



# Best Practices in Age-friendly Planning

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# Overview

This report provides an overview of current best practices in age-friendly planning in municipalities worldwide. Part I provides a summary of the broad components of age-friendly planning, followed by a brief discussion of universal design, social planning and community planning as relevant to age-friendly planning practices. Part II provides a series of actions that comprise age-friendly planning at different scales of interaction, that the District of Lake Country may choose to pursue on conclusion of the Age-friendly Living Guidelines Project. Part III provides a list of resources that District staff and other interested parties may refer to for specific guidelines above and beyond that provided in Part II. A companion digital database of resources and actions is provided in the accompanying compact disc.

## Part I

### What is Age-Friendly Planning?

Planning proactively for a future in which a greater proportion of the population lives with reduced mobility and other disabilities is responsible, necessary and timely. A recent literature review focussing on legislation for persons with disabilities published in March 2010 noted that “at the start of 2009, Canada is still quite a bit behind other developed countries in putting strategies into practice... to support people with disabilities in a broader way.”<sup>1</sup> Age-friendly planning is sensitive to the needs of all age groups and all ability levels. Whether providing room for parents with baby strollers, the mobility requirements of the elderly or other persons with disabilities (e.g., the use of walkers, wheelchairs and motorised personal mobility devices), or the needs of the general populace to navigate municipal buildings, streets, paths and sidewalks safely and easily, age-friendly planning creates a civic environment that is welcoming to all.

The need for age-friendly planning has originated in the developed world in response to an aging demographic. Statistics Canada forecasts that by the year 2041, one in four Canadians will be over the age of 65.<sup>2</sup> While senior citizens today are healthier and live longer than ever before, it is still incumbent upon municipalities to be pro-active in their planning practices and anticipate the needs of all citizens. The advantage of age-friendly planning is that it creates communities that are more inclusive of all ages. Safer streets, better connected footpath networks, signage that is legible for pedestrians and motorists alike, buildings that are accessible to persons using mobility devices, homes that are designed to allow aging in place; all of these elements and more contribute to communities that provide a welcoming environment for citizens from youth to maturity and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> Burns, K. K., and G. L. Gordon (2010) “Analyzing the Impact of Disability Legislation in Canada and the United States” in *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 20(4) 205-218, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Human Resources and Skills Development Canada “Canadians in Context: Aging Population” <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=33>

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities has identified eight features of an age-friendly community.<sup>3</sup> These are:

1. Outdoor spaces and public buildings that are pleasant, clean, secure and physically accessible.
2. Public transportation that is accessible and affordable.
3. Housing that is affordable, appropriately located, well built, well designed and secure.
4. Opportunities for social participation in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities with people of all ages and cultures.
5. Older people are treated with respect and are included in civic life.
6. Opportunities for employment and volunteerism that cater to older persons' interests and abilities.
7. Age-friendly communication and information available.
8. Community support and health tailored to older persons' needs.

The University of Waterloo's *Age-friendly Communities* "Tools for Building Strong Communities" site suggests that there are three components to planning and implementing an age-friendly community: first, an informed society; second, an enabling and supportive environment; and third, personal, social and system connectedness.<sup>4</sup> The *Age-friendly Living Guidelines Project* incorporates each of these elements: by improving public awareness of age-friendly planning issues through the blog, the focus groups and interviews; by conducting research into current Lake Country practices and opportunities for physical and social well-being and support for residents of all ages; and finally, through promoting cohesiveness in neighbourhoods and communities through the creation of a Living Charter. The results of this research will aid Lake Country in implementing the eight features of an age-friendly community as identified by the UBCM.

There are three main sets of actors within a municipal context that are involved in planning for an age-friendly community that embodies the above eight characteristics. Table 1.1 below offers insight into what the municipal government, stakeholders and citizens and residents bring to the table in collaborative planning processes.

**Table 1.1 Components and Actors**

Actors	Components
Municipal government	Bylaws, zoning, information provision, service provision, incentive creation, etc.
Stakeholders	Participation in incentive programs, provision of age-friendly buildings and developments, provision of services (e.g., health, transportation, construction & renovation, personal care services, etc.), adherence to best practices, etc.
Citizens & Residents	Activism, participation in information sessions, community outreach, volunteering and working in service provision, use of facilities, provision of feedback to government and stakeholders about needs, etc.

Within a municipality, actors may fall into more than one category simultaneously.

