

Building a Pan-Canadian Community- Based Seniors Services Sector

Summary of Provincial & Territorial Consultations 2024-2025

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Introduction

Background and Purpose

Across Canada, older adults are supported by a diverse and resilient network of community-based seniors' services (CBSS) organizations. These organizations provide essential programs and services that support ageing in place, social inclusion, health and well-being, and a sense of belonging. While deeply rooted in local realities, there are common challenges across the country including fragmented and insufficient funding, limited workforce supports, uneven recognition in health and social systems, and widening disparities in resources and capacity.

Recognizing both the value of CBSS and the need for stronger coordination, HelpAge Canada facilitated the creation of the Interim Community Leadership Council (ICLC) in January 2024. Comprised of representatives from across Canada, the ICLC builds on existing sector leadership and works to strengthen the capacity, visibility, and sustainability of CBSS organizations. The ICLC supports ongoing outreach across the sector, helps identify and guide priority areas for action, and collaborates on initiatives such as regional consultations, working groups, and the biennial CBSS Sector Summit.

HelpAge Canada hosted the inaugural CBSS Sector Summit, *Claiming our Space, Naming our Future*, in Ottawa in June 2024. The Summit brought together CBSS organizations from across the country to identify sector priorities and strengthen collective action. It showcased the enthusiasm across communities to take a coordinated approach to solidifying the important role that CBSS organizations play in supporting healthy ageing in Canada.

Building on this momentum, HelpAge Canada, in partnership with the ICLC, undertook a series of provincial and territorial consultations to explore how the sector can be strengthened both regionally and through a cohesive pan-Canadian approach.¹

The purpose of this report is to reflect the voices and priorities of CBSS organizations across Canada; identify shared themes as well as regional nuances and recommend actionable priorities for a coordinated pan-Canadian CBSS sector. This work reflects a growing pan-Canadian momentum, "led by communities, for communities", to position the CBSS sector as a foundational pillar of healthy ageing in Canada.

Consultation Approach

Between November 2024 and December 2025, HelpAge Canada, working with regional organizations, convened 20 provincial and territorial consultations (Table 1). Sessions built upon the inaugural CBSS National Summit (Ottawa, June 2024) and leveraged BC's and Alberta's sector development as a foundational starting point (i.e. the working definition of CBSS). The overarching consultation framework was developed in collaboration with the ICLC.

While each session reflected distinct regional priorities, the overarching consultation goals were to understand the vision for a strong provincial/territorial CBSS sector, gather input for shaping a pan-Canadian CBSS sector framework, and identify collective actions to strengthen equity, sustainability, and sector cohesion.

¹ *The ICLC is a consultative body guiding strategic development for the CBSS sector, with a mandate to strengthen sector capacity to meet the needs of an ageing population. Working with HelpAge Canada as the backbone, the ICLC supports sector outreach, co-designs regional consultations, and identifies systemic and emerging policy issues. Membership includes leaders from not-for-profit and public seniors-serving organizations, partner organizations, and senior volunteer leaders, with representation from urban and rural regions and underserved communities.*

Each consultation was co-designed with local partners and grounded in a community development approach. Sessions were held in-person and virtually to enhance accessibility. Participants engaged in working sessions and small group dialogues to identify strengths and challenges. Through facilitated collaborative visioning, participants discussed what is needed to strengthen the CBSS sector at the provincial/territorial and pan-Canadian levels.

Participants were invited purposefully to reflect geographic, cultural, and organizational diversity. Approximately 1500 individuals participated across the 20 consultations. Participants represented a wide spectrum of CBSS organizations, other non-profit organizations and associations, volunteers, health and social service providers, academia, and government partners. There was representation ranging from small rural communities to large metropolitan cities, as well as from equity-deserving communities, across the country. Collectively, engagements represent a pan-Canadian dialogue “by community, for community”, building toward a shared vision of ageing in place, dignity, and connection for all older Canadians. While the format and size of consultations varied, each was grounded in a commitment to inclusive, accessible, and community-led dialogue.

Table 1: Overview of Consultations

Province/Territory	Date	Location	Partner
British Columbia	November 7, 2024	Richmond	United Way British Columbia
Yukon	April 21–23, 2025 <i>(series of informal meetings)</i>	Whitehorse Haines Junction	Yukon Council on Aging
Manitoba	April 26, 2025	Winnipeg	Manitoba Association of Seniors Centres (MASC)
Saskatchewan	May 26–27, 2025	Regina Virtual	Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism (SSM)
Nova Scotia	June 17 & June 18, 2025	Halifax Virtual	Aging Well Nova Scotia
Prince Edward Island (PEI)	September 22, 2025	Charlottetown	United Way of Prince Edward Island
Newfoundland and Labrador	September 25, 2025 October 3, 2025	St John’s Virtual	SeniorsNL
Northwestern Ontario	September 30, 2025 December 2, 2025	Thunder Bay	N/A
Alberta	October 8, 2025	Edmonton	Healthy Aging Alberta
Northwest Territories	October 21, 2025	Yellowknife	NWT Seniors’ Society
Mississauga	November 4, 2025 December 11, 2025	Mississauga Virtual	Older Adult Centres’ Association of Ontario (OACAO) Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario (EAPO)
Quebec	November 25, 2025	Virtual	Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN)

