

AGE-FRIENDLY RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

REPORT OF THE OCTOBER 15–17, 2012 INTERNATIONAL
INVITED SYMPOSIUM
WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Report Prepared by:

Sheri Bell

Sheila Novek

Verena Menec

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Centre on Aging



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The Centre on Aging, established on July 1, 1982, is a university-wide research centre with a mandate to conduct, encourage, integrate, and disseminate research on all aspects of aging.

For further information, contact:

Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba
338 Isbister Building
Winnipeg MB Canada R3T 2N2

Phone: 204.474.8754 | Fax: 204.474.7576

E-mail: coaman@ad.umanitoba.ca

Website: www.umanitoba.ca/centres/aging

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Executive summary | 1 |
| Overview | 3 |
| Purpose of this report | 4 |
| Day one: Public forum | 5 |
| Panel: The nature of place. Can the place we live in become age-friendly? | 7 |
| Day two: Symposium | 11 |
| Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) survey | 18 |
| Breakout session one: SWOT group activity | 22 |
| Panel: Partnerships and leadership: Key ingredients for sustainability | 26 |
| Breakout session two: Cultivating a community of practice | 29 |
| Postcard project | 33 |
| Day three: Symposium | 34 |
| Greetings from Cindy Stevens (Province of Manitoba Deputy Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors, and Consumer Affairs) | 38 |
| Panel: Promoting age-friendly communities in the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) region | 38 |
| Breakout session three: Priorities for action | 41 |
| Plenary discussion | 46 |
| Conference reflections and closing remarks | 47 |
| Appendix A—Delegate and participant list | 49 |
| Appendix B—Symposium agenda | 51 |
| Appendix C—Distinguished seniors’ presentation notes | 54 |
| Appendix D—Community of practice | 64 |



Executive summary

The Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba and the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat collaborated with the International Federation on Ageing, World Health Organization, Rural Development Institute at Brandon University, and Public Health Agency of Canada to host an International Invited Symposium on Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places. The symposium, held from October 15–17, 2012 in Winnipeg Manitoba, brought together 46 delegates from 14 countries. The symposium opened with a public forum that included greetings from the Province of Manitoba's Premier, Greg Selinger and the University of Manitoba's President and Vice-Chancellor, Dr. David Barnard.

Symposium objectives were:

- Sharing promising practices and knowledge from around the world on age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.
- Identifying and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.
- Facilitating ongoing knowledge exchange and action by creating a Community of Practice within the PAHO region and globally.
- Developing a list of key priorities for action.

The symposium involved a public forum, presentations by four distinguished seniors, panel discussions and break-out sessions. The following are key priorities of action identified by symposium delegates:

Priorities for age-friendly rural and remote communities

- Engage older adults
- Combat ageism
- Foster intergenerational collaboration
- Address health care and emergency services
- Combat social isolation
- Provide funding and resources



Priorities for knowledge development and sharing

- Provide leadership.
- Develop communities of practice.
- Enhance communication.
- Create a common website/portal.
- Conduct research and program evaluation.
- Procure funding.

“Too often as I challenge authority I am dismayed at others lack of challenging authority with me.”

—Norma Drosdowech (Distinguished Senior)

“Older persons are resources, not burdens.”
—Helen Hamlin (Distinguished Senior)

“The new world order will consist of older adults—they will hold the balance of power.”
—Leo Bonnell (Distinguished Senior)

“Age-friendly communities can provide living laboratories to explore the insights of older adults...and not just present ways for communities to adapt.”
—John Cox (Distinguished Senior)



Overview

Background

The Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba and the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat collaborated with the International Federation on Ageing, World Health Organization, Rural Development Institute at Brandon University, and Public Health Agency of Canada to host an International Invited Symposium on Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places. The symposium, held from October 15–17, 2012 in Winnipeg Manitoba, brought together 46 delegates from 14 countries (See *Appendix A* for delegate list).

Objectives

Objectives of the symposium were

- Sharing promise practices and knowledge from around the world on age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.
- Identifying and analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to age-friendly rural and remote communities and places.
- Facilitating ongoing knowledge exchange and action by creating a Community of Practice within the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) region and globally.
- Developing a list of key priorities for action.

Overview of the symposium

The symposium took place over three days.

The first day involved:

- A public forum and reception to increase awareness about age-friendly rural and remote.
- Presentations from two distinguished seniors on aging and the meaning of place.
- An international panel on the nature of place and whether the place we live can become age-friendly.



The second day involved:

- A presentation on how to define rural and remote around the world.
- Presentations by two distinguished seniors on aging and the meaning of place.
- An international panel on partnerships and leadership; and how to sustain them.
- Two breakout sessions:
 - How to take advantage of strengths and opportunities and minimize weaknesses and threats in rural and remote communities and places.
 - How to cultivate and sustain a community of practice.
- Table topic dinners in the evening. Delegates self-selected a topic of interest and discussed over dinner: why it is important; key challenges that are unique in rural and remote settings; and how those challenges can be overcome. Topics included:
 - Older adults: providing age-friendly leadership
 - Intergenerational collaboration
 - Generating new knowledge
 - Social isolation: reaching the hard to reach
 - Extreme weather...+40 to -40: Older adults remaining engaged and safe
 - Community of practice: making it work

The third day involved:

- A report from each group from the table topic dinners.
- A panel presentation on promoting age-friendly communities in the PAHO region.
- A breakout session to discuss priorities for action.

The symposium agenda is provided in *Appendix B*.

Purpose of this report

This report provides a summary of the forum, presentations and panels from the symposium as well as a compilation of the issues and findings from group work and discussions.



Day one: Public forum

Introductory comments

The Director of the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba, Verena Menec welcomed the international delegates and members of the public to the forum. She explained that the symposium developed out of the Age-Friendly Community-University Research Alliance project (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) and the Province of Manitoba's Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative, which started in 2008. It also celebrated the Centre on Aging's 30th anniversary, making the centre one of the oldest aging research centres in Canada. She noted that delegates from all over the world have gathered at the symposium to share knowledge on rural and remote communities and places; to form relationships; to create a community of practice; and to develop a list of priorities for action.

The Province of Manitoba's Premier, Greg Selinger next welcomed the delegates and explained how appropriate it was that they chose to gather in Manitoba because the people of Manitoba come from over 137 different countries around the world. He went on to describe a number of Manitoba's age-friendly public policies including caregiver tax credits and funding for housing and assisted living. As well, the Manitoba government has made the province more age-friendly by ensuring there are curb cuts and that care is taken with snow removal at seniors' residences; by putting resources in place to combat elder abuse; and by developing a milestone program for age-friendly communities.

The President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manitoba, David Barnard next welcomed the delegates. He then informed the audience that critical work is being done on rural and remote age-friendly communities and places in Manitoba and that the symposium is a tremendous opportunity to learn from one another.



Norma Drosdowech—personal reflections on being a senior

“Too often as I challenge authority I am dismayed at others lack of challenging authority with me.”

—Norma Drosdowech (Distinguished Senior)

Norma Drosdowech began her presentation by saying that older and younger generations must work together to challenge authority in order for social change to occur. The challenge, she said, is to find ways for older adults to give voice to their concerns as well as give voice to their values and goals. She described her own negative hospital experience where she was treated with a lack of respect and she was left feeling quite vulnerable. She suggested that we are a long way from creating an age-friendly world if she (a long-time advocate) was unable to advocate for herself at the hospital. She ended by saying that it is imperative for the voices of older adults to be heard and responded to with respect (See *Appendix C* for Ms. Drosdowech’s presentation notes).

Helen Hamlin—personal reflections on being a senior

“Older persons are resources, not burdens.”

—Helen Hamlin (Distinguished Senior)

Helen Hamlin shared her personal mantra: Older persons are resources, not burdens and encouraged everyone to use it whenever possible. Ms. Hamlin suggested that an age-friendly community is one that treats its elders with dignity and respect; one that examines all that it has to offer, both public and private, to older persons; and one that finds ways to open the physical environment so that all persons may navigate with ease. She further highlighted the importance of educating younger persons on why communities should become age-friendly. Finally, she commented on the need to reinforce the notion of interdependence (See *Appendix C* for Ms. Hamlin’s presentation notes).



Panel: The nature of place. Can the place we live in become age-friendly?

Jane Barratt (Moderator), Helen Hamlin, Norma Drosdowech, Verena Menec, Bill Ashton, Ayuk Christian

“This is the first ever international symposium on rural and remote age-friendly and Manitoba has demonstrated its leadership to the world.”

—Jane Barratt (Secretary General, International Federation on Ageing)

The purpose of the panel was to set the stage for the entire symposium by examining what age-friendly looks like in various places around the world. Five participants with experience in the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Cameroon, and Japan discussed rural and remote age-friendly communities and places. In particular the panel looked at:

- What does age-friendly look like?
- What are the challenges and barriers to age-friendly rural and remote?
- Who are the champions of age-friendly?

Questions and comments were taken from the floor following the presentation.

Ayuk Christian (Cameroon and Japan)

Ayuk Christian (Vice President, Friends of the International Federation on Ageing) described the importance of family structure and kinship in Cameroon. He noted that in Africa, “elder” is a title of authority and respect because elders have knowledge and experience that younger generations lack. Further, rural areas in Africa have tremendous community support and employment is guaranteed until death.



Mr. Christian also described how small changes and programs have started to spark the age-friendly movement in Akita, Japan. According to Mr. Christian, it was decided last year that older adults would be charged 100 yen (approximately \$1.00 US) to ride the bus anywhere in Akita Japan. That small change has led to greater interest in other age-friendly projects by the general public.

Bill Ashton (Canada)

Bill Ashton (Director, Rural Development Institute, Brandon University) noted that it is important to understand the various definitions of rural and remote because the concept is not homogenous. For instance, in Manitoba, there are three types of rural areas: 1) urban/rural; 2) agricultural/rural; and 3) remote/rural. He suggested that rural and remote is an idea and geography. Therefore, if an individual takes a northern perspective of age-friendly, they may focus on issues of “snow” and having a skidoo to get to the doctor. Dr. Ashton explained that it is important to understand the conditions in other places so that we are able to address the needs of the community.

