

# A TOOLKIT FOR FOSTERING INCLUSION IN SENIOR SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

# Acknowledgements

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# ASSESSMENT TOOL

We invite you to use the following checklist to assess the state of inclusion in your organization. Please follow the page numbers to learn more about each item and why it is important for inclusion.

## WELCOMING IN (P.10)

- Does your organization encourage existing seniors to welcome in new members? Or does your organization have noticeable cliques?
- Are there meaningful opportunities for new seniors to form connections with others? Or do clients just come in for programming and then leave?
- Do you have visual symbols to indicate you are a welcoming space? Examples include: pride flags or art work promoting diversity.
- Are new seniors given a tour of the space, people there, and activities offered? Or are they expected to orient themselves?
- Do you have an ambassador program?
- Do you use inclusive and gender-neutral language when addressing seniors?
- If a senior from an equity seeking group entered your organization, would they see someone else who looks like them?

## PHYSICAL SPACE (P.11)

- Would you describe your organization's space as "homey"?
- Is your furniture comfy?
- Is your space well-maintained?
- Is your space free from clutter?
- Do you display artwork that reflects the diversity of seniors in your organization? The diversity of the community in which you are located?
- Do you display art created by seniors?

- Do you have policies or practices for regulating the amount of posters that get displayed at your organization?

## **ACCESSIBILITY (P.15)**

- Is there room for someone using a mobility aid (such as a wheelchair or walker) to comfortably get around your space without any assistance?
- Do you have: Wheelchair ramps? Working open door buttons? A working elevator?
- Have you consulted with clients with mobility limitations to ensure the practices you have in place work for them?
- Are you active in cleaning up ice and other environmental hazards?
- Are sidewalks outside your organization well-maintained? Are there any large cracks in them?
- Do you use microphones or hearing loops during programs and events?

## **CULTURAL CONNECTIONS (P.15)**

- Do seniors from different racial and cultural backgrounds interact with one another, or do people tend to form groups with people from similar backgrounds?
- Do you have a dedicated space for seniors to pray?
- Do you provide the materials needed to engage in cultural and spiritual practices? For example, materials to smudge.
- If you serve food, do you offer halal, kosher, and/or vegetarian options?
- Do you offer opportunities for seniors to learn about different cultures and their practices?
- Do you offer opportunities for seniors to try foods from different cultures?
- Do you offer resources for seniors to learn about different cultures at their own pace?
- Who is teaching programs at your organization? Do they reflect the diversity of seniors who access your services? The diversity of the community in which you are located?

- Do seniors have the opportunity to teach others about their cultures and practices if they desire to do so?
- Do you host activities on days that are important to different cultures?
- Do you host workshops on equity, diversion, and inclusion; ingrained bias; anti bullying; and anti-racism? For your staff? For the seniors?



### **INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS (P. 17)**

- Do you offer opportunities for seniors to connect and co-learn with people from younger generations?



### **OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING (P.18)**

- Do you offer a large and diverse range of activities for seniors?
- Do you ask seniors for their input into activities offered?
- Do you offer activities for different ability levels?



### **RELATIONSHIPS (P.18)**

- Do seniors have opportunities to form deep relationships with one another?
- Do you offer discussion or sharing groups?



### **STAFF COMPETENCY (P.19)**

- Do your staff know the seniors who access your services by name?
- Do staff have training in cultural competence?
- Do staff have training in diversity and inclusion frameworks?
- Is your staff dedicated to inclusion?
- Have your staff engaged in activities to learn their ingrained biases?

## ADDRESSING BARRIERS (P.20)

- Does your staff know the barriers your clients may face?
- Is your organization easy to get to by public transportation?
- Does your organization have parking?
- Do you offer free transportation services?
- Does your organization require a membership?
- Do your programs have a cost to attend?
- Do you have no-cost options for seniors who need it?
- Could someone who doesn't speak English participate in any of your programs?
- Do you have staff who speak different languages? Do they have the capacity to offer translation services?
- Do you offer language classes?

## ???

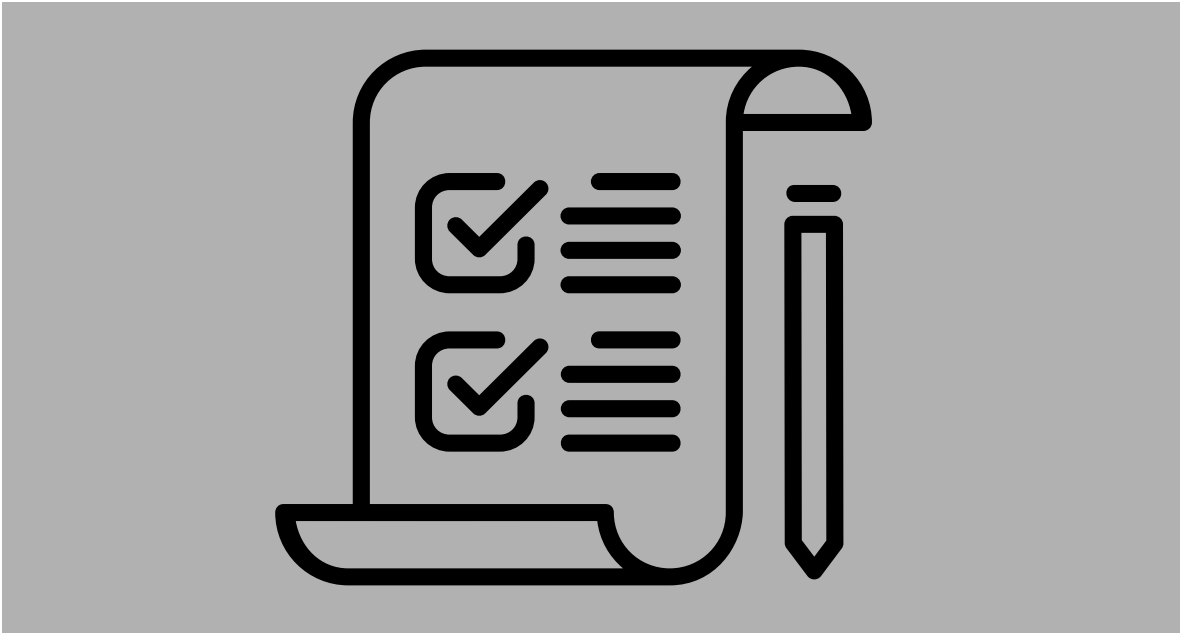
### NOW WHAT? (P.22)

