



RECREATION NOVA SCOTIA

# Connecting Seniors to Active Living Project – Executive Summary



Supported by  
Nova Scotia Department of Seniors  
Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion & Protection  
Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation

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## CONTEXT

Providing opportunities for seniors to be healthy and independent and promoting the benefits of regular physical activity will support their efforts to lead healthy, active, and productive lives.

Regardless of age, when an individual commits to a healthy, active lifestyle they reduce the likelihood their senior years will be complicated by the chronic diseases and disabilities that may occur if they are inactive.

Increasing the physical activity levels of seniors will greatly enhance efforts underway across the province to ensure Nova Scotia supports the well-being of seniors, a key component of Nova Scotia's Strategy for Positive Aging.

This publication provides an overview of the *Connecting Seniors to Active Living Project*, an initiative led by Recreation Nova Scotia and supported by the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion & Protection and Nova Scotia Department of Seniors. Details on how to obtain a copy of the full report are located on page 8.

As you proceed through this publication, you will find the following information:

- Project Goals and Activities (p. 1)
- Overall Recommendations and Highlights of Project Findings (p. 1, 2)
- Results of the Survey and Focus Groups (p. 3, 4)
- Next Steps, Contact Information, and Acknowledgments (p. 5, 6).



## PROJECT GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

The *Connecting Seniors to Active Living Project* was divided into the three distinct phases described below.

**Information Collection and Evaluation** — An extensive review of the literature, websites, resources, and tools associated with physical activity and seniors resulted in a comprehensive listing of recommended resources such as text books and manuals; programs and resource kits; videos and DVDs; and electronic downloadable files and resources. This information will be of great benefit to seniors, practitioners, and community leaders with an interest in healthy active aging.

**Needs Assessment** — The information collected during this phase of the project increases our knowledge about active living and physical activity opportunities for seniors in Nova Scotia, suggests ways to increase physical activity levels, and describes current perceptions about program, information, and resource needs for healthy active aging.

Data collection tools included a stakeholder survey of older adults, community leaders and practitioners. The survey was distributed electronically and by mail to participants across the province, resulting in 133 responses. Additionally, focus groups, involving 68 seniors, were held in seven communities throughout the province.

**Next Steps** — This phase of the project included an analysis of the data collected, a summary of the major findings, and list of recommendations for follow-up. It identified gaps in knowledge and service and suggested ways to better coordinate active living opportunities for seniors and utilize scarce resources. It is hoped that these recommendations will motivate active living partners at all levels to promote the benefits of active aging and find ways to support older adults in their efforts to lead healthy, active lives.

## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations arising from the project are based on three information sources: literature and resource materials about physical activity and aging; a survey sent to community leaders, practitioners, and older adults; and focus groups with seniors. Recommendations include:

- Develop a population-based physical activity strategy for all ages, including seniors.
- Develop a physical activity education and awareness campaign geared toward older adults.
- Develop ways for individuals and associations interested in creating active living opportunities for older adults to communicate and network.
- Provide seniors with active living opportunities close to home or offer to assist them with transportation. Consider organizing car pools with active seniors as the drivers.
- Consider the needs of low income seniors who want to be more physically active by offering affordable programs and opportunities, including reduced-fee structures.
- Develop in-home activities or home-care exercise programs for older adults unable to attend community programming.
- Identify funding so more individuals throughout the province can be certified as Older Adult Fitness Professionals.
- Provide more “senior friendly” opportunities and advise retail stores and various types of community, recreation, and health facilities how to make their premises more accessible and affordable for older adults.
- Establish income tax credits for money spent by older adults on physical activity fees and classes.
- Advocate for by-laws and legislation requiring developers to provide green space, sidewalks, and opportunities for physical activity within planned developments.
- Create awareness of the architectural design modifications available to increase the use of recreation facilities by older adults.
- Establish a resource clearinghouse focused on seniors’ active living.

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF PROJECT FINDINGS**

The project findings were informed primarily by the stakeholder survey and focus groups with seniors. Highlights include:

### ***Physical Activity Promotion & Communication***

- Older adults want to participate in consultations to determine what they need and want for active living and physical activity opportunities.
- There is a lack of health promotion information about the importance and benefits of physical activity for healthy, positive aging.
- Greater public awareness of the opportunities available in communities for seniors to be physically active is needed.
- More family physicians, health professionals, and practitioners need to encourage older adults to be more physically active.

### ***Interventions and Programs***

- More “senior friendly” opportunities to be active are needed.
- A coordinated way to contact seniors directly by telephone or e-mail is required to motivate and encourage them to increase their physical activity levels.

### ***Education and Training***

- There is a shortage of certified instructors and trained volunteers to work with seniors.
- There is a lack of education and training opportunities for stakeholders who want to learn more about physical activity and aging.
- Education and awareness activities are required to ensure older adults understand the relationship between being physically active and maximizing their health and quality of life, as they age.

### ***Infrastructure***

- There is a lack of infrastructure to support active living and promote active transportation such as trails and sidewalks.
- Those that do exist would benefit from regular maintenance and snow removal.

