

NIAGARA'S AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY JOURNEY



Impact of the Niagara Aging Strategy
and Action Plan,
- and the Way Forward to
'A Community for All Ages'



November 2023

NIAGARA'S AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY JOURNEY

Niagara Age-Friendly
Community Initiative
action plan built by
100+ citizens in all
12 areas of Niagara

**2010-
2013**

**2014-
2015**

Niagara Aging
Strategy and
Action Plan
(NASAP, 2015)
built by **500+**
**individuals and
organizations**

Age-Friendly Niagara
Network (AFNN)
implements NASAP

Local Municipal
Older Adult Advisory
Committees across
Niagara collaborate

**2017-
2019**

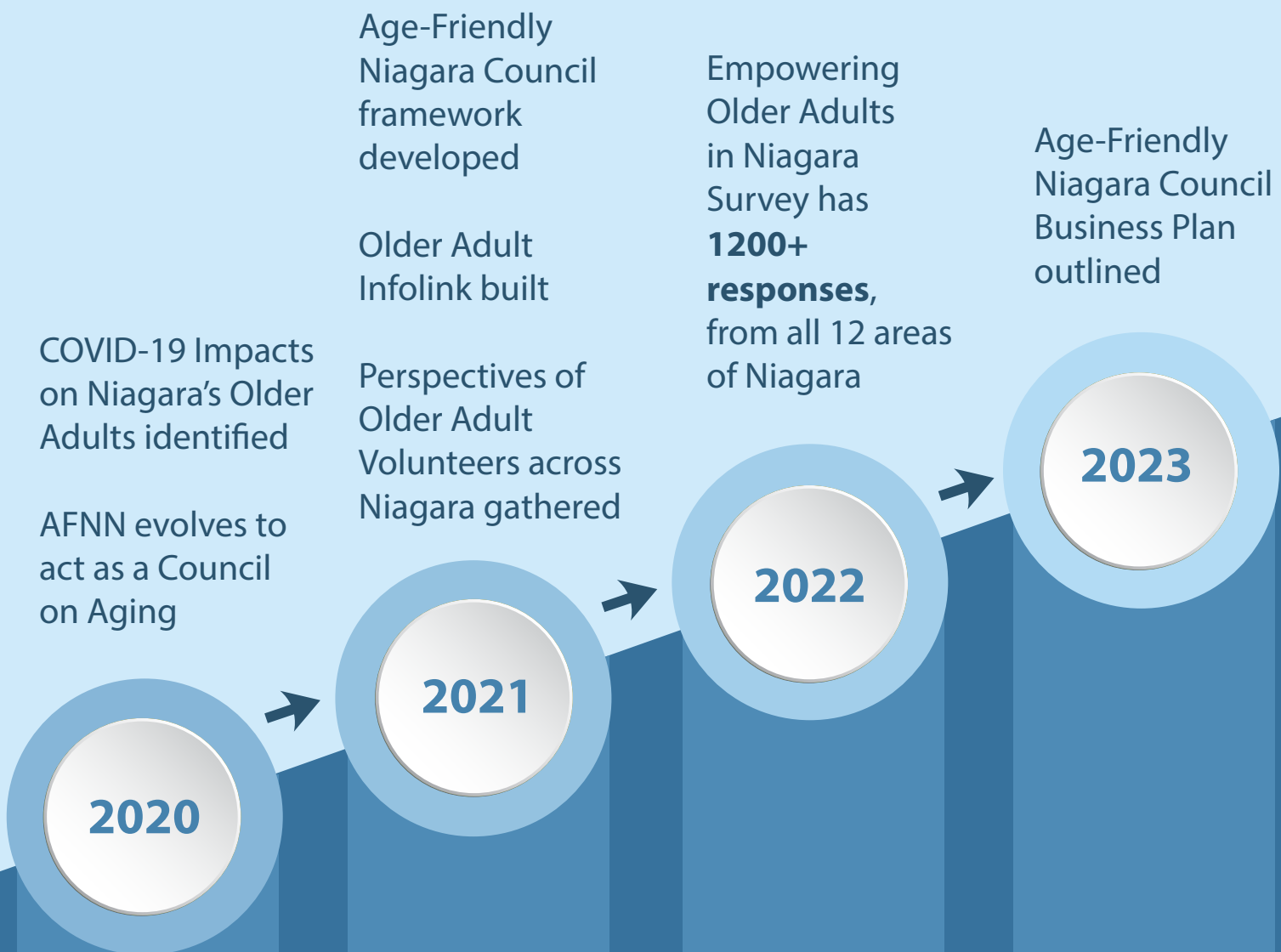




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Foreword and Acknowledgements

Niagara's Age-Friendly Journey and the Way Forward

This Foreword provides historical context of the Age-Friendly movement in Niagara. It also outlines the way forward that the Age-Friendly Niagara Council (AFNC) will pursue, guided by the 2022 AFNC survey and consultation with over 1,200 older adults across Niagara.

Since 2010, older adult volunteers have organized across Niagara to:

1. Foster awareness of the Age-Friendly Community domains identified by the World Health Organization (WHO); and
2. Promote related local action and implementation among Niagara's municipalities and local communities.

The movement in Niagara began in 2010, with an informal network of older adults. Now, in 2023, it has evolved to the more formal Age-Friendly Niagara Council (AFNC), lead by an Interim Board of Directors (with plans to have an incorporated Founding Board in 2024).