Verena Menec (Canada and Switzerland)

Verena Menec (Director, Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba) described how rural Switzerland differs from other places. In Switzerland, rural locations are often only 10 minutes away from towns with all the services required. She then went on to talk about the needs of older adults in Manitoba. She suggested that the top two needs are housing that accommodates individuals with various issues and transportation to help people get around so that they can access services. In order to address those needs, according to Dr. Menec, there has to be a champion and local government support. In other words, successful communities create partnerships.

Norma Drosdowech (Canada)

Norma Drosdowech (Distinguished Senior) described how isolation occurs not only in rural and remote communities, but also in more urban centres. Ms. Drosdowech argued that individuals must see themselves as part of the broader community so that they can rely on a group voice to attain their needs.



Helen Hamlin (United States of America)

Helen Hamlin (Distinguished Senior) began by saying that it is important to be vocal about wants and needs and to work together to achieve our goals. She described how the New York City Age-Friendly Commission is divided into task forces to work on age-friendly issues such as adding more benches along the sidewalks. These task forces are made up of representatives of local government, businesses, and older adults. Ms. Hamlin suggested that by working together on a common goal, they are able to make the community more age-friendly.

Questions and comments

The panel discussion generated a number of comments and questions from the audience. Key questions and responses include:

What are the challenges in becoming age-friendly?

- Understanding that all communities are different, with different capacities at different times.
- Hearing the voices of the people in the communities in order to know what it is that we need to address.
- Empowering citizens .
- Implementing what the communities need.
- Providing incentives to become age-friendly.
- Creating partnerships with the business community and industry.
- Being able to evaluate age-friendly initiatives already implemented.

How do we get decision-makers to make decisions?

- By having older adults take the initiative.
- By striking a committee that includes older adults and government.

Can Manitoba's age-friendly model work elsewhere?

- Not unless you first identify who needs to be involved and what are the needs of the community.



How can developing countries implement the concept of age-friendly?

- By using a bottom up approach that begins with the people and by working with what is already in place.

Is there a cost associated with sustaining age-friendly?

- Yes, but it will cost a lot more if it is not implemented or sustained.

Photo essay project: Rural and remote around the world—Bill Ashton

Inspired by HSBC Bank Canada advertising, a photo essay of words and pictures was presented to the public. This photo essay, created by Bill Ashton (Director, Rural Development Institute, Brandon University) illustrated contrasting ideas of rural and remote spaces. The collage of binary words and pictures challenged viewers to think about and understand different perspectives of what rural and remote could mean to them and others. The photo essay allowed the viewer to reflect on their own idea of community, vulnerability and what risk means.

After the photo essay slide show, there was a public reception in the lobby where individuals could view the photographs on easels around the room. The photo essay is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AORGWyz-0Oo.



Day two: Symposium

Welcome and introductory comments

Jim Hamilton (Associate Director, Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba) welcomed the delegates to the symposium. He indicated that the symposium goal is to address age-friendly rural and remote communities and places. Mr. Hamilton then introduced a video greeting from Dr. John Beard (Director of the Department of Ageing and Life Course at the World Health Organization). In the video, Dr. Beard greeted the delegates, thanked symposium organizers, and hoped attendees would discover innovative ideas to make rural and remote communities and places more age-friendly.

Peggy Edwards (Symposium Facilitator) then introduced herself and explained the agenda for the day.

Rural and remote around the world—Bill Ashton

“In terms of a definition, often rural is the one that is left out after we’ve accounted for cities.”

—Bill Ashton (Director, Brandon University Rural Development Institute)

Jim Hamilton explained that Bill Ashton (Director, Brandon University Rural Development Institute) was charged with defining rural and remote. Dr. Ashton determined that the best way to accomplish this was through a photo essay. The photo essay, the same as what was shown at the public forum, contained 11 photograph slides overlaid with words.

Dr. Ashton began his presentation by outlining a Manitoba definition of rural and remote. According to Dr. Ashton, rural and remote can be thought of as what is left after we account for cities. He suggested that Manitoba has three geographical rural and remote areas:

- Urban-rural (with a stable or growing populations);
- Rural-farm community (with smaller populations that have variable or no growth);
- Northern and remote (with a do-it-yourself attitude).



Dr. Ashton presented the slides and invited symposium participants to make comments and share their thoughts on what the pictures and words represented to them. Comments are grouped according to the words displayed on the pictures.

Background

There is great diversity across the rural and remote landscape. Ideas of what makes a community or place rural and remote are as varied as this landscape. Definitions change with individual perceptions and perspectives; they change across time and space; and they change with the different generations and cultures.

Why is a focus on rural and remote communities important?

- Without rural communities, urban centres do not exist.
- Aging issues are different in rural areas than in urban areas, such as transportation.
- Rural and remote areas lack needed services.
- Rural and remote communities are the backbones and character of our countries; they provide the history; they generally were there long before the cities.
- Rural and remote places provide an opportunity to demonstrate innovative models of delivery that can be translated to urban areas later. They are a hub for innovation.
- We need to ensure that regardless of where people live, they live in dignity.

Photo essay to define rural and remote

Rural and remote around the world was developed by Bill Ashton, PhD and his team at the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University Brandon, Manitoba Canada. ashtonw@brandonu.ca. YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AORGWyz-0Oo.

The photo essay challenges viewers to think about and understand different perspectives of what rural and remote could mean to them and others. It allows viewers to reflect on their own idea of community, vulnerability and what risk means. Below we summarize Dr. Ashton's and symposium delegates' comments on the photo essay.



Dependence and independence



Rural and remote is:

- Dependence on industry.
- Dependence on resources.
- Dependence on one another.
- Independence to get around.
- Also interdependence.

Rural, rural, rural



Rural and remote is:

- All about perceptions.

Danger and freedom



Rural and remote is:

- Where seniors are more physically active, but people may also be more vulnerable.
- Where people give you the message of danger as you grow older, yet all you see is freedom.



Poverty and wealth



Rural and remote is:

- A place of great diversity.
- All about perception. One person may look at the picture and see poor and poverty, but the people living there may see wealth because they have a roof over their head.

Resource and burden



Rural and remote is:

- Where older adults are a resource, not a burden.

Livelihood and survival



Rural and remote is:

- A place where older people are making a living despite poverty.
- Knowing that there are always others in worse situations.



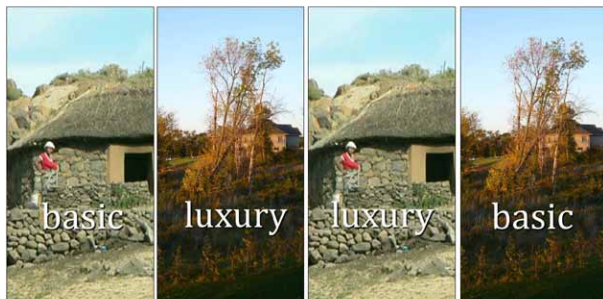
Do-it-yourself (DIY)



Rural and remote is:

- Where individuals have skills and are capable because they have always done it themselves.
- Where you look after yourself. You develop a mentality of rural that is above and beyond the physical location. When you move, you take that mentality with you.

Basic and luxury



Rural and remote is:

- Where having the basics is sometimes a huge luxury.

Remote



Rural and remote is:

- When you are geographically isolated.
- Where you feel at rest and have peace and quiet.
- When communities are not connected through technology.
- When you feel socially remote and excluded.
- Very much about access.



Scenic and isolated



Rural and remote is:

- A place of solitude.
- Idealized as simple and beautiful.
- A place where people are self-sufficient.

Home



Rural and remote is:

- Where notions of home are varied.
- A place that can change over time. When you first move to a rural area you may feel isolated, but after a while that feeling changes; it becomes your home.



Snapshot of what rural and remote is

Rural and remote can be a place where:

- You can be independent and interdependent
 - You can be active
 - You may be more vulnerable
 - The basics are luxury
 - There is poverty, yet you may see it as wealth
 - Older adults are a resource, not a burden
 - You are self-sufficient, capable and can do it yourself
 - You lack access to services and technology
 - You are geographically and social isolated
 - You feel at rest and at peace
 - Things are simple and beautiful
-

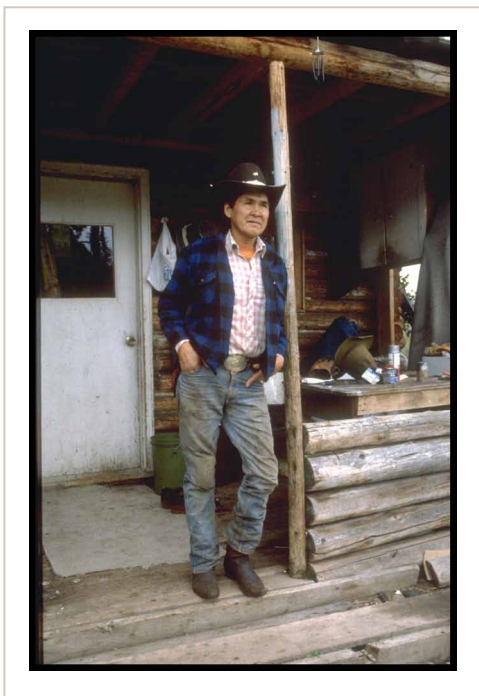


Photo © Queensland Health



Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) survey

“We have to wonder, is age-friendly for the rich? Is it for everyone?”

—Verena Menec (Director, University of Manitoba Centre on Aging)

Verena Menec (Director, Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba) presented findings from the SWOT survey and Survey Monkey questionnaire that was sent to the delegates prior to the symposium. Dr. Menec explained that analysis of the preliminary questionnaire consisted in finding commonalities among responses. This produced 9 strengths, 13 weaknesses, 9 opportunities and 9 threats in rural and remote communities and places. The second survey allowed delegates to rank these common responses in terms of importance.

Examples of strengths

- Strong social ties; people know each other and take care of each other.
- Strong sense of place and commitment to community issues.
- Local leaders are easily accessible and there is less bureaucracy so it is easier to take action.
- Easier to engage residents and share information (e.g., by word of mouth or by going door to door).

Examples of weaknesses

- Inadequate physical infrastructure; poor road infrastructure, lack of transportation networks.
- Widely dispersed population; geographic distances and isolation.
- Limited availability of services, including social/health services.
- Lack of human resources with specialized expertise (e.g., gerontology; architects aware of aging issues).
- Difficulties in attracting resources; small communities cannot compete with larger centres.



