



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

April 21-23, 2025

HelpAge

Canada

Executive Summary

HelpAge Canada convened a series of conversations on strengthening community-based seniors' services (CBSS) in Yukon from April 21 to 23, 2025, with discussions held in Whitehorse and Haines Junction. These conversations brought together service providers, community leaders, and older adults to explore what a strong CBSS sector could look like in Yukon and how Yukon communities might contribute to a Pan-Canadian approach.

Participants described a range of challenges facing the sector, including stagnant and insufficient funding, limited staffing and volunteer capacity, digital exclusion, and policies that often reflect urban perspectives more than rural or remote realities. Some participants also spoke about perceived inequities in how services and supports are accessed, highlighting the need for more open dialogue and transparent approaches to service delivery. At the same time, the conversations surfaced clear strengths. Staff and volunteers are highly committed, shared community spaces allow for meaningful programming, and there is an evident culture of care and connection. Yukon's smaller size was seen as an advantage, allowing change to happen more quickly than in larger jurisdictions. Participants expressed interest in increasing coordination between communities and building on existing relationships.

Looking ahead, participants envisioned a future in which organizations have stable, multi-year funding, improved digital and non-digital access, and stronger coordination between urban and rural areas. They described a sector that is collaborative, equitable, and shaped by the lived experiences of older adults across the territory. Participants also reflected on what a successful Pan-Canadian CBSS sector might require. Priorities included policy changes that address rural and northern realities, better cross-jurisdictional learning, sustainable funding frameworks, and a national voice that centres equity and reflects the diversity of older adults. Success would be demonstrated by more consistent access to services, improved coordination across governments, and stronger collaboration among CBSS organizations.

Overall, these conversations highlighted both the resilience and the fragility of the sector in Yukon. Participants were clear that progress will depend on steady investment, inclusive policymaking, and continued opportunities for communities to share their experiences across the territory and with partners nationally.

Introduction

HelpAge Canada convened a series of conversations in Yukon from April 21 to 23, 2025, to explore how community-based seniors' services (CBSS) could be strengthened within the territory and how Yukon communities might contribute to a broader Pan-Canadian approach. These conversations took place in Whitehorse and Haines Junction and brought together service providers, community leaders, and older adults who shared their experiences, observations, and hopes for the future of the sector.

The sessions created space to reflect on the current realities facing CBSS in Yukon, consider what a strong and coordinated sector could look like, and discuss how local insights can inform national efforts. Participants heard a presentation from the National Institute on Ageing to help situate Yukon within the wider Canadian landscape. They also engaged in two working discussions, one focused on the context of Yukon and the other centred on a Pan-Canadian vision for CBSS.

For the purpose of these conversations, the working definition of the CBSS sector was: *“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.”*

These conversations aimed to build understanding of what a Yukon CBSS sector could look like, identify opportunities for stronger coordination across communities, and explore how Yukon perspectives can contribute to the development of a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.

Purpose and objectives

The discussion employed a community development approach, ensuring the voices of older people and service providers informed Yukon 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, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and British Columbia.

The objectives of the session were:

- To increase participant understanding of a provincial CBSS sector.
- To build a vision for a provincial CBSS sector in Yukon.
- To motivate participants to invest time and energy in developing a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- To help participants see themselves as part of a Pan-Canadian sector.
- To contribute to and inform the development of a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.
- To identify next steps at the community, provincial, and Pan-Canadian levels.

Discussion questions can be found in Appendix A.

Findings: Yukon CBSS Sector

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

Challenges

Participants highlighted the overwhelming strain of limited and stagnant funding. In Haines Junction, the local organization receives just \$39,000 annually—a figure that has not increased in years. Human resource capacity is another pressing issue, with overburdened staff and a shortage of volunteers, many of whom are aging and burned out. Digital access is a barrier across the territory. Many older adults lack internet access, computers, or the digital literacy required to access online resources. Even when internet is available, it is unreliable in some communities, impeding communication and access to information. In remote communities, participants expressed feeling overlooked in policy decisions, with a sense that

programs and services are often designed with urban contexts in mind. They noted that reliance on online tools can unintentionally exclude those without reliable internet access or digital literacy. Discussions also surfaced complex equity concerns related to access to subsidized housing and services. In both Haines Junction and Whitehorse, participants reflected on perceived differences in how Indigenous and non-Indigenous older adults are supported. These conversations highlighted the need for open dialogue and a more inclusive, transparent approach to service delivery that fosters trust and community cohesion.

Opportunities

Despite the challenges, participants emphasized the potential for increased collaboration among CBSS organizations in Whitehorse. While some coordination already exists, a shared interest in pooling resources and enhancing services is evident. Merging or co-locating services has been considered, though past efforts have been hindered by internal barriers. Smaller population size in Yukon was also viewed as an opportunity.