- Do you have connections with other organizations that specifically serve equity seeking groups?
- Do you know of any organizations that could help you in ensuring your organization is inclusive?
- Do you actively invite seniors from equity seeking groups or organizations into your organization?
- Do you have anonymous ways clients can give feedback?
- Have you ever consulted with equity seeking seniors to learn how they perceive your services?



### POLICIES (P.22)

- Do you have anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies?
- Was an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) lens considered in the creation of internal policies?
- Is a commitment to inclusion included in your organizations mission?
- Does your board and decision makers reflect the diversity of you clientele? Of the community you are located in? Of Edmonton?
- Do decision makers have training in EDI and/or cultural competence?



## INTRODUCTION

This toolkit is intended as a resource for senior serving organizations and seniors to work towards implementing more welcoming and inclusive practices and policies.

In particular, this toolkit focuses on the inclusion of seniors from equity-seeking groups - including Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, immigrant, and visible minority seniors - who are especially vulnerable to being ostracized or excluded. The reasons for vulnerability are as diverse as the different groups themselves, therefore, what they need to feel welcomed varies considerably from individual to individual. The goal of this toolkit is not to create an exhaustive set of tools to welcome in everyone, but rather, to address the practices, policies, and procedures that foster welcoming and inclusive environments.

The goal of this toolkit is to help senior serving organizations to reflect on their own practices, policies, and procedures, as well as their readiness and capacity to implement more welcoming ones. Throughout the toolkit, you will find practical suggestions to make your organization more welcome. This toolkit was created with invaluable insight from interviews with seniors and experts, integrated with best practices found in the literature.





## WHY DID WE CREATE IT?

Canada's – and Edmonton's – population is growing older and more diverse. It is estimated that across Canada, the proportion of seniors will rise to 23% of the total population by 2031 (ESPC, 2019). This is due to a variety of factors, such as the baby boomer generation aging and longer longevity (Laher, 2017). As of the 2016 census, the Indigenous population of Edmonton is growing at twice the rate of the overall population. Immigrants make up 30% of Edmonton's population, and visible minorities make up 37% of Edmonton's population (Kolkman, 2018). Visible minority seniors are becoming the fastest growing segment of the aging population (Laher, 2017).

Numerous studies have shown how seniors from equity-seeking groups – such as Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (BIPOC), newcomers, LGBTQ2S+, and impoverished seniors – have faced barriers accessing and feeling represented or included in senior-serving agencies, leading them to feel isolated, which has negative consequences on their health and well being. **The National Seniors Council found that isolated or hard-to-reach seniors from equity-seeking groups experience increased risks for a range of poor health outcomes and tend to experience a lower quality of life** (Government of Canada, National Seniors Council, 2014). Social isolation has also been correlated

to other challenges facing Canada's elderly population, including elder abuse, financial scams, and fear of crime or theft (Sibley, Thompson, & Edwardh, 2016). It is important to investigate how to adjust existing practices in the senior-serving sector so that all seniors – regardless of ethnicity, class, gender, or sexual orientation – feel welcome, included, and engaged in their community, so they may have better well-being as they age.

Inclusion and diversity is good for seniors serving organizations as well. By reaching out to and meeting the needs of seniors who are otherwise not accessing services, a senior serving organization will be able to bring in more clients. In a society that is increasingly more diverse, creating an organization that respects and includes people of various groups will increase an organizations reputation in the community. Many studies have shown that organizations that actively integrate diversity and inclusion into their policies perform better than those that do not. They are more able to meet the needs of a diverse clientele, and tend to be more creative and better at problem solving (Weisinger, Borges-Mendez, & Milofsky, 2016).

