, only 3.6 million Canadians received income from a private pension plan, whereas approximately five million Canadians received benefits from CPP and OAS.²⁶

Despite retirement benefits being in place, an economic report by the Broadbent Institute indicates that Canadians are increasingly less prepared for retirement due to minimal personal savings and a trend of lower pension coverage.²⁷ Being unprepared is reported to be a result of unaffordable living and inadequate pension coverage from both private employers and government benefits.²⁸ For instance, the average monthly CPP benefit is currently \$679,²⁹ while the average monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto is \$1270.³⁰ Thus, although the population is increasingly aging, income preparation is decreasing. As a result, older adults in Toronto, and Canada in general, are susceptible to the multidimensional impacts of living in poverty.

24 "Tax filers and dependants, seniors with income by source of income and age." 2019. Statistics Canada.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Shillington, R. 2016. "An Analysis of the Economic Circumstances of Canadian Seniors." The Broadbent Institute.

28 Ibid.

29 Social Development Canada. 2019. "Canada Pension Plan – How Much You Could Receive." Government of Canada.

30 City of Toronto. 2019. "Current City of Toronto Average Market Rents & Utility Allowances."

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity can be defined as a “lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.”³¹ Aging can bring about various factors that generate challenges in securing access to food and obtaining adequate nutrition. These factors include, but are not limited to, lower income, lack of transportation, impaired mobility and dexterity, decreased appetite, declining oral health, and loneliness.³²

Being food insecure can result in older adults developing debilitating health conditions, such as diabetes, increased fatigue, low muscle mass, impaired cognition, and high blood pressure.³³ Moreover, proper nutrition is vital for seniors to lead strong, active lives, as although caloric need and appetite decreases as people age, the need for proper nutrient intake increases.³⁴ Facing barriers to accessing nutritious food leads to malnourishment, resulting in frailty, increased risk of falls, social isolation, susceptibility to compromised health, and earlier death.³⁵ Thus, food insecurity is both a result of and contributor to multiple challenges experienced by older adults.

Food and nutrition are critical components in maintaining healthy, engaged and resilient communities. Food security enables individuals to lead strong lives, and thus enhances the greater community by improving the health and productivity of its

31 Seegert, L. 2018. “Food Insecurity: Especially for Older Adults, It's about More than Hunger.” Association of Health Care Journalists.

32 Ramage-Morin, P., Gilmour, H., and Rotermann, M. 2017. “Nutritional Risk, Hospitalization and Mortality among Community-dwelling Canadians Aged 65 or Older.” Statistics Canada.

33 Seegert, L. 2018. “Food Insecurity: Especially for Older Adults, It's about More than Hunger.”

34 Ramage-Morin, P., Gilmour, H., and Rotermann, M. 2017.

35 Ibid.

individual members.³⁶ Therefore, ensuring older Toronto residents have reliable and safe access to their nutritional needs is not only beneficial for their own health, but for the health of the community as well.

Toronto has a variety of initiatives, programs and organizations in place to support food security in the city. The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) is a municipal advisory committee for ensuring Torontonians have access to healthy, affordable, sustainable, and culturally acceptable food.³⁷ The TFPC has made significant contributions to city-wide food projects, such as the Toronto Food Strategy.³⁸ The strategy identifies seniors to be a rapidly growing group that would benefit from greater access to nutritional food, and promotes independent living and healthy aging.³⁹

Within the areas of Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's, The Stop Community Food Centre works to "increase access to healthy food in a manner that maintains dignity, builds health and community, and challenges inequality."⁴⁰ The non-profit organization aims to bring Torontonians together through good food, and offers a wide range of programs including community kitchens, drop-in meals, a food bank, a community action program, community gardens, good food markets, and youth programming.⁴¹ In 2018 alone, the organization served over 52,000 meals.⁴² Hence, it is evident that The

36 Raheem, D. 2018. "Food and Nutrition Security as a Measure of Resilience in the Barents Region." Urban Science.

37 Toronto Food Policy Council. "About." <http://tfpc.to/about>.

38 Ibid.

39 Toronto Public Health. 2010. "Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System for Toronto." City of Toronto.

40 The Stop. "About Us." <https://www.thestop.org/what-we-do/about-us/>.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

Stop is making an immense impact in the Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's electoral districts with their extensive programming and high service usage.