New Brunswick	November 28, 2025	Fredericton	United Way Maritimes (English-language session) and United Way Moncton and Southeastern New Brunswick (French-language session)
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The consultations successfully gathered input from a wide range of participants; however, gaps remain in perspectives from Francophone and Indigenous communities. In addition, the absence of a CBSS partner organization in the Yukon meant that a formal territorial consultation was not possible; instead, a series of engagement sessions were conducted by HelpAge Canada. In addition, no consultations occurred in Nunavut

Provincial & Territorial Insights

Strengths

Provincial and territorial CBSS sectors demonstrated significant strength, resilience, and leadership across all jurisdictions. Participants highlighted the depth of established leadership, long-standing community service capacity and strong advocacy, alongside the critical role of grassroots knowledge, volunteers, and informal (intergenerational) caregiver networks. There was a strong sense of pride in what has been built and sustained locally through collaboration, shared infrastructure, and a deep, collective commitment to supporting older adults. The following strengths, commonly identified across provinces and territories, are detailed below:

Key strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established provincial/territorial leadership • Long-standing community service capacity • Strong advocacy and champions • Public directories, navigation support, training programs, and shared tools • Informal caregiver networks • Existing infrastructure • Grassroots knowledge

Established provincial and territorial leadership and long-standing community capacity

Established umbrella organizations provide backbone support, convening, and advocacy functions across provinces and territories. For example, in Manitoba, MASC serves as a leader in facilitating communication, networking, and planning among older adult communities and CBSS agencies. Similarly, organizations such as Healthy Aging Alberta and United Way Maritimes, played key roles in hosting and co-convening consultations alongside HelpAge Canada (refer to Table 1). Many CBSS organizations also bring decades of experience delivering programs that support ageing in place, foster social connection, and promote holistic wellness, providing a strong foundation for continued service delivery and innovation in communities across the country.

Strong advocacy and champions

Many regions highlighted the importance of coordinated advocacy and visible champions in advancing the priorities of older adults and the CBSS sector. Provinces such as British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Alberta emphasized the value of having an officially appointed Seniors' Advocate. In other provinces and territories, older adults, community leaders, and service providers were identified as trusted champions for systems change. In smaller jurisdictions, such as the Yukon and PEI, it was

noted that strong cross-sector relationships and close community connections strengthen advocacy efforts, allowing for efficiency in raising issues and influencing decision-making.

Public directories, navigation support, training programs, and shared tools.

Public directories, navigation support, training programs, and shared tools were identified as strengths. Examples include 211; dedicated navigators and resource coordinators; databases for volunteer registries, funding opportunities, and grant-writing training resources; shared resources like CORE Canada; and shared CBSS-related events that support synergies, alignment, and mitigate competing scheduling priorities through tools such as Quebec's coordinated event calendars.

Informal (intergenerational) caregiver networks

Families, neighbours, friends, and volunteers continue to provide essential informal supports to older adults, often filling gaps in formal services and systems, such as transportation, meal preparation, wellness checks, companionship, advocacy, and service navigation. In Saskatchewan, participants highlighted the Age Friendly community-development model as a framework for scaling local supports, like snow shovelling and volunteer task-matching. New Brunswick participants encouraged the expansion of intergenerational housing, in which older adults are paired with students to preserve independence and community connection. Intergenerational programs play a key role in strengthening community networks by fostering relationships between older adults and younger people, inspiring volunteerism, developing caregiving skills, and considering careers in the CBSS sector. In Mississauga, some organizations mentor students entering the health and community workforce to better understand the needs of older adults and the importance of the sector. Consultation participants emphasized that programs also help reduce social isolation, challenge age-related stereotypes, and build mutual understanding across generations. Participants from communities with smaller populations, such as PEI and Yukon, further noted that their close-knit communities contribute to strong cultures of volunteerism and shared responsibility, enabling more responsive, relationship-based supports and deeper, more meaningful connections. Respondents from the Northwest Territories also highlighted their deep respect for elders.

Existing infrastructure and grassroots knowledge

Existing infrastructure includes shared spaces, such as the Yukon Council on Aging Hub and the Golden Age Seniors Society; regional collaboratives like Better at Home in British Columbia; and program delivery partnerships such as community kitchens in Nova Scotia and rural outreach initiatives in Saskatchewan. Established services further strengthen the system, including Meals on Wheels, the Good Food Box, Adult Day Programs and Seniors' Day Away programs (such as VON Adult Day Programs in Ontario and Nova Scotia), the Centre of Rural Aging and Health in Nova Scotia, the Seniors' University Group in Saskatchewan, Community Tables, Communities of Practice, Older Adults' Forums and Fairs (including Table 50 ans et+ in Quebec), and funded home care services following hospital discharge, including Ontario's Let's Go Home (LEGHO) program. Participants also consistently emphasized the existence and importance of local knowledge and committed individuals (staff and volunteers) in driving innovation and sustaining community-based supports.