# 23%

The increase of seniors to  
the total population by 2031

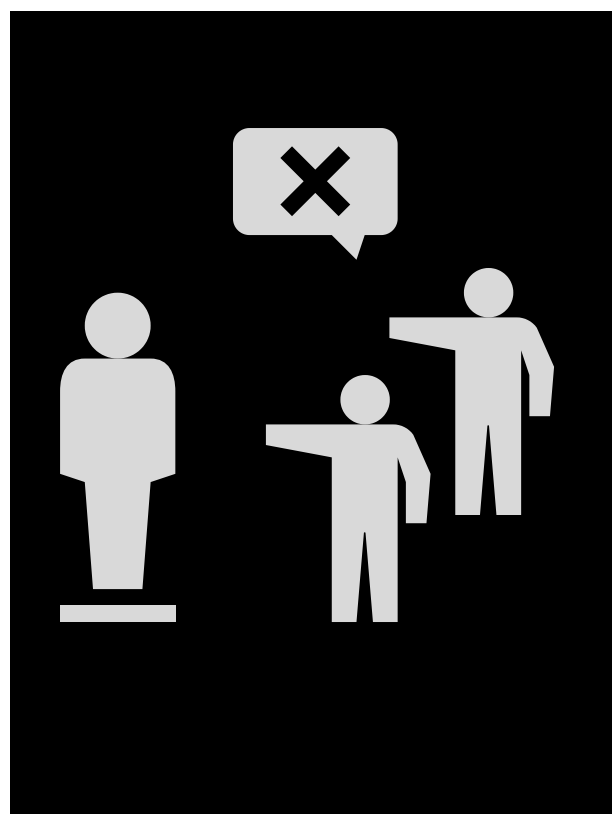
## COMMON BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

While there is incredible diversity both between and within different equity-seeking groups, there are patterns in terms of their challenges and needs. In order to create a toolkit for designing welcoming policies and practices in senior serving organizations, one needs to understand why some seniors don't feel welcome in the first place.

One large issue is explicit discrimination, such as racism and homophobia. In the Government of Alberta's Aging With Pride report (2020), 2SLGBTQ+ seniors discussed how they grew up in a time of overt and extreme homophobia and discrimination, in which they were deemed criminals or mentally ill by mainstream institutions, and faced rejection from family and peers (Government of Alberta, 2020). Many Indigenous seniors experienced abuse and had their culture eroded in residential schools, and many had been taken away from their families during the sixties scoop (ESPC, 2019). Today as well, many seniors from historically marginalized groups experience discrimination when they try to access services (Government of Alberta; ESPC, 2019). Many of these seniors created "safe spaces" and formed communities in which they were accepted, but as they age, these spaces may not be able to meet all their needs. Seniors may not want to go to senior serving organizations because they fear being discriminated against by both the other seniors and the organization itself.

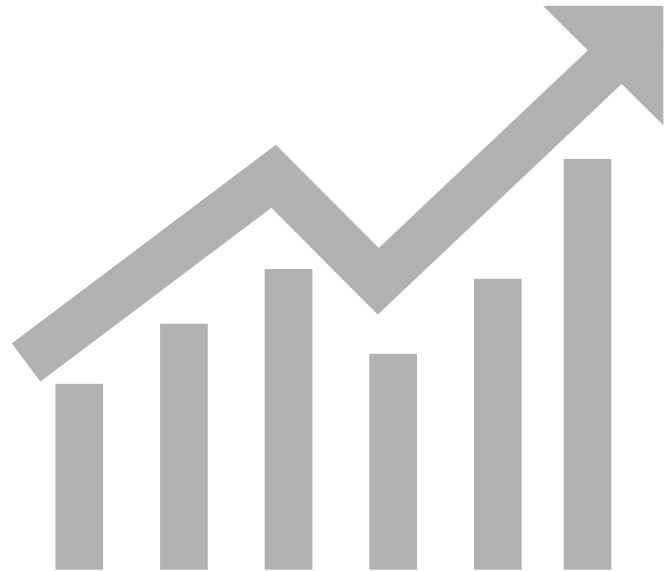
However, explicit discrimination is just one part of the picture. Implicit bias and discrimination are issues that are built into the fabric of our society, and as such, the seniors services industry.

These biases are often not noticed by the people who made the programs and policies, but nonetheless create barriers for certain groups to access services. Services in Canada are largely created through dominant systems by dominant groups - white, middle class, straight, and male. They try to make "neutral" services, but without realizing it, design services from their point of view. They may lack knowledge of different cultures, and subsequently, lack the ability to provide services to seniors in a culturally appropriate way. These services may then inadvertently exclude people of other cultures because they are not sensitive to or may even conflict with, the experiences and needs of other groups of people.



Language is a large barrier for many newcomer, immigrant, and Indigenous seniors. Simply put, it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to receive adequate services if you cannot communicate with your service provider. Research in seniors living facilities has shown that language barriers can lead to loneliness, as non-English speaking residents may not have anyone they can talk to, and their friends, family, and community members do not have the capacity to visit them regularly (Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). In the context of senior serving organizations, seniors have limited access to social and recreation programs if they cannot speak English. While some culture-specific organizations exist, these may be difficult to get to. Other organizations may offer language neutral activities, such as line dancing. While the seniors spoken to in the development of this toolkit were all proficient in English, they discussed the barriers their friends with limited English faced.

Conversations with seniors in the development of this toolkit pointed to several other barriers, including transportation and costs of services. Many seniors do not drive, and complicated bus routes along with stops that are far away from organizations makes it hard for seniors to access services. In harsh winter months, icy streets compound on these issues. Costs of services are a big barrier for seniors living on fixed retirement income, especially if they rely on Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement, or other seniors benefits.

