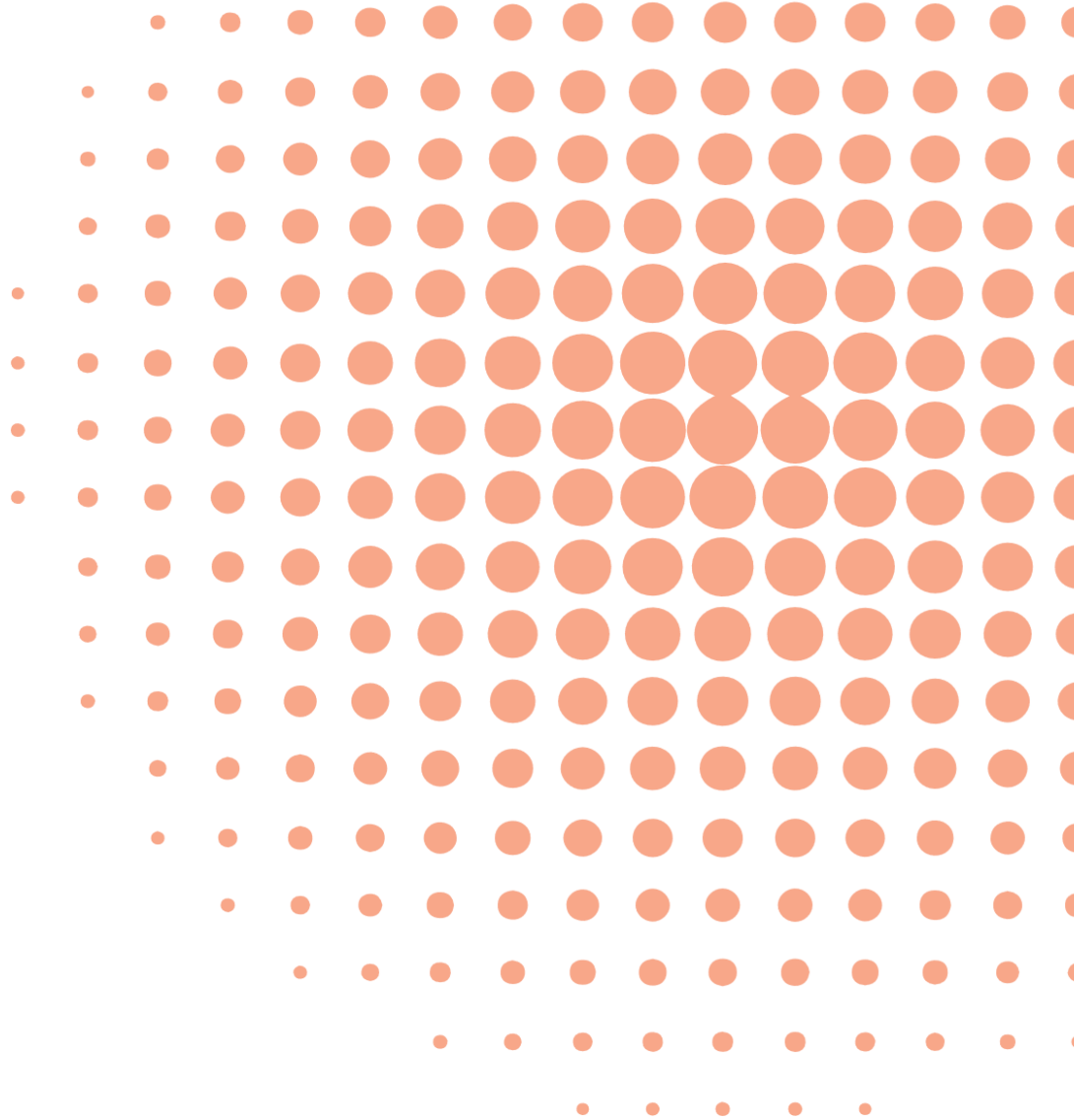




**Report Back:
World Café Session on the National Community
Leadership Council Strategic Plan**

Tuesday June 9, 2026



Purpose and Context

On June 9, 2026, HelpAge Canada hosted a World Café as part of the 2026 National CBSS Sector Summit in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This session was intended to give the Community-Based Seniors' Services (CBSS) sector an opportunity to review and validate the draft National Community Leadership Council (NCLC) Strategic Plan.