Social prescribing approaches are also gaining momentum as an effective way to improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation. Men's Sheds Canada is an example of a complementary community-based model with similar intended outcomes, particularly around facilitating social connection and healthy ageing. Similarly, seniors' centres across the country, including Ontario's Seniors Active Living Centres (SALCs), play a key role in fostering social participation, reducing isolation, and strengthening community connectedness among older adults.

Challenges

Participants across all regions identified persistent challenges which constrain long-term planning, workforce stability and service integration. Collectively, the following systemic barriers limit the capacity of community-based organizations and the sector's ability to demonstrate impact and respond effectively to meet the growing needs of older adults. The following challenges, commonly identified across provinces and territories, are detailed below:

Key challenges

- Inadequate and unstable funding
- Workforce and volunteer shortages
- Access barriers
- Lack of culturally diverse and inclusive services
- Fragmented systems and poor service navigation
- Ageism and invisibility
- Financial insecurity
- Lack of recognition in health and social systems
- Limited access to data and evaluation tools

Inadequate and unstable funding

Participants consistently described project-based funding models as a significant barrier to sustainability, long-term planning, and workforce retention. Many organizations operate with limited to no core funding, resulting in service gaps, administrative strain, and reduced organizational stability.² Short-term funding cycles, often limited to one year, were seen as particularly misaligned with longer-term budget and planning cycles, making it difficult to invest in staff, infrastructure, and program continuity. Participants in Mississauga, Ontario noted prohibitive insurance policies as financial barriers, such as those preventing drivers from acting as volunteers, and New Brunswick participants highlighted the need for funding alignment at all levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal).

Workforce and volunteer shortages

Recruiting and retaining skilled staff and volunteers is increasingly challenging, particularly in rural, remote, and Northern communities. Organizations reported high levels of burnout, gaps in succession planning, and limited access to training and professional development. British Columbian participants specifically noted the need for grief and bereavement training to help staff and volunteers manage the realities of losing clients. There is a growing over-reliance on volunteers, often without dedicated volunteer coordinators, while many long-standing volunteers are ageing out of their roles. In PEI, participants noted that a shrinking younger population further reduces the potential volunteer pool. In the Northwest Territories, participants emphasized the need for stronger incentives to attract and retain staff in Northern communities. Nova Scotia participants highlighted a gender imbalance, noting that women are carrying much of the workload within the CBSS workforce.

Access barriers

Access barriers, especially in rural, remote, and Northern communities are rampant. Transportation challenges, geographic isolation, poor digital connectivity, limited digital literacy, and infrastructure gaps were repeatedly cited as barriers to engagement and service delivery. For example, Yukon participants commented on programs and services being designed with urban contexts in mind, overlooking rural communities that lack reliable

² Core funding refers to unrestricted financial support provided to an organization to cover operating, administrative, and overhead costs (i.e., essential expenses such as staff salaries, rent, utilities, and equipment) rather than for a specific, time-bound project. Core funding ensures an organization's long-term sustainability and stability.

internet access. Participants from the Northwest Territories highlighted unstable digital infrastructure and significant commuting challenges across a vast geographic area. In Ontario, participants pointed to transportation and access barriers created by geographical and bureaucratic boundaries. In Quebec, participants highlighted winter driving conditions as a major seasonal barrier to transit, and participants from Saskatchewan noted that in Saskatoon, paratransit can involve two weeks of advanced planning and waiting hours for a return trip home.

Across regions, participants noted that many older adults, particularly men and newcomers, are hesitant to attend programs and that it is particularly challenging to reach isolated older adults. For newcomers, barriers often include language differences, unfamiliarity with available services, and lack of culturally inclusive programming. Older men may be less likely to engage in programs due to social norms related to independence and self-reliance, or the perception that programs are not designed with their interests in mind.

Access is further complicated by the need for a diagnosis to qualify for some programs, shortages of care providers, limited service availability, and long waitlists. In Northwestern Ontario, for example, some older adults are waitlisted for supportive housing for over 20 years.

Lack of culturally diverse and inclusive services

Participants expressed concern that many services do not adequately meet the needs of multicultural, Indigenous, newcomer, and LGBTQIA2S+ older adults who require culturally safe and linguistically appropriate supports. There are also gaps in programming for individuals with mobility limitations, chronic illness, and cognitive decline. Francophone participants in New Brunswick highlighted systemic inequities affecting minority communities, including inadequate hospital supports and a shortage of Francophone physicians. Quebec participants noted a lack of English services and translation supports in predominantly French regions, and Manitoba participants identified gaps in access to homecare on First Nations reserves.

