

FEBRUARY 2020

Integrating multicultural seniors in an age-friendly community

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Exploring an age-friendly
future for the North
Shore, British Columbia.



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Executive summary

As the most ethnically diverse province in Canada, British Columbia welcomes nearly 40,000 new immigrants every year. In British Columbia, 41.9% of the seniors population are immigrants. The goals of a rich multicultural society are nurturing inclusiveness, understanding and mutual respect. At the community level reducing barriers to accessing programs and services is one of the ways to help achieve those goals.

Over the last year, three partner organizations on the North Shore completed a project whose goal was to explore the integration of multicultural seniors in an age-friendly community on the North Shore. The intended and achieved objectives were to:

- Increase cross-cultural understanding among residents of the North Shore, particularly seniors, achieved through interactive conversations and focus groups, community presentations and newspaper articles;
- Increase understanding of culturally diverse groups of seniors by senior-serving community-based organizations, achieved through community presentations; and
- Improve accessibility of existing seniors' programs and services for multicultural seniors, achieved through interactive conversations and focus groups, presentations and additional and enhanced program provision.

More importantly, the results will also contribute to the community's age-friendly initiatives, particularly multiculturalism.

This project was unique in that it sought the wisdom and experiences of the seniors, which meant future planning was with the seniors not for them; the seniors' voices were heard.

The target multicultural groups for this project were chosen based on the demographic information about the immigrant population of the North Shore obtained from Statistics Canada, 2016. It was noted that seniors from China, Iran, Philippines and South Korea formed a high percentage of the immigrants on the North Shore.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Information was elicited through:

- Cultural conversations with groups of multicultural seniors from the four ethno-cultural groups using a series of focused questions; and later in the project
- Facilitated intercultural conversations between different multicultural residents; and
- Consultation from key stake holders in the community in terms of their assessment and observation of trends in seniors accessing programs and services.

KEY FINDINGS

The conversations (including workshops, individual interviews and meetings, and intercultural cafes) revealed that:

1. Although the seniors were able to move relatively successfully through the community, that is, shop, take public transportation, meet with friends and peers, language skills and to some extent finance losses, cultural isolation, lack of integrative programs and services are barriers to full integration. The barriers restrict their full involvement in the community's programs and services.
2. It was also revealed that some seniors are more comfortable within their own cultural group and at this time have not found a need or incentive to become more involved in programs and services in the larger community.
3. It was revealed that there is also room for agencies and the municipalities to develop some programs or activities that promote integration more fully in the community.



RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of the project, we shared our findings with the North Shore Services to Seniors Coalition, at the North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership Service Providers Forum and the City of North Vancouver. In sharing the draft report, additional information was offered and more recommendations were forthcoming.

Recommendations from workshops, intercultural cafes and targeted stakeholders:

- More programming, especially conversational English as a second language (ESL) and classes tailored to ethnocultural seniors' learning styles
- Specific workshops (translation available if needed) on various topics such as health, housing, technology, supports for seniors, and volunteering in the community
- Transportation classes on navigating the North Shore to reduce seniors' reliance on their family and the need to drive themselves
- Changes to the built environment to support seniors' integration and movement
- Annual or bi-annual intercultural gatherings to celebrate each others cultures, for example with a fashion show or potluck
- Meaningful volunteer opportunities in the community and sharing knowledge about where to find these opportunities
- More intercultural conversational programs meant to integrate multicultural seniors from various ethnic groups.

Recommendations from the Seniors Coalition and North Shore Multicultural Forum:

- Produce translated program guides available across the North Shore
- Support seniors by offering service in first languages or translators when they visit community organizations
- Include Indigenous seniors and LGBTQ+ seniors in future research projects
- Introduce health navigation and mental health resources in several languages
- Explore what other jurisdictions are doing to support seniors and multiculturalism
- Drill down specifically into the senior aged members of a cultural demographic when seeking higher proportions of senior newcomers rather than using all ages as a cultural demographic

CHALLENGES

As it was difficult to reach Filipino and Korean seniors, a suggestion was made to revisit the demographics specifically related to seniors in those cultural groups to verify if the current numbers are still relevant. If the numbers are as stated it might imply that the seniors are well cared for and therefore have no further need of integration, that they return home after retirement, or they are here but perhaps living in isolation.

