

# CLAIMING OUR SPACE, *Naming our Future*

June 2nd to 4th, 2024 | Ottawa, ON

**Report on the 2024 National  
Community-Based Seniors' Services  
(CBSS) Sector Summit**



**HelpAge  
Canada**

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# Introduction

HelpAge Canada is pleased to present its report on the inaugural Community-Based Seniors' Services (CBSS) Sector Summit – *Claiming our Space, Naming our Future* – which was held in Ottawa from June 2nd to 4th, 2024.

This report provides background on the CBSS sector in Canada and the events that led to the development of a national CBSS Sector Summit. The Summit brought together CBSS organizations to engage on the sector's needs, priorities, and goals, and this report summarizes what was shared, highlighting the resounding enthusiasm communities expressed to unite and take a more coordinated approach to solidifying the important role that CBSS organizations play in supporting healthy aging in Canada. This report concludes with an introduction to the Canadian Interim Community Leadership Council, who, upon careful reflection of what was learned at the Summit, will harness those insights to inform next steps for the sector to take together.



# Claiming Our Space:

## About the CBSS Sector in Canada

Community-based seniors' services (CBSS) have often been defined as "all non-profit and municipal agencies that offer low-barrier programs to seniors in seven core areas: nutritional supports; affordable housing; health and wellness; physical activity; cultural, educational, and recreational programs; information, referral, and advocacy; and transportation." CBSS organizations are found from coast to coast to coast in Canada — from the far northern community of Rankin Inlet to the big city of Vancouver, or in one of the many small towns dotting the coast on P.E.I., these local organizations provide essential programs and services to older people in their communities. They are at the heart of ensuring members of their community have opportunities to continue to engage and contribute.

Most CBSS organizations in Canada accept the challenge of meeting needs in their community despite being largely unrecognized and underfunded for their critical work. Two provinces, however, have made significant strides in

developing provincial sectors to help CBSS organizations connect with one another, share resources and best practices, and advocate in a unified voice: British Columbia and Alberta. These sectors have developed successful provincial government partnerships that fund healthy aging programs and established regional CBSS leadership councils. In addition, both provinces launched online knowledge hubs called "Collaborative Online Resources and Education" or *CORE*, that serve as a centralized directory for CBSS organizations in their respective provinces and provide CBSS organizations with data and academic resources, information on funding opportunities, and serve as a platform to host communities of practice, topical discussion groups, and more. Other successful CBSS networks that have made great progress in increasing collaboration have emerged across nearly every region in Canada, all serving to strengthen support for CBSS organizations and help older adults in Canada to age in place.

Inspired by these past successes, HelpAge Canada initiated conversations with community partners to understand their interest in formalizing a national CBSS sector. It quickly became clear that there is a strong desire for more regional, provincial, territorial, and national collaboration amongst CBSS organizations. We heard many times about the enhanced role that CBSS organizations felt they could play to benefit their communities, the bigger difference these organizations knew they could make with and for the older people they serve, and of the positive change that would be realized for the staff, volunteers, and partners that help them execute their work — if they were better recognized, funded and supported.

A National Advisory Committee and Summit Executive Team, made up of community leaders and change makers from every region in Canada, convened in 2022 to plan the Summit, laying the foundations for the sector development work ahead.

From June 2nd to 4th, 2024, hundreds of these community change makers gathered in Ottawa, ON, and online for the inaugural CBSS Sector Summit. Through community-driven processes, participants boldly embarked on conversations to **claim their space and name their future** as a national sector.