Though there are initiatives and programming in place in Toronto to promote food security, it is vital to ensure that older Toronto residents are targeted in these services and benefitting from them due to their strong nutritional needs. As the senior population grows, these initiatives must continuously adapt in order to attend to the needs in their communities.

Social Isolation

Social isolation can have numerous meanings, as everyone experiences isolation differently; however, the National Seniors Council defines the term as “a low quantity and quality of contact with others.”⁴³ Beyond a low connection with others, social isolation can also refer to a lack of connection to place, power and purpose.⁴⁴ Older individuals are at high risk of experiencing these lack of connections, due to their tendency to live alone, living with health and mobility issues, the experience of losing loved ones, and financial struggles.⁴⁵

In Canada, it has been estimated that approximately 16 percent of seniors experience social isolation.⁴⁶ The National Seniors Council identifies nine groups of vulnerable seniors who may be at greater risk of being socially isolated: Aboriginal seniors, seniors who are caregivers, immigrant seniors, LGBTQ+ seniors, seniors living

⁴³ The National Seniors Council. 2014. *Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors*. Government of Canada.

⁴⁴ Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness. “About Us.” <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/>.

⁴⁵ Sibley, J., Thompson, H. and Edwardh, J. 2016. *Seniors: Loneliness and Social Isolation*. Community Development Halton.

⁴⁶ The National Seniors Council. 2017. *Who's at Risk and What Can Be Done about It? A Review of the Literature on the Social Isolation of Different Groups of Seniors*. Government of Canada.

alone, seniors living in remote areas, low-income seniors, seniors living with mental health issues, and seniors with health challenges or disabilities.⁴⁷ Individuals belonging to more than one vulnerable group are at greater risk of being socially isolated.

Social isolation is a strong contributor to a multitude of negative health consequences. The negative health consequences include, but are not limited to:

- Depression and anxiety
- Malnutrition
- Decreased immunity
- Fatigue
- Poor cardiovascular health (risks of stroke and heart attack)
- Impaired cognitive function.^{48, 49}

It has been indicated that people who have strong familial and friend connections are more likely to have better mental and physical health.⁵⁰ Thus, older adults with stronger social connections are more likely to have improved health; however, their susceptibility to being socially isolated can present difficulties in achieving this. As the older demographic continues to grow in Toronto, it is critical that these barriers to connecting with others are addressed to foster healthy communities.

Urban Changes: Gentrification

In an ever-growing and diverse city like Toronto, urban change is inevitable. Since 2015, the population has grown by approximately 1.14 percent, and in 2016,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Keefe, J., Andrew, M., Fancey, P. & Hall, M. 2006. *A Profile of Social Isolation in Canada*. Department of Family Studies and Gerontology, Mount Saint Vincent University.

⁴⁹ The National Seniors Council. 2017. *Who's at Risk and What Can Be Done about It?*

⁵⁰ Sinha, M. 2014. *Canadians' connections with family and friends*. Statistics Canada.

nearly half of the city's population was born outside of Canada.⁵¹ In addition, Toronto is currently deemed as one of the fastest growing cities in both Canada and the United States.⁵² As the city continues to populate and acquire newcomers, adaptations and additions are required to accommodate the influx of residents from all walks of life.

Furthermore, with population growth usually comes gentrification.

Gentrification is defined as “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use,”⁵³ and it is a palpable phenomenon in Toronto. One of the most evident neighbourhoods of this occurrence is Parkdale, where new condo developments have replaced affordable food restaurants; more affluent businesses are consuming the area and have been since the Mike Harris government introduced “vacancy decontrol” in the 1990s.⁵⁴ Since then, 28 rooming houses – 347 units – in Parkdale have been converted into higher-income housing.⁵⁵ As a result, Parkdale residents have been protesting against the gentrifying change since 2017.⁵⁶

The districts of Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's are experiencing a similar reality. Davenport is a vibrant cultural neighbourhood with strong Portuguese, Italian and Spanish roots.⁵⁷ Many of its residents and their families have lived in the established

51 World Population Review. 2019. “Toronto Population 2019.”

<http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/toronto-population/>.

52 Clayton, F, and Shi, H. 2019. “Centre for Urban Research and Land Development.” Ryerson University.

<https://www.ryerson.ca/cur/Blog/blogentry35/>.

