

## **A plan to develop the third Toronto Seniors Strategy**

**Date:** May 10, 2024

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care

**Wards:** All

### **SUMMARY**

---

This report provides a response to City Council's request for a plan to develop the third Toronto Seniors Strategy.

Toronto's senior population is growing, with increasing diversity and evolving priorities for aging in place. Building on the first (2013-18) and second (2018-22) Toronto Seniors Strategies, the third Toronto Seniors Strategy will continue to develop and adapt City programs, policies, and strategic initiatives to better support aging in place, particularly for seniors who are Indigenous, Black, and those who belong to equity-deserving groups.

SSLTC has developed a community consultation process to identify the priorities of seniors in Toronto. The multi-modal community consultation plan was developed based on City engagement practices, best practices for engaging with seniors, and principles of equity and accessibility. The consultation methods are informed by leading practices for the engagement of seniors, as identified in the literature. This community consultation process will enhance the City's understanding of the concerns and experiences of seniors in Toronto, with a focus on equity-informed priorities for aging in place. The consultation results will be combined with sociodemographic data and input from key stakeholders to develop the third Toronto Seniors Strategy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

---

The General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the approach to community consultation outlined in this report and direct the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care to implement the planned consultation approach.
2. City Council request the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care to develop the third Toronto Seniors Strategy.

## FINANCIAL IMPACT

---

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendations of this report. The costs related to the implementation of the community consultations described in this report will be accommodated within the 2024 SSLTC operating budget.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial implications as identified in the Financial Impact section.

## DECISION HISTORY

---

On November 9, 2023, City Council directed the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care to report back to City Council on a plan to develop the next Toronto Seniors Strategy, including resources required:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2023.MM12.9>

On December 17, 2019, the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care presented an update to City Council on the second Toronto Seniors Strategy:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2019.EC10.8>

On May 22, 2018, City Council unanimously approved the second Toronto Seniors Strategy, directing relevant City divisions and agencies to implement the 27 recommendations within it:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2018.EX34.2>

On February 28, 2018, the Community Development and Recreation Committee adopted a Progress Report on the first Toronto Seniors Strategy:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.CD26.3>

On November 29, 2016, the Community Development and Recreation Committee adopted a Progress Report on the first Toronto Seniors Strategy:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2016.CD16.8>

On December 9, 2015, City Council adopted the Progress Report covering actions taken under the first Toronto Seniors Strategy between 2013 and 2015; and requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration develop the second Toronto Seniors Strategy:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.CD8.1>

On May 7, 2013, City Council unanimously approved the first Toronto Seniors Strategy: Towards an Age-Friendly City, and directed the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to coordinate and monitor implementation and provide progress reports to the Community Development and Recreation Committee:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD20.1>

On April 12, 2011, City Council directed the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to develop a comprehensive strategic plan for seniors in consultation with other levels of government, school boards, relevant community organizations and individuals, businesses and academia that is adequately funded,

financially feasible and able to be implemented:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.CD2.4>

## **Equity Impact Statement**

The plan to develop a third Toronto Seniors Strategy has been analyzed for potential equity impacts on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities. Overall, seniors' access to City information, services, and spaces has the potential to be positively impacted by a third Toronto Seniors Strategy.

The proposed community consultation process has the potential to reach seniors who are Indigenous, Black or who belong to equity-deserving communities, to enhance the City's understanding of inequitable access to City services among seniors. The community consultation process will use supports that aim to maximize accessible and equitable engagement for senior participants.

An intersectional analysis reveals that seniors experience a unique set of social and economic barriers that lead to inequitable access to City programs and services. Barriers related to age are compounded by other intersecting systems of oppression, including but not limited to ableism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and colonialism. There is an opportunity to develop a third Toronto Seniors Strategy that considers these systemic inequities, which are palpable determinants of health and well-being.

