



Strengthening Community-Based Seniors' Services (CBSS) in Newfoundland: An Ideas Exchange & Working Session

September/October 2025
In partnership with: SeniorsNL

SeniorsNL
RESOURCES • INFORMATION • CONNECTION



HelpAge

Canada

Executive Summary

HelpAge Canada, in partnership with SeniorsNL, hosted a provincial consultation to explore the community-based seniors' services (CBSS) sector at the provincial and Pan-Canadian level. The in-person session took place in St John's on September 25, 2025, followed by a virtual consultation on October 3, 2025. The discussion built on consultations held in other provinces and territories and included context setting on the CBSS sector, a presentation from the National Institute on Aging, and two working sessions focused on both the Newfoundland and Labrador landscape and the province's role in a coordinated Pan-Canadian CBSS sector. Participants discussed the current landscape for older adults and organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador, identifying key challenges such as transportation barriers, limited mental health supports, gaps in access to technology, volunteer shortages, isolated resources, and restrictive funding criteria.

Participants also identified meaningful opportunities for strengthening the CBSS sector, including improved collaboration across organizations, better information sharing, expanded intergenerational engagement, the integration of cultural perspectives, and more coordinated navigation of services. Reflections on the national CBSS definition highlighted opportunities to more fully capture advocacy, accessibility, systems navigation, coordination, and the inclusion of diverse organizational types.

Overall, the consultation demonstrated strong momentum and interest within Newfoundland and Labrador to build a more connected, accessible, and community-informed CBSS sector and highlighted the province's important contributions to a coordinated Pan-Canadian approach.

Introduction

As part of the SeniorsNL Conference, HelpAge Canada co-hosted a provincial consultation on strengthening the community-based seniors' services sector (CBSS) at the provincial and Pan-Canadian level. The *"Strengthening Community-Based Seniors' Services in Newfoundland and Labrador"* discussion was held in St John's on September 25, 2025 and a virtual consultation was held on October 3, 2025 via Zoom. The in-person consultation began with context setting on the CBSS sector, followed by regional insights shared by the National Institute on Aging and two working sessions that explored both the Newfoundland and Labrador (N&L) context and the province's potential role in a coordinated Pan-Canadian CBSS sector. Participants considered how improved collaboration, communication, service navigation, and community engagement can help support aging in place and enhance the wellbeing of older adults.

Discussions were grounded in a shared working definition of CBSS:

"The CBSS sector includes municipal, volunteer, and not-for-profit organizations that provide services and programming for older adults at the local level – at community centres, single and multi-service agencies, seniors' centres, community coalitions and neighbourhood houses and circles, among others. CBSS organizations deliver programs, supports, and services that enable older adults to age in place, stay connected, and thrive in their communities. They are rooted in community and built on trust, relationships, and deep community knowledge and understanding."

Purpose and objectives

The discussion employed a collaborative approach, ensuring the voices of older people and service providers informed N&L and Pan-Canadian strategies, approaches and planning efforts. The consultation questions were developed to reflect the regional context and build on the previous consultations across Canada.

The objectives of the session were:

- To increase participant understanding of a provincial CBSS sector.
- To build a vision for a provincial CBSS sector in N&L.
- To motivate participants to invest time and energy in developing a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- To help 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 levels.

Discussion questions can be found in Appendix A. A list of participants can be found in Appendix B.

Findings: N&L CBSS Sector

The first working session focused on building the CBSS sector in N&L and explored the challenges, opportunities, strengths and desired future state.

Challenges

When asked about the challenges faced by the CBSS sector in N&L, participants highlighted the ongoing lack of transportation (especially in communities with no public transit), which limits older adults' ability to access essential services. Resources and services remain fragmented, duplicated, and disconnected, making it difficult to align volunteers, share information, or connect older adults with needed supports. Financial aid programs were described as restrictive and exclusionary, particularly for those transitioning between income support and government pensions. At the same time, digital access challenges persist due to limited technological literacy, poor cell service, and reliance on online systems. Mental health supports remain scarce in rural regions, and participants noted that services often fail to meet the needs of multicultural, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ older adults who require culturally and linguistically appropriate supports. Many organizations are underfunded, rely heavily on volunteers, and struggle to reach isolated or "hard-to-reach" seniors who are not connected to social media or other communication channels. Caregivers are experiencing significant strain with few relief options, and smaller communities often lack programming to address loneliness, access to primary and secondary health services, food security, and secure housing, particularly for widows and seniors with growing debt. Systemic issues such as ageism in healthcare and government policies that overlook isolation as a criterion for care further contribute to the vulnerability of older adults, especially those without family or informal supports.

