

# Claiming Our Space

*Building the Community-  
Based Seniors' Services  
(CBSS) Sector in Canada*



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# Introduction

**By 2043, more than one in four people living in Canada will be over the age of 65.** The vast majority of older adults want to age in their own homes and communities – a term that is known as “aging in place” – but in order to do so, significant capacity-building work must be undertaken now to meet the needs of our rapidly growing aging population.

Currently, older Canadians navigate a fractured system of support as they age. Siloed health and social care systems struggle to provide cohesive services to allow older people to live safely or independently in their homes as they age, and struggle to address the non-medical needs of aging persons. We know that the best health outcomes for any individual (at any age) are achieved by optimizing both medical and non-medical factors in a person’s life.

**Community-based seniors’ services (CBSS) organizations are the backbone of support for older people in communities across Canada.**

Whether it’s a local library, a seniors’ club, a food bank, or another community pillar – CBSS organizations are stepping up with programs and services that address the social determinants of health of older Canadians, ensuring that older people can age in place for as long as they would like to. The support these organizations provide typically falls into one of the following categories:

- Nutritional support
- Health and wellness
- Physical activity
- Safety and elder abuse prevention
- Educational, cultural, and recreational programming
- Information, referral, and advocacy services
- Transportation
- Home and nutritional supports

Despite the vital role CBSS organizations play in supporting the health, wellbeing, and independence of older adults, **access to community-based care has been steadily declining in some communities, especially in rural Canada and in areas with a high population of low-income older adults.** This trend can largely be attributed to a lack of equitable and consistent funding for CBSS organizations across Canada, coupled with a lack of coordination within the sector on a national level. To meet increasing demands for community-based care and to prepare for the upcoming demographic shift associated with rapid population aging, **it is imperative that we prioritize coordination and capacity-building within the CBSS sector, which must include raising awareness of the sector’s critical role in Canadian society and establishing sustainable funding streams for CBSS organizations** in every province and territory.



# Building Up the CBSS Sector

Since CBSS organizations have only begun to convene as provincial and regional sectors in the past decade, and only very recently on a national scale, **we first must collect reliable data on who CBSS organizations are and what they need** before we can take collective action as a coordinated sector. Preliminary steps include:

- profiling the work of CBSS organizations;
- documenting best practices and innovative solutions;
- understanding challenges individual organizations and provincial sectors face;
- building the case for increased collaboration and coordination both within the sector and with external stakeholders, including funders, governments, and other partners in the health, academic and social sectors.

## Case for Support for the CBSS Sector

The challenges facing older people that CBSS organizations address are significant and complex. These include limited accessible transportation options in many communities, a lack of affordable housing, consistent access to affordable, quality home services that support aging in place, barriers to securing timely and adequate medical care, and other factors not within the scope of grassroots organizations.

A national CBSS sector is uniquely positioned to articulate the needs and strengths of older adults and the unique value proposition of CBSS organizations with key stakeholders and realize change at a system level. Community-based seniors services are efficient and cost-effective, are low barrier, are uniquely attuned and connected to the individuals and communities they serve, are agile and responsive, and leverage volunteerism and philanthropy.

**We must build a case for support for increased funding for and awareness of the value of the CBSS sector and the critical supporting role it plays in Canada and in the lives of older adults.**

# National Leadership for the CBSS Sector

To begin the work described above, **a Canadian Community Leadership Council consisting of leaders in provincial CBSS sectors and older people themselves will be established** to guide the multi-year strategic direction of the sector.

HelpAge Canada, serving as the backbone agency supporting the leadership of the Council, will undertake the groundwork of consulting and coordinating with CBSS organizations across Canada under the direction of the Council.

The path forward will build on the successes of established provincial CBSS sectors in British Columbia, Alberta, and other regions, while identifying new needs and priorities as Canada's aging population grows and shifts.

## Five-Year Strategic Objectives and Direction

The Interim Community Leadership Council will work to establish a Strategic Plan and outcomes for this work as determined by the community. The following points are examples of the anticipated objectives the Council may set.

### ***A successful Canadian CBSS Sector will:***

- Become the platform for long-term investment in community-based supports for older Canadians;
- Support data-informed decision making, monitoring, quality assurance, and capacity building with the sector;
- Ensure localization and community-level impact in a diverse country;
- Integrate principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of community care;
- Leverage a national sector to advance shared policy and operational needs, such as workforce planning, standards of practice.

# Five-Year Strategic Objectives and Direction (cont'd)

## ***Within five years, CBSS organizations will:***

1. Belong to a named, coordinated, and influential sector;
2. Develop greater capacities to enhance service delivery;
3. Influence policy shifts at the local, provincial, and national levels;
4. Engage in system change at the micro and macro levels;
5. Gain access to increased funding through a modernized funding framework;
6. Develop meaningful partnerships to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration.

***All aspects of this work will ultimately benefit not only CBSS organizations, but the older people, families, and caregivers who access their programs and services.***

## ***Overview of key activities over the next 24 months:***

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Timeframe</b>                              |
|---|---|
| Establish the Interim National Community Leadership Council                             | February – March 2024                         |
| Develop and endorse the multi-year strategy and workplan                                | March – May 2024                              |
| Develop an awareness campaign and communications plan for the development of the sector | March – June 2024<br>(Implementation ongoing) |
| Host the inaugural Canadian CBSS Sector Summit  | June 2024                                     |
| Identify, develop, and implement capacity-building strategies and initiatives           | September 2024 onwards                        |

# Five-Year Strategic Objectives and Direction (cont'd)

| Activity   | Timeframe          |
|--|--------------------|
| Conduct regional consultations with CBSS organizations across Canada   | March – April 2025 |
| Establish permanent National Community Leadership Council  | April – May 2025   |
| Publish consultation findings and a business case for the value of the CBSS Sector for healthy aging in Canada | June 2025          |
| Host the 2nd annual Canadian CBSS Sector Summit  | June 2026          |
| Identify new priorities and create the path forward for next three years                                       | July 2026 onwards  |

## Conclusion

When we examine the current reality of aging in Canada and begin to imagine a better future, **it is clear we need to harness and amplify the tremendous strength and resilience of CBSS organizations across the country.** While currently disconnected and under-resourced, there are over 8,000 CBSS organizations across Canada doing their best to support healthy aging by providing non-medical programs and services needed by older Canadians.

A recognized sector will help CBSS organizations to secure larger and more consistent funding in support of their programs and services, build individual CBSS organization capacity, find greater efficiency and quality in their work, all to the effect of strengthening support for older Canadians across the country and creating a system of care that can produce better outcomes not just in the short-term, but for years to come.