# Naming Our Future:

## The Inaugural CBSS Sector Summit

The joint Summit and Advisory Committee identified four goals for the Summit:

1. **Bring** together CBSS sector leaders, thought leaders in healthy aging, and allies
2. **Establish** the sector's needs and priorities
3. **Create** a common vision for the future of the sector
4. **Declare** the sector's role and identity in the Canadian aging landscape



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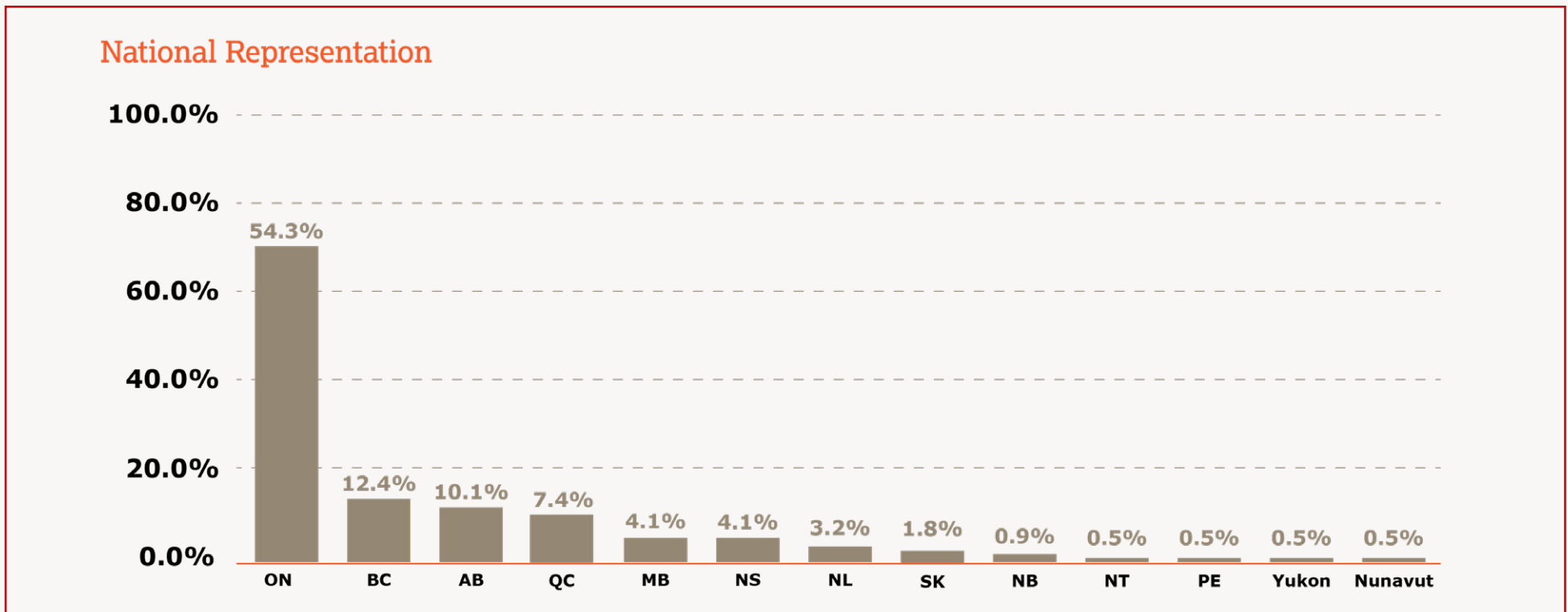
In all aspects, the sessions, speakers, and activities at the Summit focused on fostering meaningful discussions, knowledge-sharing, and collaborations, which would support the realization of these goals and ensure that future actions within the sector will be led **by community, for community**.

## Summit Reach

The Summit represented the inaugural gathering of CBSS leaders **from every province and territory across Canada** to support the development of a national CBSS

sector. 323 participants attended the Summit, with 269 participants (83%) attending in-person and 54 participants (17%) joining virtually.

While the majority of participants represented community-based seniors' services (CBSS) organizations, nearly a dozen types of organizations across several sectors were represented at the Summit including healthcare organizations; academia and research; government at the federal, provincial and local levels; private sector businesses and other types of organizations committed to supporting CBSS organizations and healthy aging in Canada.



## Ensuring Equitable Access and Diverse Representation at the Summit

### Bursaries

To ensure that a diverse group of CBSS organizations of varying sizes and program areas had the opportunity to take part in the Summit, HelpAge Canada worked with partners to secure bursaries to offset travel, attendance, and lodging costs. Bursary recipients were selected with consideration to the barriers they faced to attending the Summit, and special consideration was given to include smaller organizations, those from remote or historically under-represented areas in Canada, and those serving marginalized or underserved groups.