Opportunities

When asked about opportunities for the CBSS sector, collaboration and partnerships were a central area of focus. Partnerships with community services, governmental organizations, and non-profits can help support older adults by improving access to services through community education, such as organizing more affordable living arrangements, transportation services, filling out funding applications, immigration services, and more. Through these initiatives, transportation could be subsidized by the government or considered a refundable expense, particularly for those living in rural communities with limited public transit. Increasing awareness of barriers can improve collaboration among groups, provide peer support, and strengthen volunteer engagement. Enhancing access to technology for older adults was highlighted as another opportunity, with grants supporting classes, equipment, and knowledge-sharing to help seniors use online services. Participants also noted the importance of including cultural components in services, particularly mental health supports, to better address the diverse needs of older adults. Programs such as Friendly Calls and online chat hubs were cited as valuable ways to provide information, reduce social isolation, and foster emotional support. Additional opportunities include supporting caregivers, leveraging research to guide service development, connecting with age-friendly towns, and advocating for ongoing funding rather than pilot projects. Community engagement, such as involving younger seniors, municipal governments, and schools, can help provide social support, strengthen intergenerational relationships, and promote shared living arrangements that reduce costs and provide companionship while lessening the burden on the formal care system. Finally, numerous government grants and attendant passes were identified as tools to expand access and participation in programs for older adults.

Strengths

Many participants commented on service information resources when asked to identify strengths within the CBSS sector that can be scaled to create a stronger provincial sector. Participants highlighted 211 as a helpful resource, with the caveat that it needs to be regularly updated, and suggested a central hub or service navigator on a user-friendly website, complemented by radio, newspapers, and posters. Current programs in the province, such as Bishops Gardens neighbourhood day program and St. Luke's, were noted as examples that could be expanded to provide more accessible services, alongside Meals on Wheels and similar initiatives. Established organizations, community connections, and networks of service providers were seen as key strengths that can be scaled across the province. Participants emphasized the value of education sessions, training opportunities, and mentorship within CBSS organizations to strengthen capacity and improve service delivery. Intergenerational activities were identified as a promising avenue to engage younger people, foster stronger collaboration across age groups, and increase awareness of existing programs. Respondents also noted the important role of municipal governments, younger retirees, and community members in supporting older adults, and highlighted provincial organizations such as NLHS, public health networks, community health workers, and local MHAs as key partners for building capacity and improving coordination. Provincial newsletters and other communication tools were recognized as additional mechanisms to keep older adults informed and connected to services.

Looking ahead to a desired state

In the next 3-5 years, respondents wish to see a more inclusive, community-driven CBSS sector with increased provincial networks and connections, and province-wide access points for older adults through municipal governments, churches, community groups, schools, town councils, Lions' clubs, Veterans' associations, and other organizations. Sustained funding was highlighted as essential, including simpler and more flexible grant applications, alongside continued and expanded existing services. Participants envisioned a provincial or national strategy on aging with appointed advocates and dedicated teams to ensure implementation, supported by overarching organizations to oversee progress, performance, and ongoing evaluation. Key priorities include enhanced dementia care, training, and a dementia-friendly perspective, more caregiver supports, additional day programs with transportation to aid food security and caregiver respite, and a proactive approach to service delivery. Respondents emphasized the value of intergenerational programs, engaged youth, vibrant and self-sustained community networks, and shared knowledge where older adults both receive services and contribute as volunteers. They highlighted the importance of coordinated services, removing redundancies and fragmentation, improving infrastructure and transportation, and creating flexible services that reduce reliance on programmatic supports. Additional aspirations include community compassion at the core, easy access to information and services, celebrating successes, leveraging existing networks, supporting sustainability of volunteers, and ensuring that no one is left behind or on their own. Overall, participants envisioned a sector that is inclusive, connected, coordinated, and abundant in resources, with strong community engagement and capacity to meet the diverse needs of older adults while fostering independence, social connection, and safety in their homes and communities.