Throughout, the volunteer leadership group has included older adults and representatives of government, not-for-profit organizations, and businesses; and engaged the Niagara-wide community in sharing insights about local priorities of older adults.

All along the way, the group has steadfastly promoted "an Age-Friendly Niagara – a community for all ages". This vision recognizes that, although the focus of the movement is on older adults, aging affects people of all ages and requires inclusion and intergenerational collaboration to achieve an Age-Friendly community. The notion is that what is good for older adults is typically good for people of all ages.

In 2014/2015, the movement's leadership group solicited community input through an extensive process, during which Age-Friendly leaders engaged hundreds of people in building the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP). This Plan provided the goals and objectives that the Age-Friendly Niagara (AFN) leadership group used to engage multiple community partners in its implementation. This report highlights some of these achievements.

In 2022, the AFNC Interim Board again solicited community input through an extensive community survey and community consultations. This process has provided valuable data for Niagara and individual local area municipalities on the views, practices, and priorities of older adults - from supports for aging at home, to significant interest in volunteering. Survey responses provide insights into challenges faced by older adults, and opportunities for them to contribute and strengthen their community.

This report summarizes key findings of the 2022 survey, and identifies the community's priorities for action. In particular, the information contained in Tables 2 and 3 will serve as a guide for the AFNC Board to set goals and objectives for years to come. It will also inform decision-making for organizations and leaders in Niagara, regarding older adults' priorities.

This will enable organizations and decision-makers to more effectively meet their respective mandates, to better serve older adults and capitalize on the resources they provide.

Foreword and Acknowledgements cont.

The contributions of the many volunteers who have passionately devoted their time and hard work in providing leadership to Niagara's Age-Friendly movement are first and foremost among the acknowledgments. Most of the volunteers are older adults, and have been the heart and soul of this volunteer-led movement.

There are too many fine volunteers to specifically name, but a special mention must be made to acknowledge the contributions of the late Doug Rapelje of Welland, and the late Catherine Mindorf-Facca of Fort Erie. The untimely passing of these individuals, in 2022 and 2023 respectively, left the leadership group and the whole community extremely saddened. At the same time, they inspired their colleagues to continue their efforts toward strengthening Niagara as an Age-Friendly community.

As a volunteer-led and community-driven organization, funding through various grants has provided the necessary support to advance Niagara's Age-Friendly journey. Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation; Niagara Community Foundation; Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program; and Government of Canada New Horizons for Seniors Program. Thanks also to the various community organizations that applied for these grants on behalf of the AFN leadership group over the years. In addition, the contributions of Pat Spadafora, a consultant in the field of aging, need to be acknowledged. Pat was the lead for the 2022 survey of older adults in Niagara; authored this 2023 report; and facilitated working sessions in 2021 that helped to crystalize strategies to transition the Age-Friendly work in Niagara toward the formation of a Council on Aging and a collaborative of the volunteer members of local area municipalities' Older Adult/Age-Friendly/Seniors advisory committees (i.e., the Niagara Older Adults Alliance – NOAA). This report will guide the Age-Friendly movement in Niagara for years to come.

Furthermore, Niagara Connects has played an invaluable role in the Age-Friendly movement in Niagara. They have helped guide the AFNC's collective action by providing support in the areas of community engagement, knowledge mobilization, facilitation, and backbone coordination. Since 2010, Niagara Connects' Mary Wiley has been the consistent contributor to the work of the AFNC. She most recently oversaw the Brock University research students who helped summarize the 2022 AFNC survey data into subsets of data from the local area municipalities. This will be a valuable resource for the work of the local municipal advisory committees and other decision makers across Niagara.

Finally, an acknowledgement to Spritz Creative for their contribution to the design elements of this report.

Dominic Ventresca,

Chair, Interim Board of Directors, Age-Friendly Niagara Council

Introduction

A Canadian milestone was reached in 2016 when adults 65+ outnumbered children under 14 (Source: Statistics Canada. 2016). This demographic shift is unprecedented. Its speed and its impact will dominate and influence the social, educational, healthcare, political and economic landscape for many years to come. Similar to other parts of Canada, the Niagara Region is home to a growing number of older adults.

When the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP) was published in 2015, it noted that, in 2014, 20.5% of the population in Niagara was 65+. That percentage has grown. According to the 2021 Census Profile 31.99% of the total population in Niagara was 60+ (Source: Niagara Regional Municipality census division and local municipality census subdivisions. Statistics Canada. 2021). Statistics about the actual number of older adults living in Niagara vary somewhat, depending on the source. Despite these variances and, recognizing that the 2015 NASAP report used 65+ as the marker and the statistics from 2021 are based on 60+, the reality is that the older adult population in Niagara continues to grow.

The 2015 NASAP ‘call to action’ questioned whether Niagara’s aging population was a challenge or an opportunity. Considering initiatives undertaken by the community since 2015, it is evident that Niagara has intentionally chosen to frame an aging population as an opportunity. The NASAP is intended to be a ‘living document’ to guide planning by many sectors. In that regard, it has shaped subsequent actions across all local areas of Niagara.

One particularly noteworthy development since 2015 is the evolution of the Age-Friendly Niagara Network, to become the Age-Friendly Niagara Council (AFNC). This transition represents more than a decade of leadership and sustained action by committed leaders in Niagara. It also demonstrates their commitment to recognizing an older population as an opportunity.

Looking back, one sees that the vision for Niagara’s approach to an aging population has remained consistent. The NASAP (2015) committed to promoting this vision:

“A caring community that optimizes opportunities for overall well being to enhance the quality of life as people age”.