<sup>3</sup> CARP - A New Vision of Aging for Canada. <http://www.carp.ca/advocacy/adv-article-display.cfm?documentid=4106>

<sup>4</sup> University of Waterloo *Age Friendly Communities*. [http://afc.uwaterloo.ca/building\\_blocks/what\\_is\\_it.html](http://afc.uwaterloo.ca/building_blocks/what_is_it.html)

## Planning and Design

Planning for an age-friendly community involves all of the actors in Table 1.1. Municipal governments can create bylaws and zoning language that mandate certain design elements that make multi-family and commercial properties more accessible to people of all ages and abilities, and can provide information to homeowners about how to modify existing dwellings to be more supportive of aging in place and general accessibility. Other levels of government are also implicated in the move towards “universal design” as in the case of the federal *Fair Housing Act* and *Americans with Disabilities Act* in the United States. The *Fair Housing Act* explicitly includes design and construction into the provision of accessible housing “thereby recognizing that changes will need to be made in the way buildings are designed in order to assure accessibility.”<sup>5</sup> In Canada there is no current federal legislation for persons with disabilities; each province works independently to determine appropriate legislation regarding accessibility accommodation, within the framework of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, as seen for example in the *2005 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

In this absence of a federally mandated accessibility policy, municipal governments have a role to play as both examples of universal age-friendly design practices within municipal facilities, and as promoters of universal design in the community at large through incentive programs, regulations and enforcement of design principals that provide a welcoming environment for all residents.

## Universal Design

In short, universal design implies that all users should be able to access or use a facility or product equally, regardless of ability, without restriction. The Centre for Universal Design in North Carolina has created the following set of Principles for Universal Design.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fair Housing Act Design Manual, Part II, Chapter 1, page 1.4 [http://www.toolbase.org/PDF/DesignGuides/fair\\_housing2.pdf](http://www.toolbase.org/PDF/DesignGuides/fair_housing2.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The Center for Universal Design (1997). *The Principles of Universal Design, Version 2.0*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University. “Please note that the Principles of Universal Design address only universally usable design, while the practice of design involves more than consideration for usability. Designers must also incorporate other considerations such as economic, engineering, cultural, gender, and environmental concerns in their design processes. These Principles offer designers guidance to better integrate features that meet the needs of as many users as possible.”

**Table 1.2 Principles of Universal Design**

Principle	Guidelines
<p><b>Principle 1: Equitable Use</b> The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.</li> <li>• Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.</li> <li>• Provisions for privacy, security, and safety should be equally available to all users.</li> <li>• Make the design appealing to all users.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle 2: Flexibility in Use</b> The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide choice in methods of use.</li> <li>• Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.</li> <li>• Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.</li> <li>• Provide adaptability to the user's pace.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use</b> Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminate unnecessary complexity.</li> <li>• Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.</li> <li>• Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.</li> <li>• Arrange information consistent with its importance.</li> <li>• Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle 4: Perceptible Information</b> The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.</li> <li>• Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.</li> <li>• Maximize "legibility" of essential information.</li> <li>• Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).</li> <li>• Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle 5: Tolerance for Error</b> The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.</li> <li>• Provide warnings of hazards and errors.</li> <li>• Provide fail safe features.</li> <li>• Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.</li> </ul>

Principle	Guidelines
<p><b>Principle 6: Low Physical Effort</b> The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.</li> <li>• Use reasonable operating forces.</li> <li>• Minimize repetitive actions.</li> <li>• Minimize sustained physical effort.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use</b> Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.</li> <li>• Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.</li> <li>• Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.</li> <li>• Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.</li> </ul>

In the context of municipal planning, some of the guidelines for Universal Design are more easily applied and more applicable than others. However, by modeling universal design in municipal communication (e.g., through information materials that are legible to a variety of users, through physical access to municipal events and meetings and provision of services to allow differently abled residents to attend and participate, and through promotion and incentive of inclusion of universal design principles into the built environment, the municipality can encourage a more age-friendly community over time.

### Social Planning

In the context of age-friendly planning, social planning requires attention to the ways that a community's residents interact and stay involved in the community. A frequent concern as people age is isolation, because of reduced mobility (e.g., through loss of a drivers' license or physical inability), and because of a lack of opportunities for meaningful contribution. Age-friendly social planning addresses the need for intergenerational contact and exchange, for contribution to the labour and volunteer spheres, and to the requirement for physical spaces (indoor and outdoor, private and public) for these interactions to occur. Furthermore, social planning recognises the need for culturally appropriate avenues for resident and citizen participation in the community. Each community is comprised of a multiplicity of voices and experiences: good social planning provides a matrix in which these diverse community components can be heard and accommodated.

