



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

In Partnership with the
Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM)
May 2025



*Older
Adults
Moving
Forward*

To bring together Saskatchewan seniors' organizations for the purpose of contributing to a better quality of life for seniors.

HelpAge
Canada

Introduction

With the support of the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM), HelpAge Canada held the third Provincial Territorial consultation on developing the community-based seniors' services (CBSS) sector at the provincial and Pan-Canadian level. The *"Strengthening Senior Services in Saskatchewan: An Ideas Exchange & Working Session"* discussion was held in Regina on May 26, 2025, and virtually on May 27, 2025. The sessions included setting the stage for CBSS in Saskatchewan and Canada, a National Institute on Aging (NIA) presentation, and two working sessions – the first focusing on building CBSS in Saskatchewan and the second on a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.

Purpose and objectives

The discussions employed a community development approach, ensuring the voices of older people and service providers informed Saskatchewan and Pan-Canadian strategies, approaches, and planning efforts. The consultation questions were developed in collaboration with SSM and HelpAge Canada to reflect the regional context and build on the previous consultations held in Ottawa, British Columbia, and Manitoba.

The objectives of the sessions were:

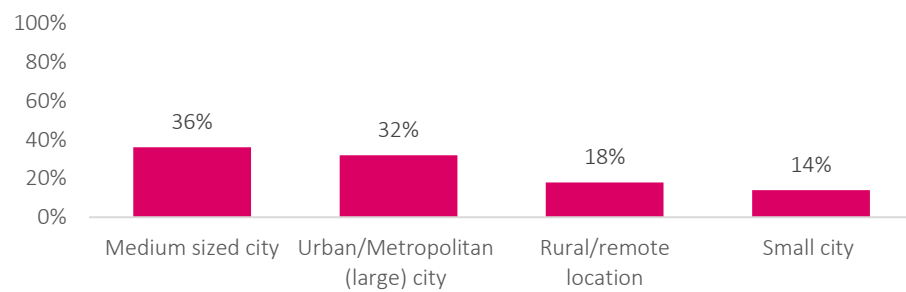
- Participants increase understanding of a provincial CBSS sector.
- Participants build a vision for a provincial CBSS sector in Saskatchewan.
- Participants feel motivated to give time and energy to develop a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- Participants see themselves as part of a Pan-Canadian sector.
- 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.

This report includes session findings and facilitator reflections (discussion questions can be found in Appendix A) and highlights from participant evaluations.

About the participants

The in-person session had 23 participants, divided into 4 tables, and the virtual session included 14 participants. A list of participants is provided in Appendix B. Of the total participants, 25 responded to the post-conference survey. All survey respondents were from Saskatchewan, with 36% from a medium-sized city, 32% from an urban/metropolitan city, 18% from a rural/remote location, and 14% from a small city (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The community respondents represent (n=22)



All organizations represented CBSS organizations; government and academia were purposely not invited to this inaugural gathering so community-based organizations had the opportunity to connect more deeply.

Of those who completed the survey, 88% identified as an older adult (Figure 2), and 22% identified as being part of an equity-deserving community (i.e., racialized, disability, LGBTQ2SI, blind, deaf, Indigenous, etc.) (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Respondents identifying as an older adult (n=24)

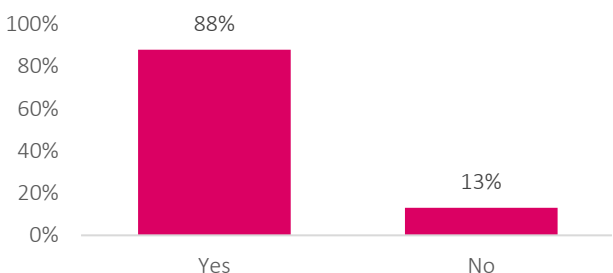
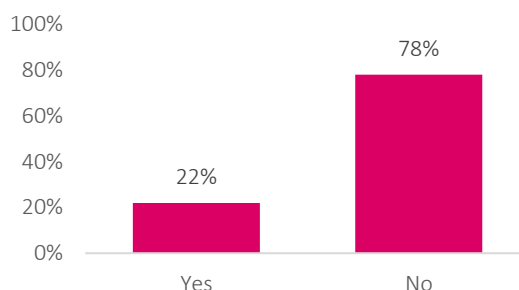


Figure 3. Respondents identifying as being part of an equity-deserving community (n=23)



Part I: Saskatchewan CBSS Sector

What follows is an overview of the challenges, opportunities, strengths, and the desired future state for CBSS in Saskatchewan; refer to Table 1 for a summary.