The CBSS sector is a diverse and essential network of community organizations, municipalities, volunteers and other partners that deliver non-clinical, preventive and supportive programs and services for older adults across Canada. Rooted in local communities and responsive to local needs, the sector supports ageing in place, social inclusion, health and well-being, and a sense of belonging by addressing the practical, social, emotional and physical needs of older adults that are often beyond the reach of traditional health care systems.

The NCLC is a leadership body representing the pan-Canadian CBSS sector. Its members are leaders and senior representatives from CBSS organizations across the country, all of whom bring diverse regional, organizational, and community perspectives to national discussions. The Council's role is to strengthen national coordination, identify and advance shared sector priorities, and ensure that national direction remains connected to the realities and priorities of communities across Canada.

The NCLC Strategic Plan builds on more than two years of national, provincial, and territorial engagement, including the 2024 National CBSS Sector Summit, where CBSS leaders identified the need for stronger national coordination, shared sector identity, and a more visible voice for community-based supports for older adults. This momentum was carried forward through the work of the Interim NCLC, which helped guide governance discussions and strategic planning.

Provincial and territorial consultations also provided the primary foundation for the strategy, surfacing common priorities across regions, including sustainable funding, sector recognition, workforce and volunteer sustainability, equity and Indigenous community engagement, stronger data and evidence, and improved collaboration across systems. The consultations also highlighted important regional differences, including the distinct realities of rural, remote, northern, Francophone, Indigenous, newcomer, and equity-deserving communities.

Those findings informed the Pan-Canadian CBSS Sector Calls to Action and were further refined through governance design work and the February 2026 strategic planning session with the Interim NCLC. Through that process, the broad input from across the sector was organized into three proposed areas of national focus:

- Advancing Sector Issues (funding gaps, workforce shortages, uneven recognition in health and social systems, and widening resource disparities)
- Increasing Sector Understanding
- Strengthening Sector Collaboration

The World Café was designed as a validation and refinement step. Participants were not being asked to respond to a strategy created apart from the sector. Rather, they were invited to test whether the draft plan accurately reflected what had already been heard, identify what needed to be strengthened, and advise how the NCLC should move from strategic direction to accountable implementation.

The World Café focused on:

1. Whether the proposed direction reflects sector priorities;
2. What needs to be refined, clarified, or strengthened;
3. What would build buy-in, readiness, and early momentum; and
4. How the NCLC should remain connected, transparent, and accountable to the broader sector.

Process

More than 150 CBSS sector leaders and allies engaged in a facilitated World Café process, joining both in-person and virtually, using Strategic Plan Validation Canvases. Each canvas was structured around the following four guiding questions:

1. **Overall resonance with the strategy**
What feels most important, clear, or energizing? Which pillars, outcomes, or ideas resonate most with your community or region, and why?
2. **Gaps, questions, and risks**
What is missing, unclear, or needs refinement? What risks should the Permanent NCLC and HelpAge Canada consider before finalizing next steps?
3. **Buy-in, readiness, and early wins**
What would help your organization, region, or community see itself in this plan? What early wins would build confidence and momentum?
4. **Governance and accountability to the sector**
How should the Permanent NCLC stay connected, transparent, and accountable to the broader CBSS sector across regions?

Participants discussed each question in table or Zoom groups and captured their feedback directly on the canvases. They also participated in a “dotmocracy” exercise, placing dot stickers or virtual pins on the ideas they considered to be of particular importance.

The canvases were then transcribed, coded, and themed to identify areas of strong alignment, recurring concerns, implementation considerations, and emerging priorities.