## **COMMENTS**

---

### **Toronto's Sociodemographic Context**

Toronto's population is aging. Demographic trends from the latest Census have significant and long-term implications for addressing the priorities of seniors in Toronto. The proportion of Toronto residents over the age of 65 increased from 2016 to 2021. In 2021, there were approximately 477,000 adults aged 65 years and older in Toronto.<sup>1</sup> By 2041, there are expected to be over 719,000 adults aged 65 years and older in the city, representing over a 50% increase in the number of adults in that age group.<sup>2</sup> In 2020, Toronto residents aged 65 and older had a median after-tax income of \$30,000, and a larger proportion of racialized Toronto seniors were living on a low income when compared to non-racialized seniors.<sup>3</sup> There is also considerable linguistic diversity among Toronto seniors, as nearly half (49%) speak a language other than English at home.<sup>4</sup>

Aging in place describes the process of supporting healthy aging while allowing seniors to remain in the most appropriate setting, based on their needs and preferences.<sup>5</sup> Seniors in Toronto, and Canada, are increasingly expressing a desire to age in place in their homes and will require various community and social supports to do so.<sup>6</sup> However, seniors also experience social and economic barriers that impede their ability to access City programs and services that enable aging in place, including food insecurity, housing affordability, transportation and mobility, financial security, and social isolation. These concerns are magnified when coupled with factors such as increasing age, poverty, immigration status, race, sexual orientation, or health status. The impact of

these barriers is demonstrated by the following findings from recent reporting on seniors:

- Seniors who are Indigenous, immigrants, racialized, women, above age 85, or live alone, experience the highest rates of poverty.<sup>7</sup>
- Seniors comprise 10% of food bank clients in Toronto, and the number of seniors accessing food banks in Toronto has increased by 31% from 2022 to 2023.<sup>8</sup>
- In 2023, 25% of Canadians aged 50 and older reported that their income was insufficient, and 26% were uncertain that they would be in a position to retire on their preferred timeline due to affordability.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2023, 41% of Canadians aged 50 and older were at risk of social isolation,<sup>8</sup> and in 2022, participation in arts, culture and recreation had decreased among Toronto residents aged 55 and older.<sup>10</sup>

The health and wellbeing of seniors was disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Case rates were disproportionately high among marginalized and racialized communities,<sup>11,12</sup> and public health measures exacerbated existing challenges experienced by people living on a low income, the 2SLGBTQI+ community, people living with disabilities, and people unsheltered or living in inadequate housing.<sup>13</sup> The systemic barriers highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic continue to impact the health and social well-being of seniors and must be addressed.

These trends and experiences underscore the need to adapt City programs, policies, and strategic initiatives to better support aging in place, particularly for seniors who are Indigenous, Black and those who belong to equity-deserving groups. Seniors are essential and valued members of our communities, and the City of Toronto has an opportunity to build upon previous and ongoing efforts to meet the priorities of Toronto's growing demographic of diverse seniors.

### **City of Toronto's Previous Toronto Seniors Strategies**

The first and second Toronto Seniors Strategies advanced key City initiatives that supported the quality of life, social participation, access to services, and well-being of seniors in Toronto. Due to the advancements made by these strategies, the City was officially recognized as a member of the World Health Organization's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities in 2016 and has since renewed the City's qualification for this designation. Each iteration of the Toronto Seniors Strategy was developed in collaboration with City divisions and agencies, community partners, seniors, and caregivers.

### **Developing the Third Toronto Seniors Strategy: Proposed Approach to Community Consultation**

The third Toronto Seniors Strategy will build on the age-friendly and age-inclusive initiatives of the previous strategies to advance age-equity in Toronto. Barriers related to age are compounded by intersecting systems of oppression, including but not limited to ableism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and colonialism. There is an opportunity to develop a third Toronto Seniors Strategy that considers these systemic inequities, which are palpable determinants of seniors' health and well-being. Age-equitable initiatives are those that account for, and address, varied experiences and challenges related to aging, recognizing that age is not the only factor that may limit a senior's access to services and supports.

Effective, robust community consultations are an important first step in the development of City-wide strategies. SSLTC intends to implement a community engagement process to identify the priorities of seniors (over the age of 65) and older adults (over the age of 50) in Toronto. The consultation will focus on understanding equity-informed gaps and priorities related to aging in place. Combined with sociodemographic data, the community consultation results will be a key input into the development of the third Toronto Seniors Strategy.

