

COMMUNITY ACTIVATION SESSIONS 2021

Report to the Community Executive Summary



A network of
community allies
for older adults.

*"I'm grateful knowing there are other areas in Alberta with similar challenges and that we can **grow and learn together**. The main purpose is to help older adults in our communities and see **that they age well.**"*

- Community Activation Session participant



In the spring of 2021, the then-named Community-Based Seniors Serving (CBSS) Sector Initiative hosted ten online regional Community Activation Sessions where seniors serving organizations and allies across Alberta came together to:

- Hear updates on the significant growth of this community-led Initiative,
- Provide community insights and feedback on ongoing work, and
- Encourage more community members to engage and participate in the development of the sector and to inform the path forward.

What follows is a continuation of the extensive feedback and consultations that have shaped the Initiative's journey from its very origin. The newly named **Healthy Aging Alberta** invites you to hear what has been shared by like-minded organizations and individuals and to envision how the results from these Community Activation Sessions will inform the path forward in serving seniors across Alberta under a common banner. As individual organizations, our influence is limited to our own sphere. By building a framework that connects the sector's organizations, we'll have a greater impact on the lives of all Albertans.



Healthy Aging Alberta Background

Connecting the organizations that support healthy aging.

The [CBSS Initiative](#) was formed in 2019 through a partnership between community organizations focused on supporting seniors “in community” and the Alberta Ministry of Seniors and Housing. Organizations serving older adults play a critical role in Albertans aging at home, in the community — coordinating efforts is a key step in meeting the needs of the growing demographic of older Albertans.

This provincial approach has aimed to enhance the community-based system of care for older adults which began through a series of province-wide community consultations, resulting in the [What We Heard Report](#) and a plan to move forward on this important work. Early in the pandemic, an Interim Community Leadership Council (CLC) came together to quickly activate the aspects of the plan most relevant to supporting a coordinated pandemic response. The Interim CLC is composed of a group of community leaders who have faithfully guided the work to date based on the original vision captured in the What We Heard Report.

Building relationships. Removing barriers.

Continuing in the same spirit, the Community Activation Sessions provided an opportunity for sector participants to voice their thoughts on the work of the Initiative, especially during a global pandemic that has had severe implications for seniors. COVID-19 both complicated and accelerated the need for better coordinated and integrated systems of care for older adults – systems that truly support safe and healthy aging in place.

A network to reimagine aging in Alberta.