Findings: Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector

CBSS definition

A working definition of CBSS (as presented at the beginning of this report) was shared with participants. Respondents noted that the following should be added to the CBSS definition:

- Advocacy
- Networking
- Cohesion
- Knowledge-sharing
- Government (federal, provincial)
- Systems navigation
- Involvement of for-profit organizations
- Involvement of provincial and federal organizations
- Urban and rural communities
- Involvement of charitable organizations
- Determinants of health
- "Wherever seniors gather"
- Replace "seniors services" with "community-based care"
- Disability/accessibility/inclusion/DEIA
- Seniors' coalition

Call to action to support the desired state of CBSS in N&L

Respondents were asked what needs to be done at a Pan-Canadian level to support the desired state of CBSS in N&L. Many highlighted the importance of engaging youth from across the province through schools, churches, community centres, and other organizations to recruit volunteers and foster intergenerational collaboration. Developing a diverse network of volunteers in terms of age, background, and culture was emphasized as essential for creating inclusive and responsive community-based supports. Participants also identified the need for sustainable and flexible funding to reduce the burden of short-term grants and enable organizations to deliver high-quality, coordinated services. Advocacy at federal, provincial, and municipal levels was seen as critical to influence policy, support preventative services, and create a unified voice for the sector. Strengthening organizational capacities, promoting collaboration among local, regional, provincial, and national groups, and leveraging existing local initiatives can help combine resources, streamline services, and improve alignment across the sector while respecting local differences. Addressing systemic ageism and ableism, particularly within legislation and service delivery, was highlighted as a structural priority, along with building awareness of the distinct value CBSS can bring at the provincial and national levels. Participants also emphasized the importance of data collection and information sharing to support evidence-based decision-making, improving infrastructure such as transportation, and addressing workforce challenges, including recruitment, retention, training, and professional development for staff and volunteers. Overall, a coordinated Pan-Canadian approach that supports self-care, fosters community engagement, and strengthens the capacity and sustainability of CBSS organizations was seen as critical to achieving the desired future state for older adults.

Defining success and determining impact

When asked what would define a thriving Pan-Canadian CBSS sector, participants emphasized the importance of a system that is both evidence-based and people-centered. They highlighted the need for clear outcome measures and quantitative data, alongside qualitative insights capturing lived experiences, feelings, and moments of impact. A thriving sector would ensure that programs and services are responsive to the unique needs of each population and province, empower local services to provide what they do best, and maintain consistency rather than expanding too broadly, fostering engaged communities where loneliness is reduced and intergenerational connections are strengthened. Participants identified key indicators of success, including improvements in seniors' quality of life and happiness at home, reduced wait lists for home care, fewer emergency room visits due to proactive supports, and enhanced access to services. Community engagement was seen as critical, with volunteer programs, age-friendly initiatives, and partnerships with schools and local leaders helping to reduce social isolation and strengthen networks. A thriving sector would also support aging in place, offer continuous feedback mechanisms, and promote regulation and training of long-term care workers and volunteers, while ensuring that systems work in conjunction with community perspectives. Overall, a strong, sustainable CBSS sector would balance evidence-based outcomes with responsive, community-driven programs that meet the diverse needs of older adults.

Summary and Conclusion

The Newfoundland and Labrador consultations illustrated a CBSS sector that is both resilient and deeply committed to supporting older adults, while also facing persistent structural challenges that limit service access and sustainability. Participants described significant strengths including strong community connections, committed volunteers, established programs, and a growing interest in collaboration across organizations and regions. At the same time, they emphasized challenges related to transportation, social isolation, fragmented services, digital access, and funding models that do not reflect the long-term needs of communities.