Examples of opportunities

- Collaborations and partnerships.
- Age-friendly programs and initiatives can generate economic development and business opportunities.
- Increased awareness and government support for aging-related issues; there are funding opportunities for age-friendly initiatives.
- Existing planning structures, activities and initiatives to build on and learn from.

Examples of threats

- Out-migration of the young (urbanization).
- Lack of awareness or political will to address aging issues and/or rural/remote issues.
- Perception that older adults are a burden; lack of recognition of contributions; ageism.
- Economic downturn/conditions.

Dr. Menec advised that despite finding dominant themes, delegates should not lose sight of issues that were not as highly ranked, including ones such as political corruption and poverty. Additionally she suggested that very few delegates mentioned vulnerable populations. She, therefore, asked delegates to ponder whether age-friendly is for everyone or only for the rich.

Dr. Menec had expected there to be more diversity in the comments between participants from developing and developed nations. However, comments were quite similar except regarding poverty and corruption. These comments tended to come from participants from developing nations.

The various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats themes, according to Dr. Menec, can be sub-divided into perspectives from people and places. She also suggested that another distinction can be made: some themes can be changed and/or addressed while others cannot.

Dr. Menec's explanation of the SWOT analysis led to a number of comments from the delegates. Key comments are grouped as follows:



Use the beauty of rural places to attract people

- There is green space and there is peace. This can attract returning migrants.
- We can build assisted living communities in rural places.

Poverty

- In developing countries, many older adults do not have access to services. They live off the land. It is only survival.
- In developed countries there are also many older adults on a fixed income with a rising cost of living.

Getting buy-in for age-friendly when other things seem so much more important

- How can we convince governments that age-friendly should be priority when mortality and morbidity is so high in certain places?
- For town councils it is all about priorities. The funds are so low. We have municipalities now that are hardly able to function.
- We need to explain to the decision makers that age-friendly does not need a specific budget. Even when you do not have money specifically for age-friendly, you can integrate it with other developments.
- Budgeting is stretched to the maximum in rural places and so we may need to undertake smaller projects.
- Communication allows the people to understand and know what to expect. Everybody shares the vision and they are also ready to fund the vision.
- Resilience and a lack of funding can be a key driving force for age-friendly.

Dignity and cultural backgrounds

- We need to consider dignity. Many older adults are too proud to accept help.
- It is important to remember cultural and religious background because it colours everything for people in rural and remote areas. We need to keep this in mind as we try to work with them.

Leadership in rural areas

- We see lower levels of education and income in rural communities; therefore; we should not expect too much from the leadership there.



John Cox—personal reflections on being a senior

“Age-friendly communities can provide living laboratories to explore the insights of older adults...and not just present ways for communities to adapt.”

—John Cox (Distinguished Senior)

John Cox shared the idea that aging is an individual experience. He said that when he retired he suddenly faced an immediate shift in his perspective. He became immersed in the micro level realities of growing older. He suggested that even when retirement is planned it can still feel like you are disappearing from life. He has noticed that many older adults have a common conviction that their lives at this point are just to be endured, a view that he does not share.

He suggested that there is an important challenge and opportunity for the age-friendly movement. The challenge is to ensure that research and knowledge development explore the insights of older adults. He recommended having more stories about older persons who must learn to adapt their own independence to accept interdependence (See *Appendix C* for Mr. Cox’s presentation notes).



Breakout session one: SWOT group activity

“We have to think of building resources, attracting people to rural and remote places for silence and intellectual stimulation. We want the integration that Erikson speaks of. It is an existential quest.”

—Jennifer Rouse (Director, Division of Ageing, Trinidad and Tobago)

The purpose of this session was to review the list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats contained in the SWOT report and address the following questions:

- How can we take advantage of the strengths in rural communities and remote places?
- How can we minimize or mitigate the weaknesses in rural communities and remote places?
- How can we take advantage of the opportunities for success in developing and sustaining age-friendly rural and remote communities?
- How can we minimize or mitigate the threats to success in rural communities and remote places?

Delegates were divided into four groups by the facilitator. Each group went to a station on strengths and weaknesses for 30 minutes and also to a station on opportunities and threats for 30 minutes. Each station had a discussion facilitator and a note-taker. After the 60 minute breakout session, the note-takers/facilitators from the four stations reported to the plenary on how to maximize strengths and opportunities and how to minimize threats and weaknesses.

Comments were grouped by the four questions delegates discussed.



How can we take advantage of the strengths in rural communities and remote places?

We can take advantage of strengths in rural and remote communities and places by:

- Recognizing what the strengths and knowledge capacities of the communities are and use them to foster partnerships and build a friendlier healthier community.
- Formulating social networks through social organizations.
- Respecting and valuing individuals' sense of place.
- Promoting intergenerational communication.
- Understanding that communities are very unique in terms of strengths, organizations and partnerships.
- Recognizing the type of leadership in the community.
- Fostering leadership at multiple levels to get the buy-in.
- Building on existing networks and expanding and growing what is already there.
- Building capacity with global organizations.

How can we mitigate the weaknesses in rural communities and remote places?

We can minimize or mitigate the weaknesses in rural and remote communities and places by:

- Building on the strengths.
- Increasing expertise on aging within the communities.
- Promoting a better understanding of age-friendly to everyone in the community.
- Increasing funding for age-friendly.
- Integrating age-friendly into all areas of the community.
- Sharing the responsibility for age-friendly between local, municipal, regional, and national sectors.



How can we take advantage of the opportunities for success in developing and sustaining age-friendly rural and remote communities?

We can take advantage of the opportunities for success in developing and sustaining age-friendly rural and remote communities and places by:

- Building on existing partnerships and developing new and innovative collaborations.
- Identifying and supporting local champions.
- Supporting local initiatives (using bottom up approaches effectively).
- Pooling resources between communities to sustain age-friendly initiatives.
- Conveying to older adults that they are in roles of power and leadership.
- Harnessing a four-step process of communication: information, consultation, decision making and implementation.
- Marketing and promoting all that older adults do in a community to use as example for others.
- Attracting immigrants by highlighting the culturally rich aspects of the communities.
- Building resources, attracting people to places (rural/remote) for silence and intellectual stimulation.

How can we minimize or mitigate the threats to success in rural communities and remote places?

We can minimize or mitigate the threats to success in rural communities and remote communities and places by:

- Promoting and investing in understanding local context and the needs of local people.
- Supporting and providing resources for local communities and initiatives that they develop.
- Providing funding for more research.
- Getting researchers and students interested in age-friendly.
- Developing new social roles for adults.
- Celebrating the achievements of older adults.
- Developing intergenerational programs and educating youth.
- Celebrating how the older cohort is a strong leader in volunteerism.
- Stopping the off-loading of service provisions to the individual and/or local.
- Adjusting liability insurance and providing access to liability insurance for volunteers.



Major themes from the SWOT discussions

| | |
|---|---|
| Empowerment | Combating ageism by communicating the capacity and strength of older adults (for example, special edition of the IFA newsletter; older adult ambassadors) |
| Communication | “Making the case” as to why we should invest in rural and remote (for example, create a fact sheet) |
| Intergenerational collaboration | For example, intergenerational video |
| Economic development/ business opportunities | |
| Knowledge sharing | For example, webinars, conferences, regional engagement Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) |

Community of Practice

“A community of practice isn’t what we do full time. It is something we do off the side of our desk.”

—Jim Hamilton (Associate Director,
University of Manitoba Centre on Aging)

Jim Hamilton (Associate Director, Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba) gave a brief outline of the concept of a community of practice (See *Appendix D, Community of Practice*). Mr. Hamilton explained that one of the key objectives of the symposium is to facilitate ongoing knowledge exchange. He suggested that a community of practice is not something that is done full time, but rather it is what occurs off the side of one’s desk.

Lisa Warth (Department of Ageing and Life Course, World Health Organization) described the role the WHO can take in developing a community of practice. Ms. Warth suggested that the WHO has the technical experience and can provide a space for information. The WHO is also able to provide support to foster a knowledge network.



Panel: Partnerships and leadership: Key ingredients for sustainability

Jim Hamilton (moderator), Anne Connolly, Lisa Warth, Greg Shaw, Graham Starmer

“A practice that is not shared or communicated globally will die.”

—Greg Shaw (Director, International and Corporate Relations, International Federation on Ageing)

The purpose of the panel was to examine opportunities for collaboration on age-friendly rural and remote communities and places. Four participants, with experience in developing partnerships and networks, participated in the panel discussion. In particular, the panel looked at:

- How do we build a community of practice?
- What are the challenges in sustaining a community of practice?
- How do you get buy-in?
- Why is a rural and remote community of practice important?

Questions and comments were taken from the floor following the presentation.

Graham Starmer (President and CEO, Manitoba Chamber of Commerce)

Graham Starmer began by discussing the importance of communication when developing a community of practice. He explained that many rural and remote communities lack the necessary communicative technology and therefore other methods of communication should be explored. For instance, the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce decentralizes the communication process by identifying individuals to be leaders of communication for a particular community. In terms of engaging businesses to participate in the age-friendly movement, Mr. Starmer suggested highlighting how age-friendly is good for business. He explained that it is important to focus on issues of aging in rural communities because cities would not exist without rural communities and people.



Anne Connolly (Executive Director, Ageing Well Network Ireland)

Anne Connolly explained that a key challenge in sustaining a community of practice is the absence of hard power. In other words, involvement in a community of practice is typically voluntary. Ms. Connolly suggested that buy-in occurs when agendas are aligned, there is a shared problem, and everyone collaborates and pools their resources. Ms. Connolly noted that sustaining engagement in a community of practice means understanding self-interest and developing mutual interests. She also explained that it is important to focus on issues of aging in rural communities because issues in rural areas are different than those in urban areas.