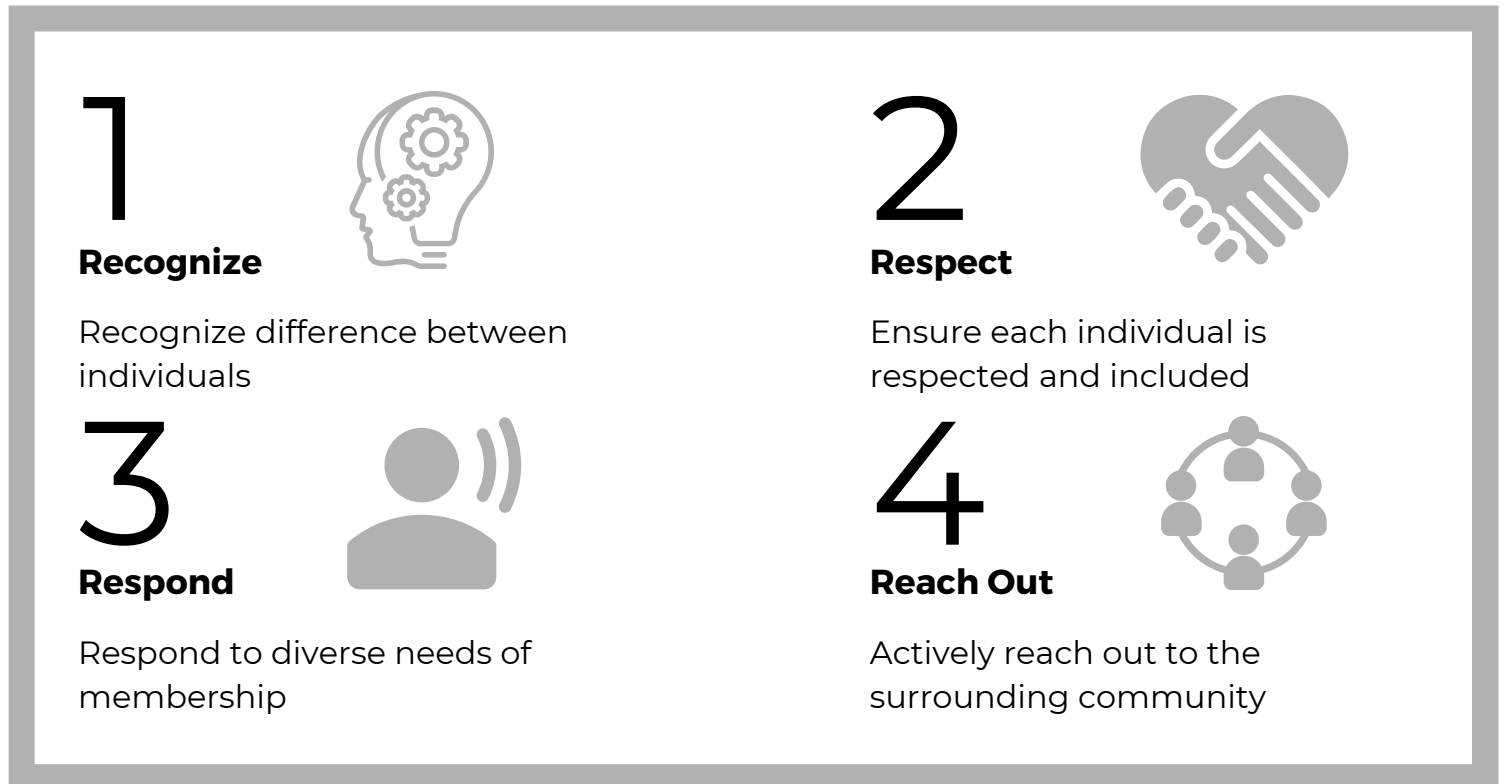


With a rising cost of living, they don't have room in their budgets to pay for a membership or individual classes and activities. Another large barrier identified by seniors is a lack of knowledge about the services available to seniors. Many seniors did not know that senior serving organizations existed, and as such, were not aware of the services they could receive.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Inclusion** is an essential concept to guide organizations. "Inclusion means valuing the differences in the community and actively seeking out different perspectives. It means looking at how we might do things differently to benefit all members of our community. Inclusive practices are not just to benefit 'other' people but are usually good for everyone" (CFRAC, N.D.).

One way of conceptualizing inclusions is through the 4 Rs:



**Diversity** refers to the many differences between people, it includes race, cultural background sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, or (dis)ability, among countless other examples. An inclusive organization is one that acknowledges and respects diversity, recognizes barriers to inclusion, and works to actively meet the needs of seniors with varied and diverse backgrounds. Inclusion values differences as strengths (CFRAC, 2017). Inclusion and Diversity cannot just be a part of what organizations do, it has to be fundamental to their work. Inclusion and diversity must guide every practice within every level of an organization.

**Cultural competence** refers to “the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, race, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each” (Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). “other diversity factors” include anything that makes us different, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, or (dis)ability. (Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017; Periyakoli, 2019).

**It is not about having knowledge about every culture out there, but rather, having the respect of and capacity to engage with people of any background.** Culturally competent care recognizes the ways in which culture may shape how seniors want to receive services, such as recognizing the importance of family and kinship ties, religion and spiritual beliefs, and traditional health and well-being practices. It supports and celebrates client's heritage, traditional activities, holidays, and traditional foods. It builds a sense of community both within and between cultures (Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). A deeper understanding, appreciation, and incorporation of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of seniors from equity-seeking groups will help service providers avoid stereotypes and biases and facilitate the development and delivery of services that truly meet their needs. (Periyakoli, 2019).