The plan to develop the third Toronto Seniors Strategy will have four key phases, which are described in greater detail below:

- Engage key stakeholders: Engagement of key stakeholders who will support the implementation and uptake of community consultations.
- Develop methods and tools: Develop accessible methods and tools to collect input from seniors, older adults, caregivers, organizations that serve seniors, City staff, and subject matter experts.
- Implementation: Implementation of the City-wide community consultation process to enhance the City's understanding of the concerns and experiences of seniors in Toronto, with a focus on equity-informed priorities for aging in place.
- Develop the third Toronto Seniors Strategy: Engagement of relevant City staff to develop the objectives and recommendations of the third Toronto Seniors Strategy.

This multi-modal community consultation process will aim to gather perspectives from several key stakeholder groups including, but not limited to: Seniors, older adults, caregivers, organizations that serve seniors, City staff, and subject matter experts. There will be an intentional focus on the engagement of seniors who are Indigenous, Black, and those who belong to equity-deserving communities.

The community consultation process will be rooted in City guidelines, best practices, equity, and accessibility. To maximize the opportunity for participation, a variety of methods will be used, including a public survey, pop-up events, in-person community meetings, focus groups, and key informant interviews. These methods are selected based on leading practices for the engagement of seniors, as identified in the literature, and with input from subject matter experts.

To maximize the accessible and equitable participation of seniors in these engagements, supports will be provided to participants. These supports include, but are not limited to, accessibility supports for participants with disabilities, as well as written translation and in-person interpretation to maximize the participation of seniors who are not comfortable communicating in English.

Key stakeholders will be involved in promoting awareness and uptake of the community consultations. These stakeholders include, but are not limited to, the Toronto Seniors Strategy Accountability Table, Toronto City Councillors' Offices, and the Toronto Seniors' Forum, a program advisory body of SSLTC that helps shape actions taken by the City to advance its commitment to seniors in Toronto.

In addition to the promoting uptake of the community consultation process, the Toronto Seniors Strategy Accountability Table will support the development of the third Toronto

Seniors Strategy. This multi-sectoral table is comprised of City divisions, agencies and corporations, seniors sector partners, health system partners, and other community stakeholders who regularly convene with SSLTC around the implementation of the Toronto Seniors Strategy and emerging issues for seniors in Toronto.

Following the implementation of the City-wide community consultation process, SSLTC will aim to develop a 10-year Toronto Seniors Strategy. SSLTC will work with relevant City divisions and partners to identify key themes from the consultations and set a long-term vision and goals for supporting seniors in Toronto. Alongside these longer-term goals, SSLTC will aim to develop shorter term actions and activities to support implementation and coordination. Overall, this strategy term aligns with the expected demographic shift in Toronto and enables the City to maximize opportunity for impact on the way seniors are supported by City services and structures.

## CONTACT

---

Leslie McCallum  
Director, Seniors Services and Community Programs  
416-392-9760  
[Leslie.McCallum@toronto.ca](mailto:Leslie.McCallum@toronto.ca)

## SIGNATURE

---

(Original signed by)

Jennifer Dockery  
General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care  
416-392-8896  
[Jennifer.Dockery@toronto.ca](mailto:Jennifer.Dockery@toronto.ca)

---

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. Census of Population, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. Population Projections 2041, Ontario Ministry of Health, IntelliHealth Ontario. Extracted in February 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. Target group profile of the visible minority populations, Census, 2021 (Community Data Program).

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada. Target group profile of seniors, Census, 2021 (Community Data Program).

<sup>5</sup> National Institute on Ageing (2022). Ageing in the Right Place: Supporting older Canadians to live where they want.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2023). Housing Market Insight into Canadian Metropolitan Areas.

<sup>7</sup> Social Planning Toronto (2020). Senior Poverty and Inequity: The Toronto experience.

<sup>8</sup> Daily Bread Food Bank (2023). Who's Hungry Report 2023: A Call to Action from a City in Crisis.

<sup>9</sup> National Institute on Ageing (2023). Perspectives on Growing Older in Canada: The 2023 NIA ageing in Canada survey.

<sup>10</sup> Toronto Foundation (2023). Toronto's Vital Signs: 2023 Special Report.

<sup>11</sup> Public Health Ontario (2023). COVID-19 in Ontario: a focus on neighbourhood material deprivation, February 26, 2020 to December 31, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Wellesley Institute, Ontario Health (2021). Tracking COVID-19 through race-based data.

<sup>13</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada (2020). From Risk to Resilience: An equity approach to COVID-19.