Challenges

When asked about the challenges faced by the CBSS sector, many participants voiced that there is a lack of awareness of what services and programs are available and how to access them. Although the Saskatchewan 211 automated directory exists, it is underutilized and not regularly updated due to a lack of funding. There is also frustration amongst seniors, as many struggle to find access points for available services and insufficient services are being offered to meet the volume of need. Volunteers are an essential part of CBSS, and there are currently not enough, with many volunteers “aging out.”

Access to services and healthcare is particularly challenging in rural areas, where resources, leadership, and transportation are limited. Many participants noted the need for more buses; in Saskatoon, paratransit can require two weeks of advance planning and hours of waiting for a return trip home. Limited digital literacy is another barrier to access for many seniors, and it is challenging to reach the seniors who are not using technology. Finances are also a major challenge, particularly in rural areas; many seniors do not want to retire or move to larger, more accessible cities because they want to remain in their communities. Bus services in Regina used to have a free day, but no longer do, and many services in smaller communities are being shut down as they are not financially viable.

Although low-income housing exists, there is not enough to meet the demand. More supports are needed for seniors wanting to remain at home and age in place, including housework, yard work, and home health care. Funding for the CBSS sector is on a year-to-year basis, which is not

sustainable long-term. There is a particular lack of financial investment in upstream, preventive services that address social determinants of health. An additional challenge is communication and collaboration. More communication systems need to be in place to exchange, store, access, and implement information amongst organizations. Coming together with a united voice is essential for advocacy. There is a need for well-equipped advocates; it is important to hear the voices of the most vulnerable and challenge the negative public perception surrounding seniors' healthcare utilization. Instead, this narrative could be replaced with the valuable contributions of seniors to their communities and beyond.

Opportunities

When asked about opportunities for the CBSS sector, an area of focus was navigation initiatives to help identify and communicate where and how to find available services. For example, a local community source guide with asset mapping, available in print, and a regularly updated comprehensive directory of services with engagement opportunities and contact information. There is also an opportunity to further leverage existing informal services, particularly in smaller communities throughout Saskatchewan that currently lack sufficient formalized CBSS resources. Technology can also improve communication channels. For example, using virtual platforms (i.e., Zoom) to communicate with harder-to-reach communities.

Another opportunity is to be more proactive by focusing on upstream preventive care and social determinants of health. Through advocacy, the CBSS sector can encourage the government to focus on aging at home, rather than using long-term care as the main seniors' strategy. Advocacy can also amplify seniors' voices and influence policy. Collaboration is another major area of opportunity. Lived experience and knowledge already exist, but more communication is required to replicate what is working. Having an annual provincial CBSS theme might encourage organizations in the sector to align and collaborate on common issues to work toward shared goals. SSM is a great resource for linking and connecting senior organizations provincially, nationally, and internationally. Healthy Aging Collaborative Online Resources and Education (CORE) is another useful platform to support exchanging ideas. Collaboration also involves listening to the perspectives of those who are new to Canada, who may have different skills, interests, priorities, and views on aging. Further, there is the opportunity to collaborate for a shared provincial and national seniors' strategy.