53 Lees, L, Slater, T and Wyly, E. 2013. *Gentrification*.

54 Barrington-Bush, Liam. 2018. “Toronto's Many Faces of Gentrification.” NOW Magazine.

55 Ferguson, Lisa. 2017. “Community Fights Back against Parkdale's Rooming House Crisis.” NOW Magazine.

56 Ibid.

57 Census Profile, 2016 Census. Davenport [Federal electoral district]. Statistics Canada.

neighbourhood for a number of years, yet many new developments are arising. Within the next 10 years, there lies the possibility of over 15,000 living units to be added to the area - and most of these lie in the high-income price range of \$400,000 - \$1 million.⁵⁸ As higher income properties envelop the area, higher income residents follow suit, ultimately influencing more affluent businesses to flock to the area as well.⁵⁹ As a neighbourhood becomes more affluent, it tends to displace its lower-income residents.⁶⁰ For the senior residents who have resided in the community for generations and no longer have a steady income to rely on, gentrification poses a threat to their sense of connection to community and feeling of home.

Urban Changes: Austerity Measures

The City of Toronto is directly impacted by the decisions and changes of the newly elected provincial government. With the implementation of a new Progressive Conservative government in 2018, numerous funding and budget changes were made in Ontario. Some of these changes include funding cuts to Legal Aid, Social Assistance, Indigenous Affairs, Health, and to the City of Toronto municipal government.^{61,62}

Moreover, the Government of Ontario reduced the size of Toronto's city council from 47 wards to 25, resulting in fewer City Councillors and larger areas of responsibility.⁶³

Older adults in Toronto are users of many of these services and divisions that

58 Davenport Community Coalition meeting, meeting notes, July 11, 2019.

59 Barrington-Bush, Liam. 2018. "Toronto's Many Faces of Gentrification." NOW Magazine.

60 Ibid.

61 Jones, A. 2019. "A List of Cuts and Changes Doug Ford Has Made This Year as He Tries to Balance the Budget." Global News.

62 City of Toronto. "2019 City Budget."

63 CBC News. 2018. "Doug Ford Government Wins Stay of Court Ruling, Moving Closer to Smaller Toronto Council." <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ford-court-toronto-council-1.4829250>.

were affected by funding cuts. Lower-income seniors may no longer have access to Legal Aid or public health services that are no longer properly funded or well-resourced. Likewise, difficulties in accessing health services or Indigenous affairs inquiries can unequivocally impact older people with debilitating health conditions and Indigenous elders.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION AND INTERVIEWS

To gain a better understanding of the issues facing older people in Toronto, a qualitative approach was used to understand the experiences, narratives and thoughts of the participants. As this research aims to illustrate the current livelihood of older adults and their experiences, personal interviews were the main form of data collection. Ten interviews were conducted with self-identifying older individuals in the Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's districts, as well as three interviews with administrators of non-profit organizations and one university professor. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended in nature. Interview topics focused on the main research themes: multidimensional poverty, food insecurity, social isolation, and effects of urban changes.

The older, community member participants were recruited with the assistance of The Stop Community Food Centre. These individuals were either users of The Stop's programs, or users of programs and services elsewhere in the area. These interviews took place at the Davenport location of The Stop and at a local drop-in centre in the Toronto-St. Paul's district. All interviews were conducted in English, with a Spanish interpreter used in one interview. Participants were both male and female, and came

from a variety of ethnic backgrounds including Indigenous, Caribbean, Salvadoran, and Colombian cultures.

The three administrators of non-profit organizations that participated were either the Executive Director or Manager of their organization. These participants were located in Nanaimo, British Columbia and Winnipeg, Manitoba and worked either directly with seniors, or offered seniors programming at their organization. The university professor participant was the Chair of the Social Work department at Vancouver Island University (VIU), with a background in gerontology. These participants were recruited via email, found using online research into seniors-serving organizations in Canada.

A consultation-style focus group was also held in the Toronto-St. Paul's area for data collection. Nine older adults participated in the consultation. The participants were recruited with assistance from The Stop Community Food Centre, through distribution of flyers in the community and word of mouth. The discussion in the consultation focused on general challenges seniors face, community changes, staying socially connected, and ideas on useful community events and activities. The participants came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including Tibetan, Chinese, Salvadoran, Filipino and Indian cultures.

