

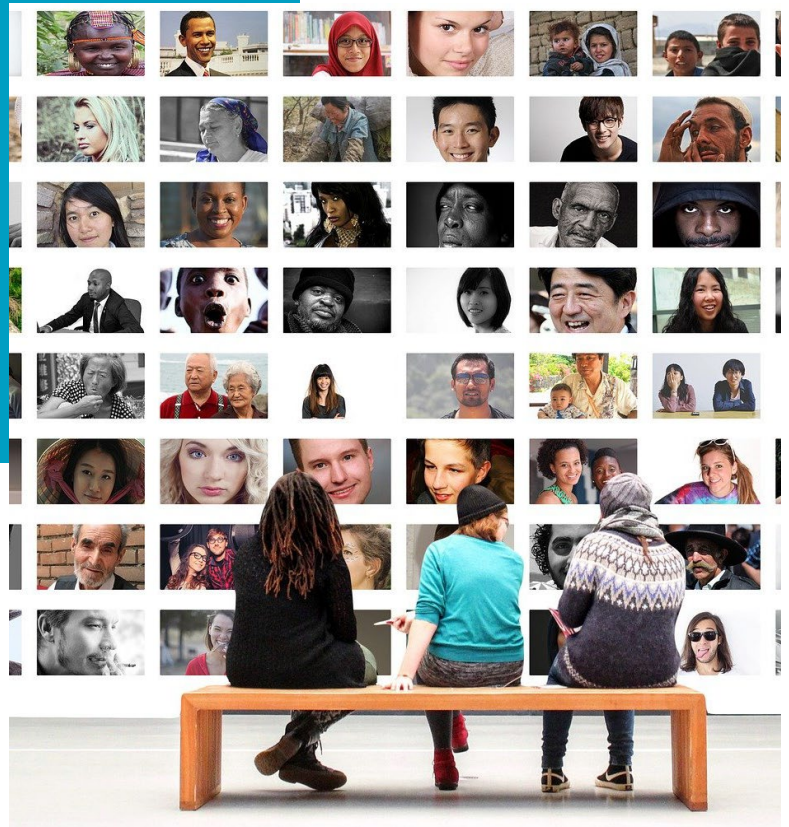
SENIORS HOMESHARING PLANNING PROJECT FINAL REPORT

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Williams Lake Age Friendly Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Williams Lake, in partnership with Urban Matters and BC Healthy Communities, has embarked on a Seniors Home-sharing Planning project to explore the housing needs of senior residents and better understand their interest in a variety of alternative seniors housing models. Objectives of community engagement held throughout spring 2023 were to:

- Understand local seniors' current and future housing needs and preferences,
- Educate community members and local seniors about select non-traditional seniors housing options, and
- Explore local seniors' sentiments towards alternative housing options.

This report summarizes the key findings to emerge from three forms of seniors engagement:

- Online Survey – 95 responses
- Focus Groups – 51 participants

Five alternative housing models were presented to participants in each form of engagement:

1. OASIS model – Seniors housing with access to collaborative support services
2. Co-Housing – Common household with individual units and shared common areas
3. Golden Girls-style Home Share – Co housing with group of seniors
4. Abbeyfield Houses – Common household with additional supports provided by household coordinator/ volunteers
5. Facilitated Home Share – Shared home with housemate who helps with household task

Key engagement findings indicate that seniors are interested in affordable housing options that enable them to retain their privacy, provide access to social opportunities, minimize their maintenance responsibilities, and meet evolving accessibility needs.

The OASIS model and Facilitated Home Share styles of alternative seniors housing received the most interest among engagement participants.

1.0 OUR APPROACH

Engagement was conducted throughout winter and spring of 2023 to hear from seniors (people aged 65 and up) in Williams Lake. Prior to launching engagement activities, an initial presentation was made in the fall of 2023 to participants of a session with the Cariboo Chilcotin Elders College on Age Friendly Housing Options, to introduce the concepts and housing models to interested seniors. Informational boards were displayed in key areas of community traffic introducing each of the alternative housing options and upcoming methods for participation (online survey, focus group discussion, and kitchen workbooks).