Fragmented systems and poor service navigation

Older adults and caregivers often struggle to understand what services are available, how to access them, and where to turn for support. These challenges are compounded by fragmented systems, a lack of integrated referral and navigation mechanisms, limited availability of service navigators, insufficient digital literacy supports, and language barriers. For instance, in the Northwest Territories, participants pointed to a lack of Indigenous language supports on forms and digital platforms. In PEI, participants commented on information sharing being informal, relying on individual relationships rather than coordinated systems. Together, these gaps limit effective service navigation and create barriers to accessing supports, particularly where culturally safe, linguistically appropriate, and accessible pathways are not consistently available.

Ageism and invisibility

Participants described pervasive ageist assumptions embedded in funding decisions, policy development, and public discourse. Despite its frontline role in supporting Canada's ageing population, the CBSS sector is currently overlooked and undervalued. For instance, in Newfoundland and Labrador, participants pointed to government policies overlooking isolation as a valid criterion for receiving care. Ageism and stigma continue to contribute to social isolation among older adults, as well as hesitancy to seek help or participate in programs. Northwestern Ontario participants specifically noted stigma related to accessing assisted living and Seniors' Day Away programs. In New Brunswick, Anglophone participants highlighted high rates of internal self-ageism a decline in neighbour-based support, further exacerbating isolation.

Financial insecurity

Participants voiced significant concern about increasing poverty, food insecurity, and housing insecurity among older adults. Financial assistance programs were described as restrictive and exclusionary, particularly for individuals transitioning between income supports and government pensions. In the Northwest Territories, participants highlighted high property taxes and the absence of comprehensive extended health benefits for

older adults. In Ontario, participants raised concerns about income clawbacks affecting Old Age Security, the Canada Pension Plan, and the Ontario Disability Support Program. In Alberta, there is a specific call for national action on reverse mortgage oversight and fraud prevention to protect the financial autonomy of vulnerable older adults. In Nova Scotia, there is a lack of public trustees in the community, preventing older adults from accessing their bank accounts and paying bills. These are just a few examples; there are a multitude of other financial insecurity challenges.

Lack of recognition in health and social systems

Despite being essential to prevention and well-being, CBSS organizations are often excluded from formal planning and resourcing conversations at provincial or territorial levels. For example, in Nova Scotia, the Ministry of Seniors is combined with long-term care, and provincial investments are therefore disproportionately focused on facilities rather than CBSS organizations. This lack of recognition limits opportunities for integration and collaboration across systems.

Limited access to data and evaluation tools

Organizations reported challenges in collecting, analyzing, and applying data to demonstrate impact and inform decision-making. Participants identified a need for shared indicators and benchmarks, culturally safe data practices, and increased support for outcome measurement, evaluation capacity and data utilization across the sector. In Manitoba, participants highlighted the need for external assistance in collecting and interpreting data, as they have limited internal capacity, and Saskatchewan noted that small organizations would benefit from mentorship in the area of data utilization.

Pan-Canadian Themes & Priorities

Refining the Definition of CBSS

Throughout the consultations, participants engaged in discussions about how the CBSS sector is defined, and specifically the importance of having a clear pan-Canadian definition. As the sector continues to grow in complexity, diversity, and impact, there is an increasing need for a shared understanding of the sector being coordinated, collaborative and impactful.

The definition that was reviewed was based on a working definition adopted within BC:

“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 encouraged the use of inclusive, person-centred language that avoids institutional or deficit-based framing. Many emphasized the preference for the term *older adults* over *seniors* and *seniors-serving* or *community-based care* rather than *seniors’ services* to more accurately reflect the strengths-based, relational nature of the sector. Other suggestions include, *working with older adults* instead of *providing services*; changing *age in place* to *where older adults choose, or in the right place*; and changing *stay connected* to *be connected*. Further, the majority of participants stated that *neighbourhood house and circle terminology* does not resonate as they are not commonly used across Canada.

Participants recurrently expressed concern that the current definition has become overly complex or inaccessible. Many participants suggested removing lengthy lists of examples and others emphasized the need for a clear, concise definition that resonates with older adults and is easy to communicate across sectors. Participants from New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec recommended making the definition more goals, outcome, and impact oriented, and those from Quebec would also like explicit mention of provincial coverage and inclusion of the Anglophone community.

Across jurisdictions, participants recommended broadening the definition of CBSS to include:

- Affordability, accessibility, and equity as core design principles.
- Indigenous-led and culturally safe services, co-developed with communities.
- Inclusivity of both urban and rural communities.
- Ageing in place and health system interface, recognizing the sector's role in preventing premature hospitalization or institutionalization.
- The social determinants of health, including transportation, housing, income, and connection.
- Private, for-profit, and faith-based organizations that are rooted in community and CBSS value-aligned
- Advocacy, policy voice, and "nothing about us without us" as essential sector functions.
- Interfaces with the educational, academic, and research sectors, to support evidence-informed practice and mutual learning across disciplines.

Sector Development Priorities

During the initial pan-Canadian consultation at the 2024 Summit (Ottawa, June 2024), participants were asked to identify and rank key priorities for the CBSS sector. While the format of this exercise varied slightly across jurisdictions and local contexts differ, strong alignment emerged through the provincial and territorial consultations, on the following priority structural investments:

Workforce: Sustainability emerged as a major concern, with participants describing burnout, recruitment and retention challenges, and succession risks among staff and volunteers.