Strengths

When asked to identify strengths within the CBSS sector that can be scaled to strengthen the provincial sector, many respondents highlighted sharing existing resources and knowledge. Participants recommend having both in-person and online forums dedicated to networking and communication to exchange information and to streamline/mitigate unnecessary duplication. It is important to connect smaller entities to create a collective voice and to have a strong backbone organization to support the collective. Organizations like SSM and platforms such as CORE can help bring organizations together. It would also be beneficial to develop a collective identity. Additionally, partnering with rural and urban councils would be advantageous, as they work closely with the older adult population; municipal councils set priorities for older persons and could be better leveraged around the province. Many respondents also commented on improving navigation of services, such as better utilizing 211 and asset mapping.

Another strength to scale is education; Libraries and the Seniors' University Group (SUG) offer helpful information sessions and courses. Participants also commented on living intergenerationally and the importance of educating upcoming generations on economics and social situations, as well as easing tension between generations. Another strength is Age Friendly, which has programming, infrastructure, data analysis, leadership, and a community-development model that can be broadened and used as a framework for scaling. Their community-development model has been shown to work by helping communicate resources, organize people to shovel and mow, and connect volunteers to perform small tasks. Medical and transportation services still need to be scaled, especially in rural and remote communities. Further, leadership and advocacy for seniors is a strength, as seen through organizations such as the BC Seniors Advocate and CBSS in BC. Using data, such as that from the NIA, helps support senior advocacy. With advocacy, it is advantageous to capitalize on the current urgency stemming from pressures on healthcare and from the passion of individuals. It is increasingly essential to increase support for informal caregivers, family, and friends.

Looking ahead to a desired state

In the next three to five years, participants want services to be easily accessible and findable through a regularly updated, comprehensive directory. Community coordinators would know who to ask, with better integration, coordination, and navigation between healthcare and community systems. Age-friendly communities would be expanded to rural and remote areas around the province and across Canada, with services accessible through improved transportation. Participants also hope to see more collaboration and coordination amongst organizations to create an organized, well-led, connected sector on the provincial and national level. Collaboration would involve having a common goal and collective voice to influence government and change policy. In an ideal three to five years, the government would lead a Seniors' strategy, with input from older adults. The government would invest in services that support the wellness of society and recognize that it is best for seniors to remain at home through a myriad of health and community supports.

The CBSS sector would have ongoing, sustainable core funding rather than fragmented project funding, with reduced competition amongst organizations for grants. Additionally, there would be more investment in preventative care, with a focus on wellness promotion versus disease treatment. Older adults would feel more connected to each other and their communities, with better mental and physical health outcomes. "Nobody would be left behind," and there would be more focus on inclusion and diversity. Proof of positive change would be seen in the data/key indicators, such as improved responses in the NIA surveys.

Table 1. Summary of strengths, challenges, opportunities and a desired future state

Strengths	Challenges
- The resources and knowledge that already exists; can be scaled through more in-person and online collaboration and communication - Education (e.g. info sessions at libraries and the Seniors' University Group) - Living intergenerationally - Age-friendly programming, infrastructure, data analysis, leadership, and community-development model - Leadership and advocacy for seniors (e.g. BC's Senior Advocate and CBSS in BC).	- Lack of awareness of what programs/services are being offered and how to access them - Offering enough services - Apathy amongst seniors to utilize services - Lack of volunteers - Lack of transportation, particularly in rural areas - Lack of funding and senior finances - Technological barriers - Lack of communication and collaboration - A need to be proactive with an upstream, preventative approach

- Data collection from NIA - Passion of individuals - Informal caregivers, family, and friends;	- Lack of advocacy - Public perception of seniors and healthcare
Opportunities	Future state
- Developing/implementing a service navigation system - Leveraging existing informal services, particularly in smaller communities, without sufficient formalized CBSS resources - Utilizing technology to improve communication channels - Being proactive/focusing on upstream preventative care - Advocating - Collaborating: using SSM and CORE to exchange resources/ideas - Establishing a provincial and national seniors' strategy	- Services would be more accessible and easier to navigate through a comprehensive directory - Expanded age-friendly communities - Improved transportation - More collaboration and coordination on the provincial and national level - The government would lead a seniors' strategy, with input from older adults - Government support for aging in place - Guaranteed livable income - Taxes would pay for services - Ongoing, sustainable core funding - Investment in preventative care - Older adults feel connected to each other and their communities, with better mental and physical health - More inclusion and diversity - Changes in statistics/data as proof of improvements

Part II: Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector

Definition of CBSS

The working definition of CBSS, derived from initial work in BC is as follows:

“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 a foundation of trust, relationships, and deep community knowledge and understanding.”

