

Continuing to Serve Seniors During the Pandemic

Detailed Report – Community Conversation
and the Sector Capacity Survey

Fall 2021



A network of
community allies
for older adults.

Background

The pandemic has brought new and significant challenges in operations and planning for the Community-Based Senior Serving (CBSS) sector.

To facilitate sharing of experiences, [CORE Alberta](#) hosted a Community Conversation on November 4, 2021, providing a space for **generative discussion** and an opportunity for CBSS organizations and systems partners to **share challenges and innovative solutions** that have been borne because of the pandemic.

The event hosted 53 participants as follows:

- 40 CBSS organizations
- 7 government
- 4 health
- 1 academia

Additionally, Alberta CBSS sector members were surveyed from October 21 to November 26, 2021, to collect further details on the sector's issues in providing services and programming to older adults.

Responses came from across the province, with 23 from the North Zone, 22 from the Central Zone, ten from the South Zone, 27 from Edmonton and 24 from Calgary (based on [Alberta Health Services Zones](#)).

A total of 106 responses were received with **100% completion from all participants**, providing a rich data source for analysis alongside the discussion during the virtual event.

The CBSS Sector identified four major themes in their continued work with older adults throughout the pandemic:

1. **Impacts on the operations of CBSS organizations**
2. **Funding for CBSS organizations**
3. **The challenge of providing services to older adults by staff and volunteers**
4. **How seniors are receiving services**

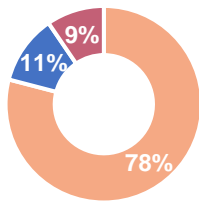
IMPACT: Organization Operations

Almost half (45%) of survey respondents stated that capacity to provide services and programming remained the same, but over a third (36%) experienced a decrease in their ability to provide services over the past 12 months.

Respondents also anticipated their capacity would largely stay the same over the coming three to six months (December 2021-May 2022). A decrease in capacity was also identified concern in the community conversation virtual event.

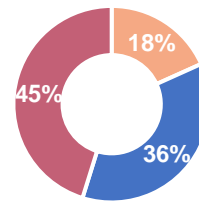
Conversely, almost one-fifth (18%) of respondents have experienced an increase in their capacity to provide programming.

Demand for Programming and services: Prior 12 months



■ Increased ■ Decreased
■ Stayed the same

Capacity in Programming and Services: Prior 12 months



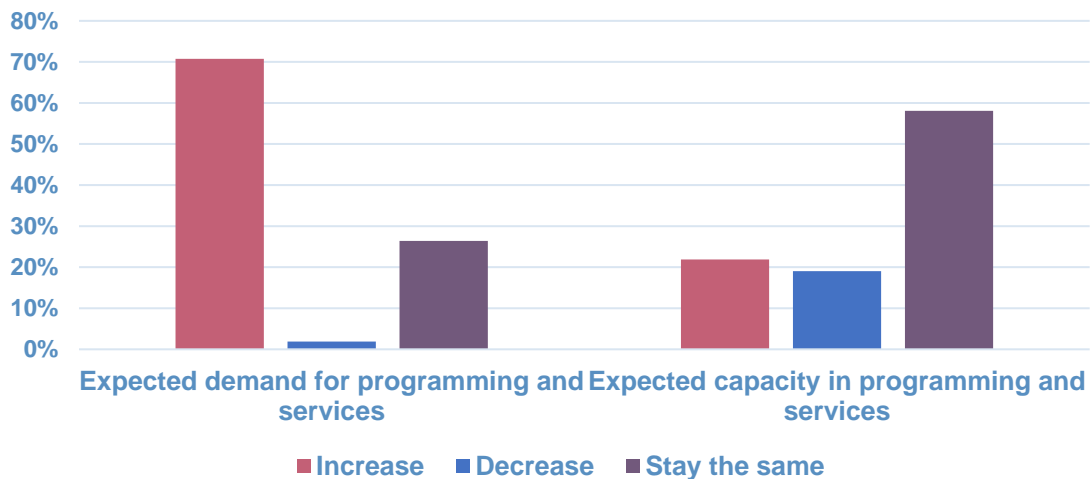
■ Increased ■ Decreased
■ Stayed the same

Waitlists indicate increased demand, and 77% of survey respondents noted **older adults are waiting for access** to programs or services.