Strengthen workforce capacity and retention: Participants call for strategies to recruit, retain, and support skilled staff across the sector, particularly in rural, remote, and Northern communities. Priorities included competitive compensation, accessible training and professional development, leadership development, succession planning, and stronger recognition of lived experience and community leadership as valuable expertise.

Support volunteer engagement and sustainability: Volunteers remain foundational to the CBSS sector, yet many organizations lack the capacity to recruit, train, coordinate, and retain them effectively. Dedicated volunteer coordinator, mentorship opportunities, and intergenerational engagement strategies were identified as essential for long-term sustainability.

Reframing ageism: Present across discussions, more as a common thread rather than a discrete policy area.

- **Center older adults in leadership and design:** A pan-Canadian strategy led by older adults. Older adults would be recognized as integral leaders; lived experience, cultural wisdom, and community leadership need to be recognized as essential to shaping meaningful, effective, and equitable solutions.

Funding: *The most frequently identified top priority, particularly the need for stable, multi-year investment to support core program operations, service continuity, and long-term sustainability.*

Enable sustained, multi-year funding mechanisms: Long-term, flexible funding agreements are needed to support core operations, maintain infrastructure, and ensure continuity of services for older adults and caregivers. Participants also called for stronger alignment across municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal funding streams, including better integration of CBSS into broader health and social funding networks. Participants further highlighted the importance of strengthening existing federal funding opportunities, such as the *New Horizons for Seniors Program*, to better support collaboration, innovation, and long-term sector sustainability.

Stable and coordinated funding is also essential to enable a broader range of supports and services identified as system priorities, including:

- **Financial security:** expanding EI, tax benefits, and reverse mortgage protections; improving criteria for disability and older adults' credits; and increasing fraud awareness programs
- **Housing security:** expanding affordable/intergenerational housing options and strengthening renter protections
- **Access and navigation:** improving affordable internet, expanding digital literacy initiatives; employing/funding system navigation coordinators; and offering services both in-person and virtually
- **Emergency preparedness:** developing stronger emergency preparedness systems and training RCMP to better address elder abuse
- **Transitions of care:** strengthening supports for transitions between hospital, home, and long-term care settings
- **Care services:** increasing access to respite care, dementia supports, and mental health services

Invest in culturally relevant services and programming: that reflects diverse cultural, linguistic, and lives experiences, including Indigenous-led programming, culturally safe service delivery, translation and interpretation supports, and programming accessible to rural, remote, newcomers, and equity-deserving communities.

Collaboration: *Consistently ranked high, reflecting the need to shift from fragmented service delivery and competition and toward integrated service delivery, cross-sector partnerships, and stronger regional networks.*

Establish a pan-Canadian Leadership Council: Building on the work of the ICLC, to coordinate pan-Canadian dialogue, ensure regional perspectives are reflected, amplify the voices of smaller regions and provide strategic oversight for the development of a national strategy and sustainable sector development.

Strengthen pan-Canadian backbone infrastructure: HelpAge Canada to continue its pan-Canadian role through convening, communication, data stewardship, and mobilizing shared tools such as CORE.

Support regional coordination and cross-sector partnerships: A pan-Canadian approach must support, not replace, regional collaboration and innovation. This approach includes encouraging partnerships between CBSS organizations, health systems, Indigenous service providers, and municipal governments.

Data: Standardized data collection and information sharing are essential to improving service delivery, guiding decisions, and demonstrating the sector's impact.

Invest in a pan-Canadian data and knowledge mobilization strategy: Develop shared definitions, outcome measures, data standards, and mechanisms to capture and communicate impact of the CBSS sector, and ensure data practises are culturally safe, inclusive, and community-controlled. This includes shared and standardized infrastructure for quantitative and qualitative data collection that can be aggregated and reported at a pan-Canadian level (comparable to CIHI data standards), while respecting regional autonomy and cultural safety.

The CBSS sector is committed to defining and measuring its impact in ways that are meaningful to communities, grounded in older adults' lived experiences, and credible to funders and policymakers. Success should be evaluated through a holistic lens that reflects quality of life, social connection, equity, and dignity, in addition to economic and clinical measures.

Key measures of success would include:

- **Well-being and quality of life:** Older adults feel connected, safe, engaged, and supported to live independently and with purpose. A strong CBSS sector supports ageing at home rather than admission to long-term care by strengthening housing and food security, improving hospital discharge planning, expanding flexible home care, and advancing age-friendly, wraparound services.
 - o *Example indicators:* hospital/long-term care admission rates, levels of social isolation, health and prevention outcomes, housing and food security, program satisfaction, and number of elder abuse calls.
- **Access to services:** Older adults are aware of and have better access to the services they need. Enablers include a centralized database of offerings, community system navigators, little to no cost to attend services, and improved transportation to access services.
 - o *Example indicators:* number, type and availability of services offered, waitlist times, number and type of (appropriate) referrals to organizations, number of participants served (disaggregated by relevant sub-populations), and number and type of staff/volunteers recruited, trained and retained; staff/volunteer hours.
- **Political and policy recognition:** Formal integration of CBSS into ageing and health strategies, sustained government investment and multi-year funding, policy change, and ongoing collaborative decision-making.
- **A coordinated sector:** Clear roles, shared goals, and mechanisms for joint planning, communication, and resource alignment that amplify sector impact and ensure accountability. A paid coordinator (backbone) convenes and facilitates information sharing sessions to support greater reach.
- **Valuing the contributions of older adults:** Recognition of older adults as key partners – leaders, caregivers, volunteers, and knowledge holders – not just as service recipients
 - o *Example indicators:* media coverage, campaigns, and public understanding of ageing and inclusion.

Advocacy: Remained a clear priority for strengthening the CBSS sector through a unified voice, strong representation, visibility, and influence across policy systems, with participants emphasizing improved CBSS representation in decision-making and greater recognition of ageing in community as essential social infrastructure.

Develop shared standards, frameworks, and advocacy platforms: creating consistent principles and frameworks to guide quality, equity, and sustainability. This includes cross-jurisdictional policy alignment, stronger CBSS representation in policy settings, and advocacy platforms that reflect rural, remote, Indigenous, and Northern realities.

Garner greater sector visibility and recognition: from all levels of government, funders, the healthcare system, and the public. Public awareness efforts should shift outdated narratives about ageing, address systemic ageism, and frame ageing in community as a cost-effective, prevention-oriented alternative to institutional care. Participants noted engagement models like ParticipACTION and storytelling campaigns as examples of how public communications can promote empowerment, positive outcomes, and ‘partners in care’ messaging.

Emerging consensus

Funding was undeniably the top ranked priority among provinces and territories that participated in conversations surrounding sector priorities, followed by collaboration and advocacy.³ Refer to Appendix A for a summary of rankings by participating provinces and territories.

Pan-Canadian Calls to Action

Across provinces and territories, participants expressed strong and consistent alignment on the need for **coordinated national leadership** to strengthen the CBSS sector and advance ageing in community. There was a recurring call to develop a unified pan-Canadian approach that would bring jurisdictions together for regular cross-regional dialogue, shared learning, and coordinated system development. Participants emphasized the value of national forums, hubs, or **backbone structures to enable the exchange of promising practices** (i.e. CORE Canada), alignment of priorities, and development of consistent public messaging. This coordinated leadership was seen as essential to elevating the visibility, credibility, and legitimacy of CBSS with governments, funders, and the public, and critical to positioning the sector as a core component of Canada’s ageing and health systems rather than as peripheral or discretionary services.

Central to this national approach is **strengthening the role of the CBSS sector in policy** and systems change efforts. Participants consistently stressed the need for a strong, collective voice that reframes ageing in community through an asset-based lens and highlights CBSS as cost-effective, prevention-oriented alternatives to institutional care. This includes amplifying the voices and lived experiences of older adults, sharing compelling qualitative stories alongside standardized quantitative data, and developing consistent messaging that can be used across jurisdictions to inform policy, mobilize cross-sector support, and shift public narratives about ageing and agism. Closely linked to this agenda were calls to **strengthen the integration of older adults’ perspectives in policy system design processes**, ensuring they have a credible, visible, and consistent voice in policy development, systems change, and accountability mechanisms nationwide. Participants also emphasized the importance of **convening spaces** that bring together older adults, community organizations, Indigenous leaders, policymakers, researchers, and funders to share learning, align priorities, and co-create a shared vision for ageing in community.

³ Ranking is available only for BC, Manitoba, Ontario (Mississauga), Nova Scotia, NW Ontario, Saskatchewan and the Yukon, as well as data collected from the 2024 National Summit.

Sustainable, **long-term funding and capacity building** emerged as another dominant and deeply interconnected theme. Participants across regions identified short-term, project-based funding as a structural barrier that undermines organizational stability, workforce retention, collaboration, and meaningful evaluation. There was broad consensus on the need for multi-year core funding to support planning, innovation, and partnerships, as well as for the inclusion of CBSS within federal transfer mechanisms and broader intergovernmental funding frameworks. Many participants also called for funding models that reduce competition among community organizations and instead incentivize **collaboration**, coordination, and collective impact approaches, particularly at the local and regional level.

Workforce and volunteer sustainability was raised in nearly every jurisdiction as a critical risk to the future of the sector. Participants highlighted widespread burnout, recruitment and retention challenges, limited career pathways, and the absence of succession planning for both staff and volunteers. In response, there were strong calls for pan-Canadian strategies to support competitive and equitable compensation, standardized and accessible training, credentialing where appropriate, mentorship, leadership development, and volunteer engagement. Many participants also emphasized the need for **national standards or frameworks**, potentially aligned with accreditation processes, to support service quality, consistency, and accountability, while still allowing flexibility for local adaptation and community-driven delivery.