NEXT STEPS

- Disseminate the *Integrating Multicultural Seniors in an Age-friendly Community* report to the general community including organizations, policy makers, and municipal councils.
- Hold a forum in the spring of 2020 which includes disseminating the final report to participants. Based on the final report, determine if there are additional recommendations to be considered.
- Sustain and enhance programming for seniors.

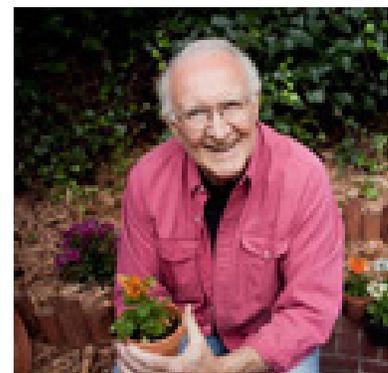


Background

In 2019 the Union of BC Municipalities funded a partnership project on the North Shore called *Integrating Multicultural Seniors in an Age-friendly Community*. The partner organizations felt that a variety of barriers may be problematic for multicultural seniors to fully integrate in their community. The project aimed to find out from seniors themselves what these barriers were and what could be improved to address those challenges. This would, they hoped, result in improved accessibility to existing seniors' programs and services and would inform the creation of new programs and services.

The partners included Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre (SHSAC), Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society (LSPS), and the City of North Vancouver (CNV). In preparation for this project, SHSAC was in the process of completing a *Welcoming Spaces and Seniors' Engagement Project* designed to increase its programming for diverse groups of seniors. Similarly, LSPS was engaged in *Planning for the Future of Multicultural Elders and Their Families*, which included a review of cultural behaviours and attitudes towards aging and integration. CNV hoped that the outcomes from this project would inform the City's renewal of its *Social Plan* (2019/2020 work program).

The Union of BC Municipalities funding criteria included the prior completion of an *Age-friendly Assessment and Action Plan*. The City of North Vancouver completed its age-friendly action plan with the strong community support of LSPS and SHSAC and subsequently received provincial age-friendly community recognition in 2015, as did the District of North Vancouver. The District of West Vancouver received their recognition in 2012.



In the first phase of action, a subcommittee made up of seniors, LSPS, SHSAC and municipal planners worked on taking the age-friendly action plans (Priorities for Meaningful Change) and completed a matrix of action designed to direct the implementation of the action plan priorities. One of these action plan items included prioritizing supports for multicultural seniors, which was also one of the reasons for this project. The priorities for meaningful change listed in the action plan document included an emphasis on “expanding research on and support to seniors whose language of origin is not English... in current services and forecasting of services”. The North Shore Services to Seniors Coalition, a coalition of senior-supporting organizations, businesses, and individuals, has endorsed this need.

“ Support the independence and wellbeing of older City residents ”

Four Seniors Action Tables (SATs) on the North Shore, sponsored by LSPS and hosted by SHSAC, as well as three other groups, are continuing age-friendly conversations and actions in their work to support seniors on the North Shore. The City of North Vancouver SAT is exploring topics including outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation and communications and information. The Capilano SAT is working on social participation and respect and inclusion.

Furthermore, the City’s Official Community Plan supports an age-friendly community and includes goal 3.5 to “Support the independence and wellbeing of older City residents”. This goal is also echoed in the City’s Social Plan, which includes objectives and actions to work toward this goal.



Demographics

BC SENIOR POPULATION (65+), 2016 CENSUS

According to Simon Fraser Gerontology Department’s research on multicultural seniors in British Columbia, there were 333,385 seniors in British Columbia whose immigration status was foreign born in 2016. This represents 41.9% of the 2016 total senior population (795,415) in the province and an increase over the 262,565 (40.7% of total seniors) reported from the 2011 census data. Most of the immigrants in BC aged 65 and over were born in Europe (150,935 or 45.3%), however this group is closely rivaled by immigrants born in Asia (138,680 or 41.6%). An additional 18,150 (5.4%) were born in the United States.

