

OLDER AND WISER: It's important to get up and move around

[Margaret Coates](#) / North Shore News

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How easy is it for seniors to get around the North Shore safely and effortlessly?

Not so easy said seniors at a recent event “Seniors on the Go” sponsored by the City of North Vancouver Library and the City of North Vancouver Seniors Action Table.

Seniors spoke about lack of sidewalks, dangerous intersections, the speed and noise of vehicles, poor lighting, bikes and skateboards on sidewalks and limits to accessibility (expanded patio table areas, sandwich boards).

Seniors complained about dips in the curbs at crosswalks as a problem for people who are sight impaired and the slow clearing of snow off sidewalks.

They were concerned about lack of benches in some areas and when there were benches the lack of covers or shelters from the weather.

They also talked about poor transportation options and issues with bus availability and accessibility.

Yet physical activity is positively linked with physical and mental health, disease prevention and management, emotional and social well-being, and autonomy and independence (Health Canada, 2002).

Physical activity is linked with maintaining or losing weight, enhancing mobility, flexibility and balance, improving sleep and boosting mood and self-confidence.

In the 2017 report Raising the Profile of the Community-based Seniors’ Services Sector in B.C.: A Review of the Literature, authors Laura Kadowaki and Marcy Cohen say that multiple studies have connected physical activity with decreased healthcare utilization and costs.

For example, exercise programs have been found to reduce the risk of falls, which is the number one cause of injury-related hospitalizations for seniors in Canada, costing the health-care system two billion additional dollars a year.

According to Annwen Loverin, executive director of Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre and one of the speakers at the Seniors on the Go event, half of the seniors on the North Shore are less likely to go out if they don't have access to a car.

In order for seniors to be active it means that the outdoor environment has to be age and ability friendly. Seniors need to feel that they can get around safely, without too many distractions, and without hazards.

At the Seniors on the Go event Daniel Watson, transportation planner for the city spoke about creating a plan which will look at ways to make the City of North Vancouver more walkable.

He talked about creating pedestrian corridors, more sidewalks, and better intersection controls.

Natalie Corbo, city transportation demand management co-ordinator, talked about the "Look Think Go" campaign to educate people in using safe travel practices.

The campaign hopes to influence pedestrians, cyclists and drivers about courteous, safe and focused ways to be safe while on the go.

Two enthusiastic representatives from the RCMP spoke about how to be safe on the streets.

They talked about safety in numbers, dressing to be seen, making eye contact with drivers – don't assume drivers see you, walking on well-lit streets, varying your route (bad guys check people's routines), watching driveways to make sure no one is exiting and watching for obstacles on paths.

They also said make sure you have time to cross the street.

At crosswalks, cross only when the walk sign is visible - not taking a chance on making it when the countdown has started.

They advised seniors to take some extra responsibility.

As one officer said, "You might be doing everything right but the other person might not."

If walking is a problem for seniors they can choose senior friendly transportation options which, as Loverin says, are "available, acceptable, accessible, adaptable and affordable."

These include public transportation, options such as the Go Bus, West Vancouver Shuttle Bus, Capilano Seniors Hub Bus, and individualized rides, HandyDART, home care companies, taxis and car shares.

She suggests that seniors use public transit whenever possible as it is cheapest and easiest.

Loverin also suggests seniors make an effort to get to know and practise how to use public transportation before they are unable to drive.

The transportation services that Loverin spoke about can be found in the Seniors Directory at issuu.com/nsnfeatures/docs/seniors_directory_2017.

Physical activity is important for seniors on the North Shore – so get out and move. You'll be happier and healthier if you do.

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