The vision of the AFNC (Board terms of Reference, 2021) is:

“An age-friendly Niagara – a community for all ages”.

The AFNC mission statement is also congruent with the 2015 NASAP vision: “Foster a caring community that optimizes quality of life as people age”.

This commitment to ‘all ages’ is reflected in the AFNC board Terms of Reference (TOR)¹. Specifically, one of the core values/principles articulated in the TOR reads:

¹ The recommended Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Niagara Council on Aging (or Council like entity, name to be determined) were approved by the AFNN Leadership Council at their meeting on May 21 st , 2021.

“Intergenerational: Bringing people of different generations together promotes sharing across age groups, increases our understanding of one another, and recognizes that individuals of all ages have something valuable to contribute within their neighbourhoods as well as in the broader community.”

In addition, the AFNC TOR recommends the following in terms of the AFNC board structure:

“At least 50% of the Board must be 50+ to ensure a focus on older adults with at least one board member from each of the following age groups – under 25, 25-50, 50-75 and 75+ - to ensure intergenerational perspectives.”

This commitment to and interest in ‘all ages’ was reinforced by respondents to the 2022 survey, ‘Empowering Older Adults in Niagara’ 2 . This survey was conducted by the AFNC, and analysis of survey results was informed by participants in an October 28 th , 2022, community forum convened by the AFNC. A few participant comments illustrate this interest.

- Encouraging intergenerational relationships and opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer
- Intergenerational programs
- Increased interaction between young and old
- Social events for all ages
- Accessible, safe multigenerational activities

Purpose of this report

As the ‘road map’ on the cover of this report illustrates, since the NASAP was launched in 2015, there has been continuous and sustained action to support older adults in Niagara—community forums, consultations, events, and reports written. A comprehensive timeline of actions and initiatives, as well as links to resources, are in Appendix A of this document.

This 2023 report will not duplicate the wealth of information that is already available through prior Age-Friendly Niagara resources. Rather, it summarizes and compares data from the extensive 2022 Niagara-wide AFNC survey of older adults, and related consultation sessions.

Further, the purpose of this report is to take a retrospective look at Niagara’s Age-Friendly journey, and to suggest a path forward, by looking broadly at the goals of the 2015 NASAP plan, in addition to what was learned from results of the 2022 survey, ‘Empowering Older Adults in Niagara’. As part of this process, these questions about ‘where we came from’ and ‘where we are’ will be explored:

- What are the similarities?
- What has stayed the same?
- What has changed?
- Where do we go from here?

² It is important to note that there was a solid response to the 2022 survey, 1200 completed surveys representing all 12 municipalities in Niagara. The survey was completed by adults 50+ who live in the Niagara region.

2015 → 2022: What are the Similarities?

A review of NASAP goals, and the priorities identified by 2022 AFNC survey respondents prompted the author to think about an analogy to apples! While McIntosh apples and Fuji apples are both apples, they are different varieties and they taste different.

Similarly, the NASAP and results of the 2022 survey both offer solid planning information, but the data is presented and, was gathered, somewhat differently for the two reports – both ‘apples’, but different varieties. What that means for this current report is that the author has drawn comparisons and differences, while acknowledging the diverse collection and presentation of the original data.

Let us begin this journey with a high-level comparison of the 2015 NASAP goals and the priorities expressed by respondents to the 2022 AFNC survey. Table 1 highlights the NASAP’s 5 transformational goals, and the top 5 priorities identified by respondents to the 2022 survey. * Please note that a complete list of how respondents ranked topics which they suggested as priorities for the AFNC to address is included in Appendix B of this document.

Table 1

NASAP 2015 Five transformational goals ³	2022 - Empowering Older Adults in Niagara Survey – Top 5 Priorities identified by respondents
1. Elevate the profile, level of leadership and engagement of seniors in the community	1. Supports to age in my own home
2. Facilitate an active and positive lifestyle for all seniors	2. Health and wellness promotion
3. Optimize the health and wellness of seniors	3. Increased recreation, leisure and learning opportunities for older adults
4. Improve access and utilization of services and supports	4. Increased housing options
5. Improve and maintain a supportive infrastructure	5. Increased education and information about programs and services available to adults 50+

It is important to also reference 5 overarching themes that emerged from the 2022 survey, as they are consistent with the 5 2015 NASAP goals and the 5 2022 survey priorities. Specific information about these themes can be found in the 2002 survey report (see link in Appendix A of this document).

These themes include:

1. Connected generations
2. Housing options and supports
3. Access
4. Inclusive communities ⁴
5. Opportunities to stay active

³ Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan. April 2015.

⁴ Inclusive communities will be further addressed under ‘What has changed?’

2015 → 2022: What has Stayed the Same?

For this section, the author reviewed: i. the seniors’ focus group notes (July/August 2014) that subsequently shaped the 2015 NASAP plan; ii. the 2015 NASAP plan; iii. comments contributed by respondents to the 2022 ‘Empowering Older Adults in Niagara’ survey⁵ and iv. remarks from participants at the 2022 Community Forum convened by the AFNC (hosted by the Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara, Welland location).

Following are some concerns expressed by older adults in 2022 that are consistent with those identified in 2015. This is intended to provide a snap shot of ongoing concerns of older adults that may require action. Only areas of common concern that the AFNC may be able to address through advocacy and concrete actions have been included in the following list. Concerns that were identified by older adults such as municipal taxes, supermarkets being too large, doctors leaving the region and/or retiring, traffic congestion and wait times for medical specialists are likely outside the purview of the AFNC. Regardless, it remains important for the AFNC to continue to ‘have its finger on the pulse’ of the overall concerns of older adults in Niagara.