	BC immigrant population	Senior population (% of total pop.)	Senior immigrants (% of seniors pop.)
European origin	150,935	19%	45.3%
Asian origin	138,680	17.4%	41.6%
All other origins	43,770	5.5%	13.1%
Total immigrant population	333,385	41.9%	
Total BC senior population	795,415		

Fact Book on Aging in British Columbia and Canada, 7th Edition, (Wister, O’Dea, Fyffe and Wagner, 2019, GRC).

SENIOR POPULATION BY COUNTRY

As per the 2016 Census, the total population of the North Shore is 181,306, with 35,385 or 19.5% over 65 years of age. The immigrant senior population on the North Shore is 16,885 or 48% of the total senior population. This project chose four ethnic groups (Iranian, Chinese and from Hong Kong, Filipino and Korean) to elicit information.

		City of North Vancouver	District of North Van	District of West Van	North Shore total	Percent of all immigrants	
Place of birth	Iran	530	810	660	2,000	11.8%	23%
	China	210	510	395	1,115	6.6%	
	Philippines	215	180	55	450	2.7%	
	Korea	80	125	85	290	1.7%	
	Selected total	1,035	1,625	1,195	3,855	22.8%	
	Other groups	3,110	5,475	4,445	13,030	77.2%	
	Total	4,150	7,100	5,640	16,985		

RECENT IMMIGRANT SENIOR POPULATION

Looking at recent immigrants from the 2016 Census, we found that between 2006-2016, 555 were recent newcomers over the age of 65. The majority of recent senior immigrants from the selected groups came from Iran or China (including Hong Kong).

		City of North Vancouver	District of North Van	District of West Van	North Shore total	Percent of all recent immigrants	
Place of birth	Iran	110	160	100	370	44.8%	22.7%
	China	40	30	50	120	14.5%	
	Philippines	25	30	-	55	6.7%	
	Korea	-	-	10	10	1.2%	
	Selected total	175	220	160	555	67.3%	
	Other groups	60	125	85	270	32.7%	
	Total	235	345	245	825		

Methodology

The three partners, Lionsview Seniors’ Planning Society, Silver Harbour Seniors’ Activity Centre, and the City of North Vancouver, formed an Advisory Committee and oversaw the project. A consultant, Westcoast Facilitators Group, was hired to perform activities to reach some of the stated objectives. The activities included:

- Identifying key informants
- Identifying key stakeholders in the community and interviewing them
- Holding workshops and cafes with seniors to identify barriers and opportunities
- Disseminating findings gleaned from the workshops
- Presenting reports to the advisory committee, City staff, the Services to Seniors Coalition and diverse senior serving organizations
- Providing and enhancing support to three cultural-specific programs at seniors’ organizations
- Evaluating and writing a final report about learnings for wide dissemination in the community
- Holding a forum in the community to discuss the findings and make recommendations

<p>METHODS to elicit information</p>	<p>Holding workshops with four separate ethnocultural senior groups</p>	<p>Creating new programs based on discussions with seniors</p>	<p>Informing existing programs and services with new information</p>
<p>Interviews with community stakeholders</p>	<p>Hosting two intercultural cafes</p>	<p>Analysing the data obtained</p>	<p>Advancing recommendations</p>

The methods that were used to find key informants included talking to staff at the North Shore Multicultural Society (NSMS), church members, local businesses who specialize in ethnocultural products, and senior-serving organizations.

Community engagement

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW AND LEARNINGS

The workshops were based on a conversational or dialogue format, with a facilitator and participants. Information was gathered from three Iranian groups, one Chinese group and a conversation with a Filipino group which took place at their Sunday morning church service. In each of these groups there was someone who spoke English fluently and was able to translate for the group. To ensure full group engagement we used the service of an interpreter at the intercultural café.

A sampling of dialogue questions from the workshops included:

- What do you like about living on the North Shore?
- What makes it easy for you to get around the North Shore to participate in programs and services? What about accessibility and barriers?
- What services or programs do you use?
- What services or programs have you not used?
- What prevents you from using these services?
- What changes would you like to see?

The North Shore has a very large Iranian population and they welcomed the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas. In conversation with Farsi speaking seniors, we learned that language and limited finances were major barriers to integration.