Greg Shaw (Director, International and Corporate Relations, International Federation on Aging)

Greg Shaw noted that one of the biggest challenges in creating a community of practice is getting access to and sharing appropriate information and best practices. In terms of getting buy-in, he suggested finding a connector, whether it is an agency or person, essentially someone who can express why it is relevant to join a community of practice. This connector must clarify what the gains have been, and demonstrate why age-friendly is worth buying into and spending money on. Finally Mr. Shaw explained that rural and remote communities and places provide an opportunity to demonstrate innovative models of age-friendly delivery that can be translated to urban areas later.

Lisa Warth (Department of Ageing and Life Course, World Health Organization)

Lisa Warth stated that the biggest challenge in cultivating a community of practice is in discovering ways to stimulate mutual learning and how to connect everyone across many different languages. Ms. Warth suggested that the solution is to develop a new website with a place for age-friendly information and areas of expertise. In terms of buy-in, she stated that it is important to align interests. She suggested that developing age-friendly competitions and awards for great ideas, visions and projects can provide incentive for involvement in age-friendly. Additionally she indicated that concrete projects with time frames and deadlines are important and that prior successes and failures must be shared. When explaining why it is important to focus on age-friendly in rural and remote areas, Ms. Warth noted that regardless of where people live, they deserve to live in dignity.



Questions and comments from the floor

The panel discussion generated the following key question and responses:

How do we begin to create a community of practice?

- Conferences help to provide the knowledge basis for creating a community of practice.
- Distinguished seniors are a start to developing a community of practice.
- There are ways we can bring local communities into age-friendly from the bottom up.

Panel summary on how to build and sustain a rural and remote age-friendly network

To build and sustain a rural and remote age-friendly network we must:

- Communicate.
- Have commitment.
- Have access to information.
- Develop connections.
- Motivate individuals and businesses to participate.
- Have access to resources.
- Be adaptable.



Leo Bonnell—personal reflections on being a senior

“The new world order will consist of older adults—they will hold the balance of power.”

—Leo Bonnell (Distinguished Senior)

Leo Bonnell shared his thoughts on age-friendly communities in Newfoundland, Canada. He began by describing his background as a bank manager devoted to educating older adults on finances. Mr. Bonnell noted that older adults are an increasingly important part of today’s society because of what they have to give back in terms of wisdom, experience, voting power, and buying power. He suggested that older adults are aging differently now with a larger proportion being healthier and having higher education levels. Therefore, this group will demand programs and services to combat financial, transportation, and housing issues. Mr. Bonnell explained that the age-friendly model is the best model to address these issues. He suggested that we must remind government why age-friendly is important and that we also must develop partnerships. He ended by reminding delegates that older adults give some of their best years to their towns and communities and we, therefore, have a duty to care for them (See *Appendix C* for Mr. Bonnell’s presentation notes).

Breakout session two: Cultivating a community of practice

“Younger people need to realize that they are the future older people.”

—Marsha Sheppard (Chair, Pinawa Age-Friendly Committee, Manitoba)

The purpose of this session was to examine ways of cultivating a community of practice. This session aimed to address the following questions:

- What are the key practical problems/barriers in sharing our collective learning, and fostering dialogue and interaction (i.e., building a community of practice)?
- How can we address and break down these barriers?



- Are there particular resources, tools or activities that we could undertake to foster, grow and nurture a community of practice?

Delegates were divided into five groups by the facilitator. Each group chose a chair to facilitate the discussion as well as a rapporteur to take notes and report back in plenary. The groups spent approximately 45 minutes discussing the above questions.

Comments were grouped under the following four themes:

What is a community of practice?

A community of practice can take multiple forms.

- It is a dynamic, focused, interdependent group.
- It has a defined membership.
- It has a shared agenda.
- It produces knowledge to share with the larger community.

Challenges in building an age-friendly rural and remote community of practice

The following are the biggest challenges when building an age-friendly rural and remote community of practice:

Definitional

- Defining community of practice.
- Understanding how a community of practice will help empower and transform communities.

Developing an agenda and identifying members

- Developing a shared understanding of the problem and defining the scope and agenda of the community of practice.
- Knowing the scale of the community of practice.
- Determining how to make the agenda accessible to all members of the community of practice.
- Aligning interests; who is in and who is not in a community of practice.



Engagement and leadership

- Knowing how people can best contribute.
- Defining a core group of leaders with a funded administration and coordination to keep the entity together.

Language

- Language; that is translating age-friendly into other languages and making it understood.

Informational

- Finding models and examples of what is going on already to share.
- Sifting through and trimming down copious amounts of information.
- Creating a repository where you can get needed information.

Lack of resources

- Lacking funding and resources to develop and sustain a community of practice.
- Lacking technology (e.g. internet) in rural and remote areas.
- Lacking opportunity to come together face to face; geographical issues.

Time and priority constraints

- Inability to see a community of practice as a priority.
- The time investment involved.

Addressing the challenges in building an age-friendly rural and remote community of practice

To address the challenges and remove the barriers to building a community of practice, we need to:

Cultivate leaders and partnerships

- Use older adults and community champions as a resource; include them in the community of practice.
- Establish core group of leaders with administrative support including political leaders, public service, trade unions, older people, non-governmental organizations, academics, business leaders.



- Find out who has expertise where and allow everyone to contribute.
- Find a way to get First Nations involved.

Use and share available resources

- Engage communities to set aside existing resources.
- Share and promote resources, information and technology.

Communicate and develop a shared language

- Have a congress of research in the area.
- Use existing meetings for face to face, for example WHO and IFA meetings.
- Ensure that there are monthly communications to find out what communities are doing.
- Create a shared, understandable language around age-friendly, keeping the dialogue simple but not simplistic.

Interact with one another and have ongoing dialogue

- Commit to a community of practice.

Commit to each other

- Come together around a task/challenge.
- Start with something doable.

Compile and disseminate information

- Define the scope as the community of practice evolves.
- Create a repository of information (e.g. website).
- Have volunteers synthesize information, compile frequently asked questions, and provide feedback to communities.

Resources that can be used to foster an age-friendly rural and remote community of practice

Resources that can be used to foster a community of practice include:

- The University of Manitoba's, Centre on Aging
- The Public Health Agency Age-Friendly Communities Reference Group



- Existing information from age-friendly communities around the world
- The internet
- Fireside chats/webinars—can be done by phone

Group work summary on how to build an age-friendly rural and remote community of practice

- Include older adults and champions
- Establish a core group of committed leaders
- Share and promote resources, information and technology
- Create a shared, understandable language
- Interact with one another and have ongoing dialogue
- Start with something doable
- Define the scope as the community of practice evolves
- Create a repository of information (e.g. website)
- Find out who has expertise

Postcard project

Peggy Edwards (symposium facilitator) handed out postcards to the delegates and explained that they are to answer the questions on the back of the card and self-address it. On the postcard, participants were asked to explain what they will do to nurture and support an age-friendly rural and remote community of practice at the local, regional, national or organizational level as well as at the global level. A few months after the symposium the postcards will be mailed back to the delegates to remind them of the symposium and their role in the cultivation of a community of practice.



Day three: Symposium

Table topic dinners

“If older adults are in charge, the right things will happen. We need to do it with them, not for them. We should not be speaking for them.”

—Doni Eve (Manager, Active Aging Seniors Directorate, B.C. Ministry of Health)

The table topic dinners allowed delegates to choose one topic of interest to discuss over dinner at the conclusion of day two of the symposium. The delegates divided into their topic groups and each group went to a different restaurant where they discussed:

- Why the topic is important.
- A key challenge that is unique in rural/remote settings.
- How that challenge might be overcome.

At the beginning of day three of the symposium, chosen group leaders reported back to the plenary about their dinner discussions. Table topics that were discussed included:

- Older adults: Providing age-friendly leadership.
- Intergenerational collaboration.
- Generating new knowledge.
- Social isolation: Reaching the hard to reach.
- Extreme weather ... +40 to -40: Older adults remaining engaged and safe.
- Community of practice: Making it work.



Older adults: Providing age-friendly leadership

Why is older adult leadership an important topic to address?

- Older adults know what areas need to be addressed in order to improve their lives. We should not be speaking for them.

Key challenges unique in a rural/remote setting:

- Geography and distance.
- Mobilization and having goals.

How might the challenges be overcome?

- We need a situational issue that is important enough to them for them to take action.

Intergenerational collaboration

Why is intergenerational collaboration an important topic to address?

- When generations connect, they start to understand one another, there is acceptance and it reduces issues such as elder abuse.
- Younger people need to realize that they are the future older people.
- It breaks down stereotypes.
- Older adults have much to teach us.

Key challenges unique in a rural/remote setting:

- Competition for resources.
- Getting university students to come back to the community.

How might the challenges be overcome?

- Through deliberation and planning. We need to develop programs to get older adults and children together, for example have reading programs; an exchange of stories or photos; have them bring something from home and tell a story about it.



Generating new knowledge

Why is generating new knowledge an important topic to address?

- We need the evidence to inform decisions and policy makers so as to improve the lives of older adults.
- The evidence gets buy-in into the topic of age-friendly.

Key challenges unique in a rural/remote setting

- Getting to the community. Rural and remote communities are far away.
- It is difficult to get a sample in these communities because there are fewer people.
- The key people in these communities wear several hats and so you have the same person who is in several positions or roles.
- It takes time to make changes. Changing the built environment takes time.

How might the challenges be overcome?

- We need to invest time and money.
- We need to develop long term relationships.
- We really need to engage seniors.

Social isolation: Reaching the hard to reach

Why is social isolation an important topic to address?

- Social isolation is associated with poor health outcomes.

Key challenges unique in a rural/remote setting

- You need face to face contact with people in communities. You need people on the ground and systemically. This can be a huge challenge for many countries.

How might the challenges be overcome?

- Examine technological and local outreach that has occurred in different areas to see if they can be adapted.
- Use points of contact for isolated individuals like grocery stores, pharmacies and police services.



Extreme weather from +40 to -40: Older adults remaining engaged and safe

Why is extreme weather an important topic to address?

- It becomes important when there is sudden vulnerability. For instance:
 - What if the extreme temperature is not the norm?
 - What if we have sudden heat waves?
 - How do we deal with issues that people are not used to?

Key challenges unique in a rural/remote setting

- Failure to take extreme temperatures seriously.
- Lack of knowledge of what to do during extreme weather events.
- Lack of knowledge of who may be vulnerable in a community.

How might the challenges be overcome?

