

Age-Friendly Summit

A two-day summit on Age-Friendly Communities was held in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba on February 11 and 12, 2008. The summit, hosted by the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, focused on informing communities throughout the province about age-friendliness and ways to make communities more ‘friendly’ and accommodating to people of all ages.

Approximately 70 representatives from 10 communities participated in the summit, including delegates from Arborg, Cartwright, Elkhorn, Gilbert Plains, Gladstone, Morris, Pinawa, The Pas, Roblin, and the R.M. of Macdonald. The Minister responsible for seniors, Kerri Irvin-Ross, provided an opening statement and announced that the rural communities participating will share \$20, 000 in provincial funding.

Speakers offered a variety of global, national, and local perspectives on the importance of developing age-friendly communities. These included Dr. Jane Barratt, Secretary General of the International Federation on Aging; Jim Hamilton from the Public Health Agency of Canada; and Ken Brennan, Mayor of Portage la Prairie.

A panel discussion further highlighted the importance of developing age-friendly communities in Manitoba from the perspectives of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (Shirley Kalyniuk); the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce (Graham Starmer); and the former mayor of Portage la Prairie, Ian MacKenzie.

Verena Menec, Director of the Centre on Aging, highlighted findings from the age-friendly focus groups that took place in Portage la Prairie as part of the Global Age-Friendly Cities Project and spoke about the Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) initiative related to age-friendly communities.

The summit was highly interactive, as participants were given the opportunity to engage in breakout sessions to discuss age-friendly features in their respective communities and to learn about the phases involved in making their communities more age-friendly.

Don Fletcher, President of the Active Living Coalition of Older Adults (ALCOA), offered a compelling and inspiring summary of the two-day’s events. As communities work to develop age-friendly features, he reminded them to ‘start small’, to record successes and learn from them, and to celebrate age-friendly achievements. He quoted Margaret Mead, the American cultural anthropologist, who reminded us to “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”.