Participants also consistently identified the need **to build enabling infrastructure** that improves access, coordination, and system integration across the CBSS sector. A foundational priority was undertaking pan-Canadian asset mapping to identify existing services, gaps, and opportunities, paired with the development of integrated digital and community-based navigation systems. These systems were seen as essential to helping older adults, caregivers, and service providers easily find, understand, and access appropriate supports, particularly for those facing barriers related to language, literacy, digital access, or geographic isolation. **Strengthening data collection, evaluation, and data-sharing practices** was also identified as a priority, both to support continuous improvement and to generate credible evidence of impact for policy and funding decisions.

Equity, accessibility, and inclusion cut across all discussions as core principles rather than standalone priorities. Participants emphasized the importance of culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and strengths-based approaches that meaningfully engage older adults with lived experience in program design, governance, and evaluation. There was a strong and consistent call to intentionally include equity-deserving populations, including Indigenous, racialized, newcomer, rural, remote, and northern communities. Participants also emphasized the importance of **engaging Indigenous leadership** in CBSS sector strengthening efforts, supporting Indigenous-led approaches to ageing in community, and fostering cultural humility in cross-sector collaboration and planning processes. Across discussions, participants stressed that pan-Canadian efforts must remain responsive to diverse regional, cultural, rural, remote, and northern realities through flexible, inclusive, and community-informed approaches.

Taken together, these themes reflect a shared vision for a connected, well-resourced, and equitable national CBSS ecosystem. Participants articulated a clear expectation **that governments shift policy and investment toward prevention and ageing in place**, recognizing CBSS as essential infrastructure for health system sustainability and community well-being. This vision calls for coordinated leadership, stable funding, a supported workforce, inclusive and culturally safe practices, and strong national advocacy to ensure that older adults across Canada can age with dignity, belonging, choice, and meaningful connection to their communities.

Together, these distinctions reinforce the need for a pan-Canadian framework that is **nationally coherent but regionally responsive**, allowing shared standards and advocacy while honoring diverse provincial, territorial, and community contexts.

Please refer to Appendix B for an overview of notable distinctions among provinces and territories.

Conclusion

Participants across all jurisdictions emphasised the importance of enabling older adults to age in place with dignity, connection, and support. While systemic barriers persist, consultations revealed that the CBSS sector is increasingly aligned around shared priorities and is well positioned to advance meaningful and coordinated change. Despite its essential role in supporting older adults and strengthening broader health and social systems, the sector remains under-recognized and under-resourced across Canada.

Pan-Canadian findings point to a clear national direction: coordinated leadership across jurisdictions, sustainable and aligned funding models, shared data and learning infrastructure, and a supported workforce, all grounded in equity and community leadership. These priorities reflect broad consensus across provinces and territories and signal readiness to move from consultation to coordinated action.

Collectively, these insights have informed ten calls to action to guide the next phase of sector development:

- **Formally recognize CBSS as essential public infrastructure:** Position CBSS as a core component of Canada's health, ageing, and social systems, and shift policy and investment toward prevention and ageing in place.
- **Establish coordinated pan-Canadian leadership for CBSS:** Build on the ICLC to create sustained national leadership that aligns provincial and territorial efforts, convenes partners, and collectively represents the sector.
- **Engage Indigenous leadership in CBSS sector strengthening efforts:** Build understanding of Indigenous experiences to support more inclusive, community-led approaches to ageing in place and ensure cultural humility in our ways of working together.
- **Embed equity and inclusion across all actions:** Ensure equity-deserving populations and under-served regions are embedded across governance, planning, service design, and evaluation efforts.
- **Convene research and knowledge-sharing spaces:** Bring together older adults, community organizations, Indigenous leaders, policymakers, researchers, and funders to align priorities, share learning, and co-create a shared vision for ageing in community.
- **Strengthen the role of the CBSS sector in policy systems:** Position CBSS as a trusted source of expertise that amplifies the voices of older adults, elevates insights from CBSS organizations, and advances consistent, evidence-informed messaging that reframes ageing through an asset-based lens.
- **Implement sustainable, long-term and collaborative funding models:** Transition to multi-year core funding, align federal and provincial/territorial funding mechanisms, and incentivize collaboration and collective impact over competition.
- **Stabilize and strengthen the CBSS workforce and volunteer base:** Address workforce and volunteer sustainability through equitable compensation, training and credentialing, leadership development, succession planning, and recognition of lived experience as expertise.
- **Strengthen data, evaluation, and enabling infrastructure:** Invest in shared data standards, evaluation capacity, evidence development, and integrated digital and community-based navigation systems.
- **Develop national frameworks for quality, accountability, and learning:** Establish shared national frameworks for service quality, accountability, and continuous learning, while allowing flexibility for local and community-driven programming.

Advancing this agenda will require coordinated efforts across governments, philanthropy, academia, and community organizations. The CBSS sector already holds the knowledge, relationships, and community trust needed to lead and sustain this work. The opportunity now is to translate shared priorities into action and strengthen the systems that support ageing in the community, ensuring all older adults can age with dignity, belonging, and choice in the places they call home.