Culturally competent care is enshrined in policy and practices. It acknowledges the systemic nature of oppression, and addresses oppression in its own system. **Culturally competent organizations continually assess their policies and practices, expand their cultural knowledge and resources, and adapt their services to better meet the needs of the communities they serve.** In other words, they look at how their existing policies and practices may be excluding, or even harming, seniors from equity-seeking groups, and work to change those practices. They seek advice and counsel from their clients (Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). Equity-seeking groups should be

consulted as programs and practices are designed (CCDI, 2018).

## THE TOOLS

These tools were created by asking seniors what they wanted out of senior serving organizations, integrated with best practices from the literature. They reflect both the “good” practices seniors acknowledged already exist, as well as practices they thought could be improved.

These tools are not a “one size fits all” approach, they need to be considered within the unique context of your organization and the different seniors you are hoping to welcome in.

**You do not need to use all the tools in this kit.** The intention of this toolkit is to allow you to reflect on the policies and practices currently in place in your organization – what is working, what is not, what can be done better? The tools in this kit are designed to assist you in filling the gaps in your services, and creating an atmosphere that is welcoming and inclusive to all.

**Seniors are a key stakeholder in implementing these tools.** Seniors want to feel like they matter, too often seniors are made to feel like they are feeble and unable to make decision for themselves. It is important to include them in decisions made about your organization and make them feel like they have an active voice in this process. They are experts with valuable first hand knowledge. **When in doubt, ask seniors what they want.**



## WELCOMING IN

First impressions are everything. **Entering a new space can be intimidating, when seniors enter a new organization for the first time, they may not know where to go, what to do, who to talk to, where they fit in. These feelings can be isolating.**

Many seniors consulted for this toolkit described how senior serving organizations are “cliquey,” and they don’t feel comfortable inserting themselves into a group. Others described how they may go to an organization for a specific activity, but then have a hard time making meaningful relationships with the other seniors. This is especially hard for seniors from marginalized and racialized groups – they don’t know which seniors they are “safe” around and fear other seniors may treat them in discriminatory ways. A few seniors mentioned that entering a new space and learning there is no one there who looks like them is a signal that that space is maybe not safe for them and makes them feel uncomfortable.

Seniors discussed the important of being ‘welcomed’ in an authentic way. Do not let them come in and figure things out on their own. **Seniors need someone to orient them to the space, the activities offered, and the people there.**

A few seniors suggested having dedicated “welcomers.” These could be staff, volunteers, or seniors already using your services. These welcomers would give a tour of the space, describe the services and activities offered by your organization, and introduce the new seniors to staff,

volunteers, and other seniors who are there that day. You should have a diverse range of welcomers, and when possible, pair new seniors with a welcomer from a similar background with whom they can relate.

You also need to educate seniors currently using your services about the importance of welcoming newcomers into their groups, and encourage them to welcome newcomers into their circles.

Have art work and other symbols (such as a pride flag or pro-diversity posters) to visually signal to seniors this is a safe place (Government of Alberta, 2020). You may also want to display guidelines for seniors to follow to ensure the space is safe. Ensure that any visual symbols of inclusion are backed up with policy. If you have a pride flag up you also need policies to ensure your organization is a safe place for 2SLGBTQ+ folks. If you have posters promoting diversity, make sure you have anti-discrimination policies in place (CCDI, 2018; Goldblatt & Horne, 2015; Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). Make sure these policies are enforced.

Also critically important in welcoming seniors is the language used when speaking to them. When signing up for memberships and/or activities, ask seniors for their chosen names and pronouns, and then respect them when interacting with that senior. Do not assume all seniors are straight, use gender neutral terms such as “partner” rather than “husband” or “wife” (Government of Alberta, 2020; Pride Center of Edmonton, 2020). **Ask seniors the terms they wish to be referred by and consistently use those terms.**

## PHYSICAL SPACE



Seniors want a physical space they are comfortable in. Several seniors discussed how the way a senior serving organization is designed reflects how an organization values seniors. For example, having a space that feels “clinical” signals to a senior that the organization sees the senior as weak or frail. On the other side, having a clean, warm, and homey space signals to seniors that they matter.

One senior described that seeing a space covered with posters for services such as the foodbank, subsidies, and meals on wheels signals to seniors that the organization assumes they cannot take care of themselves. Another senior discussed that an overwhelming number of posters is just not pleasing to look at.

**While it is important to display services so seniors can know what is available to them, it is also important to keep these posters limited, displayed in an aesthetically pleasing way, and balanced out with artwork.**

Seniors described wanting spaces that are well-kept, maintained, and open. They want comfy furniture that isn't too old and worn down, but at the same time is not so new they feel bad using it. When choosing furnishings, make sure chairs and couches are easy to get in and out of. They want the space to feel like home. Reduce the amount of clutter and have plenty of open space so seniors don't feel crowded.

Artwork is also an important aspect of physical space. A needs assessment regarding inclusion in long term care found seniors wanted to see visual representation of their culture in decorations, such as traditional art or cultural symbols, as well as access to books, television shows, movies, music, and other forms of media that represent one's culture (Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). Seniors consulted for this toolkit also described how they enjoyed seeing artwork displayed on walls, and liked seeing artwork that reflects the diversity of seniors who use the space.

As one senior put it, **artwork shows the “humanity” of the seniors who use your space.** Display artwork that reflects different cultures and art styles. Consider displaying artwork that seniors created themselves.



