

# REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

Advisory  
Committee  
on Aging

AGE-FRIENDLY NEEDS  
ASSESSMENT

**Submitted to:**

RMWB  
Advisory Committee on Aging



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In Association with Gordon and Associates



**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. Summary..... 5

    1.1. Project Overview ..... 5

    1.2. Project Setting – Wood Buffalo Population ..... 6

2. Study Approach and Reporting ..... 7

    2.1. Needs Assessment Approach..... 7

    2.2. Assessment Participation ..... 8

3. Findings Summary ..... 9

    3.1. Reporting and Interpreting Results..... 9

    3.2. Summary Findings ..... 10

    3.3. Findings of Similar Studies ..... 11

    3.4. Service Provider Assessment ..... 12

4. Age Friendly Findings by the Eight Domains of Community Life..... 13

    4.1. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings ..... 13

    4.2. Transportation..... 14

    4.3. Housing..... 15

    4.4. Social Participation..... 16

    4.5. Respect and Social Inclusion ..... 17

    4.6. Civic Participation and Employment ..... 18

    4.7. Communication and Information..... 19

    4.8. Community Support and Health Services ..... 20

5. Recommendations and Next Steps ..... 21

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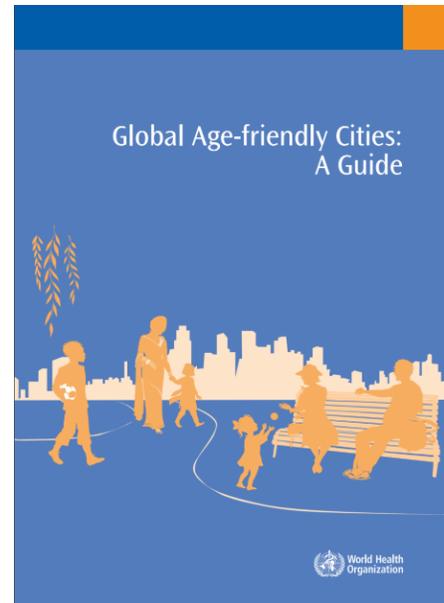
## 1. Summary

### 1.1. Project Overview

The Advisory Committee on Aging (ACoA) is taking a leadership role to help build an age-friendly Wood Buffalo Region. The ACoA undertook this Age-friendly Needs Assessment of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) to help assess conditions for seniors. This assessment will help the ACoA identify gaps in seniors' needs and meet standards as an Age Friendly Community by the World Health Organization (WHO). This review has been guided by the WHO Age-Friendly Cities process (WHO 2007).

What is an age-friendly community? The WHO has identified age-friendly community needs that respect seniors' interests that include:

- Recognizing that seniors have a wide range of skills and abilities and needs;
- Understanding and meeting the age-related needs of seniors;
- Respecting the decisions and lifestyle choices of seniors;
- Protecting those seniors who are vulnerable;
- Recognizing that seniors are a valuable part of our community; and
- Recognizing how important it is to include seniors in all areas of community life.



The guide outlines approaches for the consideration and planning of seniors' needs. It identifies outcomes in eight domains of community life:

- Outdoor Spaces and Buildings;
- Transportation;
- Housing;
- Social Participation;
- Respect and Social Inclusion;
- Civic Participation and Employment;
- Communication and Information; and,
- Community Support and Health Services.