Transportation

- Need for better regional transportation
- Enough transportation for those who don’t drive and don’t have access to a car
- Accessible transportation
- Sidewalk, roads and lane improvements
- Cost relief to defray transportation expenses
- More public transit
- Increased scooter accessibility and safety

Housing

- Increased housing options
- Affordable housing
- Supports for ‘aging in place’ whether within one’s home, or in a facility that offers a continuum of supports

It is difficult to accurately report change since 2015, as historical data proved to be difficult to publicly access. Despite this limitation, the author is grateful to Majuriha Gnanendran, Brock University graduate student, who was able to access some 2023 statistics for this report. These numbers may assist the AFNC as they explore housing needs and resources. The numbers are region-wide, and are based on information from online sources.

Retirement homes and apartments	61
Long-term care homes	32
Shelters and housing support/assistance	28

⁵ The comments reviewed were in response to this question: ‘Using 3 or 4 bullet points, please tell us what a community for all ages’ looks like to you.’

⁶ The author has used the word ‘may’ to acknowledge that positive actions and change related to these concerns may well have been addressed since 2015.

Social, recreational, cultural and educational opportunities

- Youth engagement and intergenerational programs
- More youth involved
- Increased education and information about programs and services available to adults 50+
- Easier access to information
- Need a single source of information for older adults

Healthcare

- Mental health and physical health services for all ages
- Transportation for specialized medical services



2015 → 2022: What is New or has Changed?

This section provides information about a few societal and change in the Niagara-wide community since 2015. While it is not an exhaustive list, it identifies a few factors that the AFNC may want to consider in their planning, as an update to the 2015 NASAP.

a. Increased awareness of, and focus on, social isolation and loneliness

One of the most pressing issues facing older adults in contemporary society is finding ways to become or remain socially included and connected to their communities.

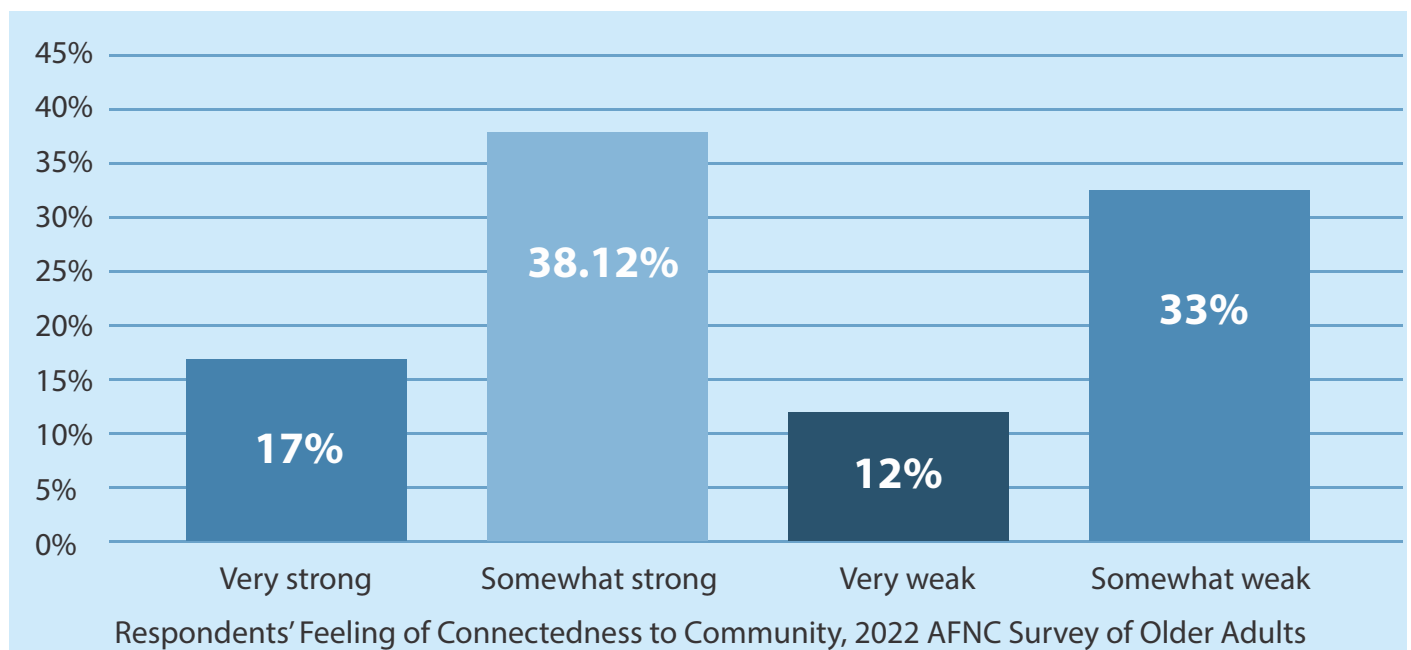
Loneliness and social isolation are increasingly identified as important determinants of health – generally, those older adults who have social connections enjoy better health outcomes and live longer. We are more strongly impacted by our peers and social networks than our genetics when it comes to changing our health (Dr. Mark Hyman, December 2022). Good friends are the longevity vaccine!

In its 85 years and counting, the Harvard Study of Adult Development has found that personal connections are the most important factor in long-term health and happiness.