Engagement activities were designed to receive insight into preferences for alternative seniors housing models. Additional questions identified housing concerns residents have as they age and their needs change. Between the online survey (95 valid responses), discussion sheet focus groups (48 participants), and kitchen table discussions (3 participants), approximately 146 data points were collected. There were limited responses from Indigenous participants so the results should not be considered to be reflective of their needs.

Figure 1: Timeline of engagement processes from January 2023 to the end of March 2023.



1.1 ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey was promoted on community display boards, take home paper handouts delivered through a seniors advocate, an article in the Seniors Activity Centre Newsletter, and City social media channels. The survey remained open from early January 2023 to the end of March 2023.

A total of 125 responses were received from community members for the Williams Lake Seniors Housing Survey. However, several of these respondents did not meet the criteria to be included in the analysis:

- Respondents who were under the age of 65 (excluded 13 respondents)
- Respondents who did not consent to their responses being shared (excluded 17 respondents)

After removing these respondents, 95 surveys met the analysis criteria.

1.2 DISCUSSION SHEETS

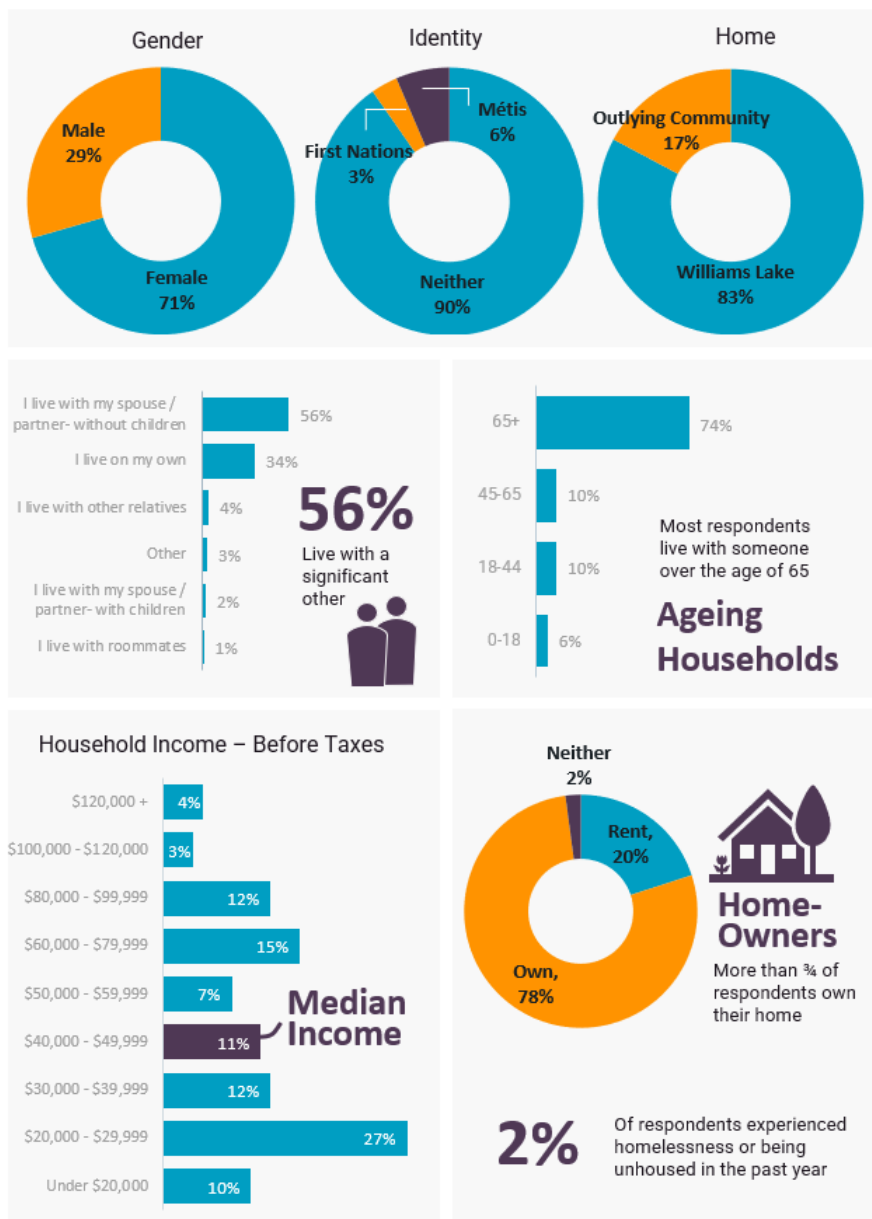
A second presentation was delivered at the Cariboo Chilcotin Elders College in February to introduce seniors to models of alternative housing. Following the presentation, senior attendees were engaged in rotating focus groups, each directing conversation to one of the four housing models. Insight from the conversations was summarized on discussion sheets and represents feedback from approximately 48 people.