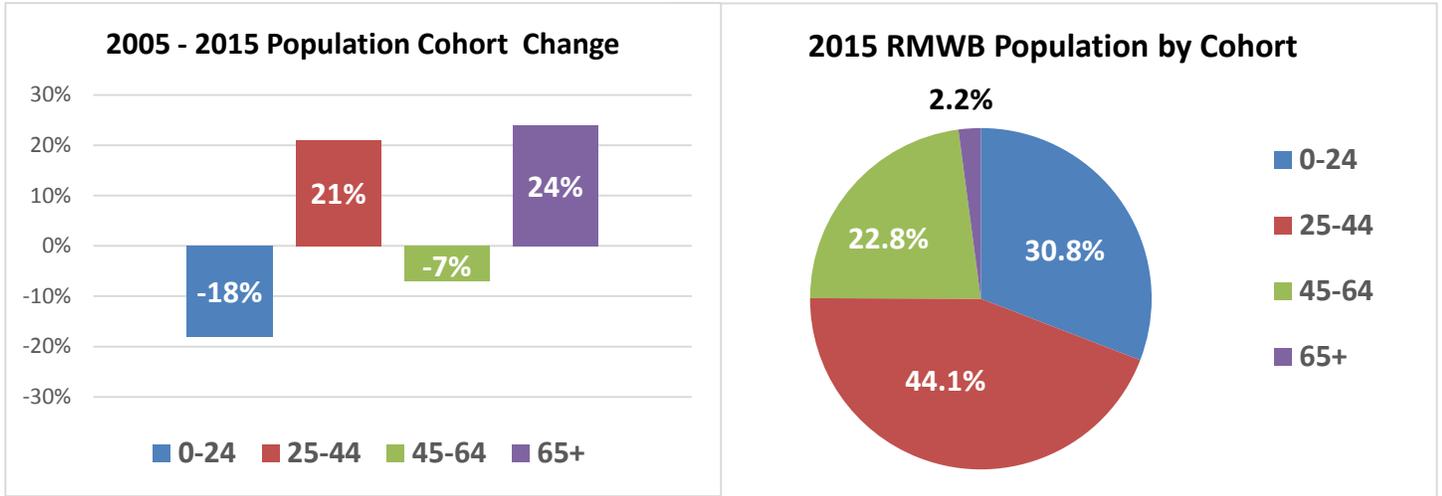


## 1.2. Project Setting – Wood Buffalo Population

The RMWB is a youthful region with a high in-migration of young, male, workers and out-migration of seniors, leaving a region without a balanced population. Seniors 65 and over accounted for only 2.1% of the permanent regional population, compared to 12% across Alberta.

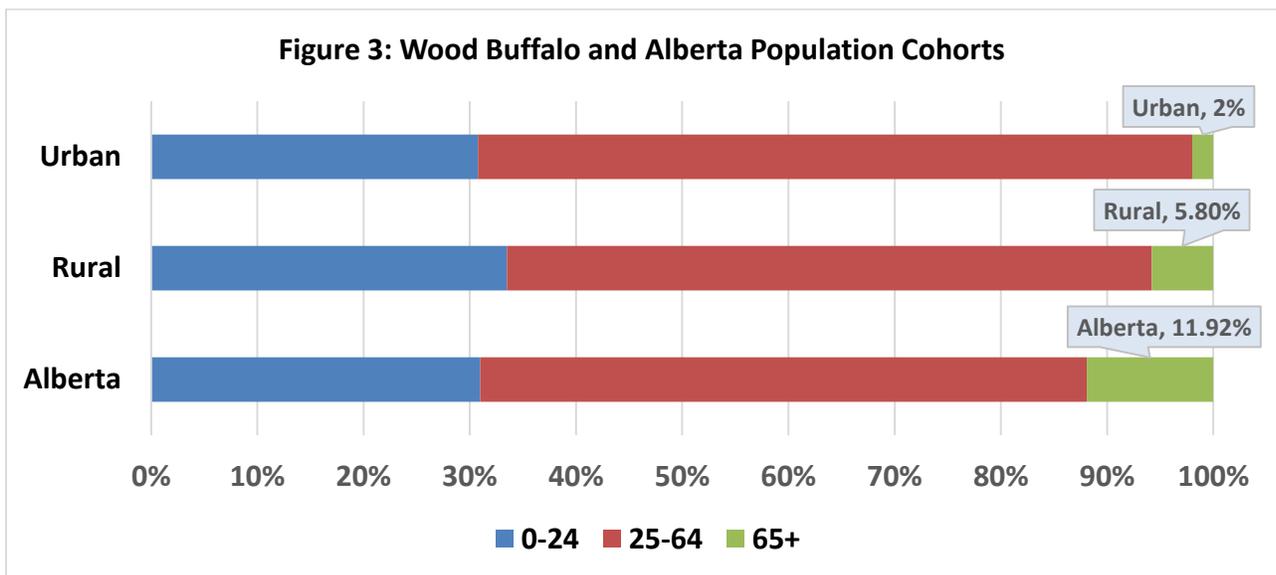
Figure 1: 2005 – 2015 Population Cohort Change