Participants noted several additions to the working CBSS definition:

- Rather than ‘just’ providing services, include designs, develops, and delivers programs/services
- Policy makers
- Advocacy
- Aging in place/in-home services
- Education
- Coordination and working together
- Engagement/involvement of older adults (“nothing about us without us,” “with us not for us”)
- All levels of government
- National, provincial, and local levels

- For-profit organizations
- Faith-based communities

Others suggested shortening the definition, especially the first paragraph, and removing the examples/list of organizations. Others recommended reordering the definition, including moving the first sentence to the end and moving the first sentence of the second paragraph to the beginning. Others were unclear on how the government fits into the definition and suggested removing “municipal” or changing it to “community.” Many commented that “neighbourhood houses” is not a term used in Saskatchewan.

Call to action to support the desired state of CBSS in Saskatchewan

Participants were asked what they think needs to be done at a Pan-Canadian level to support the desired state of CBSS in Saskatchewan. Many mentioned having a Pan-Canadian communication strategy to support interprovincial collaboration and coordination, and to feed information from the community level to the provincial and national levels. They also expressed a desire to develop and implement community-level asset mapping to help people navigate services/programs.

Participants also noted formal partnerships and advocates, such as the BC Seniors Advocate and the National Seniors Council. All provinces and territories need a seniors’ advocate, and there needs to be a united Pan-Canadian voice for a seniors’ strategy.

Advocacy should focus on the sector's collective impact, including success stories and the economic benefit of the CBSS sector; older adults are not a cost, but a revenue-producing part of society. An important part of advocacy is having qualitative and quantitative research data. Participants recommend mentorship on data utilization, as many smaller organizations lack the capacity. Further, it is important to frame requests and reports in ways that funders understand. For example, “aging in place is one third the cost of long-term care.” Participants would like to see long-term core funding for the entire sector, with less competition amongst organizations for grants. There is also a desire to preserve heritage, culture, respect, dignity, and belonging. There is a need to focus on social wellness and address ageism at the regional, provincial/territorial, and national levels.

Defining success and determining impact

When asked what would define a successful Pan-Canadian CBSS sector, many commented that success would involve recurring, sustainable funding, changes to the taxation system, and increased government grants to incentivize health and home supports. They also called for funding for age-friendly communities and wraparound supports for older adults and their families. Success would also involve legislation and policy to protect older adults, including anti-scam legislation and tax benefits. Further, older adults would have equitable access to the healthcare they need, with improved physical/mental health and more social connections. Ageism would decrease, and older adults' voices would be included in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of the services that impact them.

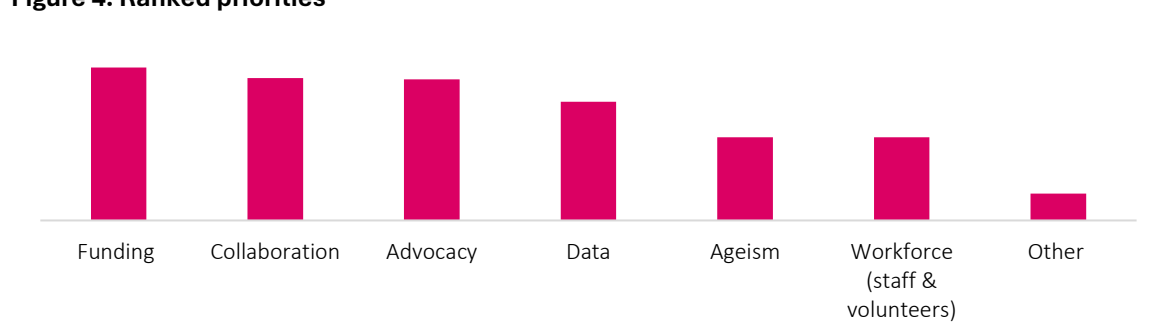
Success would also include recognizing that the term “older adult” refers to three different generations, each with different values and needs. Further, every province/territory would have a seniors advocate, and there would be a credible national voice for advocacy. A successful sector would involve collaboration among organizations, with more partnerships, less competition, and sustainable multi-year funding. Success could be measured through data, such as NIA statistical

