



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

In Partnership with the Community Health and Social
Services Network (CHSSN)

November 25, 2025

CHSSN

To support English-speaking communities in the province of Quebec in their efforts to redress health status inequalities and promote community vitality.

HelpAge
Canada

Introduction

HelpAge Canada, in partnership with the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), hosted a Provincial Territorial consultation on developing the community-based seniors' services (CBSS) sector at the provincial and Pan-Canadian level. The "Strengthening Community-Based Seniors' Services in Quebec" discussion was held over Zoom for the English-speaking communities in Quebec. The event included setting the stage for CBSS in Quebec and Canada, a National Institute on Aging (NIA) presentation, and two working sessions – the first focusing on building CBSS in Quebec and the second on a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.

The working definition of CBSS is *"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 community development approach, ensuring the voices of older people and service providers informed Quebec and Pan-Canadian strategies, approaches, and planning efforts. The consultation questions were developed to reflect the regional context and build on the previous consultations held in Manitoba, Ontario, PEI, Newfoundland, BC and more. Approximately 50 participants were in attendance.

The objectives of the session were:

- Participants increase understanding of a provincial CBSS sector.
- Participants build a vision for a provincial CBSS sector in Quebec.
- Participants feel motivated to give time and energy to develop a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- 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: Quebec CBSS Sector

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

Challenges

When asked about the challenges facing English-speaking older adults in Quebec, participants identified a range of barriers affecting access to CBSS. Many older adults experience low income, food insecurity, and unmet basic needs, which can make accessing programs and services difficult. Transportation emerged as a persistent barrier, particularly in rural areas or small towns, where distances, mobility limitations, winter driving conditions, and complex paratransit criteria make attending activities or appointments challenging.

Language barriers, including a lack of English services in predominantly French regions and limited translation support, further isolate seniors and reduce service uptake. Social isolation is amplified when older adults lose institutional or community connections, such as churches or local organizations, and when fewer volunteers are available to provide outreach or assistance. Participants also highlighted digital exclusion as a growing concern, noting that some older adults cannot afford devices or lack confidence using platforms like Zoom. Other challenges include underfunded programs, short-term or project-based funding, staffing shortages, and infrastructure limitations, including non-accessible buildings and limited community spaces.

Opportunities

Participants identified multiple opportunities to strengthen CBSS. These include partnering with other organizations to address service gaps, offering flexible and accessible programs both in person and online, leveraging volunteers and student programs for home visits and community engagement, and creating intergenerational activities with schools or youth groups. Expanding centralized information hubs, improving translation and language support, developing more inclusive spaces, and connecting municipal and community services were also seen as ways to enhance accessibility and social support. Participants emphasized that collaboration, needs assessments, and outreach initiatives can help ensure programs are responsive, equitable, and sustainable, while fostering stronger community connections for older adults.

Strengths

Participants identified several key strengths within the CBSS sector that could be scaled to support a strong provincial system. Collaboration and partnerships were repeatedly highlighted as central to success, including working with other organizations to bridge service gaps, partnering with schools to engage students, and connecting with community members to offer programs led by seniors. Intergenerational initiatives and shared resources were seen as effective ways to expand service offerings while reducing duplication.

Community tables and fairs, such as Table 50 ans et +, provide opportunities for organizations to meet, share information, and coordinate programming across the region. Virtual platforms and

online programs have extended reach, particularly for caregivers or seniors who cannot attend in person, helping reduce isolation. Supported exchanges and community of practice meetings, both regionally and nationally, allow organizations to learn from each other and reflect on effective strategies. Programs that directly engage and support older adults, such as adaptive wellness clinics, exercise programs for individuals with rehabilitation needs, sampler courses to expose seniors to new activities, and social prescribing initiatives, were identified as particularly effective in connecting participants to services, maintaining mobility, and promoting social engagement.

Food programs, volunteer networks, and informal community support, such as carpooling and meal sharing, further strengthen the sector by addressing social needs while fostering a sense of belonging. Centralized information and referral services, as well as coordinated event calendars, were also noted as critical to ensuring equitable access, avoiding scheduling conflicts, and connecting seniors to both local and regional opportunities.

Looking ahead to a desired state

Participants envisioned a future where CBSS are well-funded, stable, and focused on supporting older adults to live independently and with dignity. They emphasized the need for better salaries and reduced staff turnover, along with more core funding for existing programs rather than constant pressure to create new ones. A key priority is enhanced financial stability for organizations and seniors alike, with sufficient resources to address housing, homecare, and accessibility needs, including meal preparation, cleaning, and affordable assisted living. Centralized hubs that provide health supports, accessible information, and space for activities were highlighted as essential, alongside improvements in transportation, digital literacy, and dedicated phone lines to ensure equitable access to services. Participants also expressed the importance of intergenerational programming, social connection, and prevention-focused activities that support physical, cognitive, and mental well-being, helping seniors age gracefully and maintain independence. Robust volunteer programs with effective coordination, municipal support, and retention strategies were noted as critical for sustaining services. The vision includes community spaces where everyone helps each other, stigma around cognitive decline is reduced, and dementia-friendly initiatives like learning from Scandinavian models are implemented. Overall, participants imagined a collaborative, user-friendly, and compassionate system that allows seniors to stay connected, active, and supported within their communities for as long as possible.