1.3 KITCHEN TABLE WORKBOOKS

The Kitchen Table Workbook exercise was designed to engage participants in a conversation with close friends and family. A single workbook was received and captured a conversation among three women aged in their late 60's to early 80's. Each participant currently lives in a single-family home.

2.0 RESPONDENT PROFILE

Demographic information was collected from respondents of the online survey and is visually summarized in the graphics below. All respondents were over the age of 65.

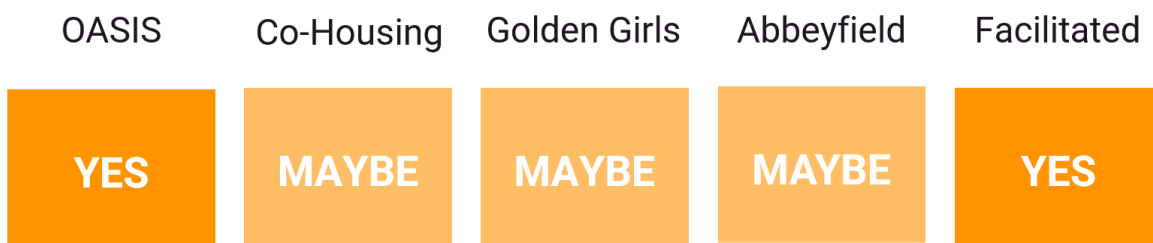


3.0 HOUSING MODEL RESPONSES

Conversations held with participants through the discussion sheets and kitchen table workbook exercises provided the most insight into preferences for the age-friendly housing models (compared to survey responses). Preferences varied by group, but both the OASIS model and Facilitated Home Share housing models received the most interest by participants. Factors that heavily influenced participant preferences were the degree of privacy and independence they would be able to maintain in a given housing model. Input from Indigenous seniors was limited, and may have resulted in different findings.

Despite individual preferences, participants were generally favourable of increasing the variety of housing types available for seniors and encouraged the establishment of each housing model. Participants recognized that as they continue to age they will have changing needs that may require different forms of housing.

Figure 2: Visual summary of participant support for each of the housing types when asked if they would consider living in the form of housing.



Common themes that arose in participant conversation regardless of model were:

- **Affordability** – Participants were concerned with the affordability of each housing option.
- **Compatibility** – Participants wondered what eligibility requirements would be in place for potential residents and questioned how screening would operate to ensure housemates are vetted for personality fit.
- **Privacy** – Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring residents have access to private spaces within these shared living options.
- **Oversight** – Participants were reluctant to live in a model with too much regulation. While some participants were appreciative of handing management responsibilities to a landlord or household coordinator, others stressed the importance of finding a reliable person for these positions and expressed uneasiness with depending on others for their living situation.