In terms of navigating throughout the community, we learned there are gateways and bridges for Iranian seniors as they encounter many people with their own language group who work in stores, medical establishments, financial institutions, and their local library. This makes it easier for Iranian seniors to move through the community and get many of their needs met.

Unfortunately, at this point for the Iranian community, the Iranian currency rate presents a financial challenge. At the time of writing, the Iranian rial is worth approximately .0000031 for a Canadian dollar. Because of this, Iranian seniors said they depend a great deal on their adult children, putting financial stress on family.

“ We will never be isolated because we are accustomed to sharing and depending on each other. ”

Due in part to the size of the Iranian population on the North Shore, family traditions and community togetherness are maintained, helping prevent isolation for seniors. Some of the English speaking Iranian seniors attend classes at the John Braithwaite Centre or Silver Harbour Seniors’ Activity Centre. To quote, “we will never be isolated because we are accustomed to sharing and depending on each other”.

For Chinese seniors, as with Iranian seniors, language is a barrier but there is a large population committed to sharing and helping each other. Some Chinese seniors who spoke English were able to attend local programs and services, but preferred to go places with others for a sense of security. It seems the service used most often is the Chinese section at the library. There is also a Chinese seniors group that meets at Silver Harbour Seniors’ Activity Centre.

The Iranian group of seniors living in West Vancouver perceived life in the district as underwhelming. They entertain each other but would like more entertainment and activities in the community. Iranian seniors in West Vancouver know there are many activities in the summer, when the weather is nice and sunny. However, they perceive there is less available over the course of the other months of the year.

Contact with the Filipino group came from attending their church service with approximately sixty attendees. It was surprising to see only five or six seniors in the group. Inquiring about Filipino seniors, we learned that many return home after retirement or move to a less expensive province. This particular church service was piped in directly from the Philippines which allowed church-goers to stay close and true to the teachings of their home country. We can infer the Filipino senior community “take care” of each other. Language was not a barrier in this group as they were fluent in English.

CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

In conversation with the Filipino settlement worker at the North Shore Multicultural Society (NSMS), we learned that in the three years he has worked at NSMS he met only about three or four Filipino seniors. At this time, he was unable to offer any suggestions or ideas of where they would gather. He also confirmed that many of the seniors return home after retirement.

The South Korean group was also challenging to connect with, as many efforts to find and bring this group together were unsuccessful. In conversation with the Korean settlement worker at the North Shore Multicultural Society, she mentioned the number of Korean seniors had drastically declined over the years. She believes the decline is due to new immigration policy and that many seniors return home. As it was summer when we spoke, she mentioned a number people would be traveling, but that she would try to get a group to attend the September intercultural gathering. However, she was not confident she would find enough seniors.

Furthermore, the volunteer who assisted as our interpreter was in contact with the leader of a church group who needed permission from the regional office before accepting us into conversation. We can assume she never received permission. There were no Korean seniors in attendance at the intercultural café.



The missing information from the Korean and Filipino cultural groups informed the project, identifying that there needs to be a revisit of the demographics with perhaps new questions to verify if the current numbers are still relevant. If the numbers are as stated it might imply a number of things: the seniors are well cared for and therefore have no need of further integration; they do indeed return home after retirement; or they are here but living in what we would classify as some form of isolation. A project learning includes the future recommendation to drill down specifically into the senior aged members of a cultural demographic when seeking higher proportions of senior newcomers rather than using all ages of a cultural demographic.

INTERCULTURAL CAFES

We hosted two intercultural cafes with the hope of maximum attendance. In spite of advertising translated into multiple languages with the promise of interpreters and refreshments, all of the participants who attended the café at Silver Harbour were Iranian, and no one attended the café at the West Vancouver site. Both interpreters (Farsi and Cantonese) attended this session.

Despite lower-than-hoped-for attendance, we learned in conversation with the interpreters that they also assist the health authority with interpretation which takes them into seniors' homes with a health care professional. Based on their observations, they reported concern about seniors who depend on their children. They assessed that the children often pattern themselves after western culture and do not "take care" of their senior parents as it occurs in their home country. This leaves the seniors to live in some isolation. This observation supports the need for English classes for seniors and to encourage integration into the greater community. It might also explain why some seniors return to their home country.