Data from the interviews and consultation were analyzed in the context of the main themes of the research: poverty, food insecurity, social isolation and urban changes. Stories, experiences and ideas that emerged were categorized into these overarching themes.

KEY FINDINGS

The results of this outreach document expressed concerns, experiences and ideas that are organized by the main research topics. However, additional themes emerged that intersect with the main topics, which amplify the multidimensionality of the challenges faced by most older people.

Multidimensional Poverty

Eight out of ten respondents from Toronto indicated income or expenses to be one of their biggest challenges. One respondent expressed that it is extremely difficult to find employment as an older woman. She thoroughly enjoys serving jobs and has experience in the field, but is struggling to secure a position once an employer is aware of her age and “older” appearance, or finds the uniform to be inappropriate.⁶⁴ Building upon this dilemma, Deborah Hollins, Executive Director of Nanaimo Family Life Association, stressed that a gender analysis should be used when considering issues faced by older adults, as women tend to experience these challenges on a disproportionate level.⁶⁵

It was also reported that the younger of older adults, those around the ages of 55-64, are often missed by community programs when considering income instability. These individuals can still be considered “older” and may experience common health effects that come with aging, but are not yet eligible for senior pension benefits.⁶⁶ Thus, these individuals can also experience challenges when securing steady income due to

⁶⁴ Legarde, Andrea. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

⁶⁵ Hollins, Deborah. July 4, 2019. Personal interview. Nanaimo, BC.

⁶⁶ Stern, Louise. June 25, 2019. Personal interview. Nanaimo, BC.

the inability to find a job, health conditions related to aging that may prevent one from working, and not being eligible for pension benefits.

The expenses highlighted by participants that cause the most issues were transportation, housing, food, and mobility devices. Food will be discussed further under *Food Insecurity*.

Four respondents indicated that they avoid using public transportation due to its cost. Although the TTC (the public transportation system in Toronto) has cheaper fares for seniors, older Torontonians still find the cost to be too high.⁶⁷ As a result, older adults walk far distances to their destination if they are able, or do not access needed services.⁶⁸

Lack of affordable housing was one of the most prominent issues mentioned in the interviews, by 10 out of all 14 interview respondents. A few participants expressed that if their rent was to increase at all, they would not be able to pay it, or would need to move.⁶⁹ Furthermore, one participant indicated to have chosen to live homeless, as the cost of their previous living situation brought upon too much stress.⁷⁰ Another interviewee explained that the older elders in her cultural community lack affordable and accessible housing. That is, most of the affordable housing in Toronto is in large complexes that are not one-level or are not wheelchair/walker accessible, making it difficult for seniors to find adequate housing.⁷¹

67 Gogolin, Graciela. July 9, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Anonymous. 2019. Personal interview.

71 Gomes, Jewel. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

Food Insecurity

In addressing access to food, seven out of ten older respondents indicated they utilize food programs, food banks or drop-in meals in their vicinity to satisfy their hunger and nutritional needs. Location and food preference were two identified factors in deciding which programs to attend. A few participants identified McDonald's to be a frequent meal option, as it is the cheapest restaurant in their area.⁷² Otherwise, shopping for food was found to be too costly.

Dr. Louise Stern, Chair of the Social Work department at VIU, expressed that most seniors are unaware of their nutritional need changes as they age and the ways in which their meal choices may affect their overall health.⁷³ Additionally, she cited a recent study in a Nanaimo hospital, which found that approximately 40 percent of senior patients were malnourished prior to admission, further emphasizing a lack of awareness for nutritional need and difficulty addressing these needs.⁷⁴ Furthermore, another respondent stressed the need for proper dental care in obtaining adequate nutrition, in which affordable dental services are tough to come by.⁷⁵

Social Isolation

All respondents defined social isolation to be a lack of connection to people and few relationships with others. None of the participants self-identified as being socially isolated or needing more social connection. A couple interviewees insisted that they

⁷² Hardacre, Phil. July 8, 2019. Personal Interview. Toronto, ON.