Survey Insight

Survey respondents were asked their preference for each of the housing models, however the short written description may not have fully explained the nuances of the models. Half of question respondents (n=36) were not in favour of any of the options, with many emphasizing that they want to continue living by themselves and not in a shared environment. Respondents were generally favourable about living in senior’s complexes with individual units (e.g., apartment suit or semi-detached home). The lack of interest in the alternative housing models could be due to respondents receiving minimum context.

3.1 OASIS MODEL

Model Description

The OASIS model is a form of supported housing for older adults which is created with residents of Natural Occurring Seniors Communities. The residents and landlord of these communities can come together and decide to create a Supportive Services Program. They then reach out to social services, health services, and other service providers in the community and collaboratively create a program that works for residents. Landlords provide space in the building free of charge for communal activities. This option supports communities where they live rather than creating new facilities.

Common Features:

- Focuses on serving those who can live independently with some support
- Recognizes self determination
- Programs based on needs and wishes of Oasis members

Likes

- Participants expressed enthusiasm for the ability to maintain independence while receiving additional access to support services.

Questions / Concerns

- Participants identified concern with this model's reliance on a stable, knowledgeable, and committed landlord to ensure the continuance of the housing option.

3.2 CO-HOUSING

Model Description

A model of collaborative housing where residents own their unit and commonly own and operate shared areas such as kitchens, gardens, etc. Some households are multi-generational, some are focused on one demographic like seniors or families. These can be run by a formal co-operative or grassroots / self-led initiative by residents.

Common Features:

- Each resident owns their unit and shared amenities are managed through an agreed upon and contractual process
- Services provided are at the discretion of residents
- Shared costs reduce price for individuals

Likes

- Participants described a preference for living with a mixture of ages rather than in an age-exclusive arrangement.
- The combination of individual units, social companionship, and shared maintenance responsibilities was seen by participants as a sustainable way to maintain independence.

- Participants noted Pacific Gardens looks like an “appealing” place to live.

Questions / Concerns

- Participants expressed concern that this form of housing could be costly.
- Participants were generally concerned with the process of creating the community and vetting potential incomers and holding members to a standard of living. Suggestions to achieve this included creating a set of community policies. Other respondents expressed concern with living in a place with too much regulation.
- Participants described wanting such a housing model to be located in close proximity to services.

3.3 GOLDEN GIRLS–STYLE HOMESHARE

Model Description

Independently arranged shared housing option: two or more people purchase or rent a home together. This model can be an existing home, or in some cases, a home is designed to have larger private areas than a normal home. Services are provided at the discretion of residents.

Common Features:

- Intentional community
- Shared costs reduce price for individuals
- Shared responsibility for housekeeping, maintenance, cooking

Likes

- Participants were in favour of this model for supporting multi-generational living and providing companionship.

Questions / Concerns

- Participants noted that housemate compatibility is critical for this housing model and suggested that communication and formal agreements would be required to ensure responsibilities are shared equally.
- Participants were reluctant to share a washroom with a housemate and recommended separate washrooms as a necessary component to feel comfortable with this housing model.

3.4 ABBEYFIELD HOUSES

Model Description

Typically, twelve to fifteen residents of retirement age live in their own private bed-sitting rooms furnished with their own things. The residents share lunch and dinner plus have access to a well-stocked breakfast bar. Snacks and drinks are also available throughout the day. A House Coordinator attends to the running of the House, shopping, and preparation and serving of meals. Privacy and independence are preserved, yet the gentle, supportive domestic environment provides companionship and freedom from worries and chores.

Common Features:

- Provide affordable accommodations and companionship
- Converts and maintains houses for a small group of residents
- Private rooms with shared common living space
- Meals are partially provided but residents may cook if they wish to
- Buildings are designed for accessibility

Likes

- Participants largely approved of the way this housing model fosters a social environment while reducing the number of individual chores and household maintenance.
- Several participants described that this model would give them a greater sense of safety than living alone.
- Participants approved of the balance between private and public spaces in this model.