Figure 2: RMWB Population by Age



Sources: 2005 and 2015 RMWB Municipal Censuses

Reflecting the baby boom, the seniors' population grew the fastest (24 per cent) of any age cohort between 2005 and 2015 (Figures 1 and 2). In rural Wood Buffalo, seniors account for 5.8% of the population compared to 2% in the Fort McMurray Urban Service Area. Alberta's seniors 65+ population is now almost 12%.



## 2. Study Approach and Reporting

The assessment included community engagement and surveys with across Wood Buffalo.

### 2.1. Needs Assessment Approach

- **Assessment: Nature and State of Age-friendliness** –The RMWB state of age-friendliness was undertaken using the WHO Checklist of Essential Features to assess the eight domains of community life. An overall research approach was developed (Appendix 2)
  - **Engagement: Community Input and Support** – Close to 400 community members and organizations were engaged, through surveys, interviews and community meetings:
    - Community Member Surveys were distributed and available on-line and by hard copy. There were 258 on-line responses.
    - Service Organization Survey available on-line. There were 17 On-line responses.
    - In-Person Meetings were held (121 total participants) with:
      - Advisory Committee on Aging (7),
      - RMWB Departments (5),
      - Fort Chipewyan Community Meetings (7),
      - Anzac Community Meeting (4),
      - Fort McMurray Service Provider Meeting (13),
      - Janvier Community Meeting (5),
      - Conklin Community Meeting (12),
      - Wood Buffalo Library Officials (2),
      - Red Pole Centre Organizations Meeting (4),
      - Fort MacKay Metis Meeting (2), and
      - Golden Years Society Luncheon (60).
    - Indigenous Engagement was targeted. Specific meetings were held with Indigenous organizations in all communities. A letter from the ACoA Chair to Indigenous Leaders (identified through RMWB) was sent out June 13<sup>th</sup> inviting participation (Appendix 5).
  - **Reporting: Deliver a Seniors' Needs Assessment-**

This report provides a seniors Age-friendly Needs Assessment covering the eight domains of community life for the Wood Buffalo region.
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## 2.2. Assessment Engagement

Participants provided perspectives across Wood Buffalo in all of its communities. The assessment was targeted to and biased towards gaining feedback from seniors.

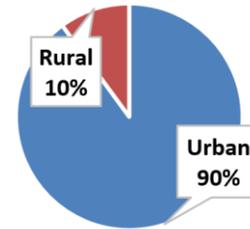
In the overall assessment, there were 258 survey respondents. Of these 90% were from the Urban Service Area and 10% from the rural areas. Over 76% of the respondents were over 50 providing valuable insight from seniors or near seniors living in the community.

Over two thirds of participants were female.

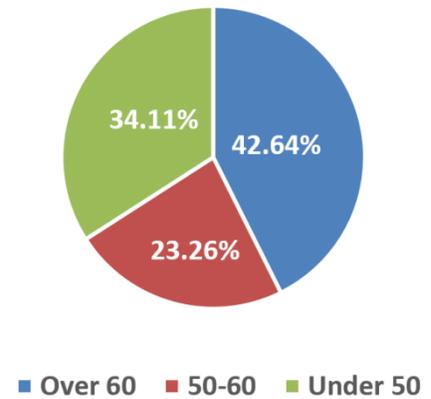
Survey Community	Percent	#
Anzac	0.78%	2
Conklin	2.71%	7
Draper	0.00%	0
Fort Chipewyan	1.16%	3
Fort Fitzgerald	0.00%	0
Fort McKay	1.55%	4
Fort McMurray Service Area	86.05%	222
Gregoire Lake Estates	0.39%	1
Janvier	0.78%	2
Saprae Creek Estates	2.71%	7
Other Community	3.88%	10
		<b>Answered 258</b>

Complementing the assessment we had 121 people attend meetings and interview sessions, 30 of which were in the rural areas. Rural meetings were held in Anzac, Conklin, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay and Janvier.