This is anticipated to continue to be a challenge, with 65% of survey respondents stating that waitlisting is expected to continue in the coming months.

Compounding this issue is the continued enforcement of health guidelines around social distancing which impacts the ability to offer in-person programming and attract seniors back to facilities when this option is possible.

Anticipated Change in Demand versus Capacity Over the Next 3-6 Months

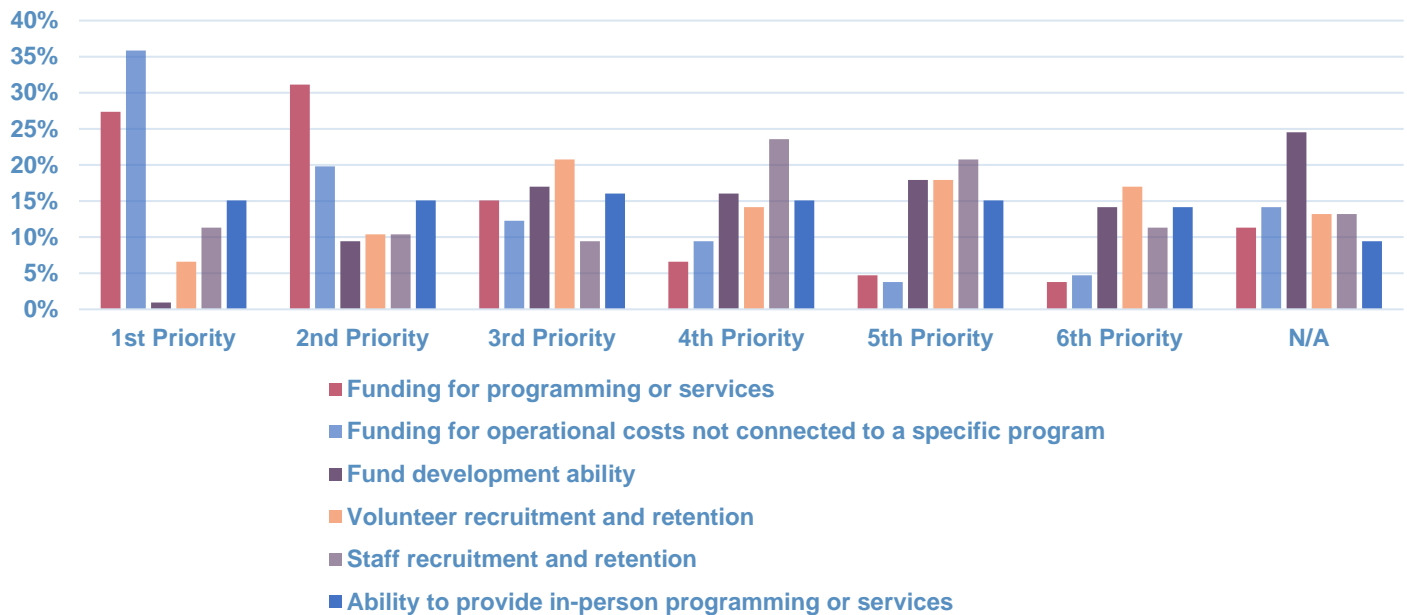


IMPACT: Organization Funding

Looking ahead to concerns that CBSS organizations have about the coming year (December 2021-November 2022), the area of most significant concern is **the ability to raise or maintain adequate funding** for both programmatic and operational expenses.

While funding outranks all other concerns, there are still significant worries about providing in-person programming and services and volunteer recruitment and retention.

**As your organization looks ahead to the next 12 months what are the highest priority needs for you to continue operating?
Choose as many as applicable.
Please rank your needs, with 1 being the highest priority:**



Revenue and funding are key components of capacity and were identified as significant concerns in the community conversation and the survey. The pandemic has highlighted unique challenges with **higher costs** due to inflation, increased gas costs for transportation services, and **supply chain delays** when dealing with procurement.

Over two-thirds of survey respondents identified **current funding** and the **ability to fundraise** as a challenge. Federal government funding is changing or ending. The slow return of seniors participating in programming is problematic for revenue, limiting opportunities for membership renewal and fees collection for program participation.