⁷³ Stern, Louise. June 25, 2019. Personal interview. Nanaimo, BC.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Tobias, Montgomery. July 10, 2019. Paper interview. Toronto, ON.

prefer to keep to themselves to stay out of trouble, but will access programs in their area if they are in need of a meal or service.⁷⁶

However, one participant remarked that for those who access services to connect with others, navigating the city and transportation system is a major issue.⁷⁷ This participant noted that people could be more engaged and connected if they had the confidence to leave their house and to move around the city more easily. Thus, there are not only barriers in using transportation, but also emotional barriers in feeling comfortable to utilize public services.⁷⁸

Another participant stated that having longer hours of operation for programs and services could promote more connections between service users.⁷⁹ Five interview respondents and many consultation participants expressed that having certain intriguing activities or programs can help get people out of their homes and into the community.⁸⁰ The following is a list of suggestions from all participants as to what kind of activities would be enjoyable:

- Yoga
- Cards & bingo
- Dancing, music & karaoke
- Senior-friendly sports (such as bowling)
- Field trips: skating, Toronto Island, Thousand Islands, Niagara Falls, local events

Although one participant indicated language not to be an issue in interacting with others, five participants noted that language barriers cause isolation. An

⁷⁶ Briggs, Alfred. July 9, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

⁷⁷ Gogolin, Graciela. July 9, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Anonymous. 2019. Personal interview.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

interviewee explained that non-English speaking newcomers in Toronto struggle to connect with local residents due to the language divide.⁸¹ Further, another participant indicated that non-English speaking residents often rely on English-speaking friends or family members to navigate services, if they require any.⁸² Cultural or language silos were identified to be prevalent within the Davenport community, creating a lack of connection between cultural groups.⁸³

Another commonly-identified issue was elder abuse. The consultation participants and two interview respondents indicated that they were afraid to trust others due to tendencies of abuse toward seniors, which prevent them from seeking potential meaningful connections with others.⁸⁴ Beyond abuse, almost all of the participants expressed judgement to be a main contributor to social isolation. It was reported by eight respondents that a fear of being judged - due to low-income, a shameful past, being different than others, and not speaking English well - is a prominent reason as to why they choose not to associate with others or to attend certain programs.⁸⁵

Urban Changes

Three participants described gentrification to be a challenging change in their community, without even knowing the term “gentrification.” One respondent stated that, “Lots of expensive condos are going up around here and everybody else is getting

81 Sardinha, Miguel. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

82 Anonymous. 2019. Personal interview.

83 Gogolin, Graciela. July 9, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

84 Orfandy, Maria. July 10, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

85 Hardacre, Phil. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

squeezed out.”⁸⁶ When asked about recent changes to her community, an interviewee expressed:

So [developers] really are trying hard because the condos are basically taking over every corner, as you can see even around here. So they know there's no room for low income people and condos. Right? They want a lot of money. So now they're starting to realize like we can't push everybody on the sidewalk. What are we going to do with all the people?⁸⁷

Another individual insisted that he has moved frequently within the past two years because of rental increases, and has not been able to put solid roots down into a community as a result.⁸⁸ Further, another person stated that she appreciates that McDonald's has remained in her community of Toronto-St. Paul's because other businesses that are popping up are not as affordable.⁸⁹

With respect to austerity measures, one interviewee explained that she used to be able to communicate with her city Councillor easily and promptly if she identified any issues in her community. Since the Ontario government made budget cuts to Toronto's municipal government in 2018 and decreased the amount of city councillors from 47 to 25 (therefore increasing ward sizes), this individual expressed that she is no longer able to communicate with and receive timely responses from her Councillor.⁹⁰ She attempted to report an unsafe sidewalk in her community (specifically noting for the purposes of upholding safety for seniors in the area), but could not reach her Councillor

86 Campbell, Dennis. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

87 Legarde, Andrea. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

88 Hardacre, Phil. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

89 Legarde, Andrea. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

90 Gomes, Jewel. July 8, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

as he was too busy to meet with her. She stated that this was not an issue prior to the municipal ward changes.