The consultation also reaffirmed the important role that Newfoundland and Labrador can play in shaping a coordinated and equitable Pan-Canadian CBSS sector. Participants expressed strong interest in learning from other jurisdictions, sharing local innovations such as social prescribing and community-based mental health approaches, and contributing to national conversations about policy, coordination, and sector development. They underscored the importance of building a sector that is inclusive, community-informed, culturally responsive, and grounded in the lived experiences of older adults.

Recommended next steps:

- 1. Establish a provincial CBSS Leadership Council to strengthen coordination**
Form a provincial Leadership Council to guide priorities emerging from the consultation and strengthen coordination across the province. The Council would bring together community organizations, system partners, Indigenous representatives, and other key stakeholders. Its role could include providing strategic direction, supporting sector alignment, identifying shared priorities, and serving as a provincial voice to link Newfoundland and Labrador into Pan-Canadian CBSS work.
- 2. Improve shared information systems and sector-wide communication**
Strengthen digital and non-digital information sharing through a provincial hub or shared system where organizations can post programs, resources, and updates. This could include aligning with or contributing to CORE and expanding multi-channel communication to reach hard-to-reach seniors.
- 3. Advance priority areas that build on existing strengths in Newfoundland and Labrador**
Build on strengths such as established social prescribing efforts, strong community partnerships, and intergenerational engagement. Priority areas for action include improving access to transportation, expanding caregiver supports, and enhancing culturally appropriate mental health and social programs. These priorities should be addressed through sustained collaboration between community organizations, health networks, municipalities, and provincial partners.

Together, these actions can help build a more connected, coordinated, and sustainable CBSS sector in Newfoundland and Labrador, while contributing to a unified Pan-Canadian approach where older adults are valued, supported, and able to thrive in their homes and communities.

Appendix A: Discussion questions

Part I discussion questions: N&L focus

Discussion question #1: Thinking about community-based seniors services (CBSS) in N&L, what are the top challenges and where are the opportunities?

Discussion question #2: What strengths or success factors within the CBSS sector in N&L can be built upon to create a stronger provincial network?

Discussion question #3: Looking ahead 3–5 years, what would a strong CBSS sector in N&L look and feel like for older adults, organizations, and communities?

Part II discussion question: Pan-Canadian focus

Discussion question #4: When you reflect on the definition of CBSS (definition provided), what feels missing or what would you add?

Discussion question #5: If we imagine a pan-Canadian CBSS sector, what would success look like? How would we know we are making an impact?

Discussion question #6: What supports or actions at the pan-Canadian level would best help strengthen CBSS in N&L?

Appendix B: Participant list

In-Person Consultation Participants	
Name	Organization
Aiden Head	SeniorsNL
Ailsa Craig	Quadrangle; Memorial
Amy Way	Nav-CARE/ NLHS
Anne & Dominic O'Driscoll	Newfoundland & Labrador Public Service Pensioners Association
Annette Hill	CARP NL
Augusta Ford	Multicultural
Beverly Snow	Nape Retirees Local 7002
Bonnie Evans	NL Health Services
Brenda Gillingham	NL Housing
Carolyn Gosse	NLHS
Chigozie Nwosu	Memorial University
Chuck Misra	Community Member
Cindy LeQuesne	NunatuKavut Community Council
Colleen Morrison	CARP NL - Board of Directors
David Starkes	MUN Pensioners' Association
Dexter Charova	Memorial University - Nursing Student
Diane Molloy	NL Pensioners Association
Dolores Billings	Retired Teachers' Association of NL
Erin Winsor	The Arts and Aging Network
Evan Simpson	MUN (Retired)
Felicity Watson	HelpAge Canada
Frances Santos	RTNL
Heather French	BDO Canada - Personal Debt solutions
Irene B Pack	NLHS Central Zone
Joanne Morrissey	National Association of Federal Retirees (NAFR)
Judy Beranger	Seniors NL
Kayla Cahill	NLHS - CSP Program
Kim Hart	CNIB
Kimberly Buckle	NL Health Services
Koren Hennessey	NLHS - Primary Health Care Urban
Lela Evans	House of Assembly