Recognizing the importance of social connections, the 2022 AFNC survey of older adults in Niagara asked respondents about their sense of belonging and being engaged in their communities. In graph 1, below, one can see that while many survey respondents reported feeling a ‘very strong’ (17%) or ‘somewhat strong’ connection (38.12%), many older adults (45%) reported that their connection was ‘very weak’ or ‘somewhat weak’. This has important implications for an updated aging strategy and action plan for Niagara.

Barriers to participation in social, recreation and cultural programs and activities that might reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness can be found in the 2022 AFNC survey results. The top barrier identified was ‘lack of information about available activities and programs.’

Graph 1



b. COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, announced by the World Health Organization in 2020, had a global and ongoing impact. The impact of COVID represents one of the most defining elements of change since 2015, and we will all be dealing with repercussions for the foreseeable future.

While there were older adults who experienced loneliness and social isolation before, during and after 2015, this was exacerbated by the pandemic, with older adults being disproportionately affected. Social restrictions and guidelines, while providing protection, also resulted in increased social isolation and loneliness.

In the UK, more people reported being more lonely today than before COVID-19 struck — 3.3 million versus 2.6 million in 2020 — despite the end of social restrictions. In Australia, post-lockdown, researchers identified a persistent “loneliness gap”.⁷

The impact of the pandemic was recognized in Niagara. A two-page Age-Friendly Niagara Bulletin provides a call to action to address COVID-19’s impact on older adults living in Niagara, with a focus on Staying Well; Staying Safe; and Staying Connected (see link in Appendix A).

c. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Over the last decade, there has been a greater and more explicit emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion. This shift was demonstrated in comments in the 2022 AFNC survey, in relationship to what an Age-Friendly community means, and reinforced in table conversations at the October 18th, 2022 AFNC community forum held in Welland.

The Region of Niagara has demonstrated its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) through the launch of its recent EDI Action Plan for 2023-2027. ‘Research shows that communities that are welcoming and free from discrimination lead to positive health, well-being and sense of belonging for all in the community’ (Source: Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan 2023-2027)

d. Technology and digital literacy

While technology was referenced in some of earlier documents related to Niagara’s Age-Friendly journey, the pervasiveness of, and reliance on, technology has increased over the last decade.

Use of technology by Canadians 65+ during the pandemic⁸ shows that:

- 23% of adults 65+ use video calling in their smart phones, twice as many as in 2019
- 37% said they use social media to communicate with family and friends
- 72% said they feel confident using current technology
- 88% use the Internet daily
- 66% of adults 50+ felt isolated at least some of the time during COVID

⁷ apolitical. From the Community/Health and Wellbeing, October 11, 2022

⁸ Source: Age-Well poll of over 2,000 Canadians conducted by Environics Research in July 2022

Olive Bryanton, 83, Hampshire, Prince Edward Island writes:

“It has kept me sane, especially in the early part (of the pandemic) when we couldn’t go out and family couldn’t come to visit.” She’s been on Zoom “almost constantly” since COVID -19 began, participating in and presenting at virtual meetings and webinars, and connecting with family. She takes to Twitter and Facebook more often, and attended a wedding via livestream’.

In Niagara, the 2022 ‘Empowering Older Adults in Niagara’ survey results demonstrate that about 30% of respondents use cell phones, about 28% use computers (lap tops and desktops) and about 22% use tablets (e.g. iPads) at least once a week.

One also must consider how individuals use technology – e.g., Internet searches, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, banking et cetera). In the 2022 survey, when asked about their ‘Preferred ways to receive information about programs, services and activities for adults 50+ in Niagara’, the top three ways identified were ‘email, Internet websites and social media’. These are important factors to consider in current and future planning.

In addition, the top 5 uses of technology reported by 2022 survey respondents included banking, social media, purchasing groceries and/or retail products, connecting with friends and family (e.g., Zoom) and reading books and newspapers. The author has bolded ‘social media’ and ‘connecting with friends and family’ because of how social media may shape, in part, how the AFNC communicates with older adults about updated NASAP priorities, and how technology can mitigate experiences of social isolation and/or loneliness.

e. Older Adult Infolink

The 2015 NASAP, noted the importance of increased information and awareness about available services for older adults, their families and caregivers. As previously mentioned in this document, the top barrier cited by older adults in 2022 survey responses, for not participating in social, recreation and cultural activities, was a lack of information about available activities and programs.

The 2022 survey results also demonstrated that many older adults in Niagara are not aware of Older Adult Infolink. This excellent resource, developed by the AFNC in partnership with 211 Ontario, was not available in 2015. Several ideas for strengthening outreach about it were advanced through community consultations related to the work of the 2022 survey.



Explore what Niagara has to offer!

Are you looking for more information about services for older adults in the community?

Older Adult Infolink provides easier, enhanced and more centralized access to information about community services for older adults. The site is designed for older adults in Niagara, their care givers and family, as well as service providers supporting older adults.

This resource is made possible through a partnership between the Age-Friendly Niagara Council and 211 Ontario, with generous funding from the Niagara Community Foundation.

Find Older Adult Infolink at: <https://www.agefriendlyniagara.com/older-adult-infolink/>



A Community for All Ages



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f. Lifelong learning

Interest in lifelong learning has been a recurring theme since 2015. **‘Expanding educational opportunities’** was identified in 2015. In the 2022 survey results, ‘increased recreation, leisure and learning opportunities for older adults’ was one of the top 5 priorities reported by survey respondents.