PROGRAMMING

As part of the project, support was given to existing multicultural programs and two new programs were developed.

- **Basic language and cultural training (Farsi and Chinese) for front line staff and volunteers at seniors' organizations:** Farsi language and cultural training has been completed with Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre and Capilano Community Services Society staff and volunteers. Chinese language and cultural training is envisioned for the coming year.
- **Roll out trained volunteer ambassadors to support individual multicultural seniors in accessing existing seniors' programs:** Identification and training of the initial group of volunteer ambassadors is nearly complete and recruitment and training of additional ambassadors will be ongoing.
- **Support for three culture-specific programs at seniors' organizations and centres:** These included transit bus trips for the Farsi speaking groups meeting at Silver Harbour (learning about and practicing using the transit system) and the establishment of a new Farsi intermediate ESL class. In the near future, transit training and bus trips are expected to be held with Chinese seniors as well as additional workshops (in first language or translated) with both Farsi and Chinese seniors.



COMMUNITY MEETINGS

As part of the project, members of the steering committee presented preliminary findings to the Services to Seniors Coalition and to the North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership Service Providers Forum.

1. Services to Seniors Coalition

A draft of the findings was presented as a powerpoint presentation to the Seniors Coalition, a group of 52 participant organizations on the North Shore. The following themes emerged:

- In care facilities, it is difficult to communicate with seniors if either the client or staff do not have English as a second language
- The history of Canada is not made available in first languages for multicultural seniors
- Program guides across the North Shore could be made available in multiple languages (and then we need to support seniors in first language or with translation when they come to community organizations)
- For further research it would be useful to include Indigenous seniors and LGBTQ+ seniors
- Some seniors need help navigating to doctors who speak their first language. A place to start might be to go to https://www.cpsbc.ca/physician_search for a web search
- Different viewpoints if a person immigrated from Europe many years ago – possibly self-isolating
- How do we identify isolated communities of seniors?
- Program suggestion: An immigrant book club at library
- There are differences from family to family in the multicultural community
- Some seniors have been here 10 years but still have not accessed services and now must find services on their own (e.g. were taking care of their grandkids and possibly isolated by that) because of the limitations of settlement programs. How do grandparents who are primarily caring for grandkids access community information?
- Ask seniors to carry the name and contact number of an English-speaking relative that they can call to help interact with services
- Western culture different approach – not taking care of our elders can be an issue
- Look at what other municipalities and groups are doing – Burnaby, MOSAIC, etc.
- Opportunity to teach a lot about transit using technology and introduce health navigation and mental health resources
- Think about intersection of immigration/settlement with milestones like onset of dementia, loss of loved one, etc.

2. North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership Service Providers Forum

The same draft was presented at a forum, where a number of North Shore organizations participated and shared their input. The following themes emerged:

- When undertaking a seniors multicultural project, look at demographic data related specifically to seniors and not the cultural group as a whole
- Seniors from different immigration streams of seniors have different needs and different eligibilities for services
- Funds are a significant barrier for creating activities to address seniors' needs. Funding is based on various factors, such as seniors' legal status, an organization's funding structure and the cultural group to which seniors belong. There is a need for a business plan to apply for different funding streams; for example, through grants. This plan needs to show the social and economic impact of these programs
- There is missing data from seniors not connected to services or only connected to services through family
- The need to develop a collaborative model of agencies doing work with seniors to be able to meet their needs, as well as a system of doing the work, which does not currently exist



Discussion and suggestions

Talking to the Iranian and Chinese groups with whom we had the most dialogue, we discovered that the first barrier to successful integration is lack of English and, in some cases, the second barrier was finances.

Historically, the Continuing Education programs at the local schools provided English classes to the community. Since the cessation of these programs, it appears that English conversation classes on the North Shore are sporadic and open to everyone. This presents a challenge for seniors since research has shown seniors' learning styles are different from a younger age group. Seniors' learning styles can be theorized as more andragogical than pedagogical. Seniors bring important lived experiences to their learning and the curriculum must allow for this incorporation.

These language classes are important for integration and incorporation into the larger community. They are also important for basic survival in case of medical emergencies or other environmental emergencies. Conversation classes are also important for civic participation, social connection, moving through the community and for general participation and agency where seniors live. The English classes could be held in the libraries across the North Shore where seniors might also learn to use the library and experience the value of library staff and services.