A variety of measures have been implemented in other municipalities to create a socially sustainable environment for residents and citizens of all ages and abilities. The intent of the next stage of the *Age-friendly Living Guidelines Project* is to determine what specific needs the community of Lake Country expresses in terms of what social infrastructure is required to make the District even more age-friendly, and what physical infrastructure might support the social needs of residents.

### Community Planning

Other municipalities engaged in age-friendly audits and reviews have found that ensuring that the community participates in municipal consultation, neighbourhood planning activities, and social events to raise awareness of what comprises an age-friendly community is necessary for implementation of age-friendly practices. Neighbourhood residents have the clearest understanding of what is missing and what is easily accessible in their areas and are often a source of untapped resources and enthusiasm for community care projects and other low-cost means of including the elderly and the

differently abled into the community fabric. The municipality can create a citizen or resident council made up of neighbourhood representatives to conduct age-friendly audits, or can provide information packets to interested community service groups to begin to engage residents in active participation around age-friendly design. It is in everyone's interest to create an age-friendly community and the municipality can be a strong voice in encouraging citizens to get active -- physically and socially -- in their immediate neighbourhoods. As the Metlife Foundation notes: "Today's residents = tomorrow's older residents."<sup>7</sup> Without buy-in and consultation with residents (existing and future, depending on the development involved), facilities may be under-utilised or may fail to meet the needs of residents. Different areas of the community will have different needs: some may want community gardening space to supplement apartment or assisted living; others may need a community taxi service or shuttle to services; still others may need an avenue to participate in meaningful volunteer or paid labour. Consultation and participation increases the likelihood that new services and upgrades will actually meet resident needs in a cost-effective manner.

## Part II

### Different Scales

As indicated above in Table 1.1, there are multiple actors involved in planning and implementing an age-friendly community. Equally, there are different scales of physical and social planning that can be considered in creating guidelines for age-friendly design. This section provides information gleaned from a variety of sources (see Part III for a listing of resources) and is organised into three scales: the home, the neighbourhood, and the community. At each scale, some activities may be implemented or influenced by the municipality or municipal policy, and some could be undertaken by other actors in the District, such as the residents themselves or members of the development and larger stakeholder communities. The scope of information provided here is deliberately broad, as the choice of what elements to promote and include in official District policy and planning language will of course rest with the District itself. The aim of this section is to provide information about what other communities have discovered in their community age-friendly audits and/or what practices have been successfully implemented as these communities have moved towards being more age-friendly.

### The Home

Home-scale activities and facilities include the interior of the home, the yard and driveway and any semi-private amenity spaces in a multi-family development. Renters, homeowners, property managers and developers can take steps to ensure that the private environment is conducive to age-friendly living. Municipalities can help the private sector and individuals by making available information about how to retrofit existing homes, by creating incentive programs to encourage developers to include age-friendly features into new developments, and by providing avenues for people to share information and ideas about age-friendly living. Some specific elements of the age-friendly home are:

- reinforced walls and handrails (for immediate or future installation of grab bars, etc.)
- wider hallways and staircases to accommodate mobility devices
- kitchen and bathroom fluid design so that top or bottom cupboards and shelves may be used for daily necessities
- universal fixtures on doors, taps, light fixtures, plug outlets

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<sup>7</sup> Metlife Foundation (2007) *A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages*, p. 2.  
<http://www.n4a.org/pdf/07-116-n4a-blueprint4actionwcovers.pdf>



- no step entryways, and contrasting colour strips on the edge of stairs
- community support for house care: e.g., hire/borrow a handy-person schemes, snow removal/lawn care/gardening support
- adequate motion sensitive exterior lighting
- open floor plans to allow easy movement from one room to the next, and simple transfer of uses as a resident ages (e.g., by ensuring closet space in all rooms)

## The Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood scale facilities include parks, community centres, sidewalks, footpath networks, local commercial facilities and service providers, among other things. Each of these can be made more age-friendly, from design inception through the lifetime of the facility or service. A neighbourhood audit or survey can provide a snapshot of what services are present, used and missing at the neighbourhood scale. Some elements of neighbourhood scale planning for age-friendly communities include:

- Smooth, level footpaths with clear signage, legible for pedestrians and motorists
- Adequate snow removal and/or salting, especially the end of driveways post-road-clearing
- Frequent rest areas with benches and weather shelters or shade trees
- Accessible transportation -- community taxi services, service shuttles (e.g., to health care facilities or local commercial services), and affordable, frequent public transportation (including kneeling buses, bicycle racks etc.)
- Centres for community exchange; neighbourhood houses, settlement services, adopt-a-grandparent/grandchild programs, elder councils, and easily accessible information regarding local services, volunteer opportunities and paid employment
- Connections for pedestrian & non-driver modes of transport from residential to commercial hubs (e.g., foot path networks, cycling routes, etc.)
- Sidewalks that are smooth, well maintained, with adequate lighting, curbs that are suitable to mobility devices and painted for the safety of the visually impaired, sufficient crosswalks that are obvious to drivers and pedestrians
- Neighbourhood community supported agriculture subscription plans, community gardens

## The Community

The community scale facilities encompass road and neighbourhood land use planning, transect-based decisions for where to locate future services, provision of a variety of housing types and costs, oversight of aged-care facilities and service providers, regional transportation networks to connect small communities and neighbourhoods to larger centres and associated facilities (e.g., hospitals and continuing education facilities). Action items suitable for implementation by municipal governments from the Metlife Foundation's *A Blueprint for Action*<sup>8</sup> include:

### Housing

- property tax relief programs for older homeowners
- home modification and repair programs
- universal design and visitability in new housing construction
- partnerships between housing and service providers

### Planning and Zoning

- Engage older adults in the planning process

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<sup>8</sup> Metlife Foundation (2007) *A Blueprint for Action*, p. 8. <http://www.n4a.org/pdf/07-116-n4a-blueprint4actionwcovers.pdf>

- Incorporate accessory dwelling units and senior-friendly housing in the zoning code

### **Transportation**

- Use walkability audits to identify and prioritize pedestrian improvements
- Improve roadway design and signage
- Provide safety programs and refresher courses for older drivers
- Make transit services more flexible and customer responsive
- Support volunteer driver programs

### **Health and Support Services**

- Create a single point of entry for information about local services
- Integrate home-based services
- Support farmers' markets
- Develop exercise and active living programs tailored to older adults' preferences
- Provide vaccinations and preventive screenings
- Improve access to medical transportation

### **Cultures & Lifelong Learning**

- Provide a robust range of programs to enable older adults to contribute to the cultural life of the community
- Provide opportunities for intergenerational learning around arts and cultural production
- Increase technology training opportunities for older adults

### **Public Safety**

- Encourage Neighborhood Watch programs
- Create mail carrier alert programs
- Train law enforcement officials to detect and report elder abuse

### **Civic Engagement Opportunities**

- Support intergenerational learning programs
- Start Senior Academies
- Establish Asset Mapping

Age-friendly communities need implementation of action items at each scale of endeavour. Community involvement is key to understanding the needs of different sectors and to communicating the reality that an age-friendly community is one that is accessible and supportive of *all* community residents, and is reached through realising where there are overlaps in facility needs and use (e.g., seniors may use the same walking paths and needs the same sorts of safety measures as children walking to school, but may use the path network at a different time of day). As the Regional District of the North Okanagan notes: "Age-friendly communities are based on the principles of active aging throughout life. As a result, they benefit everyone: children, the young, adults and older persons."<sup>9</sup> A measure of equity in a community is its capacity to provide for and support its least able member: age-friendly thinking and planning means that 'accommodation' is not an added afterthought -- it is a way of life.

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<sup>9</sup> Regional District of the North Okanagan *SHSI Final Report*, p. 2

<http://www.ubcm.ca/assets/Funding~Programs/Documents/shsi-northokanaganrd-report.pdf>

# Part III

## Resource Types

In the accompanying Excel database, there are a variety of age-friendly planning tools and resources referenced. These include: toolkits, checklists, databases of other resources, websites for older adults, community and academic research reports and documents, and organisations that provide information on age-friendly planning. This list is not exhaustive; the volume of information available for age-friendly planning is immense, and this resource database is meant to be a starting point to which more material can be added as time permits.

Specific elements of age-friendly planning gleaned from the reports etc., referenced in the database are provided in the Excel workbook on the sheet titled: List of Actions. These items have been sorted by source, element of planning (e.g., housing, transportation, inclusivity, etc.) and then the specific element is provided. The resources themselves can be sourced directly by clicking on the appropriate resource on the Resources worksheet.