### Language Inclusion

It is critical that, as a pan-Canadian sector, we support engagement in both official languages. Live English to French translation was provided throughout the Summit to allow participants to participate in their preferred language, various sessions and parts of the World Café were conducted in French, and, as much as possible, materials and communications before, during and after the event were released in both English and French. Bilingualism remains a priority for HelpAge Canada and the Interim Community Leadership Council.

The majority of participants (89%) speak English as their primary language, 9% of participants speak French, and the remainder speak Chinese or Polish.

### Accessibility Considerations

Recognizing the importance of accessibility, the venue for the Summit was chosen based on its accessible features and central location. Live captioning was also provided online and on-screen at the event, and participants were provided space at registration to indicate any dietary requirements or accessibility needs they may have.

Moving forward, HelpAge Canada will continue to explore opportunities to improve the accessibility of all sector development work and events.





## Summit Design and Program

In support of the goals of establishing the sector's needs and priorities, creating a common vision for the future, and declaring the sector's identity, the inaugural CBSS Sector Summit had the following key agenda components:



**48 speakers**



**42 exhibitors**



**23 organizers**

There were  
**21 workshops**  
on the following  
key themes

**7**

on sector development

**6**

on initiatives and best practices

**3**

on elder abuse

**1**

on social isolation

**1**

on age-friendly communities

**2**

on advocacy, policy, networking, and collective impact

**1**

on minority language communities

There were **4 plenary presentations:**


**CBSS101 – Dare to Dream It, Dare to Do It: A Story of the CBSS Sector in Canada.** Kahir Lalji (United Way of BC), Mariam Elghahuagi (Healthy Aging Alberta), Annika Voltan (Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia), and Gregor Sneddon (HelpAge Canada) shared their experiences of watching the CBSS sector develop across Canada and provided insights on the road ahead.

**Terry Sheehan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Federal Minister of Labour and Seniors,** expressed gratitude for the personal connection CBSS organizations give older Canadians, helping them to age with dignity.

**What is Sector Development?** Vinod Rajasekaran, CEO of Future of Good, and Annika Voltan, Executive Director of Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia, challenged participants to use imagination and courage to define the next decade of social purpose, including building trust, defining new values, and taking a decolonized approach to community-based care.

**Aging in the Right Place.** Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Mount Sinai and the University Health Network Hospitals, highlighted the need to support older adults to age in the right place and challenged participants to consider what the CBSS sector's role is in shifting thinking, promoting independence, dignity, and respect, and building sustainability through collaborations and partnership.





There were 5 lightning round presentations, moderated by Laura Tamblyn Watts (CanAge), profiling CBSS programs, successes, and best practices from across Canada:

**1 Elder Abuse and Ageism.**

Anne Caines, Ressources Ethno-culturelles Contre l'Abus envers les Aîné(e)s, Respecting Elders Communities (RECAA), explored how the immigrant framework contributes to abuse through isolation, financial and social dependency, language, and lack of knowledge. RECAA takes a non-verbal approach to promoting healthy and dignified aging through performance arts.

**2 Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and the Ambleside Oasis Pilot Project.**

Sue Garvey, Queen's University, described how naturally occurring retirement communities collectively meet the needs of older adults and empower them to age in place through self-determination and community connections.

**3 Seniors Centre Without Walls.**

Ornella Gatore, The Good Companions Seniors Centre, shared the impact of free group phone programs in 14 languages, offered through microgrants and formal partnerships with municipalities and community agencies. The program has helped older people to feel less lonely and gain a sense of belonging from wherever they are.

**4 Social Isolation and Loneliness.**

Lyne Ouellet, St. Thomas University, described a community connector pilot project that connects seniors to resources, one conversation at a time, through a 211 information hub.

**5 Age-Friendly, Dementia Friendly, and Compassionate Communities.**

Diane Weidner, McGill University's Dementia Education Program, described a shift in thinking about dementia-friendly communities, with the key ingredients being ambassadors with lived experience, support from academic institutions, and collaboration with multidisciplinary teams.