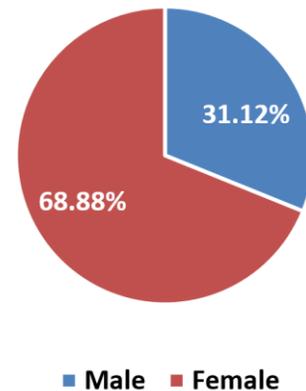
Survey Respondent Community



Survey Respondent Age Profile



Survey Respondent Gender



### 3. Findings Summary

#### 3.1. Reporting and Interpreting Results

Reporting data comes from needs identified in a combination of survey results and meeting feedback (see Appendix 7). Gaps and needs are assessed from the 61 questions covering the eight domains of community life in the community survey. The community survey asked whether the community attribute was available: most of the time, some of the time or never (see survey example below). There are over 366 data sets from the survey as well as the interview and focus group feedback. Only a summary of results can be provided in a report format. Detailed data is provided in the Appendices.

#### Community Survey Design Question Sample

Sample Survey Question:	Most of the Time	Some of the Time	Never
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are sidewalks linking residences and essential services in most or all areas of my community.</li> </ul>			

#### Gaps and Needs Assessment

A gap is assessed to exist if the community attribute is not available most of the time; therefore, the data is organised to show the level that the attribute is available most of the time (Table 4). For example, when all responses for the eight domains of community life are considered, age-friendly community attributes are available 25% 'most of the time' for the urban service area and 14% for the rural areas.

#### Averages of All Community Attribute Availability 'Most of the Time'

Age Friendly - Most of the Time	RMWB	Urban	Rural
Average	24.26%	25.18%	14.30%

Data also shows the difference between the Urban Service Area and the rural communities of the Wood Buffalo Region. This recognizes the regional geography of the RMWB and different service levels.

#### Reporting

This report organizes the results for each question in the eight domains of community life. The results are further interpreted and put into context with the feedback from community meetings and interviews. Overall survey results and community meeting results are available in Appendices 6 and 7).

### 3.2. Summary Findings

Overall, the age-friendliness of the Wood Buffalo region showed a number of trends, needs and gaps:

- **Rural-Urban Differences** - Rural Wood Buffalo has more age-friendly gaps and needs than the urban service area of Fort McMurray. When considering all respondents' feedback, 14% of rural respondents felt that the WHO eight domains of community life were available 'most of the time'. Comparatively, 25% of urban area respondents felt those domains were available,
- **Housing, Community Health and Social Inclusion are Key Gaps in the Rural Areas** – Housing stands out as a significant gap in rural areas along with community health services and social participation,
- **Housing, Communication and Civic Participation are Key Gaps in Urban Areas** – Housing also stands out in urban areas as a significant gap, along with communication, and civic participation and employment opportunities,
- **Rural Wood Buffalo Has Higher Senior Civic Participation** – Seniors' play a more active role in civic participation in the rural areas, being engaged on boards and community organizations, and
- **Outdoor Spaces and Buildings have the Lowest Gap in Wood Buffalo** – The domain of community life had the most positive response was for outdoor spaces and buildings.

#### Community Survey on Availability of Key Domains of Community Life 'Most of the Time'

Age Friendly - Most of the Time	Urban	Rural
<b>Average</b>	<b>25.18%</b>	<b>14.30%</b>
Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	49.67%	31.00%
Transportation	33.48%	18.18%
Respect and Social Inclusion	25.71%	19.12%
Social Participation	26.69%	8.23%
Civic Participation and Employment Opportunities	17.13%	24.11%
Communication and Information	17.16%	10.00%
Community Support and Health Services	20.38%	3.75%
Housing	11.18%	0.00%

## Meeting Summaries

Findings from focus groups and interviews are reported in the Appendices, the most frequent words from those, and survey comments sections, were sorted into the word graph below which identifies common needs and issues raised; transportation, housing, public events, community and others.