In the interim, North Shore municipalities could provide subtitles or electronic translators to their civic proceedings. For example, one month it could be Farsi, the next month Mandarin or Cantonese, and the next month Korean. We understand from our research that the Filipino community speaks English more fluently, but a directed invitation to this group might encourage them to attend. In many situations immigrants came from a political regime that might not be as open as our democratic system and if we openly share our government systems it could provide added motivation for seniors' integration and participation in other community programs and services.



In terms of cultural activities, the City and Cistricts could plan for these year-round. These could be individual cultural activities, for example, Iranian afternoon or Chinese afternoon and annually host an intercultural event in the summer. These activities would require only the use of space, perhaps a school gym, community centre and in the summer it could be an open space at a park. One group suggested the use of the open space in malls after the stores are closed. Our conversations revealed many people from these cultures are willing to provide their own entertainment and refreshments and are very comfortable with social gatherings.

All groups suggested the need for bus trips. The bus trips would be scheduled with an interpreter and “free” compass cards are currently available. The suggested bus trips would be to places such as IKEA, Costco, or the Real Canadian Superstore.

Suggestions from the conversations about creating outdoor spaces that are inviting to seniors (one priority of an age-friendly community) included to:

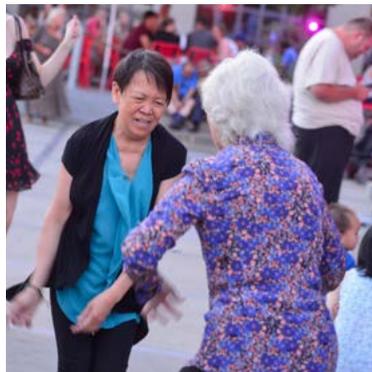
- Build more public washrooms
- Install more street lights
- Ensure crosswalk lights accommodate seniors’ pace
- Install reflectors on streets
- Ensure covered bus shelters are more available
- Install more benches

Evaluation

Through a logic model method, the steering committee enumerated how many workshops and interactive meetings were held, how many participants attended, and how many recommendations were formulated from the responses elicited at the gatherings. They also enumerated and analysed the effectiveness of the responses from the presentations to the community in terms of the ongoing work in increasing newcomer inclusion for seniors. They noted the wisdom of multicultural seniors on barriers to full integration and how to overcome these barriers.

In the project's final report (which is in addition to the UBCM final report), the committee also outlined the increase and effectiveness in the enhancement of the cultural specific programming, counted the new programs implemented, including the attendance, and the amount of welcoming Farsi seniors' programs for front line staff.

The information gathered formed the basis of this final report which is to be disseminated to the community through drop offs, presentations and in a spring forum. The draft report has also, through a powerpoint presentation, been used to elicit and gather information to the community. The spring forum is a stepping-stone to furthering the work begun in decreasing multicultural seniors' barriers in participating fully in an age-friendly community.



Sustaining the project

The project will be sustained beyond the funding period in the following ways:

- Sustain the language and cultural training sessions and ambassador program established during the project as well as the three culture specific programs. Chinese seniors have been targeted for this program
- Continue to disseminate the information we have gathered by distributing the report widely across the community by hosting a Spring 2020 forum on increasing integration and access for multicultural seniors in cooperation with North Shore Immigrant Society/North Shore Immigrant Inclusion Partnership
- Present findings to City of North Vancouver City Council in Spring 2020.



These activities will be sustained beyond the granting period thanks to volunteer leadership, and with modest program expenses covered by Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre and Lionsview Seniors Planning Society. The Spring 2020 forum received financial support from the West Vancouver Community Foundation with a venue provided by the District of West Vancouver.

The *Integrating multicultural seniors in an age-friendly community* project was funded by an age-friendly community grant, provided by the BC Ministry of Health (Population and Public Health Division) and administered by the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM).

Conclusion

All participants and their responses in this project demonstrated a need for seniors to be full participants in the community and all that it has to offer. As stated in the executive summary, this project was unique in that it sought the wisdom and experiences of the seniors, which meant future planning was with the seniors, not for them. The seniors' voices were heard.