- An early response program that identifies potentially vulnerable persons.
- A community plan to deal with extreme weather situations.

Community of practice: Making it work

Why is a community of practice an important topic to address?

- There is a wealth of experience from different countries and a community of practice allows us to share those experiences.

Key challenges unique in a rural/remote setting

- Someone or some organization needs to take leadership in creating a community of practice.
- Lack of new resources or financial resources.

How might the challenges be overcome?

- Set realistic goals to achieve.
- Continuous reporting and one point of contact to a group of leaders who we can report back.



Greetings from Cindy Stevens (Province of Manitoba Deputy Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors, and Consumer Affairs)

Patti Chiappetta (Executive Director of Manitoba's Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs; Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat) introduced Cindy Stevens (Manitoba's Deputy Minister of Healthy Living, Seniors and Consumer Affairs). Ms. Stevens explained that age-friendly is very important in Manitoba and that there are many rural and remote communities that stand to benefit from the knowledge that will be shared at the symposium. Further, she stated that the number of age-friendly experts at the symposium is impressive. She thanked the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba and their partners for their hard work.

Panel: Promoting age-friendly communities in the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) region

Greg Shaw (moderator), Enrique Vega Garcia, Cathy Bennett, and Catherine Dusseau

“In the rural community it is important that the people feel that we are with them and not that they are with us.”

—Enrique Vega Garcia (Regional Advisor on Healthy Ageing, World Health Organization)

The purpose of the panel was to examine how age-friendly initiatives can be promoted in the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) region. Three participants from different PAHO countries: Enrique Vega Garcia (Cuba); Cathy Bennett (Canada); and Catherine Dusseau (Bolivia) took part in the panel. The panel was moderated by Greg Shaw (IFA). More specifically the panel looked at:

- How to address health challenges in rural and remote places
- How to engage older adults in age-friendly in rural and remote places
- How to overcome ageist attitudes
- How to demonstrate the benefits of age-friendly

Questions and comments were taken from the floor following the presentation.



Cathy Bennett (A/director, Population Health Promotion and Innovation Division, Public Health Agency of Canada)

Cathy Bennett began by explaining that age-friendly is important because it addresses the needs of older adults and increases their quality of life through a social determinants approach. According to Ms. Bennett having enough physicians and health care professionals in rural and remote areas is a problem in Canada. In order to address this situation, the government has developed a student loan forgiveness program for doctors and nurses if they settle into rural and remote communities. Furthermore, Ms. Bennett stated that at the national policy level, the Pan-Canadian age-friendly milestones were developed which recognizes communities that engage older adults in the age-friendly initiative. Finally, when explaining how to put age-friendly on the PAHO agenda, Ms. Bennett suggested looking at the “art of the possible” or in other words, to center discussion on healthy aging.

Catherine Dusseau (Regional Health Advisor, Helpage International)

Catherine Dusseau explained that though there is a lack of health facilities in rural Latin America, urban populations are also under-served. Ms. Dusseau stated that it is important to develop programs that start from people’s needs. She suggested that in order to do this we need to meet with the people, analyse what they want and find solutions. By focusing on their needs and supporting the local people and their organizations, partnerships can be developed within the community. Ms. Dusseau explained that if we do not provide the local authority and older adults with expertise then dialogue suffers. A big challenge, therefore, is in developing communities of practice that include all. Ageist attitudes can be dispelled by working together and getting to know one another.

Enrique Vega Garcia (Regional Advisor on Healthy Ageing, World Health Organization)

Enrique Vega Garcia began by explaining that almost 40% of Latin America and Caribbean populations do not have access to services to meet their basic health needs. Additionally, 50% do not have pensions or retirement savings. In Ecuador about 20% of the older population lives in extreme poverty. Many of them live in rural areas and are Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, 90% of university programs (medical/health science) in Latin America do not include any knowledge or training in aging or older person’s health. As a result, the rural population must teach the doctors how to resolve the health issues of older persons. Mr. Vega Garcia suggested that adopting the social determinants of health is important in these rural areas.

Mr. Vega Garcia reiterated that older persons are the reason and the resource for age-friendly. He suggested that older adults living in rural and remote areas are extremely busy and in order to



get them involved in age-friendly we must target their needs. He underscored the idea that it is important for people in the rural community to feel that we are with them and not that they are with us.

In terms of addressing ageist attitudes, Mr. Vega Garcia suggested that politicians begin to acknowledge that they are also older adults. Furthermore, we need to teach the younger generation about older adults.

Comments and questions from the floor

The panel discussion generated the following key questions and responses:

Is it appropriate to mix disability issues with aging issues?

- There is a difference between aging and disability issues and often the two groups do not want to be put together.
- Disability programs are subsumed into the aging programs, which can make those in the aging community uncomfortable .
- Mixing disability issues with aging issues can be progressive because it brings in an intergenerational group with disabilities.
- The rights of older persons are progressing much faster than the rights of the disabled.

How do we demonstrate the benefits of age-friendly?

- It can be demonstrated by finding and addressing the common needs of a community, people and place.
- It can be demonstrated by promoting and sharing age-friendly knowledge, information and best practices among individuals, groups, organizations, communities and regions.

Panel summary on promoting age-friendly communities

Age-friendly health initiatives in rural and remote communities and places

- Examine the needs of the people.
- Promote collaboration.
- Use a social determinants of health model.
- Engage older adults to be part of the solution.



Engaging older adults in rural and remote PAHO areas

- By going directly to older adults and mobilizing them.
- By finding a goal that is important.
- By acknowledging the many organizations in which older adults are already involved.

Overcoming ageist attitudes

- Have politicians acknowledge that they too are older.
- Teach the younger generation to value the experience of older adults.
- Find ways for the generations to get to know each other better.
- Redirect health priorities to issues of aging.
- Share experience and information on how to scale up good practices.

Breakout session three: Priorities for action

“Evaluation research is important. Many communities have not done this and those who have done this need to share it and the methodology used.”

—Margaret Neal (Director, School of Community Health, Portland State University)

The purpose of this session was to examine priorities for action at the global level and in knowledge development and sharing. Peggy Edwards (symposium facilitator) asked the delegates to keep in mind the relationship between the importance of the action and doable actions. For instance, an action may appear important, but perhaps it is not doable. On the other hand, an action might not be very important, but is highly doable.

Delegates were divided into five groups by the facilitator. Each group chose a rapporteur to take notes and report back in plenary. The groups spent approximately 45 minutes discussing the above questions.



Each group was asked to list doable priorities for action in the two areas (at the global level and in knowledge development and sharing). Priorities for action in both areas were grouped together into the following themes:

Priorities for age-friendly rural and remote communities

Engage older adults

- Use newsletters, direct calling, and find adults where they gather in order to engage them in age-friendly.
- Mobilize older adults as leaders by promoting situational issues that are important enough to them for them to take action.

Combat ageism

- Advertise the fact that we are all aging; personalize aging.
- Teach the younger generation to value the experience of older adults.
- Celebrate achievements of older adults.

Foster intergenerational collaboration

- Develop programs to get older adults and children together.
- Find ways for the generations to get to know each other better.

Address health care and emergency services

- Support health care delivery in rural and remote communities.
- Develop an early emergency response program that identifies potentially vulnerable persons.
- Develop plans to deal with extreme weather situations.
- Redirect health priorities to issues of aging. For example in Latin America the main focus is on mother and child health even though populations are aging rapidly.

Combat social isolation

- Examine technological and local outreach that has occurred in different areas to see if they can be adapted.
- Use points of contact for isolated individuals like grocery stores, pharmacies and police services.



Provide funding and resources

- Increase budgets for age-friendly.
- Provide resources for local communities and initiatives.
- Priorities for knowledge development and sharing.

Provide leadership

- Create a leadership group to promote age-friendly rural and remote communities.
- Develop a central coordinating body (for example to take the lead on developing a website/portal of information).
- Identify and support local champions.

Develop communities of practice

- Develop communities of practice that address different needs (for example, global and community).
- Build on existing networks and expand and grow what we already have.

Enhance communication

- Develop a universal, succinct way to describe what age-friendly is (in 25 words or less).
- Develop promotional material on why communities should be made more age-friendly with a rationale for different audiences. For example quick guides on:
 - Why communities should be age-friendly.
 - The value of age-friendly for funders, businesses, communities and political bodies.
 - Why governments and organizations should support it.
 - Why we need to collaborate internationally.
- Translate age-friendly principles, promotional materials and guides into different languages and different cultural contexts. For example, develop materials using pictures or designs to communicate the concept of age-friendly.
- Use social media.
- Share global stories, toolkits and best practices about age-friendly.



Create a common website/portal

- Have an agency take the lead in maintaining and sending out information.
- Create a searchable data base/repository that contains:
 - An inventory of age-friendly tools.
 - An annotated description of best practices.
 - A description of services/programs at local, regional, national and international levels.
 - Community assessments.
 - Development and implementation strategies (action plans).
 - Declarations and milestones.
 - Literature related to age-friendly and aging.
 - A list of expertise (who has expertise in what areas of the field and who is willing to do what).
 - A matrix with intervention categories so communities can log their work to find others who are doing similar interventions.
- Make the *Canadian Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* available globally by posting it on the portal, marketing it, reviewing it to ensure applicability to developing countries, and translating it; include suggestions and a checklist for actions in the report.

Conduct research and program evaluation

- Determine what communities are doing and how they are becoming age-friendly, including:
 - What has been done?
 - What implementation strategies are being used?
 - How long is it taking?
 - What resources are needed?
 - We have a lot of tools, but what impact have they had?
 - How do the tools get created and how are they used?
- Develop performance measures.
- Share research on what has been implemented.



Procure funding

- Provide funding for more research. This will increase interest in age-friendly by researchers and students.
- Have dedicated funds for communities of practice.