The themes summarized below reflect both the content of the discussions and the ideas participants prioritized most strongly.

What We Heard

1. Strong Resonance with Collaboration, Partnerships, and Coordination

Participants strongly supported a coordinated national approach that would break down silos, improve navigation, reduce duplication, and strengthen connections across local, regional, provincial, territorial, and national efforts.

They emphasized that this coordination should extend beyond CBSS to include health, housing, transportation, social services, governments, funders, researchers, Indigenous organizations, community groups, and other sectors that contribute to ageing well in community.

Participants also stressed that national coordination should not replace local or regional leadership. Instead, it should amplify existing work, connect organizations currently working in isolation, and create shared structures that help the sector act with greater alignment.

2. Shared Language, Sector Identity, and Public Understanding Are Foundational

Participants noted that CBSS is still not well understood by governments, funders, health systems, the public, adjacent sectors, and sometimes even by organizations working within or near the sector. Common language, shared definitions, and consistent messaging were flagged as necessary foundations for collaboration, advocacy, data collection, public recognition, and funding.

Participants highlighted the need to clearly communicate:

- What CBSS is;
- What types of organizations and services are included;
- How CBSS contributes to ageing well in community;
- Why CBSS should be recognized as essential social infrastructure; and
- How CBSS complements, but is distinct from, health and continuing care systems.

Participants also noted that some organizations supporting older adults may not identify themselves as part of the CBSS sector, creating both a communication and inclusion challenge.

3. Evidence, Data, Storytelling, and Measuring Impact Are Vital

Participants strongly supported the Strategic Plan's emphasis on research, data, shared evidence, and community impact. They called for common definitions, shared data approaches, and practical ways to measure impact. At the same time, they noted that evidence must extend beyond quantitative data to include stories, lived experience, first-voice accounts, regional examples, and qualitative evidence.

Participants saw evidence as necessary for:

- Informing policy and funding decisions;
- Demonstrating the value of CBSS;
- Identifying gaps and unmet needs;
- Improving public understanding;
- Supporting accountability;
- Helping organizations learn from one another.

Participants also cautioned that data collection and evaluation should support rather than burden CBSS organizations and should not simply reproduce health-system reporting requirements.

4. Sustainable, Flexible, Needs-Based Funding Remains Critical

Participants emphasized the need for sustainable, long-term, flexible funding and raised concerns about short-term pilot funding, staff and volunteer burnout, under-resourced grassroots organizations, and

limited operational capacity. They linked funding directly to recognition: if CBSS is seen as essential social infrastructure, it must be resourced as such.

Participants also called for equitable, needs-based funding approaches. They cautioned against funding formulas that rely only on population size or per-capita distribution, noting that rural, remote, northern, Indigenous, newcomer, and underserved communities often face vastly different costs, barriers, and service gaps.

5. Inclusion, Representation, and Missing Voices Require More Clarity

Participants affirmed the importance of equity and inclusion while raising concerns about who is represented, whose voices are missing, and how engagement will continue.

Groups identified in the feedback included:

- Indigenous communities;
- Black seniors;
- LGBTQIA+ older adults;
- People with disabilities;
- Newcomers;
- Older adults in rural, remote, northern, and isolated communities;
- Francophone communities;
- Underserved populations;
- Families and caregivers;
- Grassroots and frontline organizations;
- Smaller organizations not already connected to mature provincial networks.

Participants called for clearer pathways to participation, so the work does not become limited to already-connected organizations or provinces with more developed infrastructure. Questions were also raised about the NCLC itself, including who sits on the Council, how members are selected, and how members will remain accountable to communities and organizations not directly at the table.

6. Equity, Indigenous Leadership, Anti-Ageism, and Cultural Safety Must Be Operationalized

Participants supported the Strategic Plan's cross-cutting commitment to equity, Indigenous engagement, and anti-ageism, but emphasized the need to translate these commitments into practice.