surveys. Ideally, a better system would be in place to collect and measure outcomes, which would help secure funding. Indicators of progress would also include hearing from the people and recording success stories.

Priorities

When respondents were asked to rate priorities in order of importance to support a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector, the following was determined: Funding was ranked most important, followed by collaboration and advocacy, then data, ageism, workforce, and lastly, 'other' (Figure 4). Within the 'other' category, respondents included policy, public education, federal and provincial support, and reviewing and evaluating policy and strategy effectiveness.

Figure 4. Ranked priorities

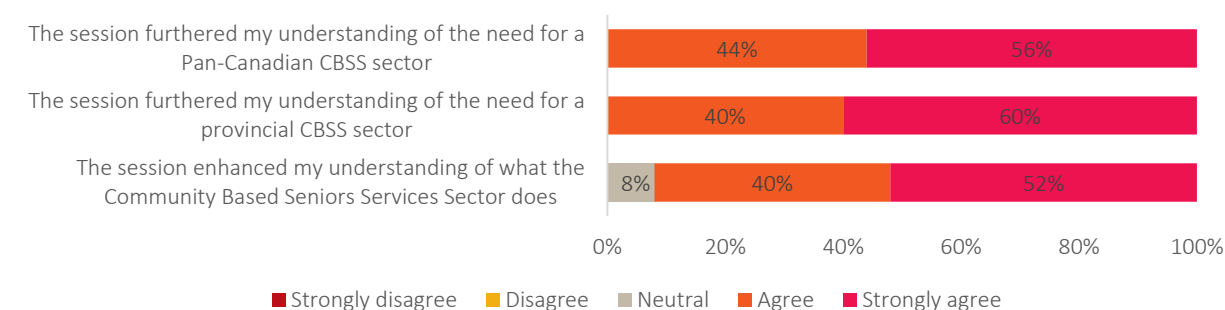


Session Evaluation

Effectiveness of the consultation

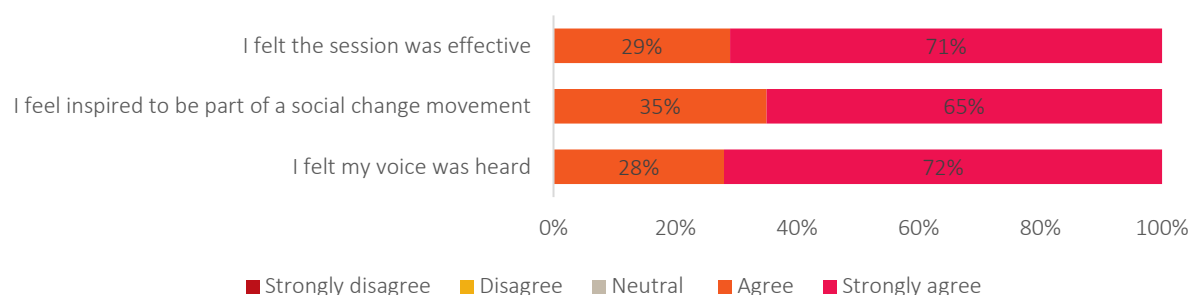
Nearly all (92%) of respondents (n=23) agreed or strongly agreed that the session enhanced their understanding of what the CBSS sector does. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the session furthered their understanding of the need for a provincial CBSS sector and the need for a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Effectiveness of the session enhancing the respondents' understanding of the CBSS sector (n=25)



All respondents (n=25) agreed or strongly agreed that the session was effective, that it made them feel inspired to be part of a social change movement, and that their voice was heard (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Respondents' feelings towards the session being effective, inspiring, and feeling heard (n=26)