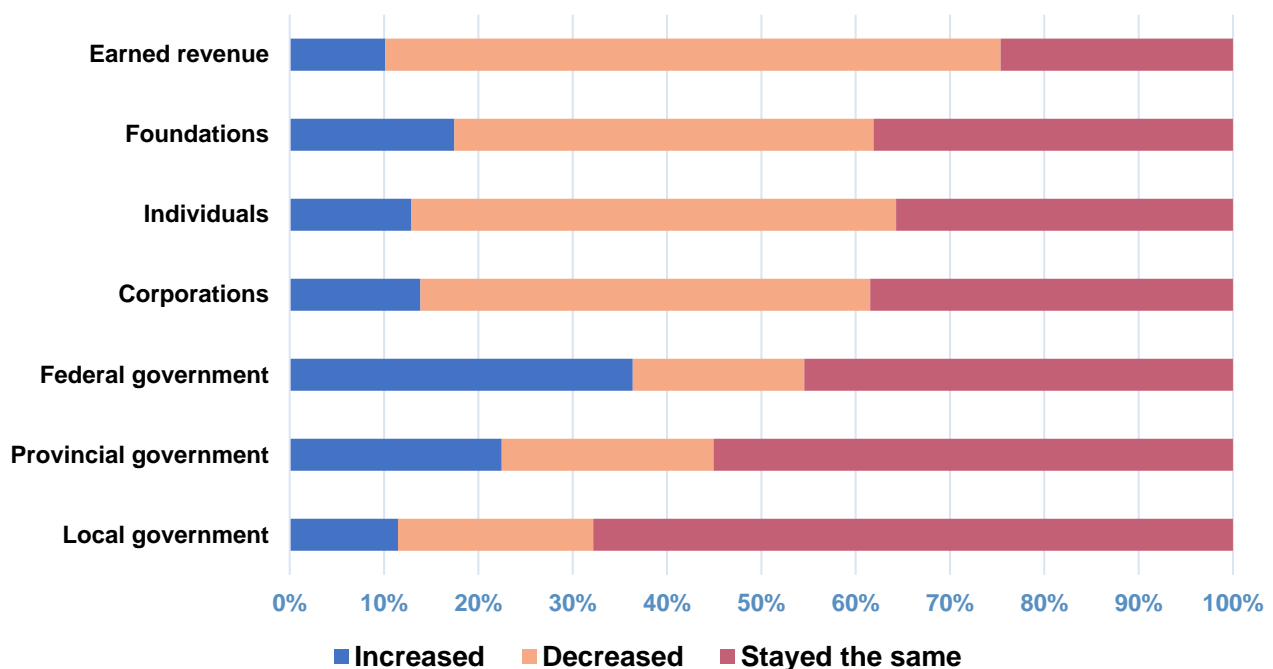
When ranking top priorities over the next twelve months, respondents ranked funding for **programming or services** (27%) or **operational costs** (36%) as their highest priority needs.

Financial challenges are further exacerbated when viewed in tandem with significant changes noted in funding or revenue faced in 2021, as illustrated in the graph below.

Every source of funding taken in by organizations decreased by at least 18% (federal government), with the most significant decreases seen from earned revenue (65% decrease), individuals (51% decrease), and corporations (48% decrease) rounding out the top 3.

While each source of funding also witnessed increases during 2021, the most significant increase came from the federal government at 36%, notably in the form of temporary emergency benefits, including wages and hiring support and rent subsidies.

Changes in Sources of Funding or Revenue in 2021



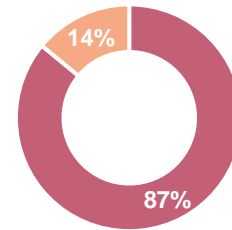
Despite this, a significant number of organizations (87% of survey respondents) feel they have the financial capacity to continue their current level of programming over the coming 3-6 months (December 2021-May 2022)

Organizations Have the Financial Capacity to Continue Current Programming Over the Next 3-6 Months

This may be due to the **multiple sources of funding** that many CBSS organizations receive, from various levels of government to foundations and individuals.

