



Building a Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector: Alberta Ideas Exchange & Working Session

Supported by Healthy Aging Alberta
October 8, 2025



A network of community allies for
older adults.



Executive Summary

The Building a Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector: Alberta Consultation on October 8, 2025, brought together community partners and sector leaders to consider how best to support older adults and strengthen the community-based seniors' services (CBSS) sector both provincially and across Canada. Participants emphasized the need for greater visibility and recognition of the sector, more stable, long-term funding models, and stronger collaboration among organizations, governments, and communities. The discussion also highlighted the importance of culturally responsive services, consistent training across the workforce, reliable data, and cross-provincial coordination to measure impact and build a more inclusive, sustainable system of community-based support for older adults.

Introduction

HelpAge Canada held the “Building a Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector: Alberta Ideas Exchange & Working Session” in Edmonton on October 8, 2025, as part of the Healthy Aging Alberta 2025 Summit. The event included a presentation on setting the stage for community-based seniors' services (CBSS) in Alberta and Canada, as well as a working session. As Alberta already has a well-established provincial CBSS sector, the discussion focused on how to strengthen this existing system to better support older adults in the province and across Canada.

Purpose and objectives

The discussion used a community development approach to ensure that the perspectives of service providers and older adults informed Pan-Canadian planning efforts. The consultation questions were developed to reflect national considerations and build on earlier consultations held in other provinces and regions.

The objectives of the session were:

- To motivate participants to give time and energy to develop a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- To ensure participants see themselves as part of a Pan-Canadian sector.
- To contribute to and inform the development of a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- To identify next steps at the community, provincial, and Pan-Canadian level.

Discussion questions can be found in Appendix A.

Findings: Alberta CBSS Sector

Actions needed at the Pan-Canadian level to support the desired state of CBSS in Alberta

Participants identified a wide range of priorities for strengthening the CBSS sector. Although Alberta has a well-developed provincial structure, the discussion focused deliberately on the broader Pan-Canadian actions required to support older adults and improve community-based services across the country.

A central theme was the need for greater visibility and recognition of the CBSS sector among provincial and federal governments, funders, and the public. Participants noted that CBSS organizations remain largely invisible within broader ageing and health system conversations, despite playing a vital role in prevention, navigation, and social connection. Increasing national awareness of the sector's impact was seen as foundational to securing sustained investment and integrating CBSS into policy and planning frameworks.

Funding was identified as a significant challenge. Participants stressed that short-term, project-based funding makes it difficult for organizations to plan, evaluate, and collaborate effectively. They emphasized the need for multi-year, stable funding streams that strengthen capacity, protect continuity of service, and reduce burnout among staff and volunteers. National leadership, including advocacy and coordination across jurisdictions, was seen as essential for achieving this shift.

Participants also highlighted the importance of culturally responsive services at a national scale. They underscored the need for sustained support for Indigenous-led programming, more meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities, and recognition of distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical experiences. This includes addressing disparities in life expectancy, improving access to appropriate supports, and ensuring that national strategies honour Indigenous rights and self-determination. Conversely, participants identified gaps in services for racialized and newcomer older adults, and emphasized nationwide access to translation, interpretation, and culturally relevant programming. Another priority was strengthening the CBSS workforce through standardized, accessible training. Participants observed that service quality varies significantly across Canada, and that national training frameworks would help build consistency, enhance safety, and promote shared values across the sector. They noted that CBSS staff often carry complex responsibilities without adequate support, and that national approaches to training, pensions, and workforce development would help address recruitment and retention challenges.

Participants identified broader social policy gaps that influence ageing in community. They called for national action to improve digital access, including affordable internet, technology supports, and digital literacy initiatives tailored to older adults. They also pointed to the need for national caregiver supports, expanded EI and tax benefits, improved criteria for disability and seniors' credits, and stronger protections for older adults in financial vulnerability, including reverse mortgage oversight and fraud prevention. Housing emerged as a significant concern. Participants described the growing mismatch between older adults' needs and available housing options and identified opportunities for national leadership in supporting accessible home modifications, mixed generational living incentives, and policies that improve security for renters and low-income seniors.