We welcomed two special guest speakers that served to inspire participants and highlight public support for the work that they do, as well as a featured theatre performance by RECAA:



The **Rt. Honourable Adrienne Clarkson**, 26th Governor General of Canada, shared personal insights around growing older and the importance of fighting for all Canadians to be treated equally, along with her own rules for aging: take care of yourself, respect yourself, dress every day as though you are seeing someone, always eat properly, be involved in your community, and remember – the fight is what keeps you alive!



We were thrilled to have **Mary Walsh** acting as the emcee for the evening, who brought the house down with her signature humour and stage presence. As an older person herself, Mary also spoke to the importance of the work CBSS organizations are doing to amplify the voices of older people and support them.



During the banquet's intermission, **RECAA** performed a non-verbal re-enactment of an older person's experience in a long-term care home as a person with a language barrier. The performance highlighted the impact this kind of barrier can have on older adults, their families, and their care providers.

# Keystone Event: The World Café

For Community, By Community

The World Café – a facilitated day of brainstorming and connecting – focused on identifying the needs and priorities, challenges and common concerns within communities, areas for action, opportunities for working more collaboratively, and most importantly, the potential positive impact of a national CBSS sector on healthy aging in Canada.

Insights and actions arising from the two-step process (exploration and deep dive sessions) provided an understanding of potential next steps on the path to the establishment of a unified, coordinated, and formalized national CBSS sector.

*Keep reading to see what major areas for change were identified by the World Café participants.*

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## Unified Voice to Amplify Advocacy of the Sector

It is crucial that the sector speaks in a unified voice to amplify the collective impact of CBSS organizations. Government relations efforts must focus on engaging governments to influence policy decisions that impact the lives of older adults in Canada and that lead to securing sustainable resources that sustain the work of CBSS organizations. The full diversity of CBSS organizations (capacity, size, and experiences) must be represented as the sector engages with stakeholders and establishes its identity and influence in Canadian society.

## Mobilization and Involvement of Older Adults

As awareness of the sector grows, we must intentionally include older adults' voices in conversations around sector development work and policy decisions that affect them and encourage older adults to take action in their own communities to create a stronger healthy aging landscape in Canada.

## Ageism

Ageism is a significant structural and institutional challenge that requires a systemic approach to address its impacts on society. It affects older adults' quality of care, access to services, and contributes to loneliness and isolation. Ageism also leads to care work being undervalued, impacts recruitment to properly maintain older adult programs and services, and augments the stigma and self-shaming among older persons seeking programs, services, and opportunities to continue to engage and contribute. Collaborative work as a sector to combat ageism could help to change cultural perceptions around aging and foster more support for the work of CBSS organizations.

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## **Social Isolation and Loneliness**

Social isolation and loneliness are significant challenges for older adults, particularly in rural areas where there may be fewer opportunities for social interaction and less infrastructure (i.e., transportation barriers) to support connectedness. Language barriers and digital literacy challenges further limit access to information and services. More resources at a sector-wide level to address language, digital literacy, and educational needs can help improve access for older adults to community-based programs and services.

## **Data and Evaluation**

A significant lack of available desegregated data, particularly at the community level, and the lack of program evaluation data and best practices hampers effective decision-making, service provision, and support for advocacy initiatives. Standardized data collection, research, and information sharing across the sector can improve service and program delivery, promote collaboration and help reverse the trending challenges impacting older adults.

## **Collaboration**

Siloed and fragmented service delivery presents significant challenges for older adults, forcing CBSS organizations to compete with one another to access the same funding and hampering collaboration, and no sector-wide information hubs for CBSS organizations or older adults

and care providers seeking information about programs and services to refer to have yet been formally recognized or adopted. Provincial successes in creating centralized, scalable directories and information hubs can serve as a model for increasing utilization of national approaches.