## ACCESSIBILITY



Accessibility is essential. On a fundamental level, seniors cannot come to your organization if it is not physically accessible. Senior serving organizations should have room for seniors with mobility aids – such as wheelchairs, walkers, and scooters – to be able to get around efficiently and without the help of others. There should be standard accessibility aids – ramps, open door buttons, and elevators. Importantly, these aids need to work. Senior discussed going to buildings that had open door buttons that did not work.

Any adjustments to accessibility measures in a space need to be created with the input of seniors with accessibility needs. For example, seniors discussed how they accessed services that had ramps, but those ramps were unusable because they were too steep. If mobility aid users were consulted before implementing those ramps, they would be usable. **Consider doing a tour of your own facility with someone who uses a wheelchair or walker – what is it like for them to get around? How can you do better?**

Seniors of all physical ability levels discussed the impact that winter and ice have on them. They discussed experiences of them or their friends slipping and falling on icy roads. When physical disability is layered on top, ice can make it impossible for someone to access services. Be proactive about shoveling snow and cleaning up ice. Consider having

volunteers who can escort seniors between bus stops and your centre.

Many older adults experience hearing loss. Senior serving organizations should use microphones during programs and events or install hearing loops in order to address any hearing issues. Ensuring that spaces are filled with soft surfaces will reduce background noises which can interfere with hearing. For all accessibility factors, you must address issues when they arise.

## CULTURAL CONNECTIONS



Seniors from racialized backgrounds described a wide variety of experiences with racism. Some claimed that, while they may have the occasional experience of racism directed towards them, they felt these incidents were the exception, and the majority of the time felt like they were accepted. Others described that their experiences with racism were more covert, no one outright rejected them, but they didn't feel fully 'safe' in senior serving organizations and had to hide certain elements of themselves. Lastly, some seniors did describe experiencing overt racism – such as slurs directed towards them, racist comments and microaggressions (everyday incidents of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination), or feeling excluded – within seniors serving organizations. **It is important that senior serving organizations create safe environments, so everyone feels safe to be their full selves.**



As one senior described, seniors from equity seeking groups will always be the minority in Canadian spaces. It up to majority groups to recognize and understand others, and to welcome them in. Senior serving organizations can become a space in which seniors learn about and embrace other cultures.

It is essential that you consider the ways in which some of the practices you currently have in place exclude seniors from different cultures. For example, Muslim seniors need to pray multiple times during the day, they discussed either not having a space to pray, or the space offered was undignified – such as a bathroom. Offer spaces to pray, for example, dedicate a multi-faith room. Offer any materials seniors may need to engage in cultural practices, such as having material to smudge. Offer Halal, Kosher, and Vegetarian foods. Above all, ask seniors what they need to feel safe and like their culture is respected and do those things.

Some seniors believed that the racism directed towards them is a consequence of seniors just not knowing enough about their culture. Even those who did feel accepted felt like more could be done to teach other seniors about their culture. **It is important that senior serving organizations encourage learning about other cultures.** In fact, many seniors from various cultural backgrounds described that they both loved learning about other cultures and teaching about their own culture. They wanted to share their foods, artwork, crafts, games, and other cultural practices, and to learn from other cultures as well.

Consider organizing culture sharing activities. Seniors could take turns cooking lunch for their fellow seniors, showcasing food from their country of origin. Alternatively, cater food from different cultural restaurants. Have senior volunteers lead a class in which they teach a craft or game from their country of origin. One senior suggested hosting fieldtrips to Indigenous ceremonies such as Powwows and Round Dances. Host events on important holidays and awareness days, and allow people from those cultures to educate others on the importance of those days.

It is also important to collaborate with other community organizations. It can be difficult, time consuming, and expensive to provide culturally relevant programming for all seniors. By collaborating with different organizations, seniors services can help seniors to access programming that is culturally relevant to them (Age Friendly Edmonton, 2015; Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017).

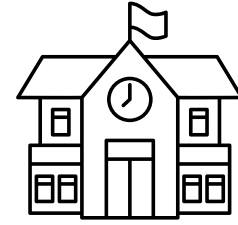


Offer educational resources seniors can pursue at their own pace. For example, one senior suggested displaying a map of Canada showing all the treaty and Metis settlement borders.

Senior serving organizations should also host more formal workshops lead by experts. Host workshops on equity, diversion and inclusion; ingrained bias; anti bullying; and anti-racism. These should be given to staff, board, volunteers, and the seniors who come to your organization. Have a history expert come in and teach the history of racism and discrimination in Canada, or the history of different groups in Canada. Have experts come in who can teach about different cultures, religions, sexualities, and gender identities. These will not only be a step towards reducing discrimination in your organization, it also gives seniors the opportunity to learn new things as they age.

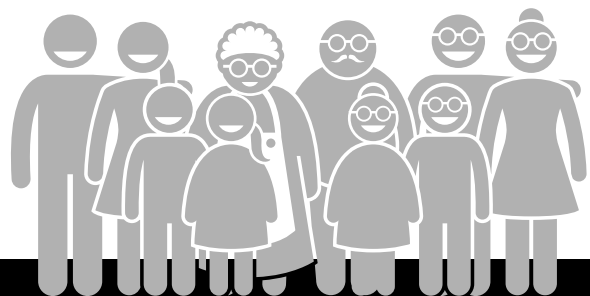
In the absence of formal policies and practices to combat racism, many seniors from racialized groups created their own coping mechanisms. In senior serving organizations that serve a diversity of seniors – often seniors from the same cultural backgrounds will group together. They do this because they know they will be safe with people from their own culture, and don't feel safe or feel like they can be their full selves around others (see also: Goldblatt & Horne, 2015). Other seniors have described that, especially with language barriers, it is easier to hang out with people who speak your language. Implementing measures to make your space safer will likely lead these seniors to venture out of their groups.