### 3.3. Findings of Similar Studies

Two earlier studies identify some similar seniors' needs and gaps in the Wood Buffalo region. Taken together all of these studies can help inform action to address needs.

#### 3.3.1. Findings of the St Aidan's Society Diversity Focus Group

The St Aidan's Society diversity focus group on a more welcoming and inclusive community identified a number of summary findings for overall needs (St Aidan's Society 2015):

- Lack of supportive, accessible, social housing for seniors.
- Transportation

- Community perception was seen as another barrier by the staff. This was due to the perception that there are not a lot of seniors in the region
- Physical Accessibility of the region
- Lack of services and program for supporting seniors.
- Inadequate long term care needs
- Invisible seniors

**3.3.2. ACoA 2015 Seniors’ Survey**

The 2015 Seniors Survey (ACoA 2015) showed some similar findings to the needs assessment, However, this survey was largely responded to by young people (65% were under 55) compared to this needs assessment where 76% were 50 or over. Emerging themes included:

Improving Quality of Life	Resource and Service Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A place facility</li> <li>• Affordable housing</li> <li>• Easy access</li> <li>• Health care facilities</li> <li>• Seniors homes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy access</li> <li>• Home care</li> <li>• Independent living</li> <li>• Term care</li> <li>• Term care facilities</li> </ul>

**3.4. Service Provider Assessment**

Findings from the service provider assessment are provided in Appendix 8. This assessment asked service providers to identify whether areas of the eight domains of community life were a service standard for them. The service provider assessment is more of a tool to help with the Action Plan phase of the Needs Assessment. The service provider information, if augmented with more feedback from a broader representation of providers, will help inform the recommendations and response to seniors’ needs and gaps from governments and community organizations.

#### 4. Age Friendly Findings by the Eight Domains of Community Life

##### 4.1. Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings	Urban	Rural
<b>Average – Most of the Time</b>	<b>49.67%</b>	<b>31.00%</b>
Q4. There are sidewalks linking residences and essential services in most or all areas of my community	68.78%	21.05%
Q5. Sidewalks in most or all areas of my community are well-maintained and accessible to everybody	51.13%	36.84%
Q6. Snow clearing is done in a timely manner so walking and driving are safe	56.56%	47.37%
Q7. There are enough street crosswalks in busy business, residential and/or recreation areas	71.95%	42.11%
Q8. Crosswalks are accessible to everybody, including individuals with visual or mobility impairments	39.37%	26.32%
Q9. There are enough public washrooms in key areas of my community	19.00%	15.79%
Q10. Public washrooms accommodate people with wheelchairs and strollers in my community	36.65%	31.58%
Q11. Most or all business and public buildings are easily accessible to everybody	47.96%	26.32%
Q12. Public facilities (recreation, transportation systems, parks and outdoor spaces) are accessible	55.66%	31.58%

##### Summary

- Outdoor spaces and buildings ranked the highest of the eight age-friendly domains of community life,
- Streets and sidewalks are generally accessible in the urban service area, and not accessible in the rural areas, and
- Public washrooms are not generally available, especially in outdoor spaces.

##### What was said:

- It's a long walk to washrooms,
- Automatic door openers never seem to work on buildings, even on newer buildings like the recreation centres,
- More benches make it easier to rest while walking around, and
- Government buildings are more age-friendly than businesses.

## 4.2. Transportation

Transportation	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average – Most of the Time</b>	<b>32.30%</b>	<b>33.48%</b>	<b>18.18%</b>
Q14. The road signs in my community are easy to read and large enough for older drivers	58.90%	59.41%	52.94%
Q15. Roads are in good repair and are well -maintained	20.45%	21.18%	11.76%
Q16. Roadways are clear of obstructions that block a drivers' vision	32.73%	33.50%	23.53%
Q17. Driver education and refresher courses are promoted for all drivers	17.27%	17.73%	11.76%
Q18. Roads and parking areas are promptly cleared of snow and ice	30.91%	32.02%	17.65%
Q19. Affordable and accessible transportation options are available for those who do not drive to facilitate access to necessary services and opportunities for social and recreational well-being	42.73%	44.83%	17.65%
Q20. Public transportation is reliable and frequent, including at night and on weekends/ holidays	33.18%	34.50%	17.65%
Q21. Public transportation is easy to navigate, with accessible routes, and can accommodate people with hearing, visual or mobility impairments or strollers	26.82%	28.08%	11.76%
Q22. Persons with disabilities are able to access reliable and affordable transportation	35.91%	37.44%	17.65%
Q23. Affordable transportation services are available where public transportation is too limited	15.45%	15.76%	11.76%
Q24. Information about transportation services is available	40.91%	43.84%	5.88%