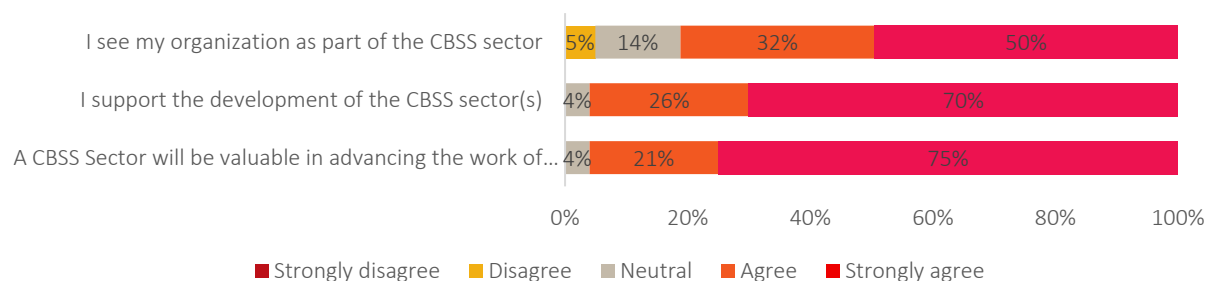
When asked what the best part of the session was, respondents commented on networking and meeting new people. Another highlight was the group discussions and feedback during breakout sessions, in which participants could share information and hear what others had to say. Respondents noted that the questions were well-structured and effectively led by facilitators to guide conversation. Further, some commented that the session was focused and well-paced. One respondent highlighted learning about the realities of seniors across the country, another noted the NIA presentation, and one enjoyed the focus on Saskatchewan in the morning session.

When asked how the session could be improved, most participants said they needed more time, particularly during the breakout sessions and the NIA Aging in Canada surveys. One respondent suggested more pre-work to better optimize time during the session. It was also suggested that the facilitator and scribe roles switch in the afternoon. One participant felt the NIA presentation was too detailed and technical, and another would have preferred a limit on group sharing so group feedback took less time. Respondents would like a virtual option/live feed for those who cannot attend in person, as well as sessions held in other locations, such as Moose Jaw and Prince Albert. Participants would also like to have more organizations involved.

National CBSS Sector

When asked about building a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector, the majority (91%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they see their organization as part of the CBSS sector. The remaining 9% felt neutral. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they support the development of the CBSS sector(s), and nearly all (96%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a CBSS sector will be valuable in advancing the work of the network of community-based organizations. The remaining 4% felt neutral, and no one disagreed (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Building a Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector (n=23)



Reflecting on the previous consultations (national Ottawa, British Columbia, and Manitoba)

Analogously, participants attending the National Summit World Café in Ottawa, the British Columbia provincial consultation, and the Manitoba provincial consultation were asked how *likely* they were to support the development of a national CBSS sector; 94%, 98%, and 96% agreed, respectively. Further, 88% of respondents from the Ottawa consultation, 92% from the British Columbia provincial consultation, and 82% from the Manitoba provincial consultation see their organization as being part of the national CBSS sector.

Similar to the input from British Columbia, Manitoba, and the national summit, participants commented on the importance of having a unified, collective voice and vision for effective advocacy and to secure funding. Participants also reported that a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector brings people together to share resources, identify common issues, and collaborate. Key actions that are necessary to support the development of a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector include: having more opportunities to collaborate and communicate; securing funds at all levels of government through advocacy and awareness; and improving education and awareness of the CBSS sector.