## Websites

AdvantAge Initiative (<http://www.vnsny.org/advantage/>)

Ageing Well Network Wiki *Relevant Public Policy on Age-friendly Communities* (<http://ageingwellnetwork.pbworks.com/Relevant%2BPublic%2BPolicy%2Bon%2BAge-friendly%2BCommunities>)

Aging in Place Initiative ([www.aginginplaceinitiative.org](http://www.aginginplaceinitiative.org))

City of Chilliwack *Age-friendly Planning* ([www.chilliwack.gov.bc.ca/main/page.cfm?id=1619](http://www.chilliwack.gov.bc.ca/main/page.cfm?id=1619))

Creating Aging Friendly Communities ([www.icohere.com/agingfriendly/](http://www.icohere.com/agingfriendly/))

Health Aging in Cities *A Current Awareness Report* (<http://agingupdate.blogspot.com>)

Partners for Livable Communities ([www.livable.com](http://www.livable.com))

Senior Resource for Aging in Place ([www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm](http://www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm))

Special Needs Ontario Window (SNOW) (<http://snow.utoronto.ca>)

Union of British Columbia Municipalities *Senior's Housing and Support Initiative* ([www.ubcm.ca](http://www.ubcm.ca))

## Toolkits

Center for Disease Control *Designing and Building Healthy Places* ([www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/))

Community ToolBox (<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/index.aspx>)

Fair Housing Act Design Manual ([www.toolbase.org](http://www.toolbase.org))

University of Waterloo *Age Friendly Communities: Building Blocks* ([http://afc.uwaterloo.ca/building\\_blocks](http://afc.uwaterloo.ca/building_blocks))

## Checklists

Aging-in-Place Design Checklists ([www.toolbase.org](http://www.toolbase.org))

AARP *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide* ([http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311\\_communities.pdf](http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311_communities.pdf))

Center for Universal Design *Universal Design Principles* ([www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciples.htm](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm))

Metlife Foundation *A Blueprint for Action: Designing a Livable Community for All Ages, Appendix B.* (<http://www.n4a.org/pdf/07-116-n4a-blueprint4actionwcovers.pdf>)

Senior Resource *Home Assessment* ([www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm#assess](http://www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm#assess))

Senior Resource *Remodeling Your Home* ([www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm#remodel](http://www.seniorresource.com/ageinpl.htm#remodel))

## Reports/Documents

Aging in Place Initiative/Metlife Foundation *A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages*

Annie E. Casey Foundation & Henkin, NZ *et al.* (2005) "Communities for All Ages: Planning Across Generations" in the *Elders as Resources: Intergenerational Strategies Series*.

AARP & Mia R. Oberlink (2008) *Opportunities for Creating Livable Communities*

Australian Local Government Association *Age-friendly Built Environments: Opportunities for Local Governments*

EPA/Aging Initiative (2009) *Growing Smarter, Living Healthier: A Guide to Smart Growth and Active Aging*

Help the Aged UK *Future Communities: Re-shaping our Society for Older People*

Public Health Agency of Canada *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide*

UK Department of Health and Department of work and Pensions *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society*

World Health Organization *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*

## Academic/Community Research

Center for Universal Design (<http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm>)

UNC Institute on Aging *AgeLib Digital Library* ([www.uncioa.org/agelib](http://www.uncioa.org/agelib))

The Institute for Life Course and Aging ([www.aging.utoronto.ca](http://www.aging.utoronto.ca))

University of Waterloo *Age Friendly Communities: Tools for Building Strong Communities* (<http://afc.uwaterloo.ca/index.html>)

## Organisations

Active Living Coalition for Older Adults ([www.alcoa.ca/e/](http://www.alcoa.ca/e/))

Ageing Well Network (<http://ageingwellnetwork.pbworks.com>)

American Association of Retired People (AARP)

Canadian Association of Retired People (CARP) (<http://www.carp.ca/OkanaganValley/index.cfm>)

Megan RC Salhus

Seniors BC ([www.gov.bc.ca/seniors](http://www.gov.bc.ca/seniors))

The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada *Senior's Resources* ([www.chfcanda.coop/eng/pages2007/about\\_2\\_5.asp](http://www.chfcanda.coop/eng/pages2007/about_2_5.asp))

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