### Summary

- Road repair, driver education and affordable transportation were considered the least available service, and
- Rural areas have fewer transportation options, especially information on them.

### What was said:

- Transportation is a major barrier, options are needed to access medical care and avoid social isolation.

### 4.3. Housing

Housing	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average Most of the Time</b>	<b>10.27%</b>	<b>11.18%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>
Q26. Appropriate and affordable housing is available in areas that are safe and close to community services and amenities which help people stay connected with the community	<b>14.01%</b>	<b>15.26%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>
Q27. Affordable housing options are available for people with a wide range of economic circumstances	<b>11.59%</b>	<b>12.63%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>
Q28. Appropriate and affordable home maintenance and support services are available	<b>7.73%</b>	<b>8.42%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>
Q29. Information about how housing needs can change with age is available in the community	<b>7.73%</b>	<b>8.42%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>

#### Summary

- Housing availability scored the lowest of all eight areas of age-friendliness in the RMWB, with very strong availability issues in the rural areas where there is no seniors housing.

#### What was said:

- With limited amounts of higher level assisted housing, seniors are living in unsafe conditions or moving to Edmonton,
- I am a homeowner currently but if I wish to retire in the community to remain with my family how do I downsize into an affordable housing option on a pension?
- Aging in community/place is a huge issue. There is nowhere near enough social housing, There are no housing options for seniors with a range of wrap around services. It's independent living or assisted with just meals and light housekeeping,
- Build Willow Square,
- Most elders are staying with families, and many have many supportive needs,
- We don't have access to home care in rural areas. A public nurse will come to visit, but we cannot access services that will allow them to stay in their homes. Such as help with cleaning and yard maintenance. Most can handle making a small meal, and we have a Meals on Wheels program, but a gap exists for the other areas, and
- Housing is a significant issue for our elders, living in isolation, or unsafe conditions.

#### 4.4. Social Participation

Social Participation	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average - Most of the Time</b>	<b>25.09%</b>	<b>26.69%</b>	<b>8.23%</b>
Q31. There are opportunities for people of all ages to be socially active in my community	46.19%	48.33%	23.53%
Q32. There are a wide variety of activities offered to appeal to a diverse population of people, including older people and people with disabilities	27.41%	30.00%	0.00%
Q33. Events and activities are affordable and located in community venues that are comfortable and safe for older people and persons with disabilities	23.35%	24.44%	11.76%
Q34. Good information about activities and events is provided, including details about accessibility of facilities and transportation options for those who do not drive	19.29%	20.56%	5.88%
Q35. There is consistent outreach to include people at risk of social isolation	9.23%	10.11%	0.00%

#### Summary

- There are opportunities for seniors to participate in the urban area, but information on what’s going on can be difficult to access, and
- Seniors in the rural communities have challenges participating in events mainly due to lack of transportation options and accessibility issues.

#### What was said:

- Post information through community radio, circulate information and use word of mouth,
- Better parking and more smart bus options,
- More information on events and supported transportation, and
- Accessibility is a huge issue. Venues need to have wheelchair accessible parking, bathrooms, and the ability to get around. For example, when the CFL were playing at Shell Place, the transportation was wonderful, but they dropped off people at the far end of the parking lot and the distance to walk to/from the stadium door was ridiculous.