“It’s easier to change the direction of a canoe than a cruise ship.”

With the right leadership and investment, change could be implemented more swiftly than in larger jurisdictions. Participants also expressed a desire to increase coordination between urban and remote communities, though they acknowledged logistical and capacity barriers. Strategic partnerships and shared administrative supports could make collaboration more feasible.

Strengths

The commitment and resilience of existing staff and volunteers stood out as a strength. Even in underfunded and understaffed contexts, service providers manage to deliver vital programs, including foot care, social engagement, and system navigation. Existing infrastructure, like the shared space used by the Yukon Council on Ageing and Golden Age Seniors Society, supports daily programming and serves as a community hub. While space is limited, it demonstrates a foundation on which further services could be built. There is also clear recognition of the need for equity and fairness, even amid tensions. Discussions reflected a willingness to engage in difficult conversations and a shared desire for more inclusive and transparent approaches to funding and service delivery.

Looking ahead to a desired state

In 3–5 years, participants envisioned a CBSS sector that is well-funded, collaborative, and equitable. Service providers would have sustainable funding and adequate staffing, allowing them to plan strategically rather than operate in crisis mode. Digital inequities would be addressed through infrastructure improvements and non-digital service pathways. Government engagement would be inclusive of rural and remote perspectives, and public policy would reflect the lived realities of older adults across Yukon. Participants hoped to see increased collaboration among CBSS organizations, improved equity in service provision, and a stronger voice for older adults in decision-making.

Table 1: Summary of Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and a Desired Future State

Strengths	Challenges
- Dedicated staff and volunteers - Shared community spaces - Social engagement programs - A culture of care and service - Recognition of equity issues	- Stagnant funding and small envelopes - Volunteer burnout and lack of replacements - Digital exclusion and unreliable internet - Urban-rural policy disconnect - Internal tensions around equity and identity
Opportunities	Future state
- Increased collaboration in Whitehorse - Shared administration and space - Faster change possible in small jurisdictions - Cross-community coordination - Strategic advocacy and storytelling	- Sustainable core funding - Reliable digital and non-digital access - Coordinated urban–rural service delivery - Inclusive, equity-informed policy - Stronger voice for older adults

Findings: Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector

The second working session examined how Yukon-based perspectives and priorities can inform and strengthen the Pan-Canadian CBSS sector.

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

To support Yukon’s vision for a strengthened Pan-Canadian CBSS sector, participants highlighted the need for:

- Cross-jurisdictional knowledge sharing and collaboration
- A national advocacy strategy that includes rural, remote, and northern realities
- Policy change focused on sustainable funding and digital inclusion
- Equitable access to services and the inclusion of all seniors, regardless of identity or geography
- A unified national voice to amplify regional needs and successes

Participants emphasized that Pan-Canadian efforts must center equity, recognize the diversity of older adults, and include those most often left out of decision-making.

Defining success and determining impact

Success would mean that organizations are no longer struggling to survive but have the resources to thrive. It would include:

- Stable, multi-year funding
- Better government coordination and policy coherence
- Services that are accessible regardless of geography, income, or identity
- Stronger collaboration across the CBSS sector
- Metrics and stories that reflect both the impact and value of older adults in society

Summary and Conclusion

The conversations in Yukon highlighted both the significant strengths within the CBSS sector and the real pressures that organizations and communities are navigating. Participants spoke about the dedication of staff and volunteers, the strong sense of community connection, and the willingness of people across the territory to come together to reflect on how supports for older adults can be strengthened. These strengths create a solid foundation for future progress and contribute to a sense of possibility about what could be achieved with the right support.

At the same time, participants were candid about the persistent challenges of limited and stagnant funding, volunteer fatigue, staffing shortages, and the realities of digital exclusion in many parts of the territory. Policies and programs that do not always align with the experiences of rural and remote communities add further strain. These pressures make it difficult for organizations to plan for the long term and can leave them operating in a constant state of response. Despite these challenges, participants expressed optimism about the potential for more coordinated efforts within Yukon and across the country. Yukon's smaller size and strong relationships offer opportunities for quicker collaboration and more direct engagement with decision-makers. Improving digital and non-digital access, strengthening communication between communities, and ensuring Indigenous and rural perspectives remain central were seen as meaningful steps forward.

Looking nationally, participants expressed interest in contributing to a Pan-Canadian CBSS sector that supports shared learning, amplifies regional and northern experiences, and promotes more consistent policy and funding approaches. They saw value in connecting Yukon's insights to a broader movement focused on equitable, community-rooted supports for older adults.

Overall, the conversations reflected a sector that is both stretched and full of potential. By investing in relationships, equitable systems, and the community wisdom already present in Yukon, there is a clear opportunity to build a stronger, more connected sector where older adults can access the supports they need to age well in their communities.