Questions / Concerns

- Participants were generally concerned with the logistics of living in a shared environment with questions regarding running of the residence, dietary selection, room costs, amenity spaces, and housemate screening processes.
- Dependence on volunteers was identified as a potentially unsustainable component of this model.

3.5 FACILITATED HOMESHARE

Model Description

Programs that match a home provider (someone with an available room in their home) with a housemate who provides an agreed upon level of help in exchange for low cost living. Designed to create solidarity between generations. Many programs aim to enable older people to remain independent in their homes by finding housemates who are willing to cost share or help with household tasks. Some programs pair university students with seniors.

Common Features:

- Homeowners provide a private bedroom, access to bathroom and kitchen, space in the kitchen to store food and cook
- An agreement is created that addresses rent, what contributions are expected from the housemate to the household, and what spaces in the home are shared
- Housemates cannot provide assistance with activities of daily living like feeding, bathing, medication management, assessment, etc. They cannot replace a caregiver.

Likes

- Participants liked the idea of sharing labour and having someone to socialize with, but emphasized the importance of finding someone who would be a compatible housemate. Being involved in screening for the housemate was suggested to reduce possible personality conflicts.

Questions / Concerns

- Participants noted that the home provider / landlord would be in a position of power in this model

4.0 HOUSING NEEDS

In addition to being asked their thoughts on alternative senior's housing models, engagement participants were also asked to provide insight on the following topics:

- If their current needs are being met with their existing housing
- What they anticipate their future housing needs will be
- Access to support services

The following section summarizes responses to these questions received from the kitchen table workbook and online survey.

4.1 CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

Key themes that emerged from participant responses are as follows:

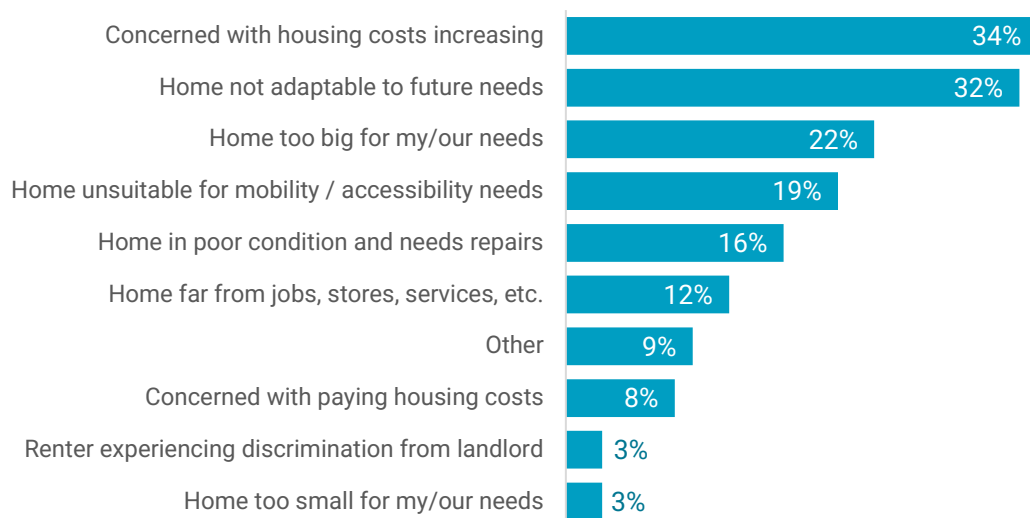
- **Affordable housing** - A majority of participants are living in affordable housing situations where they spend less than 30% of their monthly income on housing costs (65%) and never have difficulty affording monthly living expenses like utilities, transportation, and food (63%). Around

one quarter (24%) of participants said they do spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing and only 7% of participants say they always or often have difficulty affording monthly living expenses. A majority of participants (76%) spend less than \$1,000 per month on housing & utilities payments.