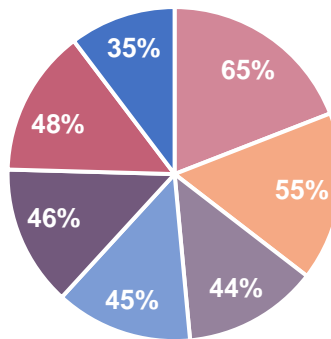
When asked where they expect to receive funding in 2022, and if those sources would remain unchanged for 2022, the breakdown of funding sources confirmed or expected to stay the same, as noted in the figure below.

Local government leads at 65%, followed by the provincial government at 55%, with all sources from foundations, individuals, corporations, and federal government at around the same rate.



■ Yes ■ No

Funding or Revenue Levels Confirmed or Expected to Stay the Same in 2022



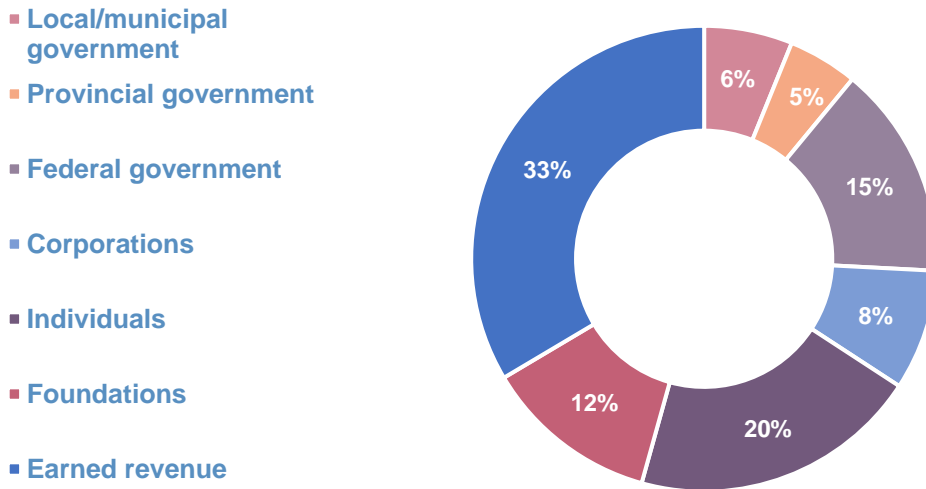
■ Local government ■ Provincial government ■ Federal government
 ■ Corporations ■ Individuals ■ Foundations
 ■ Earned revenue

This is a heartening view of the financial expectations of CBSS organizations; however, there is still a noticeable concern when viewing the responses on confirmed or expected **increased** levels of funding, as well as confirmed or expected **decreased** levels of funding.

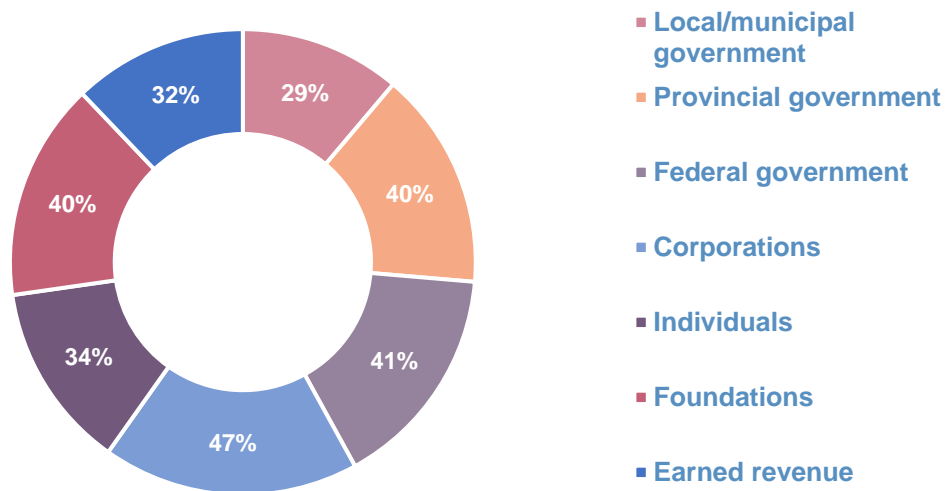


Of note is an optimistic perspective on the expected increased level of earned revenue for 2022, which contrasts with almost one third (32%) of respondents expecting a decreased ability to bring in earned revenue, and slightly higher than one third (35%) believing earned revenue will remain the same as 2021 levels.