Participants also emphasized public awareness and prevention as critical national priorities. They called for campaigns to reduce ageism, strengthen understanding of healthy ageing, and normalize help-seeking among older adults. They highlighted the need for national attention to elder abuse, including improved training for law enforcement and stronger reporting and prevention mechanisms.

Underlying all of these themes was a desire for stronger coordination across the country. Participants stressed the value of cross-provincial learning, integrated systems that allow for shared data and evaluation tools, and a national virtual CORE hub to support resource exchange, policy alignment, and tracking of sector-wide progress. They suggested that HelpAge Canada and provincial networks could play an important role in providing national leadership, convening partners, and advocating for long-term investment in the sector.

Defining success and determining impact

When asked what success would look like for a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector and how impact could be measured, participants envisioned a future where older adults experience greater equity, inclusion, and overall well-being. They identified tangible outcomes such as a decrease in housing insecurity, food insecurity, and social isolation among older adults; improved access to services; reduced caregiver stress; and fewer hospitalizations or long wait times for care. Success would also mean increased quality of life, better health outcomes, and greater public understanding of ageing, particularly among younger generations. Participants emphasized the need for clear, consistent communication in grant processes through plain language and standardized eligibility criteria, as well as increased satisfaction among both service providers and older adults. They envisioned multiple layers of collaboration, including networking opportunities among organizations and decision-makers, and the creation of a national virtual CORE hub to share knowledge, track progress, and strengthen coordination across communities and provinces.

In measuring progress, participants called for stronger data infrastructure and long-term systemic change. They proposed modernized and standardized data collection, reporting, and analysis across Canada (similar to the role of CIHI for healthcare) to enable evidence-based decision-making and social impact measurement. Success would also mean establishing consistent funding mechanisms that move away from short-term project grants toward sustainable, ongoing funding tied to measurable outcomes. Participants suggested leveraging international examples of innovation, policy flexibility, and adaptable models, while recognizing the unique histories of Indigenous and other Canadian communities and honouring treaty commitments. They also highlighted the importance of national leadership through organizations like HelpAge Canada, advocating for the sector, aligning with the Healthy Ageing Framework, and promoting intergenerational supports. Additional measures of success included improved fraud awareness programs, enhanced RCMP training to address elder abuse, stronger reverse mortgage protections, expanded pensions for the CBSS workforce, and more older adults feeling financially and emotionally prepared for retirement, all contributing to a culture of community care and consistent, reliable services across the country.

Summary and Conclusion

The Alberta consultation highlighted a shared vision for a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector that is equitable, sustainable, and rooted in community care. Participants called for a shift from short-term project grants toward stable, multi-year funding that allows organizations to plan ahead and measure success more effectively. Strengthening data collection and developing a shared national framework for tracking impact were seen as essential for improving accountability and decision-making. Participants also stressed the need for greater collaboration through a Pan-Canadian hub for sharing knowledge, as well as stronger alignment between governments, funders, and community partners. At the heart of these discussions was a call to ensure that services reflect the diversity of older adults' experiences (particularly Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized groups) and that staff and volunteers are supported through standardized training and resources. By investing in people, data, and collaboration, and by promoting greater awareness of ageing and inclusion, Canada can build a CBSS sector that supports healthy, dignified ageing and ensures every older adult feels connected, valued, and cared for in their community.

Appendix A: Discussion Questions

Discussion question #1: What supports or actions are needed at the Pan-Canadian level to help support the CBSS sector in Alberta?

Discussion question #2: Looking across Canada, what would success look like for a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector? How would we know we are making an impact — in your community and across the country?

Appendix B: Participant list

No participant list was provided for this event.