Key takeaways and lessons learned

Key lessons learned about the session and surrounding sector development include the following:

About the session

- Ensure there is adequate time for networking
- Table facilitators were instrumental in the process. What sets facilitators up for success includes:
 - Sharing the note-taking template electronically so facilitators/note-takers can be as prepared as possible
- Consider the NIA having a more condensed presentation
- Allow tables to share ideas directly with each other
- Share the participant list ahead of the session

Sector development

- Engage Indigenous communities and diverse communities in advance of the session for more inclusive collaboration
- Undertake provincial asset mapping
- Collect and share provincial data in a way that is easy to communicate
- Continue to advocate for a shared provincial/territorial vision and for multi-year funding

Summary and Conclusion

The Saskatchewan consultation highlighted the essential role that community-based seniors' services play across the province, particularly in rural and remote communities where informal networks, volunteers, and local leadership are central to supporting older adults. Participants described both the strengths of this landscape and the systemic barriers that make it difficult to navigate services, maintain programs, and plan for long-term sustainability. Despite these challenges, there was a clear sense of momentum and shared commitment to building a more coordinated, prevention-oriented approach to ageing in community.

The discussions pointed to a need for stronger structures that bring organizations together, reduce duplication, and strengthen communication across the province. Participants expressed interest in tools and platforms that would make information easier to find and share, as well as more intentional collaboration with government and health partners. Overall, the consultation demonstrated that Saskatchewan has the building blocks for a more connected CBSS sector and that with coordinated leadership and strategic partnerships, significant progress is possible.

Recommended Next Steps:

- Establish a provincial CBSS coordination table or explore forming a Saskatchewan Leadership Council to provide ongoing guidance, shared voice, and sector leadership.
- Develop a Saskatchewan CORE platform (or expand an existing hub) to support information sharing, navigation, and collaboration, accompanied by a funding strategy for sustainability.
- Advance a coordinated provincial approach to reducing loneliness and social isolation by identifying shared priorities, supporting community-based initiatives that build connection, and strengthening opportunities for older adults to engage socially in ways that reflect Saskatchewan's diverse communities.

Appendix A: Discussion questions

Part I discussion questions: Saskatchewan focus

Discussion question #1: Thinking about CBSS in your region, what are the top challenges and where are the opportunities?

Discussion question #2: Can you identify points of strength within the CBSS sector that can be scaled to support a strong, provincial CBSS sector (i.e., what are the success factors)?

Discussion question #3: If you think ahead about the CBSS sector in Saskatchewan in 3-5 years, what is the desired state? What does it look like? How does it feel?

Part II discussion question: Pan-Canadian focus

Discussion question #4: Reflecting on the definition of CBSS, what is missing (definition of CBSS is provided)? What can be added?

Discussion question #5: What needs to be done at the Pan-Canadian level to support the desired state of CBSS in Saskatchewan that you talked about this morning?

Discussion question #6: Thinking about a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector, what does success look like? How will we know we are making an impact?

Appendix B: Participant list

Name	Organization
Andre Nogue	Age-Friendly Regina & SSM
Ann Donovan	Saskatchewan Retirees Association
Brenda Glaspey	SaskTel Pioneers
Chelsea Schwartz	Saskatchewan Health Quality Council
Cheryl Loadman	Saskatoon Services for Seniors
Donna Kovatch	Seniors' University Group (SUG)
Donna Sparvier	Indigenous Grandmothers Support Network
Eric Lefol	Vitalité 55+
Felicity Watson	HelpAge Canada
Holly Schick	Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism
Janell Schwartz	Seniors' University Group - Regina
Jayne Whyte	Canadian Mental Health Association (Sask)
Jennifer Wright	Saskatchewan Health Quality Council
John Mowbray	Saskatchewan Retirees Association (SRA)
June Gaudun	Saskatoon Council on Aging
Kate Pederson	Saskatoon Council on Aging
Kerrie Strathy	Indigenous Grandmothers Support Network
Linda Anderson	Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism
Linda Pratt	Age-Friendly SK
Liz McGuire	National Institute on Ageing
Marlene Nameth	Women of the Dawn
Mary Gemmell	Women of the Dawn
Natalie Iciaszczyk	National Institute on Ageing
Randy Dove	Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism
Rod McKendrick C.M.	Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism
Sunil Pandila	Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan
Terina Nelson	Regina 55+ Community Centre
Wynona Giannasi	Howegroup
Yvonne Pratt	Women of the Dawn