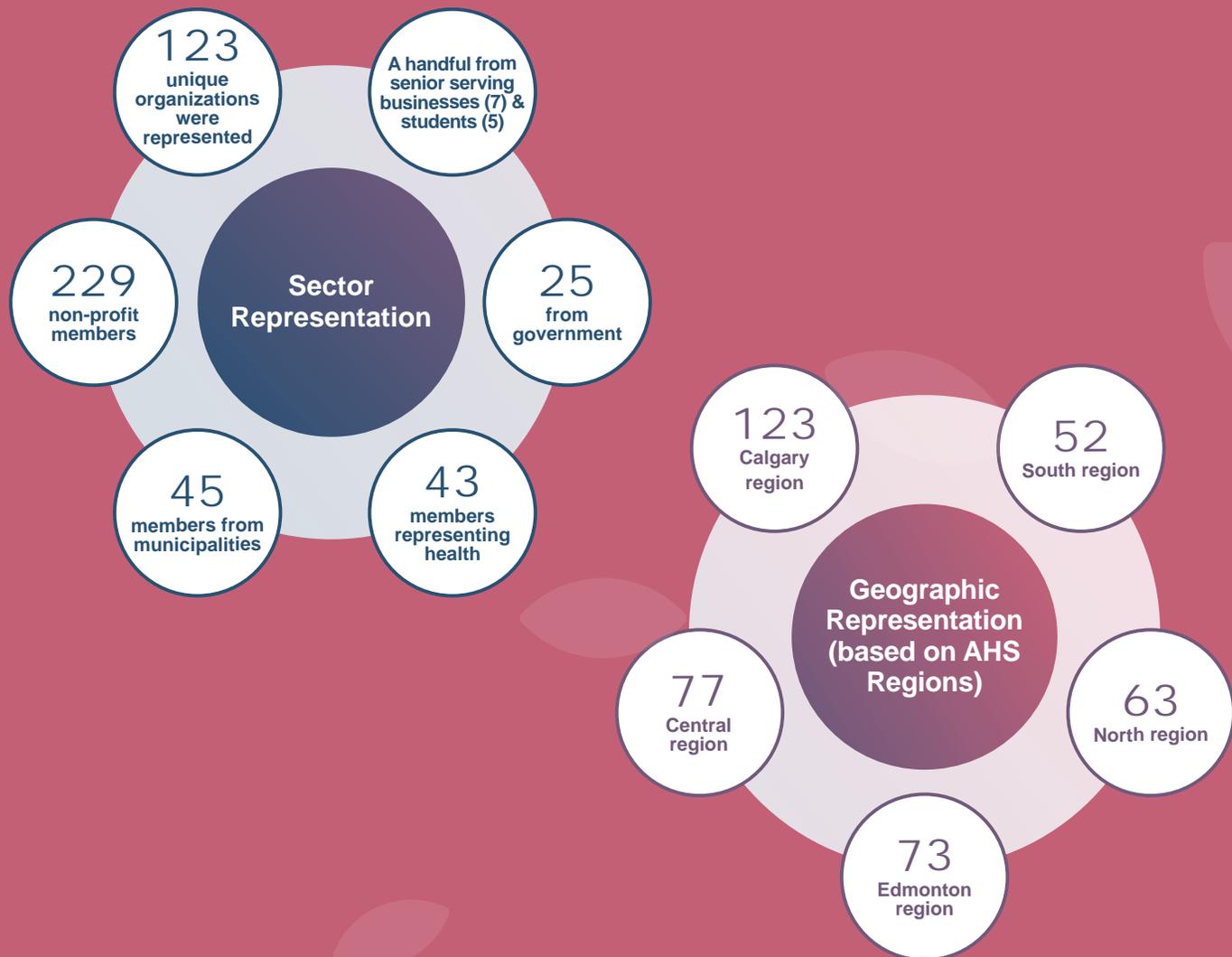
Advocating for the development of a coordinated senior sector in Alberta, the CBSS Initiative aims to create a provincial network of organizations united by a shared vision: ***We want Alberta to be one of the best places in the world to grow older.*** Together we can develop a coordinated community-based seniors serving sector that is respected and integrated within the broader seniors’ system of care and can empower, support, and inspire every senior to age how they choose, ultimately improving health and social outcomes for older adults. The network will advocate for healthy aging, sharing knowledge, and creating functional relationships between senior-serving sectors and other key sectors.



Community Activation Sessions

Creating a unified voice for community organizations serving older Albertans.

Throughout the ten virtual sessions, 354 participants actively engaged with interim CLC members in a dialogue regarding the accomplishments of the CBSS Initiative along with the Initiative's community-led vision and work on the horizon.¹ Participants were wide-reaching with the following audience breakdown:



¹ Aspects of this work that were shared included the Collaborative Leadership Model, including the interim CLC; the Initiative Road Map; CORE Alberta: Collaborative Online Resource and Education knowledge hub; the Healthy Aging Framework; and, the Hub and Spoke Model, which will be renamed as the Constellation of Network Model based on participant feedback from these sessions. Further information is available through the presentation slide deck and session recording on [CORE Alberta](#).

Following a short CBSS Initiative presentation during these sessions, council members and session facilitators dedicated the remaining time to soliciting feedback through three means of information gathering: **breakout sessions**, **polls**, and **post-event surveys**.

It was critical to gauge the participants' motivations for collaboration in the CBSS Initiative along with their current interests and excitement, future hopes, areas of potential, and areas of concern as this culminated in asking participants to better refine the sector's work and how it could be communicated to others. To spur participants into creative and outside-the-box thinking, facilitators walked breakout groups through two exercises:

- The first was to provide words or ideas for a **rallying cry** or **declaration** for the seniors sector, and
- The second was to share a **rose** (something you are glad to see blooming), a **bud** (something you are looking forward to or something that has potential), and a **thorn** (something that we should watch out for or something you are not sure about).

These activities helped break the ice and provided robust discussion, generating 45 ideas for a sector declaration, 145 “roses”, 153 “buds”, and 203 “thorns”, with the most commonly touched upon themes shared in the findings.