Photo © Queensland Health

Snapshot: priorities for action

- Engage older adults
 - Combat ageism
 - Intergenerational collaboration
 - Address health care needs
 - Combat social isolation
 - Provide Leadership
 - Develop communities of practice
 - Communicate age-friendly
 - Create a common website
 - Research and program evaluation
 - Procure funding
-



Plenary discussion

Delegates were asked to consider what products they would like to come out of the symposium. The following is a list of these products:

- An in-depth SWOT analysis report
- A photo essay of what is rural and remote (developed by Bill Ashton)
- Delegate profiles—a start for cultivating a community of practice
- Newspaper articles (Lindsay Jolivett)
- Fact sheets
 - Why invest in rural and remote
 - What do we mean by rural/remote
 - Age-friendly rural and remote challenges and possible solutions
- Videos—panel and interviews
- Report which includes:
 - Priorities for action
 - Information on a community of practice
- New/renewed partnerships
- A leadership team
 - Verena Menec
 - Eileen Clarke
 - Kathleen Brasher
 - Mitulika Chawla
 - Connie Newman
 - Doni Eves
 - Vicki Toews
 - Ernesto Morales
 - Gulnara Minnigaleeva
 - Jim Hamilton
 - Leo Bonnell (Distinguished Senior)
 - Bill Ashton



Conference reflections and closing remarks

The following are delegate reflections at the close of the symposium:

“I am so happy that the work around age-friendly is in excellent hands.”

—Helen Hamlin (Distinguished Senior; International Federation on Aging)

“This was a great opportunity for us to learn from other countries. This has given us all a boost.”

—Laura Ryser (Research Manager, University of Northern British Columbia Rural and Small Town Studies Program)

“There are those of us in the room that represent the seniors themselves. What would you like me to do?”

—Norma Drosdowech (Distinguished Senior)

“For me, when I leave this place, I don’t need money to advance age-friendly communities. What I am going to do when I get back home is simplify the eight domains for older persons in the rural cities.”

—Titus Ouma (Principal Gerontologist, Ugandan Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development)

“What we talked about in Manitoba is that age-friendly is an important initiative. Now you made it real for us. Wow, I met all these people from all over the world and everyone is committed. They like what we are doing and it is validating. It is a real boost to us for what we are doing.”

—Jean-Yves Rochon (Chair, Manitoba Council on Aging)

“I feel privileged. Even though my community is new to age-friendly, it made sense to get involved ... It has been really nice to share what is going on in my community and help give ideas to others.”

—Louise Lawrie (Churchill Manitoba)



“Everything was great and ran smoothly...We all have been really engaged in the activities...We are trying to decide something and everyone already knows what they will do when they get home.”

—Gulnara Minnigaleeva (Research Fellow, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Russia)

“Very rarely have I been to a meeting with such a useful process ... I’m personally not an expert on rural and remote and it has been a wonderful learning experience ... I think with this group and leadership team there will be follow up ... It is a very promising step in the long journey.”

—Lisa Warth (Technical Officer, Department of Aging and Life Course, World Health Organization)

“What I go back with is so much validation. I go back with a deep sense of responsibility. We have so much expertise in this room ... We all have, in our own diverse way, a vision of what rural and remote looks like. We must be open enough to understand diversity. I have so much to go back to tell my government ... I am optimistic.”

—Jennifer Rouse (Director, Division of Ageing, Ministry of the People and Social Development, Trinidad and Tobago)

Verena Menec, Director of the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba closed the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities and Places Symposium by noting that this is the beginning of the journey, not the end.



Appendix A—Delegate and participant list

| First name | Last name | Role | Country |
|------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Alexander | Segall | Delegate | Canada |
| Anne | Connolly | Delegate | Ireland |
| Ayuk | Christian | Delegate | Cameroon/ Japan |
| Bill | Ashton | Delegate | Canada |
| Catherine | Dusseau | Delegate | Bolivia |
| Cathy | Bennett | Delegate | Canada |
| Connie | Newman | Delegate | Canada |
| Denys | Volkov | Delegate | Canada |
| Doni | Eve | Delegate | Canada |
| Eileen | Clark | Delegate | Canada |
| Enrique | Vega Garcia | Delegate | Cuba |
| Ernesto | Morales | Delegate | Canada |
| Graham | Starmer | Guest Speaker | Canada |
| Greg | Shaw | Delegate | Canada |
| Gulnara | Minnigaleeva | Delegate | Russia |
| Helen | Hamlin | Delegate | USA |
| Jane | Barratt | Delegate | Canada |
| Janice | Keefe | Delegate | Canada |
| Jean Yves | Rochon | Delegate | Canada |
| Jennifer | Rouse | Delegate | Trinidad and Tobago |
| Jill | Zacharias | Delegate | Canada |
| Jim | Hamilton | Delegate | Canada |
| John | Cox | Delegate | Canada |
| Jose F. | Parodi | Delegate | Peru |
| Kathleen | Brasher | Delegate | Australia |
| Larry | Flynn | Delegate | Canada |
| Laura | Ryser | Delegate | Canada |
| Leo | Bonnell | Delegate | Canada |
| Lindsay | Jolivet | Reporter | Canada |
| Lisa | Warth | Delegate | Switzerland |



| First name | Last name | Role | Country |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Louise | Lawrie | Delegate | Canada |
| Louise | Plouffe | Delegate | Canada |
| Margaret | Neal | Delegate | USA |
| Marsha | Sheppard | Delegate | Canada |
| Mary | Deery | Delegate | Ireland |
| Mitulika | Chawla | Delegate | Canada |
| Nana | Apt | Delegate | Ghana |
| Norma | Drosdowech | Delegate | Canada |
| Patti | Chiappetta | Delegate | Canada |
| Peggy | Edwards | Symposium Facilitator | Canada |
| Rachel | Winterton | Delegate | Australia |
| Richard | Milgrom | Delegate | Canada |
| Sandra | MacLeod | Delegate | Canada |
| Titus | Ouma | Delegate | Uganda |
| Valerie | White | Delegate | Canada |
| Verena | Menec | Delegate | Canada |
| Vicki | Toews | Delegate | Canada |



Appendix B—Symposium agenda

Monday, October 15

| | |
|----------------|--|
| 11:00 am | Lunch for Delegates |
| 12:15 pm | Transportation to the Winnipeg Art Gallery |
| 1:00–1:30 pm | Welcome and introductions |
| 1:30–2:30 pm | The nature of place. Can the place we live in become age-friendly? Panel—Jane Barratt, IFA (moderator), Helen Hamlin, Norma Drosdowech, Verena Menec, Bill Ashton, Ayuk Christian |
| 2:30–2:55 pm | Open question and answer period, conclusion of panel |
| 2:55 pm | Photo project: Rural and remote around the world |
| 3:00–4:00 pm | Public reception |
| 4:00 pm | Transportation to Inn at the Forks from the Winnipeg Art Gallery |
| 6:00–6:45 pm | Reception and bar |
| 6:45pm–9:00 pm | Welcome and dinner |



Tuesday, October 16

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 7:30–8:15 am | Breakfast |
| 8:15 am | Welcome—Jim Hamilton and Peggy Edwards |
| 8:30–9:00 am | Rural and remote around the world—Bill Ashton |
| 9:00 – 9:40 am | Review of SWOT survey—Verena Menec |
| 9:40–10:00 am | Distinguished senior presentation—John Cox |
| 10:00–10:30 am | Break |
| 10:30–11:45 am | Group activity: SWOT |
| 11:45–12:15 pm | Plenary discussion |
| 12:15–1:15 pm | Lunch |
| 1:15–1:30 pm | Community of practice—Jim Hamilton and Lisa Warth |
| 1:30–2:30 pm | Partnerships and leadership: Key ingredients for sustainability? Panel—Jim Hamilton (moderator); Anne Connolly, Lisa Warth, Greg Shaw, Graham Starmer |
| 2:30–2:45pm | Distinguished senior presentation—Leo Bonnell |
| 2:45–3:15pm | Break |
| 3:15–4:15pm | Small group work—cultivating a community of practice |
| 4:15–4:50pm | Report back/discussion in plenary |
| 4:50–5:00pm | Post card project |
| 5:00pm | Adjourn |
| 6:30pm | Transportation from inn at the forks to restaurants |
| 7:00–9:00pm | Table topic dinners |



Wednesday October 17

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 7:30–8:15 am | Breakfast |
| 8:15–9:00 am | Report from table topic dinners |
| 9:00–10:00 am | Promoting age-friendly communities in the PAHO Region Panel—Greg Shaw(moderator); Cathy Bennett; Catherine Dusseau; Enrique Vega Garcia |
| 10:00–10:30 am | Break |
| 10:30–11:30 am | Small group work—Priorities for action |
| 11:30–12:15 pm | Plenary discussion |
| 12:15–1:15 pm | Lunch |
| 1:15–2:00 pm | Key foundations of success in developing and sustaining age-friendly rural communities and remote places: Plenary discussion |
| 2:00–2:45 pm | Concluding remarks; evaluation |
| 2:45 pm | Adjourn |



Appendix C—Distinguished seniors' presentation notes

Norma Drosdowech

Good afternoon everyone. It is both a privilege and a pleasure to speak to you this afternoon as a “Distinguished Senior”—I do hope I can live up to that new title! Since my retirement from the public school system, I have certainly appreciated many opportunities to raise seniors concerns about government policies and programs as past-chair of the Manitoba Council on Aging; as a senior representative on CIHR's Institute of Aging; as a participant in planning and presenting the goals of the Age-Friendly Initiative; and as a guest speaker who often challenges other seniors to become involved.

My approach mirrors the advice once presented to a seniors' discussion group by the Reverend Carl Ridd, long-time United Church minister and prominent social activist. He stated passionately that the most dangerous principle he learned in his youth was to always respect your elders and to always respect authority. What is needed for social change to occur, he fervently declared, is for all of us, young and old, to develop the skills needed to challenge all authority, all of the time!

This statement affirmed my personal experiences in advocating for change as a University student confronting a professor whose sarcasm reduced students to tears; as a parent confronting a public school system that too often did not meet student's needs; as a school counsellor hearing stories of struggling families left unsupported by our welfare system; as a Family Life Educator advocating the rights of children to learn about themselves intellectually, physically, socially and sexually, and as part of the community of active, forceful and energetic volunteers who work tirelessly to promote the needs of Manitoba's seniors.

Yet, too often as I have stepped forward to challenge authority, I find myself dismayed by the unwillingness of most citizens to challenge those in power even when invited to do so. As we move forward to achieve our goals of creating Age-Friendly environments in rural and remote areas, we must provide ways for all seniors to give voice to their concerns, their disappointments, frustrations and their fears, as well as their values, their goals, their achievements, their values, and their gratitude.