### ***Funding***

- Funding to encourage and support individuals who want to be trained to conduct older adult physical activity groups or sessions is needed.
- Older adults with low incomes who want to become more physically active could benefit from programs with a reduced fee structure, if they were available.
- An income tax credit is strongly desired to help offset the costs of participating in active living programs.

### ***Resource Clearinghouse Development***

When survey respondents and focus group participants were asked if they favoured the development of a resource clearinghouse focussed on seniors’ active living, sixty-three percent (63%) said, “yes” and made the following suggestions:

- Compile a regional and/or local inventory of available programs, services, and infrastructures for increasing active living and physical activity opportunities for seniors.

- Collect, organize, and disseminate information about education and training opportunities, funding opportunities, jobs, and volunteer opportunities for seniors' active living.
- Provide a provincial e-mail list-serve for networking and information sharing among practitioners with an interest in active aging.
- Provide opportunities for sharing success stories and highlighting physically active seniors who can serve as role models for others.
- Develop a lending library with resource materials such as videos, DVDs, and CDs.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

There were 133 responses to the province-wide stakeholder survey of older adults, community leaders, and practitioners.

- 71 percent of respondents indicated they had some level of services, resources and/or infrastructure to support seniors' active living.
- 51 percent of respondents reported using paper flyers or pamphlets to let older adults know about active living opportunities.
- 66 percent of respondents reported wanting more information on motivating and removing the barriers to physical activity.
- Close to half of respondents said they wanted more information on active living and physical activity opportunities for older adults, community based facilities, preventing falls, and programming for "frail" older adults.

### ***Challenges to Connecting Seniors with Active Living Opportunities***

- A lack of transportation for participants; limited funding for equipment and facilities; physical limitations or health problems of participants; shortage of reliable and qualified instructors, leaders, and volunteers; difficulty offering affordable programs.

### ***Accomplishments and Success Stories***

- An increasing number of physically and socially enjoyable programs geared towards older adults are emerging such as those focused on general fitness, walking, skating, kayaking, and intergenerational activities.
- New fitness centres and facilities catering to older adults are being established, some in new locations such as seniors' housing complexes and clubs.
- In some areas, financial assistance is being provided to train and/or certify individuals to work with older adults.
- Some program organizers are taking steps to reduce the cost for seniors to participate in programs.
- More government funding is available for seniors' programming, such as the federal New Horizons for Seniors Program and provincial Physical Activity Enhancement Grants.
- More seniors are participating and volunteering with local, provincial, and national Seniors' Games.

## **FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

Focus groups, involving 68 seniors, were held in seven communities throughout the province. Responses are summarized below.

### ***Challenges to Being Physically Active Cited by Seniors***

- Travel distance and lack of transportation options or vehicle.
- Financial cost to participate and travel.
- Poor weather conditions.
- Require a friend or acquaintance to participate with them.
- Physical health limitations (e.g., injury, asthma, knee or hip replacement, arthritis, heart disease, visual impairment).
- Age and perception that they are too old to be physically active.
- Lacking the 'know how' and opportunity to improve physical activity levels.
- Lack of energy or personal motivation.
- Caregiving responsibilities and lack of respite care options.
- Time of day classes are offered. Daytime programs are preferred.
- Lack of time to participate.
- Lack of facilities or infrastructure (e.g., bowling, swimming pool, safe walking trails).

### ***Ways to Encourage Seniors to Be Physically Active***

- Provide opportunities to be active close to home and community.
- Offer transportation to those requiring it.
- Ensure activities are affordable.
- Let seniors pay per session or try out activities before paying registration fees.
- Have someone telephone and ask a senior to participate or travel with them.
- Ongoing support and encouragement from friends and family goes a long way.
- Make activities social and fun.
- Ensure information about the benefits of and opportunities for active living is tailored to older adults.
- Send information to seniors by mail or find other ways to make it easy to access.

### ***Type of Active Living Information That Would Be Useful***

- List of local resources and opportunities.
- Local calendar of events.
- Motivation tips on becoming and staying active.
- Creative ideas describing the type of physical activities seniors can do.
- Teaching tools and instructors' manuals.
- Resource library where active living resources (videos, CDs, DVDs, etc.) can be borrowed.
- List of web sites and relevant organizations.
- List of internet resources available for downloading and printing.

## NEXT STEPS

The *Connecting Seniors to Active Living Project* has laid the groundwork for increasing the physical activity levels of Nova Scotia seniors today and in the future. Its unique focus on older adults is significant and will complement other initiatives underway across the province to promote active living among other age groups.

Implementing the report's recommendations and supporting the efforts of seniors to lead healthy, active, and productive lives will require the direct involvement of seniors and close collaboration among multiple stakeholders at national, provincial, and local levels.

As a first step in this process, a link to the list of recommended resources identified in the project will be made available electronically on the web sites of Recreation Nova Scotia, Department of Health Promotion and Protection, and Department of Seniors. This information will be of great benefit to seniors, practitioners, and community leaders with an interest in healthy active aging.

**The full report of the *Connecting Seniors to Active Living Project* (123 pages) is available electronically on the web sites identified on the following page. Print copies are available upon request.**

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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