In addition, a participant in the consultation expressed strenuous concern over the recent funding cuts to Legal Aid.⁹¹ Similarly Deborah Hollins identified the struggles that exist in operating programs with funding deficits:

It is an absolute travesty that, you know, the bulk of our job is sniffing out to small pockets of money to address some of these issues and putting in, you know, a tremendous amount of effort to get very little return. So we can address a small part of this population, we need a federally funded, ongoing program that provides non-profits like mine, who are doing the work, with the ability to develop the infrastructure, to provide seniors with relevant services and to be secure in those.⁹²

Thus, funding cuts and austerity measures are being recognized as challenges to promoting well-being from both older service users and service providers for older adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Older People Themselves

Seniors have the ability to assist one another in overcoming the common identified barriers due to their shared and unique lived experiences. One possible way to enable this capacity is through peer mentorship. Older adults who use community programs to build social connections with others can reach out to other older adults in their neighbourhoods that might not be aware of these programs, or lack the confidence to attend them alone. This would be especially tangible in seniors' housing complexes, such as the ones started by Toronto Community Housing.

⁹¹ Julie. July 10, 2019. Personal interview. Toronto, ON.

⁹² Hollins, Deborah. July 4, 2019. Personal interview. Nanaimo, BC.

For the Government of Ontario

The Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility currently offers public information on health care programs, vaccinations, active living, Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, and fall prevention and injuries, yet nothing on nutritional needs.⁹³ Introducing proper aging nutrition into this informational base could raise awareness of the detriments of malnourishment and bolster the efficacy and reach of existing initiatives that target seniors.

In addition, the provincial government should consider offering greater support to Councillors and municipal staff due to the ward cuts that were instituted in the 2018 election for the City of Toronto Council.⁹⁴ The City Councillors now have a larger constituent base, resulting in more public inquiries and less time to listen to them all. This presents safety concerns in infrastructure requests not being addressed as frequently, creating safety dangers for those with mobility impairments navigating the streets.

For the City of Toronto

Toronto Community Housing recently proposed to have a newly city-owned seniors’ housing corporation, placing more responsibility for seniors’ housing on the City of Toronto.⁹⁵ This new corporation can create partnerships between the City’s seniors’ housing complexes and community food organizations to provide accessible, low-cost

93 Government of Ontario. “Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.” <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-seniors-accessibility>.

94 CBC News. 2018. “Doug Ford Government Wins Stay of Court Ruling, Moving Closer to Smaller Toronto Council.” <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ford-court-toronto-council-1.4829250>.

95 City of Toronto. 2019. “Implementing Tenants First - A New Seniors Housing Corporation and Proposed Changes to Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Governance.”

transportation to nutritious food programs. Having reliable and affordable transportation between seniors' housing and community food organizations motivates residents of the complex to take part in food programs. Thus, low-income seniors in Toronto would be provided with accessible nutritious food and social connection with fellow program users, contributing to long lasting health benefits.

In attending to gentrification trends in the area, the City of Toronto Council should develop and adopt a policy that regulates new developers to incorporate units designated for Toronto Community Housing, or the newly city-owned seniors housing corporation, within their complexes. For example, for every 50 units in a new development, five units must be "donated" to Toronto Community Housing or seniors' housing. A similar initiative is taking place already in the city, in which a new condominium development in the Davenport district is allocating 11 units to Habitat for Humanity.⁹⁶ Thus, this idea could be adapted further to foster connections between people from diverse backgrounds and assist in maintaining affordability for the surrounding community.

Moreover, to respond to prevalent gentrification, the City of Toronto should work more closely with community organizations to gain insight regarding evident needs in the gentrified communities. The City of Toronto should introduce these needs into future development agreements in the respective areas, enforcing community involvement in development regulations. New developments could include public space

⁹⁶ Davenport Community Coalition meeting, meeting notes, July 11, 2019.

for community events or seniors programming, kitchen space for expanded programs or sites for organization expansion for extended hours of operation.

The City of Toronto has addressed their growing seniors' population in their latest Toronto Seniors Strategy, Version 2.0. This strategy is a comprehensive analysis as to how the city can best support its increasingly older residents. The City of Toronto should continue to review and adapt to the changing needs of its aging population through community consultations and continue to implement its needed Seniors Strategy.

For Community Organizations

Senior-serving community organizations can support the aforementioned peer mentorship initiative between seniors, by helping to create a group of volunteers who would be willing to mentor fellow older adults in the community.

As transportation poses a barrier to accessing useful programs, delivering transportation tokens within the community (specifically in seniors' complexes, local businesses, health care centres, etc.) can motivate older adults to travel. Additionally, if funds allow for it, offering transportation to programs could further enhance participation.