## INTER- GENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS



**Several seniors also discussed the importance of creating connections with younger generations.** For the Indigenous seniors consulted, many had gone or had family who had gone through the sixties scoop and residential schools. One senior described how he wasn't allowed to speak out against discrimination. These seniors appreciate the younger generations who are getting educated and engaging in activism. Immigrant seniors discussed how many youth in Canada are disconnected from their cultures, and the seniors enjoyed teaching youth about their customs and practices. They also valued when youth would in return teach them about technology.

Senior serving organizations could host intergenerational events, perhaps pairing with local schools and community groups, and creating activities in which seniors and youth can teach each other. Seniors could teach youth how to cook a traditional meal, and youth could teach seniors how to use new technologies.





## OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING

**Seniors want opportunities for development, to express themselves, to build confidence, display their strengths, and to feel accomplished and capable.**

There is a stereotype that seniors are feeble, weak, or unable to learn new things. But the seniors consulted for this toolkit are vibrant, energetic people who want to get the most out of life. As one senior put it, she wants to “feel as relevant as long as possible.”

Almost all seniors discussed how they liked learning new things and gaining new experiences. One senior, when asked how she would design her perfect senior serving organization, described it as a space where seniors could achieve their “bucket lists.” **Ask seniors what they want to achieve, and offer them opportunities to achieve those things.** Senior serving organizations should offer a wide variety of activities for a range of abilities and skill levels.



## RELATIONSHIPS

Seniors want to make meaningful relationships when they go to an organization. They do not want to just come in, do an activity, and then leave. **Seniors discussed the importance of having friends with whom they can talk and receive emotional support.** They like to talk about their lives when they were younger, the hardships they experienced, and the challenges they are going through now. They appreciate having the ability to talk through difficulties with someone in a similar position and learn from their experience.

**Senior serving organizations can be a place that fosters these deep connections.** Consider creating groups in which seniors can talk about their problems and give advice to each other, guided by a trained facilitator. It is important to consider that these types of conversations can bring up sensitive topics – especially if seniors discuss past and present experiences of oppression and discrimination – these groups need to be a safe space in which seniors can talk without fear of judgement, and seniors should have resources to access if these conversations harm them in any way.

## STAFF COMPETENCY



Seniors discussed they greatly appreciated staff who took the time to get to know them – who remembered their names and basic facts about them and their lives. For example, remembering someone's grandsons name and asking how he is doing.

Seniors appreciated staff who notice their absence. Seniors discussed how, at certain organizations, staff would call them if they had not shown up in a while, this made seniors feel like they were not “forgotten” and that the staff and organization cared about them.

Staff are sensitive to the needs of seniors. **Staff should be culturally competent, and know how to approach sensitive topics in an affirming way.** For example, one senior shared an experience in which a staff member discussed her personal information loudly in front of people, making the senior feel embarrassed. It is important that staff know how to discuss tough, embarrassing, and triggering information with tact and respect.

Staff should respect seniors, they should not look down on them, or make stereotypical assumptions about their ability. A quick online search will allow you to find quizzes to assess one's ingrained biases in terms of age. Encourage staff, board, and volunteers to take these quizzes to see some of the biases they may hold - maybe without even knowing it.

Education is essential to this work. Staff who serve seniors need training in culturally competent care and in diversity and inclusion frameworks. It is important for staff to get training to learn how to care for people of diverse cultures and who belong to equity-seeking groups. Training could also teach staff the importance of creating an inclusive organization, and how to apply an inclusive lens to policies, practices, and everyday activities within the organization (CFRAC, 2016; Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017).



# ADDRESSING BARRIERS

While all the above tools will help to make your organization more inclusive, you will also need to address a number of barriers so that seniors can actually come to your organization.



## LOCATION AND TRANSPORTATION

Many seniors use public transportation as their main mode of transportation. Senior fares are cheaper than adult, and subsidies are available to those with lower incomes. However, seniors cannot always easily get to senior serving organizations by public transit. They described that the bus system in Edmonton is complicated – getting to a senior serving organization requires seniors to plan out a complex route filled with transfers and long walking distances.

Seniors described complicated trade-offs they had to make. There may be a senior serving organization that is close to them, but it doesn't suit their needs, or they did not feel welcome there. They would travel long distances to get to organizations they liked better, sometimes putting themselves at risk. Implementing culturally competent practices is one strategy to make seniors who live close to you more inclined to use your organization.

Consider partnering with organizations that serve seniors from equity seeking groups. Offer shuttles or a ride share system to transport seniors to your organization.



## COST

Many seniors are living on fixed incomes. A big reason why they do not come to private senior serving organizations is that they simply cannot afford it. Seniors discussed how an organization will often have a membership fee, and then they have to pay for classes and activities on top on that. Seniors living off of OAS and CPP are already struggling to pay their bills, they cannot afford a membership. Consider creating subsidy funds or 'pay it forward' campaigns, which can be used to pay for the membership fees and other associated costs for seniors with low incomes

One senior suggested making the “first one free.” Seniors may have a decent income, but may be hesitant to try a new activity if it costs money. Allow them to attend their first activity for free, if they like it and feel comfortable in the space, they will be more inclined to pay for future activities.