There are too many resources related to opportunities to learn to reference in this report, and the author will provide a couple of examples.

i. Lifelong Learning Niagara

“Lifelong Learning Niagara is a third age learning organization providing learning programs and experiences for adults 50+ living in the Niagara region and beyond.

Our goal is to present stimulating and enlightening educational programs and events that appeal to a broad range of interests.

We promote a community where we can discover new ideas from speakers who are well informed and learn with others in a friendly environment.”⁹

ii. Across Niagara, a total of 13 Seniors’ Active Living Centres (SALCs) and 11 local Public Library systems offer many learning opportunities.

iii. Niagara College and Brock University both offer courses and events, potentially of interest to older adults

g. The Francophone community

One significant area of change, in 2022, was the opportunity to translate the ‘Empowering Older Adults in Niagara’ survey into French and also the opportunity to facilitate a focus group for French speaking participants to explore their wants, needs and interests.¹⁰

⁹ From the Lifelong Learning Niagara website. <https://llniagara.ca/>

¹⁰ The AFNC appreciates the work of Bianca Gagnon, Coordinator, Quality Improvement, Centre de santé communautaire, Welland, in ensuring that we were able to hear the voices of the Francophone community



2015 → 2022: Where do we go from here?

Five themes emerged in response to the question about what a ‘community for all ages’ looks like (2022 AFNC Survey). Table 2 identifies 5 themes, and provides relevant examples of survey respondent comments. This information can help to shape AFNC priorities.

Table 2	
What a ‘community for all ages’ looks like in Niagara, from 2022 AFNC Survey results	
5 Themes	Examples of survey respondent comments
Opportunities to stay active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place to contribute • A place to socialize • Walkable neighbourhoods • Outdoor spaces • Activities and programs • Walking and cycling paths • Flexible times for programs • Being able to attend things on evenings and weekends • Quiet, open spaces • Opportunities to volunteer
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable information • Health services and health practitioners • Affordable technology and Internet plans • Transportation • Affordable programs • Access to services and programs for people living with mobility challenges • Access to facilities – e.g. libraries staying open late
Connected generations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational programs • Increased interaction between young and old • Mentorship • Learning from and helping one another • Social events for all ages
Inclusive communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational programs • Increased interaction between young and old • Mentorship • Learning from and helping one another • Social events for all ages
Housing options and supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased housing supports • Age-friendly housing • Increased housing options • Affordable and accessible housing • Mixed housing • Access to affordable retirement communities

While previously referenced in Table 1 (page 7), Table 3 reiterates the top 5 priorities identified in the 2022 survey, for the AFNC to focus on in strengthening Niagara as an Age-Friendly community. It also includes examples of what is meant by each priority. Combined with the 5 themes (in Table 2) for what an Age-Friendly community looks like, these 5 priority areas will guide the AFNC in its decision making.

Synergies between the 5 themes and the 5 priority areas may also guide AFNC planning, and in determining short-, mid- and long-term priorities – e.g., many similar comments were made by 2022 survey respondents and by participants in 2022 community consultations, which are reflected in ‘increased housing options and supports’ (Theme, Table 2) and ‘supports to age in my own home’ and ‘increased housing options’ (Priorities, Table 3)

Table 3 Top 5 Priorities for the AFNC to focus on in strengthening Niagara as an Age-Friendly community, from 2022 AFNC Survey results	
Top 5 Priorities	Examples of Survey Respondents’ Suggestions
Supports to age in my own home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring community services to community residences where there is a desire to stay at home • Identify what our top three factors to help people “age at home” and take action once identified - what the neighborhood within the community can do
Health and wellness promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between planners, health providers and private sector • Community Health Centres throughout the region • Connecting with care services that advocate for older people
Increased recreation, leisure and learning opportunities for older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative development of parks to include activities for all ages (walking trails, benches, fitness equipment) • Bike paths, community walking clubs • Having someone to go with is an important motivator for people to participate in community activities and programs • The importance of preserving the French language by offering opportunities to engage with others in French in all facets (e.g., cultural activities, recreational activities) • Recreation programs in each municipality • Challenges of rural communities
Increased education and information about programs and services available to adults 50+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the role of technology – incorporated to support more interaction, not the opposite – more accessible – shrinking the digital gap through education • Simple and clear promotional material
Increased housing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter/multigenerational housing • Students living with older adults – perhaps low (no) rent for students; student provides home maintenance and other supports for the older adults with whom they live • “mini” homes idea

In its planning, the AFNC may want to include an emphasis on factors previously referenced in the ‘What is new or has changed section?’, particularly as they relate to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and ensuring/strengthening the digital literacy of older adults.

Any plan is only as robust as the resources available – financial and human – to implement it. To that end, the author recommends that the AFNC dedicate some efforts to volunteers – skill sets needed, how to recruit, train and provide support, etc. Many initiatives rely heavily on volunteers, and their roles must be considered when looking at both sustainability and succession planning.

Volunteers

Ninety-one individuals who completed the 2022 AFNC survey indicated that they have an interest in volunteering. How can you ‘find’ these individuals in the community? Participants at the October 18, 2022 AFNC community forum made a number of suggestions about volunteer opportunities, including family volunteering and reaching out to older adults in the Niagara region who have retired and may be looking for ways to become involved. Forum participants’ suggestions may be taken into consideration along with 2021 Brock University research, “Civic Engagement to build Sustainable Local Capacity: Perspectives of Age-Friendly Community Volunteers in the Niagara Region” August 2022” – see link to research report in Appendix A).