Increased Level of Funding Confirmed or Expected for 2022



Decreased Level of Funding Confirmed or Expected in 2022



IMPACT: Service Provision by CBSS Organizations

Overall, participants in small group discussions during the CORE Event identified that demand for services is increasing and their capacity to provide services and supports is decreasing, **creating a gap** in the ability for organizations to offer sufficient programming and services to older adults.

An example was provided in one of the small group discussions around transportation needs. Seniors may not have access to reliable transportation during the pandemic and are increasingly turning to CBSS organizations for rides. This is causing a gap in the capacity of organizations and the inability to support all seniors requesting service.

In addition, the services required are changing as the needs of many older adults are becoming increasingly complex.

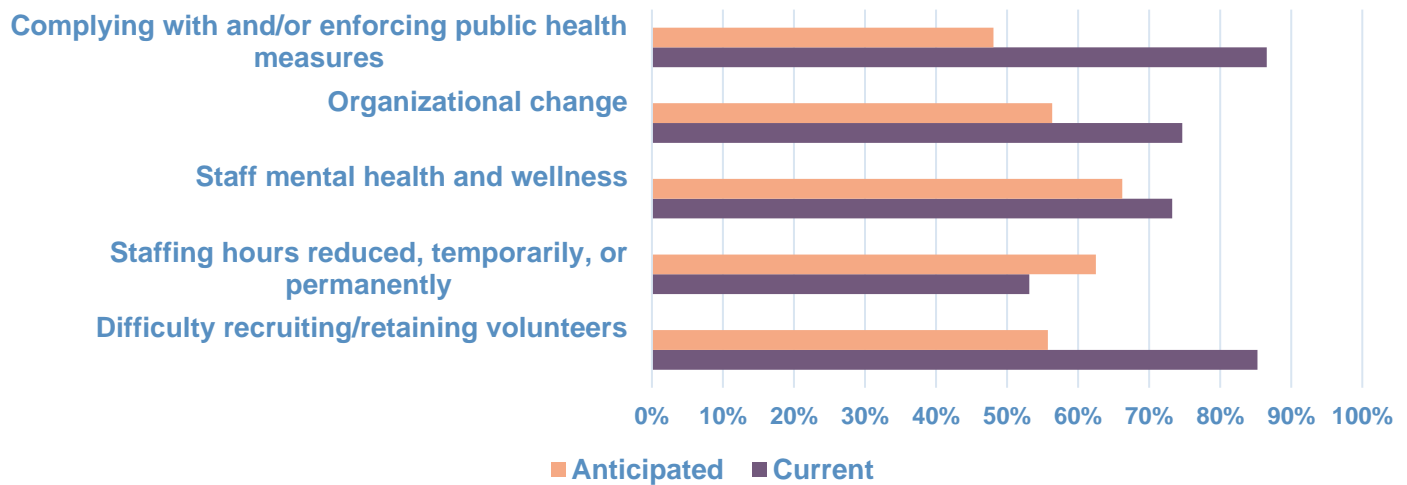
Another example raised during a small group conversation was increased homelessness or its risk due to addictions and/or mental health challenges. Additionally, the consequences of increased income levels after receiving federal pandemic benefits or financial scams perpetrated on seniors who may already be dealing with limited incomes were also raised.

Several factors related to impacts on organizational capacity due to the pandemic were identified, including:

- **Volunteer recruitment and staffing**
- **Funding and operating costs**
- **Capacity of partners**
- **Level of need and complexity of clients**

Survey results mirrored similar concerns, particularly when focusing on service provision by CBSS organizations and the impact on staff and volunteers; the impact has been significant.

Current and Anticipated Challenges with Staff and Volunteers



Volunteerism

Several participants identified volunteers as a critical part of their service delivery models and their capacity to deliver services. The pandemic has impacted **volunteer recruitment and retention** significantly and negatively.