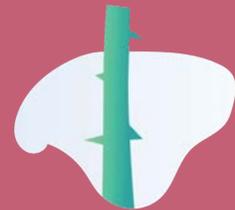
ROSE
Celebrations



BUD
Promise & Potential



THORN
Areas of Concern



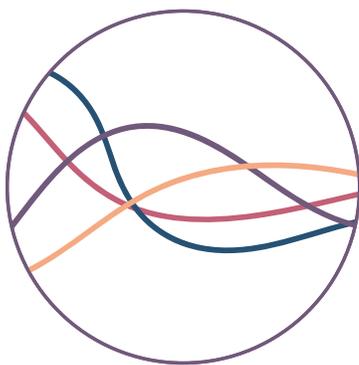
*Click on Rose, Bud, or Thorn
to review the emergent themes*

Overall Findings

More vitality, more support, more community.

The key themes that were pulled out from these exercises along with the questions and polls presented to participants include the following:

- **Seniors are at the centre of the Initiative's work.** There are thousands of incredible organizations in our sector, each offering critical services that support healthy and empowered aging. We are working together to unite these organizations to better serve older Albertans.
- **Diversity, equity, and representation are essential.** The diversity that encompasses all seniors in Alberta must factor in differences amongst rural and urban dwellers, cultural and ethnic groups, varying age groups, and socioeconomic levels.
- **Collaboration is essential to address resource, capacity, and advocacy challenges.** Like a tapestry — we become stronger when we weave our knowledge, expertise and passion together. United, we can create more communities where Albertans are supported as they grow older.



**Sector coordination
and broader
network weaving**



**Cross-sectoral
collaboration
on priority areas**



**Services for older
adults are
better resourced
and enhanced**

These themes were heard loud and clear in the declaration exercise, the roses, buds, and thorns exercise, and in the poll results as participants voted on their priorities. Roses, buds, and thorns themes can be found in [Appendix A](#) which mirrors this summary. Additionally, over 33% of post-survey respondents were excited about the opportunity to collaborate with another 50% excited about the Initiative and its future. The first poll question on **Sector Motivations** asked respondents, “Which area of development would be your strongest motivation for actively participating in this initiative?” The top three results were:

- Improving services for **seniors**;
- **Coordination and connection** to achieve a common purpose, and;
- Developing **cross-sector** coordination and communications.

When asked about **Sector Enthusiasm** in “What elements of the work are you excited about?”, poll results were high for:

- Addressing sector-identified priorities through a **collaborative approach** and;
- Establishment and **coordination** of the CBSS Sector.



In the final poll about the Initiative Name where participants were asked about changing the current name of the Community-Based Seniors Serving (CBSS) Sector Initiative to a more memorable and representative name, the overwhelming winner was “**Healthy Aging Alberta - A Network of Community Organizations Supporting Older Adults**”. This new name and brand have since been adopted, truly embodying the messages of being centred around seniors and collaborating together as a network to empower, support and inspire older adults to age on their terms, while improving health and social outcomes.



**A network of
community allies
for older adults.**

Hearing that we are on the same page about how we can proceed as a seniors serving movement, it is gratifying to unite under this new identity that encapsulates the hard work that countless organizations and individuals have poured into the Initiative since its inception.



*“We know there are a lot of great things happening in regions, and we are building upon it and **connecting it toward the bigger picture.** [We] can all connect and pull in the same direction; any one network can’t do that alone.”*

- Community Activation Session participant

Declaration and Next Steps

Making Alberta one of the best places in the world to grow older.

Moving forward, the declaration exercise served two purposes. The first was that it gave participants the freedom to state what meant the most to them in their sector work, allowing for meaningful expressions that extended beyond role responsibilities and tasks. The second was that these terms could contribute to a statement that would capture the essence and the principles of Healthy Aging Alberta. Creating an aspirational identity through shared accountability and commitment, a future goal is to see organizations come together under a common, defined banner that generates like-minded enthusiasm and collective impact.



Based on the words in this declaration and the overall findings, the next steps for Healthy Aging Alberta are to remain committed to the vision of *collaboratively working together to serve seniors* and to ensure that the community's feedback is continually represented.



³ These points are further expanded in Appendix A.

The information gleaned from this report will be incorporated into the road map going forward. **Enthusiasm** for the work being done so far and the **anticipation** for creativity, innovation, and service improvement in the senior serving sector will balance the need to **pay attention** to accessible communication, advocacy against ageism, diversity and inclusion, creating a sense of belonging, addressing service gaps, and incorporating the voice of seniors at all levels.³

Creating a rich network of community-based organizations, government and health system partners, and allied systems allows us to build the infrastructure that connects them to increase our collective impact and directly impact the lives of older adults in all Alberta communities. This report confirms that we want Alberta to become one of the best places in the world to grow older and that as Healthy Aging Alberta, we will work to get there.