#### 4.5. Respect and Social Inclusion

Respect and Social Inclusion	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average - Most of the Time</b>	<b>25.13%</b>	<b>25.71%</b>	<b>19.12%</b>
Q37. There are opportunities for people of all ages to be socially active in the community	<b>34.90%</b>	<b>37.14%</b>	<b>11.76%</b>
Q38. Older people and persons with disabilities are recognized in their community for their past and present contributions	<b>22.92%</b>	<b>22.29%</b>	<b>29.41%</b>
Q39. Schools provide opportunities to learn about ageing and older people, and involve older people in school activities	<b>13.54%</b>	<b>13.71%</b>	<b>11.76%</b>
Q40. There are opportunities to socialize and maintain good networks of friends, family and neighbours	<b>29.17%</b>	<b>29.71%</b>	<b>23.53%</b>

#### Summary

- Opportunities to be socially active and maintain good networks of friends is most available in the urban area, and
- Older people are recognized the most for their past and present contributions in the rural communities.

#### What was said:

- More events, communications and availability of seniors' activities at community centres,
- Host more senior outings, provide senior discounts, make housing and transportation affordable to seniors, and arrange out of town trips for seniors at reasonable costs,
- I think this is a losing battle! Seniors are not really respected much unless they have been a 'fixture' in the community for a long time. Most seniors have to move away from Ft. McMurray due to most of the focus on youth and young families,
- Many seniors isolate themselves for different reasons, and often won't participate in things on their own, without assistance from an outreach worker to go with them at the same time introducing them to new things that they have feared going to or trying, because they are alone,
- I am sure there are things going on, but it is not easy to find out this information. Those in the know, know and those who don't, don't, and
- Businesses and organizations to consider seniors as a volunteer base. When recruiting they could go out to senior locations to seek volunteers.

#### 4.6. Civic Participation and Employment

Civic Participation and Employment Opportunities	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average - Most of the Time</b>	<b>17.74%</b>	<b>17.13%</b>	<b>24.11%</b>
Q42. There are opportunities for people of all ages to participate in suitable volunteer, civic and employment positions	40.76%	39.88%	50.00%
Q43. Appropriate training and guidance are provided to citizens to support a wide range of volunteer and employment opportunities	21.74%	23.81%	0.00%
Q44. The skills and attributes of older employees and persons with disabilities are well promoted	14.13%	10.71%	50.00%
Q45. Citizens have options that allow them to remain in the workforce if they choose to continue working, including a range of flexible and appropriately paid opportunities	12.50%	11.90%	18.75%
Q46. Local employers are aware of the potential contribution of mature workers and persons with disabilities and are aware of the benefits of attracting, retaining and developing these individuals	5.43%	5.36%	6.25%
Q47. Our community recognizes that healthy aging may involve working longer and a gradual transition from the workforce to retirement	11.48%	12.57%	0.00%
Q48. Decision-making bodies in public, private and voluntary sectors encourage and facilitate membership for older people	18.13%	15.66%	43.75%

#### Summary

- Seniors do not feel readily engaged with civic organizations and employment opportunities. While opportunities exist (q.42), especially in the rural areas, training, options to work, and options to participate are seen as not being available, and
- Community respect for elders in rural areas is evident with increased access to, respect for and availability of opportunities for seniors in civic, decision-making and employment.

#### What was said:

- We need to promote keeping the older generation in the work force. Having our business embrace our aging population and being a part of making a difference, and
- Promote job postings, volunteer opportunities, safety training, drivers training.

#### 4.7. Communication and Information

Communication and Information	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average - Most of the Time</b>	<b>16.53%</b>	<b>17.16%</b>	<b>10.00%</b>
Q50. Our community has a basic, effective communication system that reaches community residents of all ages	18.03%	19.16%	6.25%
Q51. Oral communication accessible to older people is promoted	12.02%	10.18%	31.25%
Q52. Information is readily available on community events, activities and opportunities	21.31%	23.35%	0.00%
Q53. There is affordable and accessible access to computers and the internet	23.08%	25.30%	0.00%
Q54. People at risk of social isolation receive needed information	8.20%	7.78%	12.50%

##### Summary

- Communication and information sharing was in the bottom tier of the eight areas of age-friendliness, in urban and even more so, rural areas. The strength of oral communication in rural areas was identified.