Organizations are seeing a decrease in the number of volunteers and the hours individuals volunteer. It was emphasized in the community conversation that volunteers are an essential component of their service delivery models for many organizations.

Personnel

The pandemic has also impacted staffing and human resource management. During the community conversation, some organizations described higher **turnover** rates; **low morale** is a concern and **mental health** issues amongst staff are emerging.

Funding

Generally, the community conversation participants indicated that their funding has decreased, yet **costs have increased**. As a result, the available funding does not go as far as it did before the start of the pandemic.



Examples of cost drivers are **inflation** (higher costs for gas, food, and the procurement of services) and **administrative costs** associated with putting pandemic health and safety measures in place (cleaning and administrative staff for screening).

Capacity

Some organizations indicated the capacity of organizations they partner with has also been impacted by the pandemic, resulting in **increased workloads** on staff who are tasked with absorbing the provision of services with reductions happening elsewhere (e.g., if an Alberta Supports office is closed in a community, older adults may then seek out CBSS organizations for information, advice, and support).

Capacity can also be viewed from the perspective of **service delivery** and **participation**. Organizations have experienced various forms of opening and closing, impacting **service provision** during the pandemic. Since CBSS organizations offer multiple services (e.g., cafeteria, fitness classes, home supports, transportation), the protocols and processes for re-opening have varied across organizations.



Participation

Several organizations identified that the pandemic prevented them from offering all their regular programs and services. Many are experiencing **hesitancy** by older adults to return to services they participated in before the pandemic.

Some organizations are seeing a higher **complexity of the needs** of the seniors seeking support, and organizations are working on ramping-up services and responding to the changing needs of older adults.

With the pandemic causing service disruption when organizations have reduced staffing levels or are temporarily closed, seniors are **turning to other organizations** as a 'one-stop shop' to have a variety of needs met that is placing an increased burden on staff to provide or source alternative services.

Older adults will seek more assistance when they also experience a **lack of support** due to the loss of a spouse or the inability to receive usual support from family members or support groups. Considerations around how best to deliver services to meet the needs of older adults and **address the participation levels** are concerns moving forward.

The increasing complexity of client needs, combined with the growing demand for services and a minimal increase or a decline in organizational capacity, raises real concerns about the ability of the community-based senior serving sector to meet the demand for services in their communities.



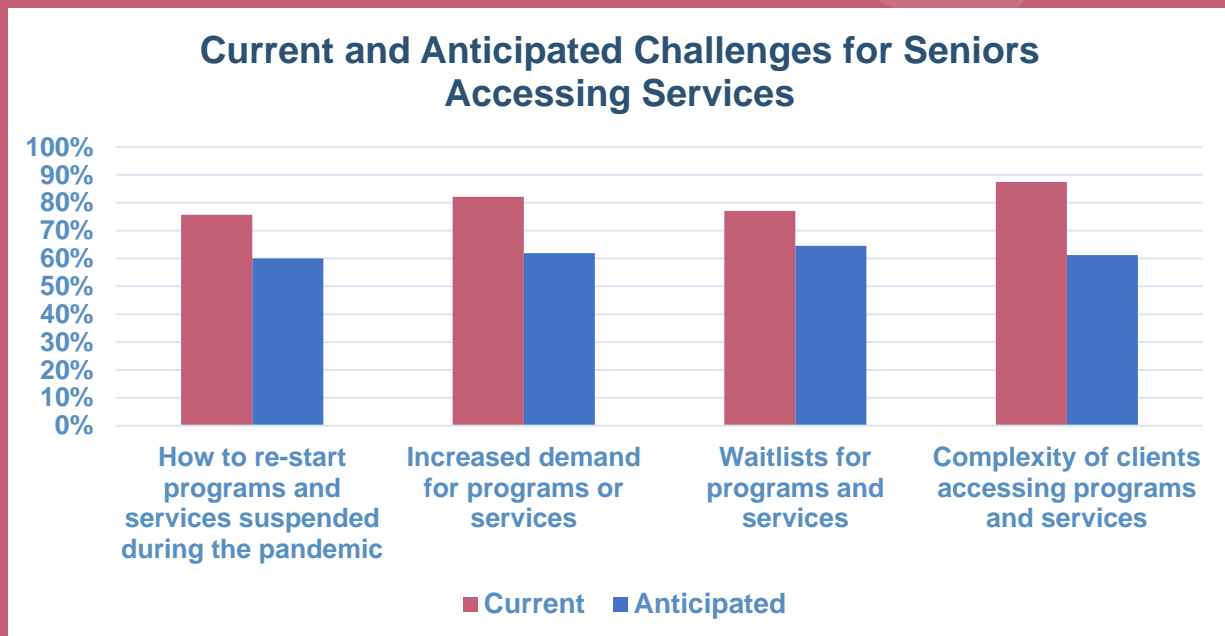
IMPACT: Service Provision on Older Adults