## **Human Resources**

Finding and retaining qualified paid staff is a significant challenge for CBSS organizations, which is only exacerbated in rural areas. Staff burnout and lack of viable professional development opportunities are major concerns; staff are overburdened, leading to high turnover rates. Volunteers, who make up a significant part of the workforce in the CBSS sector, are also difficult to recruit and retain, and they require training and support which necessitates additional resources that are often already limited. Addressing funding challenges across the sector and raising awareness of the CBSS sector could improve staffing, volunteerism, and retention for CBSS organizations.

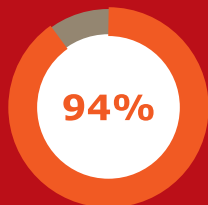
## **Funding**

Many CBSS organizations face financial constraints that impact their ability to deliver services, and for some, these funding constraints are significant. The shared frustrations around sustainable and flexible funding – which is usually either short-term or difficult to secure – present significant burdens for organizations. Increased, sustainable, and more easily accessible funding can better support the work of CBSS organizations and the development of the sector.

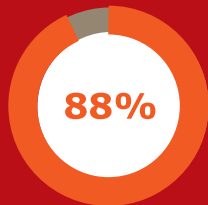
# The Road Ahead:

## Continuing CBSS Sector Development

Overall, Summit participants strongly expressed their desire to develop and participate in a unified, coordinated national CBSS sector, and to see increased coordination in their own provinces and territories.



**94%** of participants agreed that they are likely to support the development of their provincial CBSS sector and that they are likely to support the development of a national CBSS sector.



**88%** of participants see their organization as being part of the national CBSS sector.



**80%** of participants indicated that they recognize how they can contribute to the development of a national CBSS sector.





United Way

The Summit's purpose was to act not as a stand-alone event, but as a catalyst for the CBSS sector's growth and development. This legacy moment brought together community changemakers to share their needs and priorities, put a spotlight on the unique identity of the CBSS sector and its critical role in our society, and carve out a vision for the sector's future and the future of aging in Canada. Now, those insights will be turned into action, with work being led **for community, by community.**



## Introducing the Canadian CBSS Interim Community Leadership Council

In January 2024, HelpAge Canada placed an open call for nominations for the first national leadership council for the CBSS sector – the Canadian CBSS Interim Community Leadership Council (ICLC) – and selected two community leaders, Karen McDonald (Healthy Aging Alberta) and Marta Hajek (Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario) to co-chair the council. The ICLC's 'interim' term of eighteen months will focus on affirming its mandate, terms of reference, strategic directions, and most importantly, establishing the social license of Canada's community organizations to represent their voices. To ensure representation from all regions, provinces and territories at this national table, the ICLC will continue to recruit new members until all regional vacancies are filled.

## National Consultations and Collective Action

Building on what we heard at the Summit, HelpAge Canada with the support of the ICLC will embark on a series of **provincial and territorial consultations**, both online and in community, to delve even further into the challenges and issues, opportunities and needs of the sector, and to ensure all community voices are captured in a respectful and inclusive manner. The consultations will amplify and raise awareness of the various local and regional contexts from across the CBSS sector in Canada. Participation across the entire sector is foundational in ensuring the work being done is truly **for community, by community**.

The insights gained from these community consultations will serve as a framework for designing the elements and priorities of a future roadmap, that will inform our collective actions over the next three years.



To learn more about the Canadian CBSS Interim Community Leadership Council and read member bios, **CLICK HERE.**



To stay up to date on the latest news from the Leadership Council and from HelpAge Canada, **sign up for HelpAge Canada's CBSS Sector Newsletter.**



Back row (left to right): Vi Sorenson, Daisy Au, Karen Willy, Bev Buckway, Sue Hesjedahl, Deborah Simon, Erica Botner, Shirley Ann Burdock, Holly Schick, Anita Newling, Connie Newman.

Front Row (left to right): Judy Beranger, Marta Hajek, Karen MacInnis, Karen McDonald, Annika Voltan, Robert Goluch. Absent: Pierre Lynch.

# Thank you to our Summit Sponsors

HelpAge Canada would like to extend its sincerest thanks to the sponsors who helped make this event possible.



The Muttart Foundation



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