##### What was said:

- Our society is so strong into social media, however our seniors are not, thus missing much of the communication. In this generation, seniors still use phone books and read the paper, and listen to the radio or TV. We need to continue that type of communication along with oral communication, until we hit a generation that has the ability to access social media on the computer,
- Most seniors do not use computers or fancy phones. They rely on the newspaper or posters, or word of mouth to find things out. The radio is ok as well, and
- Computer training would help.

#### 4.8. Community Support and Health Services

Community Support and Health Services	RMWB	Urban	Rural
<b>Average - Most of the Time</b>	<b>18.86%</b>	<b>20.38%</b>	<b>3.75%</b>
Q56. There is an adequate range of health and community support services offered for promoting, maintaining and restoring health	21.14%	23.27%	0.00%
Q57. Older adults are supported in staying physically active and safe	19.43%	21.38%	0.00%
Q58. Affordable services to help seniors and persons with disabilities, such as snow removal or lawn care, are available in the community	14.86%	15.72%	6.25%
Q59. Local health care services meet the needs of older citizens	16.57%	16.98%	12.50%
Q60. Community emergency planning takes into account the needs of older citizens and persons with disabilities	22.29%	24.53%	0.00%

#### Summary

- Community support and health services are an important issue of concern for seniors who need more frequent and accessible community and health services, and
- The rural areas of Wood Buffalo identified a very low availability of community and health services.

#### What was said:

- Access to medical professionals (i.e. neurologists, oncologists) and services (i.e. MRI, CT, mammograms) in a TIMELY fashion and accessibility. I could get an appointment for a mammogram next week in Edmonton, but would have to wait over a month to have it done in YMM,
- Though we are a city, we don't have certain medical services that are required by seniors. Many seniors need assistance to these appointments and presently, we have no services that offer to assist a senior to be able to attend these appointments, when they have no one in their life that offers that support. Often seniors try to pay someone to take them, yet can't afford it or they get taken advantage of by the person they are paying. We also don't have someone to assist seniors to appointments in town, when sometimes they can't hear the doctor or they don't understand what they are telling them, and
- During the fire, for example, it was pretty challenging to get out of town if you didn't have a vehicle or couldn't reach somebody who would help you.

## 5. Recommendations and Next Steps

### Summary

This assessment report highlights the needs of seniors and the gaps that currently exist across the eight domains of community life. The identified needs and gaps form the baseline assessment of age-friendly features in each community. This will be the starting point from which future progress can be measured. Assessing the WHO checklist of essential age-friendly features will also enable a comparison by the community and demonstrate where and on what specific features of community life progress is being made over time.

### WHO Process

This assessment is the second step in the process to join the WHO's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities for Wood Buffalo. The four steps are:

- Establishment of mechanisms to involve older people throughout the Age-friendly Cities and Communities cycle – The Advisory Committee on Aging was established as the RMWB mechanism to involve older people.
- Development of a baseline assessment of the age-friendliness of the city/community – This Assessment provides a baseline for the Wood Buffalo region.
- Development of a 3-year city-wide action plan based on the findings of this assessment – An Action Plan and the development of indicators are future steps.
- Identification of indicators to monitor progress against this plan.

### Next Steps

Next steps to advance an age-friendly Wood Buffalo include:

1. **Thank Participants:** Thank participants who took the time to fill out the surveys and participate in assessment meetings and interviews.
  2. **Communicate and Review Findings:** Further discussion, review and interpretation of the baseline assessment with community partners. Engage those that support seniors and encourage their response to address identified gaps.
  3. **Broaden Service Provider Assessment:** Consideration of a full RMWB assessment of its level of service delivery against the eight domains of community life. This could be achieved by having all RMWB program areas responding to the Age-friendly survey designed for the baseline assessment.
  4. **Initiate steps towards an Action Plan and Monitoring:** Develop Action Plan and identify roles and timelines to address age-friendly needs and gaps in the Wood Buffalo region.
  5. **Join the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities.**
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