It was identified that seniors lack awareness of their proper nutritional needs. Community food programs should develop an informational nutritional guide for their older service users to promote healthy aging. Furthermore, community organizations could implement a seniors-specific weekly program on healthy aging. Topics covered in the program could include nutritional needs, financial skills, technological and Internet

skills, moderate exercises, self defense, abuse and fraud prevention, simple cooking skills, advice on where to access mobility devices, English as a second language (ESL) lessons, information on eligible seniors' benefits, and general activities. A health and education focused seniors program can promote active aging, foster connections with peers, provide useful skills for older adults to make meaningful connections with their greater community, and build confidence. Such a program could be led by fellow seniors, to influence engagement of older adults in the community. A different individual could be responsible for the program each week to bring about vast ranges of knowledge.

Furthermore, holding frequent consultations with seniors in the community is beneficial for programming to adapt to changing needs. A Seniors' Advisory Council should be developed in larger organizations for older adults in the community to provide advice on how to make both new and existing programming more accessible to seniors.

In any relevant programs that address or involve seniors, values and policies on respecting seniors and being a responsible neighbour should be implemented to encourage people of all ages to connect with older adults in their community. For instance, there should be verbal reminders to check on neighbours and offering compassion to seniors in daily interactions. Introducing reminders to safely check on fellow community members can be a form of outreach to seniors who lack connection and experience isolation.

IMPACT

The intent for this research was to gain an enhanced understanding of how older Toronto residents, specifically in the districts of Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's, are experiencing issues of multidimensional poverty, food insecurity, social isolation, and urban-related changes in their community. This research can contribute to the future decisions and program changes made by the Government of Ontario, the City of Toronto, and community organizations in the Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's districts. Indicating that older adults are recognizing rampant gentrification, without even knowing there was a term for the concept, can impact the opinions of municipal policymakers in handling future development agreements by understanding that it is negatively impacting their aging community. Being aware that perceived stigma and transportation difficulties prevent service usage can impact where community organizations locate and how they present themselves in the community and execute their programs.

Other cities world-wide that are similarly experiencing a demographic change and gentrified trends can use this research as a framework for preparation. Understanding the impact of increased barriers, insufficient resources, austerity measures and gentrification on a growing aging population can help cities elsewhere to prioritize areas of need.

The findings of this research can prove beneficial to the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC) due to their mission to raise awareness about the rights and social isolation of older people. More specifically, the growing issue of gentrification

offers a new intersectional lens for SCSC in their research and advocacy on urban design and older people's rights. Additionally, SCSC can support and partner with more senior-serving organizations, being aware that seniors programming is beneficial in promoting social connectedness among an isolation-prone group.

CONCLUSION

The fact that older adults face a multitude of multidimensional barriers is not essentially breaking news. However, the seniors' population reaching the highest it has ever been, in Canada's most populous city, is exciting and worth informing the greater public about. However, this triumphant shift brings along with it the need for appropriate resources to be in place to attend to the demographic change.

Although it has been evident for years that seniors tend to experience higher issues of poverty, food insecurity and social isolation, it is beneficial to delve deeper into understanding how these broad concepts are exactly impacting seniors' sense of well-being and connection to their community. By doing so, relevant actors and stakeholders can pinpoint specific challenges that can be addressed.

From this research, it is evident that seniors in Toronto's districts of Davenport and Toronto-St. Paul's experience multidimensional poverty in terms of not being able to secure employment and reliable housing and being unable to afford public transportation to access necessary services. Older adults in these areas are evidently food insecure due to their consistent reliance on drop-in food programs to obtain a meal and their lack of awareness of proper nutrient needs. Social isolation among seniors in these particular communities manifests itself through language and emotional

barriers, as well as through a persistent fear of abuse and stigma because of being low-income. Furthermore, older Toronto residents in these communities identified city-wide or societal changes, such as gentrification and provincial-level austerity measures, despite not being aware of appropriate terms or research.

Thus, addressing these identified issues can ensure a smoother transition for all actors to support this demographic shift. Relevant stakeholders remaining accountable to the needs of the older population now provides hope for the future in building healthy, resilient communities and fostering meaningful social relationships.

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