My message today has been influenced by past experiences as a caregiver and support person to family members in both urban and rural areas as they have confronted with a wide variety of issues: the availability of healthcare in rural and remote areas; timely healthcare, the high costs of eye care, dental care, and prescriptions; inadequate housing opportunities and the vagaries of daily living. My message has also been influenced by recent reminders that I am very much a part of an often vulnerable aging community coping with health issues. These have included the lack of effective care in Manitoba during our daughter's struggle with a serious illness. We did find renewed strength through her successful surgery and strong recovery in an American hospital.



Recently, I found myself overwhelmed by the issues raised in a focus group of seniors' caregivers who shared their stories of feeling powerless in their daily struggles with the healthcare system which often treats them with an astonishing lack of respect.

Currently, my husband and I are both anxious about the medical care available to a family member in rural Manitoba as well as personal health concerns that ended in a very negative hospital experience which certainly left me feeling extremely vulnerable. As I prepared for this presentation, I have attempted to reshape these events by labelling them as learning experiences. Yet, this question arises: If someone who has made a career out of challenging authority finds herself unable to speak up for herself, does not suggest that we are a long way from creating an Age-Friendly world?

Like many other seniors, I feel vulnerable both because of the aging process and the barriers to seeking assistance in this not so age-friendly world which surrounds me. As vulnerable, perhaps as doctors and nurses who struggle with the lack of adequate medical personnel or long-term care staff to provide adequate care in their facilities; as vulnerable as family caregivers who are receiving inadequate support for their efforts, while being criticized if they raise concerns; as vulnerable as parents watching the downward spiral of their daughter and being unable to find someone to respond adequately to their needs; as vulnerable as family, friends, and members of our community who cannot afford the dental care, eye surgery, hearing aids, and prescriptions drugs they need for a life worth living.

The end result of my personal exploration of these philosophies, principles and policies has been recognition that it is imperative to enable all seniors to make their voices heard, to know that their messages will be received and responded to with respect, and that appropriate actions will be undertaken. As we reflect on the future of the Age-Friendly Initiative, we must design many different ways for this to occur:

- Personal interviews with seniors (as in Denmark) to ascertain the needs of individual seniors, and to respond to them;
- Direct access to a patient advocate in hospitals and personal care settings so that individual concerns can be expressed in timely fashion;
- Requesting regular personal feedback, individually or in focus groups, from seniors and their families about issues related to their hospital stays, home care, medical supplies, relationships with staff, personal safety, dietary needs, medications; and
- Speaking with seniors about their individual financial concerns—re: dental care/eye care/prescription drugs/adequate housing.



There truly are many possibilities to allow the voices of all seniors to be heard, valued and respected. It has been said that change is only possible when we know the truth and only possible if there is an alternative. I welcome this opportunity to explore both the truth and the alternatives solutions to creating a better world.

Certainly, the invitation to participate in this conference has empowered me as it affirms that people with influence and authority believe my voice, an elder's voice, must be heard; that change can happen if we all play a role in challenging authority all of the time; and that individually and together, we can take the steps necessary to create age-friendly remote areas, towns and villages; age-friendly cities; age-friendly nations; and an age-friendly world.

Helen Hamlin

1. My mantra: Older persons are resources, not burdens.
2. An age friendly community is one that treats its elder members with respect and dignity—and at whatever age—even youngsters who also need to be enabled to value life and age.
3. An age-friendly community examines all of its offerings, both public and private, to soften, ease and open the environment to enable older persons to navigate with relative ease, to make getting from place to place easier, or less difficult.
4. To educate and enforce, in daily dialogue if needs be, using radio, internet, etc, about the interdependence of the generations.
5. We have to learn to recognize and accept others as part of our communities—meaning families, all people living on this planet, to be aware of each other's existence, no matter what age we are. It needs to be taught and transmitted that we are part of a greater whole—and are in the world together, and ageing from the time of birth—reaching the older years—requires those younger to regard us with respect and entitled to a bit more room—we had better learn to look out for each other—perhaps we should be looking at age-friendly as ages friendly!

John Cox

Good morning! I am delighted to be with you and I thank Verena and Jim for inviting me to be with so many friends and colleagues at this Age-friendly Communities Symposium.

First, a disclaimer. I do not see myself as “a distinguished senior”! Yesterday you met Helen Hamlin and Norma Drosdowech who have unquestioned rights to that accolade. Also, we are in a Province that has been a rich incubator for people such as Yetta Gold and Betty Havens who, as seniors, made truly distinguished contributions to the well-being of older adults in Canada and globally. On the other hand, at 67 and retired just 30 months, I have certainly not distinguished myself as a



“senior”. Of course, hope springs eternal!

I am a first world senior with the benefits and challenges that Canada offers to older adults. And, I recognize that even within that context, based on the Age-friendly Community indicators, I am advantaged over many peers.

I live in Ottawa, Canada’s capital, an age-friendly community with high quality, accessible and attractive outdoor spaces and buildings. Transportation is not an issue because I still drive and there is available public transportation. My wife Lily and I are very well housed with all the amenities of a North American suburb.

Prior to my retirement I worried that social participation would be my big challenge. Like many, my contacts were heavily weighted to work and career. Beyond that I relied on my wife as the social facilitator. Happily, I can report some personal progress. I pursue informal education with others, go regularly to the gym, am more engaged in my local community, and I participate in a men’s book discussion group.

Perhaps because I am a young, middle-class senior, respect and inclusion have continued and my rights as a citizen are protected. Employment is not an issue—after 35 years in the federal public service I have a good pension and my wife continues to enjoy her employment. Our income allows me to volunteer, to pursue personal interests and offers future security.

Despite being a digital immigrant, I have access to many sources of communication and information about the things important to my family and me. My health is probably better than it was before I retired, but well-established community support and health services are features of my community should I need them.

Overall I’m excited and optimistic about my situation and opportunities at this stage of life. It reminds me of being a 10 or 12-year old kid—my life seems quite sheltered with new and promising paths to explore.

But I know the boyhood parallel is temporary. New pathways also contain threats. Challenges are not always predictable or amenable to change. For example, good health, adequate income and social connections can be real chinks in the armor of protective experience that may come with increased age.

Let me share some a couple of experiences so far. Then I will conclude with a challenge

1. My retirement after, a 22-year career in seniors’ issues and really exciting collaboration in establishing the age-friendly communities model, brought an immediate shift in perspective.



I was no longer absorbed (or protected) by the focus on aging at the macro- and mezzo-levels of policy and program development. Instead, I became immersed in micro-level realities faced by a husband and wife (aged 87 and 93) who have moved to supported living. A third woman (aged 99) continues to live independently in her own apartment, but with increasing frailty, reduced mobility and at a real distance from her family.

2. Less urgently, but on a fairly regular basis, I meet well-educated, successful friends and colleagues who are on the cusp of retirement. They want to know if I am really retired; second, they want to know if I am “busy”, and most important, what occupies my time. I suspect that these questions are not just social banter but that they reflect on their own concerns. Perhaps you agree that the specifics of life after, even a well planned retirement, is terra incognita for many.

The AFC model addresses the collective requirements of aging communities, but as we all realize, aging is an individual experience. It is the sum of internal/personal, as well as external/societal factors, for each of us. Perhaps you will agree that the specifics of post-work life experience are terra incognita in terms of broad public knowledge and understanding.

When I think about the three seniors I spoke of earlier I am amazed by their combined personal life experiences. During the 20th C. in Europe and Canada they have lived the Depression era, survived Hitler’s war and extermination camps, chosen migration, rebuilt their lives, raised gold medal kids, and achieved financial wellbeing. They overcame huge challenges by making difficult choices, exercising great will and demonstrating personal independence as an art form. While each of these people is unique, they express a common conviction, definitely not a choice, that their lives are now to be endured. Diminished health and their own personality traits have conspired to limit the options in their advanced age.

From my limited experiences as a senior I draw a bit of a mash-up of truisms and sayings:

Acquiring personal resilience is an ongoing lifelong necessity; and, it is everybody’s business. Resilience is a positive trait for individuals but society should also recognize it as dynamic, a trait to be nurtured and supported.

Advancing age does not reduce Life’s demands on individuals; there is no rest for the weary. Trusting to good luck or genetic endowment may be necessary in the face of this reality, but it is strategically insufficient. What are the self-protective strategies individuals need and can they be acquired in later life?

An individual’s greatest strengths can be their greatest weakness; we all have pre-existing conditions. The very independent nature of many who succeeded in adult life can be a millstone if reality calls for interdependence in daily living.



SO HERE'S MY CHALLENGE.

I am proud and extremely grateful for the fulfillment that my work in AFC has allowed me to feel. But you know, in the face of my admittedly limited experience, I have really wondered about the relevance of the AFC model across the full range of old age concerns.

On the one hand, the AFC model is being successfully and creatively implemented in more than 850 Canadian communities as well as globally. It is being monitored by innovative and important research initiatives. Furthermore, with collaboration including different levels of government, academic research centers and NGOs, like the WHO and IFA, there is a global movement. We have every reason to expect that important new knowledge will result that enables governments and our communities to optimize responses to an aging population. These are the very goals that I recall being in the forefront of our design and development efforts. So, it's all-good!

On the other hand, looking forward I suggest there is another, important challenge and opportunity for the Age-friendly Communities movement. I believe that AFC communities offer an unparalleled opportunity to increase the knowledge of skills individuals need in order to optimize their adaptations to successful aging in later life.

I imagine this is already being accomplished for those directly involved in local AFC initiatives. This is fortunate for them, but inadequate in the face of the need. We need increased 'storytelling' about older persons who must learn to adapt their valuable independence from a lifetime of experience and accept and value new forms of interdependence.

Some components of successful aging are becoming more widely known e.g. physical fitness, good nutrition, and social interaction. In other areas, understanding how to prepare for and make later life psychological and behavioral adaptations is much less clear. We want to show—not only increases in the number of age-friendly communities around the world but also—that people are better able to take advantage of AFC benefits!