Leo Etchegary	Association for New Canadians
Linda Okanee	NAPE Retires Local 7002
Linda Oldford	Fifty Plus Federation Inc.
Lori Mercer	Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada
Marilyn Best	National Association of Federal Retirees
Marta Hajek	Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario/Pan-Canadian CBSS Interim Leadership Council
Mary Ennis	NL Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
Michaela Wheaton	NLHS - Community Support Program
Mike Kehoe	The Aging Workforce of Newfoundland and Labrador
Nick Bray	MUN
Pamela Dawe	Office of the Seniors' Advocate, Newfoundland and Labrador
Peggy Orbasli	Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Ron Taylor	Connections for Seniors
Sandi Pelly	The Waltons Trust
Sara Hawkins	Public Legal Information Association of NL
Sarah Naz	Digital Seniors NL
Sharron Callahan	Newfoundland & Labrador Public Sector Pensioners' Association
Shelly Collins	Seniors NL
Shirley Marie Rooney	Board member Newfoundland Horticultural Society
Terry Inder	Seniors Coalition, CARP, Bell Pensioners Group
Valery Goulding	Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services
Veeresh Gadag	Retired Faculty from Memorial University
Yamuna Kutty	Multicultural Women's Organization of NL (MWONL)

Online Consultation Participants	
Name	Organization
Alysha Delaney	NL Health Services
Bethany Roberta	SeniorsNL
Beverly Woodward	Labrador Grenfell Zone
Bonnie Hobbs	NL Health Services
Brianna Hodder	NL Health Services
Carrie Simpson	Central Health Gander LTC
Catherine Babstock	NL Health Services
Catherine Snow	NL Health Services
Catherine White	NL Health Services

Christa Shandera	NL Health Services
Chuck Misra	Community Member
Claudine O'Brien Briffett	NL Health Services
David Tilley	Newfoundland and Labrador Housing
Dawn Pittman	Western Regional School of Nursing
Dayna Rowe	Central Health
Debbie Sheppard	Central health
Deborah Doherty	SeniorsNL
Diane Curtis	NLPSPA
Doreen Burry	Seniors NL
Elizabeth Norman	50PLUS Group Lewisporte
Fadeelatu Yussif	Memorial University
Gabrielle Gallant	National Institute on Aging (NIA)
Gloria Pynn	Pax
Holly Hunt	NL Health Services
Irene Pack	NL Health Services
Jeanne Clarke	Personal
Jennifer McGrath	NL Health Services
Jessica Connors	NL Health Services
Judy Beranger	Seniors NL @ NLNPEA
Julie Malone	NL Health Services
Karen McDonald	Healthy Aging Alberta
Karen Peardon	SeniorsNL/Exploits FCT
Kelly Manning	NL Health Services
Kelly Penney	LG Zone
Kim Coveyduck	NL Health Services
Kimberly Collins	NL Health Services
Krista Harding	NL Health Services
Krizza Garcia	NL Health Services
Melvin Layden	NL Health Services
Michael McDonald	NL Health Services
Michael Ryan	Federal Retirees Association of Western NFLD and Labrador
Moein Habibi	National Institute on Ageing
Natalie Bonilla	NL Health Services
Nick Bray	MUN
Nora Lundrigan	Senior's fitness instructor

Priscilla Corcoran Mooney	NL Health Services
Rebecca Long	NL Health Services
Safiya Dina	HelpAge Canada
Samantha Penney	NL Housing and Homelessness Network (NLHHN)
Sara Cooper	NL Health
Sarah Burt	NL Health Services
Scott Parsons	NL Health Services
Selma Pike	Office of MP Carol Anstey
Shakti Chandra	MUN
Shauna Collins	NL Health Services
Susan Hounsell	McDonald & Hounsell
Tania Clark	NL Health Services
Tanya Sexton	Labrador Grenfell Health
Thomas Mengel	Killick Coast North Seniors Co-operative
Trudy Marshall	SeniorsNL
William Kean	NL Health Services
Wynona Giannasi	Howegroup
Zannat Reza	HelpAge Canada
Zeem Qureshi	National Institute on Aging (NIA)