“

Ageing well in Canada is about belonging, contributing, and older adults shaping the communities they call home. Government is being called upon to recognize the CBSS sector as an essential partner in leading Pan-Canadian collective action.

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Appendix A: Ranking of Priorities

Jurisdiction-specific rankings from among provinces and territories that participated in conversations surrounding sector priorities along with pan-Canadian ranking gathered from the 2024 National Summit are as follows:

	 Funding	 Collaboration	 Advocacy	 Workforce	 Data	 Ageism
BC	1	4	2	5	3	6
Manitoba	3	2	1	6	4	5
Ontario (Mississauga)	1	2	4	3	5	6
Nova Scotia	1	2	3	4	5	6
NW Ontario	1	4	2	3	6	5
Saskatchewan	1	2	3	6	4	5
Yukon	2	1	3	4	5	6
2024 National Summit	1	2	3	4	5	6

Appendix B: Provincial & Territorial Calls to Action

<p>British Columbia</p>	<p>Strengthen coordinated provincial engagement aligned with national CBSS priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maintain momentum through continued engagement, communication, collaboration. b. Contribute insights to the national strategic plan. <p>Advance integrated service access and policy leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support shared or national service databases and centralized access (including CORE). b. Advance culturally sensitive and language-accessible service models.
<p>Alberta</p>	<p>Advance national visibility, advocacy, and policy influence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advocate for stable, multi-year funding. b. Contribute to a shared national data and impact framework. c. Position CBSS as essential social infrastructure. <p>Lead innovation in equity-centred and Indigenous-led approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advance Indigenous-led programming and self-determination. b. Address digital inclusion, housing policy, and elder abuse prevention. c. Contribute to a national virtual CORE hub.
<p>Manitoba</p>	<p>Establish a provincial CBSS Leadership Council and backbone support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Form a provincial Leadership Council. b. Identify a backbone organization, ensuring equitable representation and develop a Terms of Reference. c. Lead a State of the Sector report. <p>Build shared digital infrastructure and knowledge exchange:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop a digital collaboration system. b. Support peer learning and training. <p>Advance priority thematic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reduce loneliness through social prescribing. b. Enhance rural and remote service delivery.
<p>Saskatchewan</p>	<p>Formalize provincial coordination and leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a leadership table or council. b. Strengthen navigation and asset-mapping tools. <p>Reduce loneliness and social isolation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify shared priorities. b. Support community-based connection initiatives. <p>Contribute to pan-Canadian advocacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support national communications. b. Engage in pan-Canadian learning.
<p>Ontario</p>	<p>Advance national policy and funding advocacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Include CBSS in federal transfers. b. Implement a National Ageing-in-Place Strategy. c. Strengthen navigation portals. <p>Strengthen regionally responsive service delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Address rural and remote priorities. b. Expand mental health supports. c. Reduce stigma through inclusive practices.

	<p>Invest in system infrastructure and workforce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Standardize data and coordination. b. Invest in navigation and workforce capacity.
Quebec	<p>Stabilize the sector through sustainable investment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advance long-term funding. b. Strengthen workforce and volunteer supports. <p>Improve data, digital, and navigation systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reduce service gaps. b. Strengthen impact measurement. <p>Embed equity-centred leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ensure Indigenous leadership and language access. b. Centre older adults' voices.
New Brunswick	<p>Advance national public engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop public awareness campaigns. b. Strengthen provincial representation in federal structures.
Nova Scotia	<p>Strengthen provincial coordination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish coordination mechanisms and support shared planning. <p>Expand community-based wellbeing supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Scale isolation-reduction programs. b. Strengthen community partnerships. <p>Support CORE Atlantic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Contribute to a regional CORE platform. b. Link to pan-Canadian initiatives.
Newfoundland and Labrador	<p>Establish a provincial CBSS Leadership Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strengthen coordination. b. Link to pan-Canadian efforts. <p>Improve information systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strengthen digital and non-digital sharing. b. Build on social prescribing. <p>Advance priority actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve transportation. b. Expand caregiver and mental health supports. c. Strengthen intergenerational engagement.
Prince Edward Island	<p>Strengthen provincial coordination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish a CBSS network. b. Ensure national representation. <p>Build shared understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conduct an environmental scan. <p>Engage in Atlantic and pan-Canadian collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Participate in Atlantic CORE. b. Contribute to national working groups.

<p>Northwest Territories</p>	<p>Strengthen territorial coordination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve communication across remote and Indigenous communities. b. Ensure inclusion in national decision-making. <p>Improve access through culturally appropriate models:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expand digital and in-person access. b. Support Indigenous language access. c. Expand local training. <p>Continue elder abuse prevention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sustain community-based training.
<p>Yukon</p>	<p>Strengthen coordination and communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve cross-community coordination. b. Use flexible mechanisms. <p>Improve digital and non-digital access:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Address digital inclusion. b. Strengthen community hubs. <p>Contribute to pan-Canadian CBSS development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Participate in national learning and CORE. b. Leverage strong relationships.