- **Property maintenance** – Survey respondents and participants in the kitchen table conversation described physical manual labour tasks associated with maintaining their yard as a difficulty they are beginning to encounter. Several respondents currently rely on family or hired help for these tasks.

Participants shared their greatest concerns with their existing housing situation (see figure 3 below).

Figure 3: Survey responses to “Do you currently have any concerns about your house?”



Despite a majority of respondents sharing that they currently have affordable housing, the greatest concern shared was an increase in housing costs (34%). Several respondent comments offered additional insight, noting that a spouse dying would cause financial difficulties, making it difficult to afford their existing housing situation.

4.2 FUTURE HOUSING SITUATION

Respondents recognized that their housing needs are likely to change as they age, and many expect to need to move to more appropriate housing in the coming years (45% of respondents expect to move in the next 10 years compared to 23% who intend to stay put). Key factors motivating respondents to change their housing are captured in the word cloud in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Survey responses to “What are your biggest concerns related to housing as you age?”

Home & Yard Maintenance – Many described their properties as being too large, or the tasks associated with maintenance (e.g., ladders, shoveling) being too dangerous or strenuous.

Accessibility – Accessibility was generally identified as a barrier to staying in the home with several respondents noting that stairs and fear of falling are growing concerns.

Affordability – Many respondents identified growing costs associated with maintaining the home or completing basic renovations as difficult to keep up with.

Transportation – Several respondents shared that their home’s location requires them to drive to groceries/doctors/other necessary amenities and that a loss of a driving licence combined with limited access to public transportation would make their home unlivable.

Age-in-Place or Move on Out?

A large proportion of respondents want to age-in-place and would do so if their current home was senior friendly (67% “yes” vs. 10% “no”). However, many recognize that their home situation or finances make this possibility unlikely. Of those planning on moving (45% of respondents), most want to stay in Williams Lake (84%), but doing so relies on finding appropriate housing—for as much as 49% of participants, staying in Williams Lake depends on securing seniors housing. There was a general consensus among respondent comments that there is a limited amount of seniors housing in Williams Lake, and that availability is bottle-necked by long wait lists.

Of the available seniors housing options in Williams Lake, Glen Arbour and the Seniors Village were the most popular options referenced by respondents (33% and 15% respectively).

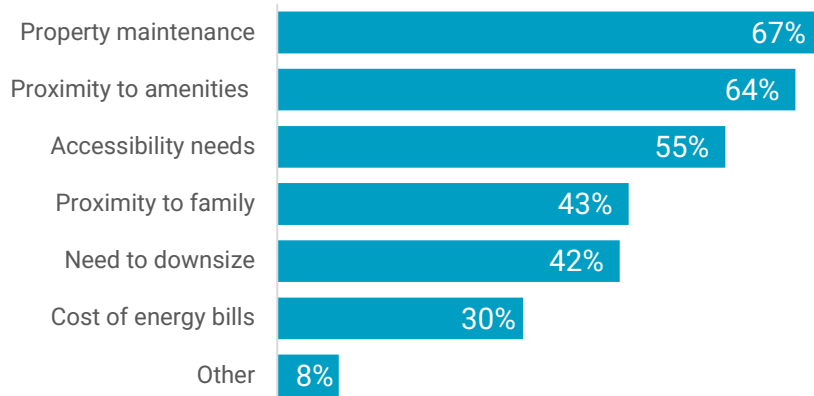
Age-Friendly Housing Preferences

The kitchen table workbook conversation summarized an ideal housing situation that captures many of the comments received in the survey:

An apartment unit with no stairs (or with elevator access) equipped with an accessible washroom and in-suite laundry with access to a protected parking spot and outdoor garden. The unit would be located close to services and seniors’ amenities and would have few, if any rules. Such a unit would enable the resident to continue living independently while having access to formal and informal networks of support.