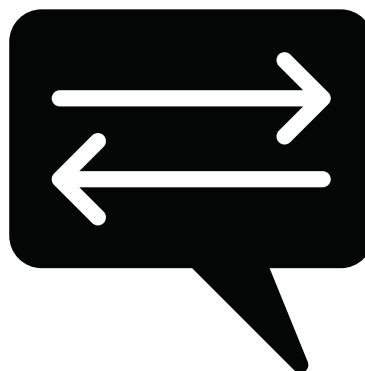
## LANGUAGE

Seniors discussed the problems that come with language barriers. Put simply, they have a limited ability to engage with services if they don't speak English. While all seniors consulted in the creation of this toolkit were fluent in English, they discussed how they had friends who could not speak English and would never attend a mainstream senior serving organization.

Even for seniors who are proficient or fluent in English, many feel more comfortable speaking in their first language. Speaking in their home language reminds them of home – which is an important feeling for them.

Some discussed strategies for dealing with language barriers such as having a friend translate, or communicating more with gestures and body language. Senior serving organizations need to be more active in removing barriers for seniors who do not speak English. Consider offering English Language courses. Get volunteers or paid staff who can speak different languages to translate and offer to reimburse volunteers to translate materials. However, it is important to balance the needs of staff as well because a staff member may become over-burdened if they have to translate on top of their other responsibilities (Age Friendly Edmonton, 2015; Peel Long Term Care, n.d.; Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). Lastly, consider offering language neutral activities, such as line dancing.

Also important is to not police language, allow seniors to speak the language they are most comfortable with.



## NOW WHAT?

Now that you've implemented the tools, how will you get seniors to come to your organization?

There are a variety of reasons seniors are not going to senior serving organizations – some do not know they exist; for some it is just not part of their culture, they instead hang out informally with friends at coffee shops and each other's houses; others have accessed them and had bad experiences, so they never came back. It is not enough to hope seniors from equity seeking groups will show up, **senior serving organizations need to actively reach out to seniors from equity seeking groups and prove to them they are committed to inclusion.**

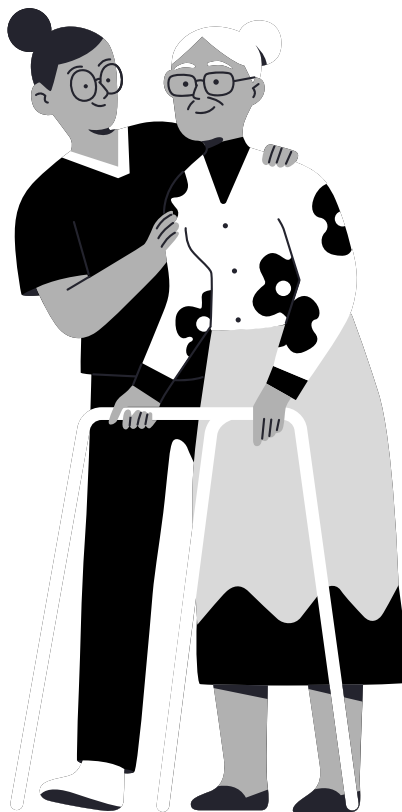
Try engaging with a group of seniors from a particular equity-seeking group – contact a mosque, cultural center, or a non-profit that serves seniors from a specific background – and arrange a culturally appropriate 'field trip' for a small group of seniors. Once those seniors are through the door, they can learn more about your organization, get acquainted with the other seniors there, and get a sense of how comfortable the space is for them. They may be encouraged to come back on their own. Many seniors spoke about the importance of "word-of-mouth." **If just one senior likes you services, they will tell their friends about it and others will come.**

It is also important to regularly check in with clients in order to see how they perceive your services. Offer anonymous ways to give feedback, such as a feedback box or online form. In particular, make sure to ask for feedback from seniors from equity seeking groups. Consider hosting roundtable discussions with specific communities to ask how those seniors perceive your services, the things they like as well as the things they think you could be doing better. Consider getting a third party to host these conversations so seniors are not biased. Asking senior's input shows that they are valued and their opinions matter, which will make them feel part of the organization.

## POLICIES

If senior serving organizations want to promote their commitment to inclusion, they need the policy to back their practices up. At a minimum, senior serving organizations should have anti-discrimination policies which address a wide range of discriminations (CCDI, 2018; Goldblatt & Horne, 2015; Sue Cragg Consulting, 2017). A focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion should be integrated throughout all organizational policies. A commitment to inclusion should be a part of your organization's mission and values.

Organizations need diversity on boards and in leadership positions in order to ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in decision making, and that inclusion and cultural competence are promoted at every level of the organizations (CFRAC, 2016). Forming collaborations with community groups and organizations can also be a powerful resource to consult when designing inclusive policies and practices (CCDI, 2018; Age Friendly Edmonton, 2015).



## CONCLUSION

Seniors, community-based organizations, and local leaders have all expressed that a lot of work needs to be done in Edmonton's senior-serving sector in order to include seniors from equity-seeking groups. This toolkit is just one step in achieving this goal. We appreciate you taking the time to use the tools laid out in this kit to seriously and critically reflect on your organization's policies, practices, and procedures. Now it is up to you to put these tools into practice and start making your organization more welcoming and inclusive!



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