The pandemic has had a wide range of impacts on older adults in Alberta. Through the insights gathered during the community conversation, it is clear that the pandemic has resulted in a significant reduction of access to services, with the needs of many older adults increasing and becoming more complex.

Examples experienced by organizations include an onset or return of **mental health issues** associated with the increased isolation seniors are experiencing and the inability to access support, either due to the reluctance to come to in-person appointments due to fear of exposure or declining to participate in virtual assistance.

There has also been a noticeable **decline in the physical health** of seniors, as regular follow-up appointments with medical professionals are not happening. This is translating into issues of mobility and cognitive decline, heart issues, and increased stress levels with the lack of human connection.

While the survey noted a more positive tone in what is anticipated for serving seniors in the coming three to six months (ending May 2022), there remain significant barriers with access to programming and services for older adults as the pandemic continues.



Access to Services

Access and connection to services by older adults was raised as a critical issue with the ability to access needed services promptly linked to many factors, including:

- Service restrictions due to limited hours of service by CBSS organizations, and service navigation
- Accessible and affordable transportation
- Ability to access and effectively use needed technology
- Hesitancy to participate, and conversely the expectations of older adults in assisting them through pandemic challenges

Health and Well-Being

Community conversation participants expressed deep concern about the mental health impacts of social isolation and an increase in the frailty of many older adults.

Participants identified that the pandemic has impacted the health and well-being of seniors significantly, including experiencing:

- Challenges related to accessing doctors, dentists and needed services
- Increased complexity in health issues that need addressing
- Housing instability and the risk of homelessness
- Prolonged stress, social isolation, depression, grief, fear
- Lower overall physical activity and lack of awareness of essential health prevention information
- Loss of independence
- Addictions

Financial Issues

The financial impact of the pandemic was also raised, with discussion on issues such as older adults being victims of fraud and scams and their Guaranteed Income Supplement federal benefit being negatively impacted because of accessing the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

Participants identified **intersectionality** to all of the above issues: access to service, health and well-being, and financial issues. This intersectionality creates a complexity that CBSS organizations must address.

These issues may be further compounded by location, as living in a rural and/or isolated community was identified as an added layer of complexity to the impacts of the pandemic as it introduced barriers such as partial or complete lack of access to transportation and reliable internet service.

In examining the available services that organizations typically offer to seniors, it is essential to see the broad scope of coverage while realizing the gaps that still exist.

What Services Does Your Organization Offer to Seniors?



Summary

In reviewing the robust community conversations and survey findings, it was evident that many CBSS organizations faced similar challenges together. Those who participated in the community conversation and survey shared honest feedback about what was working and what was not. By bringing the sector together, **Healthy Aging Alberta** sought to unify collective voices into identifying shared concerns and spotlighting potential solutions and service innovations.

This **Detailed Report** complements the **Executive Summary**, both of which are available on **CORE Alberta**. For more information about this community conversation, the past **Community Activation Series**, or any future stakeholder engagement event, please contact Healthy Aging Alberta at healthyaging@calgaryunitedway.org.



“[There is] agreement that we are facing common problems and we can develop common solutions.”

- Community Conversation Participant

Thank you to all who participated in this vital conversation and snapshot in time of what it looks like to serve older adults in Alberta.

We are especially grateful to **Alberta Nonprofit Network** (ABNN) for their support providing raw data and permission to use survey questions from their pulse surveys as the starting point for the CBSS Sector Service Delivery Capacity Survey.

