

Waves Of Silver - The Evolving Lives Of Seniors

There is no single definition of who is a senior . Older adults and their desire for programs and services within the City and from other governments may have different operational requirements but have the same outcomes as youth aspiring to lead autonomous, experience-rich lives.

Older adulthood can easily include people in their fifties, while the eldest of Toronto's residents may be far more active and independent than many may commonly perceive.

The challenges of aging intersect with, and amplify vulnerabilities related to a number of factors such as gender, ability, ethnicity, culture, race, language, literacy, income, education, sexuality and citizenship status.

People living with means and supports are likely to age very differently than those whose lived experience includes victimization, violence, homelessness, housing insecurity, poverty, systemic discrimination and social isolation.

On the local level, the Toronto Seniors Forum is responsible for:

Advocacy: Provide ongoing input into the implementation of the Toronto Seniors' Strategy.

Outreach: Lead the formation of a network of seniors' organizations in Toronto to collaborate on joint advocacy initiatives

Leadership and Operations: Develop and implement initiatives that will strengthen, renew and enhance the ability of TSF and its members to carry out its mandate.

Policy: Develop policy positions on issues that are relevant to seniors – including, but not limited to, those being addressed by Council and municipal committees

Technology for Inclusion and progress toward age-readiness

Literacy and comprehension can be built through visualizations, social experiments and other forms of teaching activities. Working with schools, libraries, and the disability community, we can advance greater forms of inclusion in civic education by building new and shared resources and mental models for verbal and non-verbal communication for residents of all ages and abilities.

As Mayor, I would support the initiatives of the Toronto Seniors Forum by working to bring more hybrid forms of civic participation to help older adults, such as:

- Developing partnerships to support employment of older adults who are looking for work to remain safe, independent, and productive.

- Enhancing the opportunities to mobilize the wisdom and experience of older adults
- Ensuring age-friendly components in neighborhoods, all City meeting rooms and gathering places.
- Fostering connections between the City's main advisory bodies for youth and older adults from the Toronto Seniors' Forum to identify opportunities for collaboration.
- Providing tools to help businesses and employers become more age-, disability-, and dementia-friendly.
- Providing opportunities for adults age 50+ and adults with disabilities to live with passion and purpose by expanding integration of assistive devices and technologies into public services

With sustainable funding from Toronto Public Library, we will expand partnership with CanAge to improve service coordination and access for residents experiencing frustration and difficulty navigating government-funded services.

CanAge will help older adults register for:

- City-wide updates and to update the "Services for Seniors in Toronto" directory
- Early-access to recreation, education and exercise classes for seniors
- Identify gaps in serving the social participation needs of older adults and develop strategies to reach out to them.
- Provide more opportunities for older adults and adults with disabilities to engage in the life of their community.
- Registration for repairs, property tax deferral and cancellation programs for seniors
- Registration for monthly hybrid meetings on seniors' issues programming
- "Seniors Tech Help Line" and "Library Digital Literacy" programming to gain access to low-cost refurbished devices and tech support from businesses that receive Environmental sustainability, Social wellbeing, and Good governance tax rebate
- Support development of new programming for individuals age 50+, including people with dementia.

Working with Toronto Public Library and the City's departments, I would address concerns with digital and civic literacy by developing an "age-ready" network of accessible and inclusive programs, services, and support providers.

Universal design and access

To support positive public health outcomes for older residents, we will need “Campuses of Care” to adopt the City of Seattle’s “no wrong door” policy to remove the stigma associated with seeking mental health care and meet needs effectively.

Additionally, with a new Caregiver Strategy, Toronto Public Health will work directly with families and professionals to distribute information, respite, transportation and financial support to improve access to other existing supports and services that may be available, or unknown to caregivers.

With zoning reforms, we can build “Campuses of Care” to replicate a “village approach” for supporting family caregivers without isolating them for their need to accommodate the complexities of disabilities. This will relieve caregiver stress, enhance caregiver resilience and expand social support and participation.

In the City of Toronto, a “Campus of Care” will receive the following supports:

- Award small grants for creative age-friendly/healthy aging projects through the Public Health Innovation Fund.
- Coordinate outreach to older adults among neighborhood organizations.
- Create a seniors-inclusive training curriculum aimed at increasing officer awareness around aging related issues and increasing officer capacity to connect seniors to appropriate community services.
- Develop strategies to reach more older adults who lack access to services
- Ensure that every City of Toronto employee understands the impacts of age, disability, and dementia/cognitive development
- Guided registration for finding affordable dental, eye care, prescription medications, mental illness and isolation treatment, health promotion and disease prevention programs offered by Toronto Public Health
- Increase public awareness of elder abuse and self-neglect, and enhance safety
- Increase community understanding of dementia, its effects, and ways to be supportive through mandatory public service training
- Partner with the “Animal Welfare and Biodiversity” agency to increase access to pets and pet care services, nature exploration and urban preservation activities
- Partner with meal planning and food sharing organizations to establish healthy food access initiatives for seniors living in social housing through Toronto Public Health
- Strengthened support for LGBTQ elders using inclusive programming
- Sustain fund the “Community Paramedicine” programming to provide non-emergency care and support for seniors who are high-volume 911 callers.

Making Age-Friendly Neighborhoods

From governments and local shops, to book clubs and churches, we all have a part to play in creating communities where people with dementia feel active, engaged and valued.

A city built with universal design in mind provides user experience solutions for residents of all ages and abilities, but in particular for those with mobility, cognitive, hearing, or vision challenges.

By sharing their experiences and connecting with others, they ensure that communities keep the needs of seniors at the heart of everything we do.

I would promote affordable housing and high quality home and community care delivered by not-for-profit community-based organizations through zoning reforms and ongoing assessments of the housing needs of older adults to develop action strategies.

- Amending the Official Plan to reflect age-friendliness within Universal Design principles that create innovative senior living communities and models, including dementia-friendly housing, cooperative housing for workers, and campuses of care with exclusive transportation solutions for seniors.
- Create new affordable housing and fund housing repairs and accessibility modifications for seniors by delivering federal-provincial-City funding and City incentives.
- Develop more senior-friendly outdoor fitness equipment in the design and refurbishment of parks.
- Enhance travel safety for older adults by improving first-mile/last-mile connections for seniors that walk, use bicycles or electro-mobility vehicles
- Encourage use of the Street Design Toolkit for Age-friendly buildings, pavements and walkways, repair uneven sidewalks, improve snow removal, safe pedestrian crossings and areas for adequate rest
- Integrate home sharing partnerships among colleges, and universities into RentSafeTO, to continue connecting overhoused seniors with underhoused graduate students and others.
- Promote visitability and independence through home modifications for people with disabilities

The external environment has a major impact on the mobility, independence and quality of life of older people as they go about their daily lives beyond the comfort of their homes.

Using thoughtful, universal design is planning building codes and regulations and encouraging their application not only when new buildings are constructed and public spaces are built, but when existing ones are retrofitted or improved.

A clean city with well-maintained recreational areas, ample rest areas, well-developed and safe pedestrian and building infrastructure, and a secure environment provides an ideal living environment for seniors to age-in-place in.