The challenge is to ensure that AFC research, knowledge development and dissemination can go an extra step. Age-friendly Communities could provide living laboratories to explore the insights of older adults, in order to create and disseminate teaching and learning tools that increase the ability of individuals, not just communities, to adapt and prepare for successful aging.

Thank you for your attention.



Leo Bonnell

Good afternoon. I want to say thank you to Jim and Verena from the Centre on Aging for the invitation and the opportunity to be here in Winnipeg at this invited International symposium. It will be a great opportunity over the next few days to learn from other participants, who are here from other parts of Canada and the world community.

I have been asked to share with you some background information on me, where I live, what have I done, and my thoughts on the topics of an aging population and age-friendly communities, as I have experienced it in my home province.

As indicated last night at the dinner introductions, I live in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, one of the most creative and uncomplicated places in the world. Now, for the benefit of the folks who are here from outside of Canada I should tell you that N.L. is one of the ten provinces of Canada and located on Canada's east coast on the Atlantic ocean side. Newfoundland and Labrador was a former colony of Great Britain up until 1949, when Canada decided to join Newfoundland. The Canadians in this room will understand this last part and why we sometimes put it in this context.

To give you some personal background I am happy to tell you that I have been a community volunteer throughout my working career that has now continued into my retirement years.. This volunteer work have ranged from the presidents of Rotary and Lions clubs, chamber of commerce, bankers associations to church boards to mention just some. My three adult children have now followed my example and are actively involved in community volunteer work in addition to the demands of their professional careers.

In 2004, I retired from a banking career of 42 years. It was during the years when I was the Bank Manager in the many towns and communities where the bank had asked me to serve, I developed an interest in seniors. I had identified a huge need for financial awareness among older adults, so I would take banking information sessions to "town hall" meetings or seniors clubs in smaller outlying communities to engage older people in discussions around financial matters. It was a huge success not only from a business promotion aspect but also as a community education service to seniors. It now seems like a "seniors friendly" initiative before "age-friendly" became a concept on a global scale.

Soon after my retirement in 2004, I accepted an appointment from the Government of N. L. as Chairperson of a newly created advisory called the Provincial Advisory Council on Aging and Seniors.

The Province had just launched its Healthy Aging Policy Framework and the Advisory Council was considered to be an extremely important component of this Framework. Our government



had recognized that seniors were important and wanted to ensure there was a place for their voice to be heard on matters that impacted them. The Council's mandate is to advise and inform government on issues and needs of seniors. Our government has been receptive to the recommendations from the advisory council and many of the senior friendly programs and strategies in our province today is as a result of advice from the advisory council.

In my role as Chairperson , I receive many invitations to be a guest speaker, to participate in conferences/ forums and other seniors related events, as well as to add support to our the Minister of Health and Community Services, who has a responsibility for seniors .

In 2007, The Town of Clarenville (where I live) became one of the 10 communities in Canada to pilot the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities initiative. I was invited to take a leadership role in the Steering Committee established to pilot this project. Out of this Committee emerged Random Age-Friendly Communities Board with an organizational structure that would oversee an action plan to create a more age-friendly town. The Age-Friendly movement has a high profile in the town. We are recognized for the value of the work that is being done at the community level. One of the first things we did as a Board was to have a resolution passed in the Town Council committing to the principles of AFC. This proclamation signing by the Mayor was later done at a public function.

There have been many "age-friendly" achievements over the last five years. Time does not permit me to outline all of them now, but it is worth mentioning one of the most recent initiatives. Our municipal governments, along with our community partners, have just started the development of an Age-Friendly Park. This park is located in an area near a seniors' housing complex, the high school, Shopping mall, Regional Hospital and Long-Term Care Centre. The Park will have safe walking trails, benches, gazebo and green spaces. The aim is to encourage social participation, physical activity, as well as intergenerational activities. Linking up older people up with the youth can create an environment of a better understanding among the two age groups.

I consider myself privileged to have been able to lead the charge on our Random Age-Friendly Communities initiative and through my provincial position to be a source of advice and assistance for other communities in our province that are now on, or starting the AFC journey.

I have many other community roles, including being a member of the Reference Group for Public Health Agency of Canada at the Federal level to help guide the implementation of AFC in Canada .

As mentioned earlier my home province in Canada is Newfoundland and Labrador. Like other provinces in Canada, we are experiencing population aging. In fact, we have the highest median age of 44 years in Canada. Besides a change in demographics, the human landscape in some towns and communities is changing.



The province is experiencing both out-migration and in-migration all at the same time. Younger workers are moving away to Western Canada and other parts of the world for employment. This leaves older parents and grandparents in small communities without their family supports. In-migration is occurring as a result of out of province retirees returning to their homeland for retirement (explain). Additionally, highly skilled people from other areas of Canada and the world are coming to our shores to work in the booming oil, gas and mining industries. This prosperity has brought about change to the structure and make-up of those communities that had previously been quietly inhabited by decedents primarily from Ireland and England. Community life has changed and some of this change has not been positive. Some of our seniors are being left behind. This new prosperity has placed additional demands for housing and rental accommodations, thereby impacting seniors and families living on fixed incomes. The highways are a little more crowded at times.

As an advocate and champion for the needs of older adults, I have been asked the question: "how do you see older adults in today's world"? Firstly, I see seniors, as an age group, becoming increasingly important to all parts of our society now and well into the future. Important, because of what they have to give back to society in terms of wisdom, experience, voting power and buying power in the marketplace. It is a well-known fact that seniors of today and tomorrow are aging, and will age differently, than their parents and grandparents. A large portion of this demographic will have higher education levels, will have more disposable retirement incomes and will be giving healthy aging a greater priority. As a result, they will be demanding from their governments at all levels, and the service providers, programs and services that are geared to their lifestyle. In other words, the new world order will consist of older adults—they will hold the balance of power.

In saying this I recognize however, that there will always be a segment of the adult population that will have greater dependence on society, due to a variety of circumstances and will still face challenges in their day to day living. Issues like financial, affordable housing, transportation, health care and so on. That is a fact of life.

While I feel positive changes are happening in the way older people are viewed, I know there is still a lot of work yet to be done in order to profile older adults for their value to society. We are exposed to stereotypes that still show older people through a lens of diminished value, and as a burden on society and especially the healthcare system. Government and other agencies campaigns/programs, to better educate society about aging have helped reduce ageism, but we all still have to be vigilant to ensure these attitudinal shifts continue to reflect a more accurate picture of older adults.

Another question that has been often asked is: "How do we as community leaders, advocates, government officials, business and healthcare professionals best respond to the needs of an aging population?"



Based on my experience at the community level, I truly believe that there is no one other single initiative that focuses directly on this demographic as does the age-friendly communities model. Each one of the eight domains as outlined in the Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities Guide contributes directly to the well-being of older adults. The benefits to society and reduced health care costs are huge in my view.

Embracing the principles of the AFC concept will make a difference in the lives of all age groups not only those deemed to be older. This global movement has already started and moving forward. There is ever increasing competition for scarce government resources these days, but I believe we all have a role to play to constantly educate and remind our government leaders at all levels why it is so important to build upon this AFC initiative. It's the right thing to do.

To move this initiative forward, it will be necessary to get the AFC message on as many agendas as possible. Most of all, community champions and community partners will be the engine that will make things happen. Governments can only do so much. Citizens and seniors themselves have to be involved. We should never miss an opportunity to promote the economic benefits that can be gained by a community that has become an "age-friendly community" (population growth).

WE should all have a vested interest in aging as more and more of us become seniors—so, why wouldn't you want to live in an age-friendly town or city?

Thanks for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. I want to leave you with this message: Older adults have given some of their best years in their contributions to their towns and communities where they have lived—they have devoted their lives and energies to help shape a better future for their families, and society in general. I don't think we want to be remembered as the generation that was neglectful in our duty to provide the appropriate support.

Thank you.



Appendix D—Community of practice

Communities of practice

A tool to support age-friendly community development?

Since its launch in October 2007, the World Health Organization’s Age-Friendly Cities initiative has gained widespread global appeal. The initiative has captured the interest of large cities as well as smaller rural and more remote communities. Interest and engagement is diverse ... geographic regions, communities large and small, researchers and policy makers, civil society and the business community.

In less than five years much has been learned. However, challenges remain in sharing those experiences and in supporting the diverse global interests in creating and sustaining more age-friendly environments. The WHO has established the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, implementation models have been developed in various countries, milestones and standards have been established and promotion and recognition programs are in place in some regions and countries.

At the same time, there is an ongoing recognition of resource limitations, competing demands for community attention and for the challenges of sharing knowledge and nurturing what is still a new, uncertain but very promising initiative. Leadership, partnership and sustainability remain key elements to the future success of the age-friendly community movement.

At the first international Conference on Age-Friendly Cities, held in Dublin, Ireland in September 2011, Etienne Wenger shared perspectives on the development and the utilization of Communities of Practice. He notes that “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor. “Communities of practice provide a new model for connecting people together in the spirit of learning, knowledge sharing, collaboration and individual, group and organizational development.” (iCoHere Inc). Communities of practice are important because they:

Connect people together who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact, either as frequently, or at all.

Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight.



Enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new mutually-beneficial opportunities.

Capture and diffuse new knowledge that expands awareness of a larger system of possibilities and advances the agenda of an individual, group, organization and/or industry.

Wenger identifies three essential characteristics of a community of practice:

The domain: A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. (You could belong to the same network as someone and never know it.)

The community: In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. A website in itself is not a community of practice. Having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together. The claims processors in a large insurance company or students in American high schools may have much in common, yet unless they interact and learn together, they do not form a community of practice. But members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together on a daily basis.

The practice: A community of practice is not merely a community of interest—people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

Wenger notes that it is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community.

iCohere Inc. makes the point however, that communities of practice are not “built” per se. They are dynamic social structures that require “cultivation” so they can emerge and grow. Organizations can, however, sponsor communities of practice and through a series of steps, individuals can design a community environment, foster the formalization of the community, and plan activities to help grow and sustain the community. But ultimately, the members of the community will define and sustain it over time.

Centre on Aging



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

338 Isbister Building
Winnipeg MB Canada R3T 2N2
Phone: 204.474.8754 | Fax: 204.474.7576 | Email: coaman@ad.umanitoba.ca
<http://umanitoba.ca/centres/aging>