With collaborative actions community-based organizations, health and government partners, families, and individuals can create the infrastructure that some older adults may need to be fully empowered members of their communities.

Together, we can create the bedrock for healthy aging in our province and make Alberta the best place in the world to grow older. We invite you to join us as we build a stronger, better, and brighter future for seniors in Alberta.



*“We need to have **vulnerability, openness, and willingness** to examine processes and change so we can **do better for seniors.**”*

- Community Activation Session participant

Appendix A: Celebrations, Promise and Potential, and Areas for Consideration

Using the imagery of the rose, the bud, and the thorn, Healthy Aging Alberta will embark on its next steps with these comments in mind.

Celebrations (Roses) - What Respondents Were Glad to See Blooming

1. The CORE Alberta knowledge hub allowed people to see collaboration and tangible work happening faster. People appreciated and saw the benefits of this one-stop site to learn and connect. Response to the COVID-19 pandemic was made easier and more complete by using this site.
2. The **momentum** that the initiative has created to date and the desire to see it continue to grow was a point of celebration.
3. **Collaboration** has enabled a holistic approach to serve seniors and a significant amount of work has been completed. Participants were glad to see how many organizations were working together.
4. The **knowledge and information** shared have been an opportunity for the seniors' community to engage and contribute to it. Enhanced by CORE, participants repeatedly noted their gratitude for the breadth of information available to the CBSS organizations.
5. The **coordination and organization** of the work so far have made it clear and easy to follow. Participants were glad to see the roadmap and the frameworks within this coordination and how it allowed CORE to be up and running in 6 months as opposed to the planned 2 years. They also anticipated how it will facilitate the work going forward.



*"I love this whole piece around **collaboration**; we have to work together and not always compete for funding. If we're collectively working together then we reduce competition and that will hopefully **improve quality of care for seniors**."*

- Community Activation Session participant

Promise and Potential (Buds) - What Respondents Looked Forward To or Saw Potential In

1. Looking forward to **new and better relationships**, participants expressed enthusiasm about the opportunities for collaboration.
2. Seeing a lot of **opportunities to grow** as individual organizations and as a sector.
3. The **Healthy Aging Framework** seemed to have a lot of promise, seeing potential in growing and adapting it to the sector.
4. Knowing what has already been happening and what gaps exist by participating in the **Alberta Senior Sector Service Mapping**.
5. Through CORE and other sector collaborations and working groups, the participants were looking forward to the ability to **learn and share** knowledge and information.
6. Across the province, CBSS participants expressed enthusiasm about growing **creativity, innovation, and service improvement** in the senior serving sector.

*“The bud would be how **well-thought-out** everything is. It’s evident that you’re really looking at the senior’s experience and knowing that next is to engage seniors. People that do this work day to day, need to be **leading this work.**”*

- Community Activation Session participant



Areas of Concern (Thorns) - What Respondents Cautioned About or Were Uncertain Of

1. While there is the recognition that creating a sector reduces competition and helps both organizations and the initiative with sustainable funding, a thorn is that **not everyone will understand** or see this. Suggestions provided in the sessions include:
 - a. Ensuring outstanding communication and keeping things simple.
 - b. Supporting access to technology with a multi-pronged approach to staying connected.
 - c. Helping people know where they fit. This is a big initiative and we need to make participation easy and communicate clearly that we are all a part of the sector.
2. There are **gaps in services** for seniors that we need to be aware of and attend to.
3. **Diversity and inclusion** are essential, with considerations made for those in urban and rural settings, different ages, abilities, and cultures. Rural representation is needed at decision-making tables as organizations and individuals are dealing with unique issues and challenges in capacity.
4. The initiative and its output need to be **senior-centered**, as it is critical to hear the voices of seniors in the work at all levels.
5. Building a **strong network** will help the Initiative face increasingly complex challenges in the senior sector. Having the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services' **commitment and connections** are crucial to the sector's work.
6. The Initiative needs to be alert for and **advocate** against ageism and there is a **need for action** and not just words as the Initiative grows.



*“[It is] easy to get lost if you are a smaller centre [and] have fewer organizations available to help [as] not everyone can go online. Larger cities get most of the attention. **Priorities need to serve the needs of everyone.** [The] challenge is that smaller regions have different needs than larger cities.”*

- Community Activation Session participant

Acknowledgments

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