Examples of change identified in the Brock report were presented by Pauli Gardner, Brock University at a webinar hosted by the AFNC on March 29, 2023, titled “Strengthening Niagara: Insights from a 2022 survey of Niagara’s older adults”. These examples are depicted in the slide below, part of the March 29, 2023 presentation.

Examples of Change



Hospice in the City of Welland

Photo: iHeart Radio



Affordable Housing in the City of Thorold

Photo: Niagara This Week



Pilot Bus Project in the City of Niagara Falls

Photo: Niagara Transit



Seniors’ Forum in the Town of West Lincoln

Photo: West Lincoln Public Library

Next steps

The AFNC Interim Board is committed to disseminating this report, as well as the data from the 2022 ‘Empowering Older Adults in Niagara’ survey report to as many community partners as possible (e.g., community decision makers such as municipal councillors, government representatives, agency leaders, business owners, and volunteers serving on local municipal older adult/age-friendly/seniors advisory committees).

In addition, the AFNC board will act on the priorities and themes described in this report through its role in raising awareness about population aging in Niagara, and promoting local and regional strategies that foster Age-Friendly communities.

In 2023, the AFNC Interim Board developed a business plan, in preparation for proceeding toward establishing an AFNC Founding Board. When established, the Founding Board will continue to ensure that action on the priorities identified in this report continues into the future.

Summary

The AFNC, in collaboration with municipal seniors/age-friendly advisory committees and others, has a unique opportunity to build on the strengths and progress of the last decade, in order to create lasting and meaningful change for older adults living in Niagara. Current and future work is not starting from square one – rather, it is building on a solid foundation created over many years.



Appendix A

This appendix contains detailed background information and links to resources grouped into three phases.

Phase 1: Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP) launched

<https://www.agefriendlyniagara.com/niagara-aging-strategy-and-action-plan/>

Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP)

The Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan was dedicated to advancing the vision of a “caring community that optimizes opportunities for overall well being to enhance quality of life as people age.” NASAP is a “living document” that serves as a template for planning by service agencies, different levels of government, businesses and the community at large.

Companion documents include:

Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Toolkit

This toolkit consists of resources and publications designed to support the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan: Booklet (2015).

<https://niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/niagara-aging-strategy-and-action-plan-toolkit/>

Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Template

This implementation template identifies over 100 actions to execute the strategies and to help marshal existing assets, ensuring coordination of efforts in the implementation of action plans and monitoring progress over time.

<https://niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/niagara-aging-strategy-and-action-plan-implementation-template/>

Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Project Report

This document summarizes the input from over 500 individuals to:

- Validate needs of older adults as currently being perceived by older adults, advocacy groups, service providers and others
- Identify new or emerging needs of older adults, as the population and society changes
- Provide insights into existing and emerging needs that will help communities and organizations within communities to become more age-friendly and advance to achieve the world-class age-friendly community characteristics of the World Health Organization

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/niagara-aging-strategy-and-action-plan-project-report/>

Phase 2: 2017-2019 – NASAP Implementation Action

Community partners were engaged in taking ‘concrete action’ (fully documented) over 28 months.

- **Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Project (2017-2019)**
Evaluation Highlights

This two-page document summarizes progress toward, and future opportunities for, implementing the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP). Final evaluation findings for the 2017-2019 NASAP Implementation Project are shared by the Age-Friendly Niagara Network (AFNN).

https://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/12/2019-11-30_NASAP-Evaluation_2-page-Highlights_FINAL_web.pdf

- **Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan Implementation Project (2017-2019)**
Full Evaluation Report

This October, 2019 report outlines Age-Friendly Niagara Network (AFNN) action steps to begin implementing the Niagara Aging Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP, 2015).

Action Groups advanced strategies for:

- Community Engagement and Communication;
- Recreation, Learning and Leisure; and
- Improved Services, Systems and Infrastructure.

https://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/12/2019-11-30_NASAP-Evaluation_Full-Report_FINAL_web.pdf

Upshot of 2017-2019 Implementation Project – Steps to Advance the AFC Movement for Niagara:

- Leverage AFNN membership in the newly-formed Ontario Association of Councils on Aging, to bring ideas, evidence and promising practices to Niagara, and to share successes.
- Evolve AFNN to act as a Council on Aging equivalent, with an intergenerational focus.
- Engage youth in AFNN planning and action.
- Strengthen the AFNN Niagara-wide Collaborative of local municipal Seniors/Age-Friendly advisory committees, through timely information-sharing and alignment to address topics of common concern.
- Advance AFNN advocacy on priority issues – health benefits of social inclusion; and access to: services (transportation, technology), a range of suitable housing options for people of all income levels, and opportunities to benefit from physical activity, recreation and learning activities.
- Expand AFNN’s demonstrated success as a nimble framework for decision-makers to connect with what local older people are thinking; and for hosting Niagara-wide learning forums on timely topics.
- Continue to engage decision-makers in seeing the benefits of investing in the AFNN.