The feedback called for:

- An intersectional framework;
- Cultural safety and cultural humility;
- Sustained centering of Indigenous insights and ways of knowing;
- Multilingual research and engagement;
- Attention to power dynamics;
- Appropriate engagement with equity-deserving communities;
- Accountability for how equity commitments influence decisions.

A key concern was that equity-deserving groups could be named in the plan without a clear "how," dedicated resources, or accountability mechanisms.

7. National-to-Local Alignment Includes Honoring Provincial and Territorial Differences

Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that national efforts to strengthen the CBSS sector are aligned with provincial, territorial, regional, rural, remote, and local contexts. They noted how provinces and territories are at different stages of CBSS sector development, with some having established networks or coordinating bodies and others continuing to build sector infrastructure.

Participants highlighted the importance of building on existing provincial and territorial strengths while ensuring that jurisdictions with less established infrastructure are also supported. They noted that national priorities should remain responsive to local realities and avoid unintentionally privileging jurisdictions that are already more organized or visible.

8. Governance, Accountability, and Communication Must Be Clear

The strongest accountability request was the need for regular, transparent, two-way communication between the NCLC and the broader sector.

Participants called for:

- Regular updates and clear reporting;
- Newsletters, webinars, town halls, and roundtables;
- CORE updates;
- Progress dashboards or infographics;
- Feedback opportunities and clear pathways for community and regional feedback.

Participants also wanted greater clarity about the NCLC's governance, including roles, responsibilities, selection processes, accountability mechanisms, and how information will flow between local communities, provinces, territories, and the national Council.

There was strong support for provincial or regional communication pathways, including leadership councils or other mechanisms that could feed information up to the national level and progress back down to local communities.

9. The Strategy Is Promising and Scaled Implementation is Important

Participants generally affirmed the direction of the strategy but noted that it is ambitious. They encouraged the NCLC and HelpAge Canada to clarify scope, priorities, timelines, roles, decision-making structures, subcommittees or working groups, realistic milestones, and measures of success.

There was a strong desire for practical implementation tools, including:

- Plain-language summaries and shared messages;
- Playbooks and templates;
- Communities of practice;
- Directories or inventories;
- Agreed-upon evaluation metrics;
- Examples from early-adopter provinces;
- Timely post-Summit reports and next steps.

Three Messages to Carry Forward

The World Café feedback on the NCLC Strategic Plan can be summarized into three key messages:

1. The direction is supported.

There is strong support for building a more connected and representative national CBSS sector through stronger partnerships, collaboration, and mechanisms that elevate local, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and community voices.

2. The conditions for success need attention.

Participants emphasized the need to strengthen the foundations that will enable the strategy to succeed, including sustainable funding, sector capacity, common language, shared data and evidence, evaluation tools, and coordinated infrastructure.

3. Trust will depend on accountability.

Building trust will require continuous, transparent, two-way communication and engagement. This means reporting back regularly, sharing progress, creating meaningful feedback loops, and demonstrating how sector input is reflected in decisions and action.

Recommendations for Applying the Themes

The World Café feedback both validates the strategic direction and provides practical guidance for strengthening the Strategic Plan and its implementation. The following recommendations distinguish between refinements to the Strategic Plan itself and priorities for the subsequent work planning process, helping to translate the feedback into a phased, realistic approach to implementation.

A. Strategic Plan Refinements

Based on the feedback, the Strategic Plan should be refined to:

1. Position collaboration as both a strategic priority and an implementation principle.

Clarify that the NCLC will work through partnerships, regional relationships, shared learning, and sector feedback mechanisms, with national coordination intended to amplify rather than replace local, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and community leadership.

2. Make shared language, sector identity, and public understanding more explicit.

Identify common CBSS language and definitions as an early priority and clarify what constitutes the CBSS sector, how it contributes to ageing well in community, and how it complements but remains distinct from health and continuing care systems.