Findings: Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector

CBSS definition

Reflecting on the definition of CBSS, participants identified several additions and changes to better capture the scope and impact of the sector.

What to Add:

- Home support services such as cleaning, help with groceries, and accompaniment to medical appointments, with funding to community organizations to provide these services.
- Bilingual support for medical appointments and documents.

- Recreational and intergenerational programs, including book clubs, discussion groups, and social activities.
- Food programs like Meals on Wheels, especially in rural areas.
- Technology support, including Zoom and other digital tools.
- Explicit mention of provincial coverage and inclusion of the Anglophone community (e.g., CHSSN).
- Recognition of CBSS's role in bridging gaps between government, municipalities, and community organizations.
- Inclusion of social services, referrals, and psychological supports.
- Emphasis on “care and support” as the foundation of services instead of “trust.”

What to Change:

- Clarify what is meant by “deep community knowledge and understanding” (culture, heritage, and current local resources).
- Specify services for seniors who are mobile and those who are cognitively well but less mobile.
- Reduce duplication by encouraging collaboration between organizations to free up resources for unmet needs.
- Incorporate the role of community coalitions and tables de concertation in coordinating services.
- Highlight measurable outcomes and CBSS's impact on health system gaps, including cost savings.

Defining success and determining impact

Participants identified several priorities for supporting the CBSS sector at a Pan-Canadian level. Increased and flexible funding was emphasized, including resources for transportation, home support, grocery delivery, literacy programs, and creative workshops to engage seniors in new ways. Recognition of the sector at the national policy level was highlighted, particularly the need to value caregivers and ensure sustainable operational funding that reflects the growing demand as the population ages. Participants stressed the importance of aligning funding opportunities across provincial and federal programs while enabling organizations to collaborate and share resources to address gaps, including services in English and support for isolated seniors. Access to user-friendly programs, streamlined patient navigation, and integrated hubs for services were seen as essential, alongside innovations in housing models, intergenerational living, and support for seniors who wish to remain in their homes safely and independently. Strengthening the sector also involves national-level knowledge-sharing, collaboration with Francophone colleagues and other diverse communities, engaging youth and education sectors, and connecting with organizations beyond the aging sector to pool information, share resources, and amplify advocacy efforts across the country.

Success in a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector would be evident through reduced gaps in service delivery and increased collaboration among organizations, governments, and community groups. It would be measurable by clear data showing that services are being used, reflecting that needs are being met, and by research identifying remaining gaps and informing policy development. Indicators of impact would include increased employment for caregivers and support workers, fewer people in isolation, better transportation enabling seniors to access services, and more seniors aging in their communities rather than entering long-term care prematurely. Success would also be seen in new networks and initiatives forming, more members and partners engaging in knowledge-sharing and best practices, and a stronger sense of belonging among older adults and the CBSS workforce. Additional markers include improved mental health outcomes, reduced stigma, more effective retirement transitions, greater public awareness of seniors' services, increased media coverage, and recognition of Canada as a country with a strong seniors' social safety net. Testimonials and before-and-after measures could further validate the effectiveness of programs, while initiatives such as outreach doctors, preventive health programs, and shared successful models would reinforce long-term sustainability and equitable access across regions.

Conclusion

The consultation reinforced that CBSS organizations are a critical component of social infrastructure in Quebec's English-speaking communities, playing a central role in supporting older adults to remain connected, independent, and engaged in their communities. These organizations are responding to increasingly complex and growing needs while operating within constrained funding environments and a fragmented service landscape.

There is strong alignment across participants on the need to move toward a more coordinated, well-resourced, and integrated CBSS sector that is recognized at both provincial and national levels. Strengthening the sector will require sustained investment in core funding, workforce stability, transportation and accessibility supports, and centralized navigation systems, alongside continued investment in community-led innovation, partnerships, and intergenerational approaches.

Ultimately, participants articulated a clear vision of a CBSS sector that is collaborative, equitable, and person-centred, one that reduces isolation, improves access to essential supports, and enables older adults in their communities to age with dignity, choice, and belonging. These insights provide a strong foundation for advancing a more coordinated and responsive sector in Quebec's English-speaking communities, while contributing to broader learning on system integration and community-based approaches. With sustained leadership and partnership, the CBSS sector is well positioned to build a more connected and resilient system that reflects the voices and needs of older adults and the organizations that support them.

Appendix A: Discussion questions

Part I discussion questions: Quebec focus

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

Discussion question #2: What strengths or success factors within the CBSS sector in Quebec 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 Quebec 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 above), 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 Quebec?

Appendix B: Participant list

No participant list was provided for this event.