



North Shore News Column.

Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

WV seniors live longer than peers in region

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News August 14, 2011

Last time in this column, I featured a profile of the seniors population in North Vancouver.

We saw that while the number of older adults in North Vancouver will nearly double by 2027, its share of the region's seniors at that time is expected to be slightly lower than it is today.

Today we profile the seniors population in the District of West Vancouver and Bowen Island. I'll be utilizing statistics from the United Way of the Lower Mainland, Statistics Canada's 2006 census and estimates by B.C. Stats for Local Health Areas to help us with the analysis.

Two caveats: we're talking about averages here and the comparisons, when made, are to the 12 other municipalities that comprise the Metro Vancouver region.

The West Vancouver local health area accommodates 2.3 per cent of all residents in the region, making it one of the smallest areas by population size. The area includes Bowen Island with 6.5 per cent of the area's total population, and Lions Bay with 2.6 per cent. The local health area population is expected to rise by 9 per cent over the next two decades, a much lower growth rate than the broader region's 30 per cent increase.

What do we know about the seniors population?

West Vancouver-Bowen Island currently has the highest concentration of seniors in the Lower Mainland/Sea-to-Sky area - one in five residents is 65 or older.

The projection for 20 years from now is that almost one in three residents will fall in this age group.

Over the decade, the area's share of seniors in the region will fall slightly, from 3.9 per cent to 3.4 per cent.

Overall, as a group, seniors in West Vancouver-Bowen Island do fairly well. The median age of its citizens make West Vancouverites the oldest in the region.

The proportion of low-income seniors is the region's lowest, while the percentage of older adults living alone in West Vancouver is close to average.

According to the 2006 census, after English the top three languages spoken at home most often by West Vancouver residents are Persian (Farsi), Chinese and Korean.

Differences in the composition of the population in the regions can be dramatic. In the next two decades, the

Howe Sound local health area is expected to see its seniors population increase by 244 per cent, the highest increase in the Lower Mainland/Sea-to-Sky area.

Here's a statistic that caught my eye: The median age at death in West Vancouver and Bowen Island is the highest in the region at 84.3 years of age. The median age at death in Howe Sound is the lowest in the region at 73 years of age. No, that's not a misprint. What the data is telling us is that on average, a resident of West Vancouver is expected to live more than a decade longer than a resident in the Howe Sound region.

How can we account for such a dramatic difference? After all, the two municipalities are side by side. The answer may lie with the range of services that are available to residents in each of those communities.

The North Shore is thought to be adequately served by a range of services available to seniors. Currently Squamish, Whistler and Pemberton have both the fewest seniors services and the most limited array of services for seniors in the Metro Vancouver region.

I believe there may be a connection between a lack of services available and the health and longevity of seniors in the region, but until we conduct a much more rigorous analysis of the data, that's just a theory.

Tom Carney is the co-ordinator of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604-985-3852 or send an email to lions_view@telus.net.