3. Operationalize the cross-cutting equity lens.

Clarify how equity, Indigenous leadership, anti-ageism, cultural safety, cultural humility, and intersectionality will influence priority-setting, engagement, evidence, communications, policy and funding engagement, and accountability.

4. **Clarify NCLC governance, representation, and accountability.**
Provide greater clarity on the NCLC's role, membership and selection, the distinction between representation and engagement, and mechanisms for ongoing communication, feedback, and accountability to the broader sector.
5. **Recognize provincial, territorial, and regional differences.**
Acknowledge different levels of sector development and readiness across Canada and emphasize local adaptation rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
6. **Embed evaluation and learning from the outset.**
Include practical shared outcomes, indicators, learning questions, and developmental evaluation approaches while ensuring that evidence and reporting requirements remain proportionate and do not create unnecessary burden for grassroots organizations.

B. Work Plan Priorities

The following priorities identify practical actions to advance the Strategic Plan:

1. **Governance and accountability**
 - Clarify NCLC roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures.
 - Establish regular reporting and sector feedback mechanisms.
 - Consider focused task teams or working groups to advance priority areas.
2. **Communication and sector engagement**
 - Develop plain-language materials, shared messaging, and common CBSS language.
 - Establish regular communication through channels such as CORE, newsletters, webinars, and regional networks.
 - Create clear pathways for communities and organizations to provide input and see how it informs decisions.
3. **Evidence, data, and evaluation**
 - Develop shared outcomes, indicators, and evaluation approaches.
 - Establish a focused national evidence agenda.
 - Combine quantitative data with stories, lived experience, and community knowledge.
4. **Equity and inclusion**
 - Develop targeted approaches to engage underrepresented communities and organizations that are less connected to established networks.
 - Ensure Indigenous leadership, cultural safety, intersectionality, and anti-ageism are reflected in implementation.
5. **Policy and sustainable funding**
 - Establish shared policy and funding priorities.
 - Develop a national CBSS narrative that positions CBSS as essential social infrastructure and makes the case for sustainable, flexible, and needs-based investment.
 - Build evidence that supports policy and funding engagement.

6. National-to-local alignment

- Develop mechanisms that connect national priorities with provincial, territorial, regional, rural, remote, northern, and local realities.
- Support jurisdictions and organizations at different stages of readiness.

Conclusion

The World Café feedback strongly affirmed the overall direction of the Strategic Plan while identifying key considerations for refinement and implementation. Feedback emphasized a desire for coordinated national action that is practical, inclusive, transparent, and grounded in local and regional contexts. Participants also called for a phased, achievable approach that builds sector confidence and continued alignment over time.

The recommended next steps reflect this staged progression, advancing from foundational planning and governance to shared infrastructure and longer-term sector development.

Focus	Recommended Next Steps
Establish the foundation	• Finalize the Strategic Plan and 24-month work plan • Clarify NCLC governance, roles, and accountability • Establish communication and reporting mechanisms • Develop plain-language materials and shared messaging • Identify priority areas and appropriate task teams or working groups
Build shared infrastructure	• Develop shared CBSS language and definitions • Begin evidence, outcomes, and evaluation work • Identify initial policy and sustainable funding priorities • Strengthen sector engagement • Develop practical tools and resources
Advance and learn	• Advance policy and funding engagement • Strengthen provincial, territorial, regional, and local pathways • Develop communities of practice and shared evidence products • Report back on progress, roadblocks, learning and next steps • Review and adapt the work plan based on learning and emerging priorities

The feedback gathered through the World Café confirms both the relevance of the proposed Strategic Plan and a strong appetite for collective action. Participants saw significant potential for the NCLC to strengthen collaboration, amplify sector voices, and advance shared priorities nationally, provided that implementation remains inclusive, capacity-aware and responsive to diverse regional realities. Moving forward, success will depend not only on what is achieved, but on how the work is carried out, through ongoing partnership, transparency, and a commitment to learning alongside the sector.