Phase 3: Building the Niagara Council on Aging

■ 2020 – Nimble Gather Older Adult Leaders in Niagara to Inform COVID-19 Response

● Addressing COVID-19 Impacts on Niagara's Older Adults

This two-page bulletin provides a call to action to address COVID-19 impacts on older adults in Niagara, with a focus on: Staying Well; Staying Safe; and Staying Connected.

https://www.agefriendlyniagara.com/wp-content/uploads/Age-Friendly-Niagara-Bulletin-October-2020_FINAL.pdf

■ 2021

● Building and Launching Older Adult Infolink

- Webinar Recording – Age-Friendly Niagara Council Update & Launch of Older Adult Infolink – December 9, 2021

- Webinar Slide Deck

- Older Adult Infolink Frequently Asked Questions and Video Tour

- Formalizing a Niagara Region Wide Council on Aging- A record of processes and documents representing work conducted during April, May and June 2021 - June 28, 2021 report prepared by Pat Spadafora

■ 2022

- Empowering Older Adults in Niagara Survey - A report on the results of a region wide survey and related activities from May 2022 – October 2022 prepared by Pat Spadafora

- AFNC Interim Board Sustainability Task Force (March – April, 2022) - Report to Interim Board, April 28, 2022 – approved by Interim Board, June, 2022

■ 2023

- January, 2023 Community Study Report – Civic Engagement to Build Sustainable Local Capacity – Perspectives of Age-Friendly Community

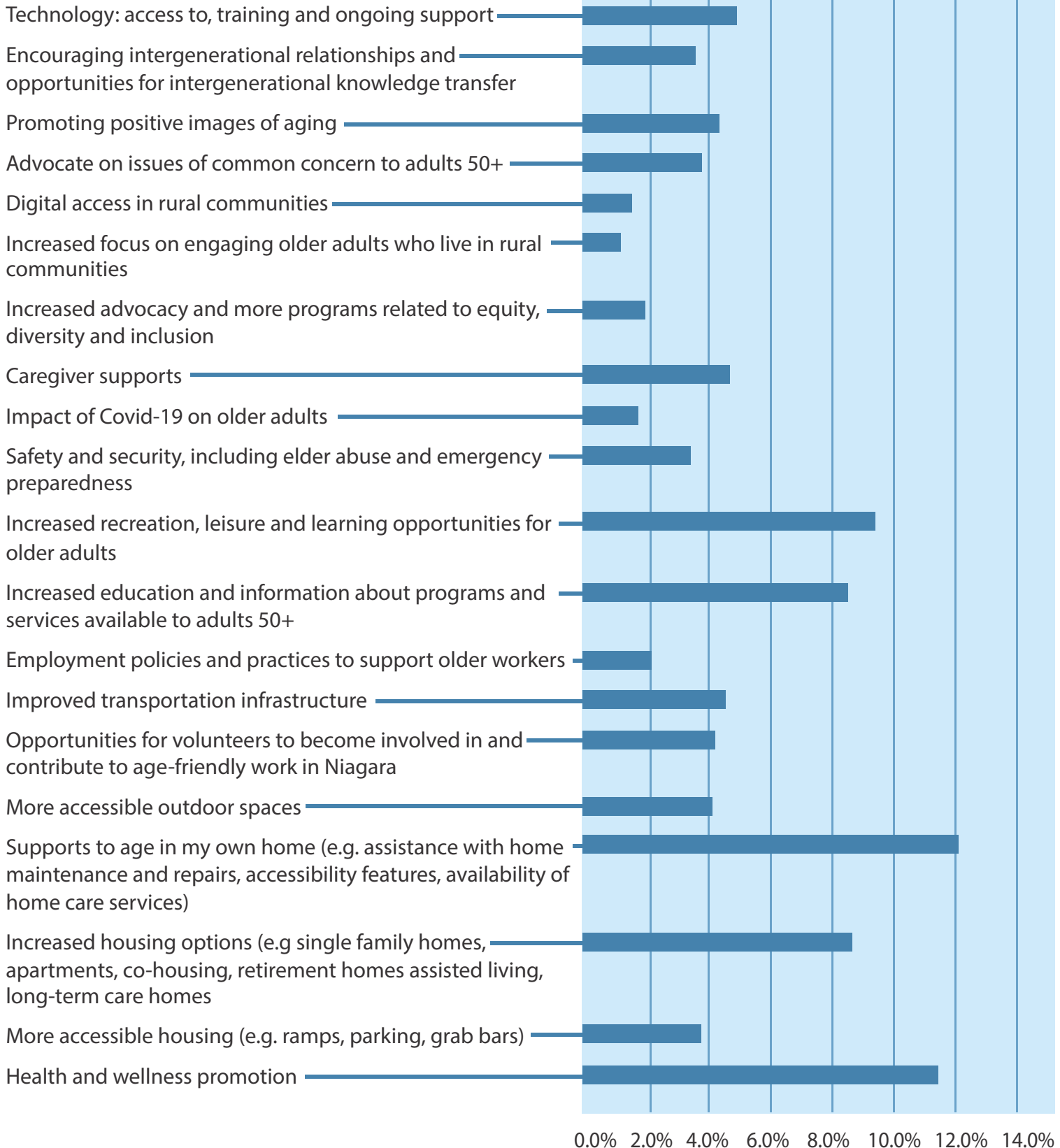
Volunteers in the Niagara Region

<https://niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/community-study-report-civic-engagement-to-build-sustainable-local-capacity-perspectives-of-age-friendly-community-volunteers-in-the-niagara-region/>

- March 29, 2023 Webinar: Strengthening Niagara: Insights from a Survey of Niagara's Older Adults
<https://niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/resources-publications/strengthening-niagara-insights-from-a-survey-of-niagaras-older-adults/>

Appendix B

Planning priorities identified for the AFNC





A Community for All Ages



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