Survey respondents echo this vision with their priorities for age-friendly housing (see figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Survey responses to “What are the top factors you consider when assessing age-friendly housing options?”

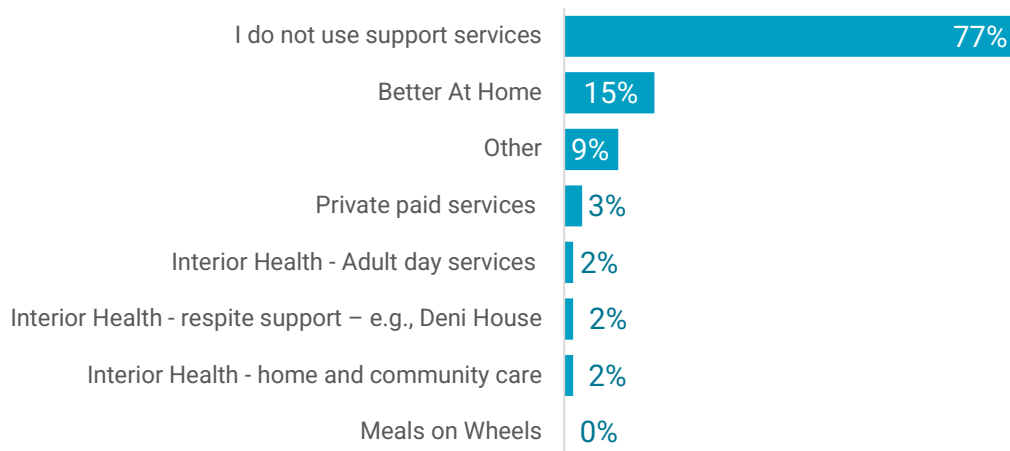


The top 3 preferences describe a living situation with minimal property maintenance, that is close to amenities and responds to evolving accessibility needs. In addition to these priorities, many respondents also noted that having a dog friendly unit and access to appropriate walking areas would be critical.

4.3 SUPPORT SERVICES ACCESS

Currently, 77% of survey respondents are not accessing formal seniors supports. A general trend emerged from survey responses and conversations in the kitchen table workbook activity that people are using networks of informal supports (such as family members or neighbours to check-in and/or complete tasks, and paid services to accomplish household repairs and maintenance) more commonly than specialized or formal seniors supports.

Figure 6: Survey responses to “If you currently use support services for seniors, what do you use?”



Of those respondents accessing services, only 6% said they use Interior Health services (Adult day services, respite support, home and community care). The most commonly accessed service was Better at Home (used by 15% of respondents).

5.0 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS & NEXT STEPS

Engagement participants were universally supportive of exploring more methods to increase the availability of seniors housing options in Williams Lake. Alternative housing options that garnered the most interest were the OASIS model and Facilitated Home Share.

Clear trends emerged across responses that should be considered when exploring piloting or developing either of these models:

- **Affordability** – Comments generally highlighted a concern with affording seniors housing options.
- **Private vs. Communal** – Respondents are keen to maintain their independence as long as possible and prefer to have access to their own private spaces (e.g., washrooms, bedrooms). Many respondents are amenable to sharing common areas with other residents and are more likely to consider co-housing situations if they live alone or want additional support with household tasks.
- **Accessible** – When respondents move, they want the home they move into to be equipped for evolving accessibility needs (e.g., walk in shower, elevator access, no stairs, etc.)
- **Access to Amenities** – As respondents look to a future without personal vehicle access, they want to live close to services and daily amenities that they can access by walking or transit.
- **Minimal regulation** – Respondents are used to living independently and are reluctant to live in highly regulated situations, or in housing options that give too much control to others.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on what we have heard from the input in this project, there is an interest among Seniors in Williams Lake to explore some alternative housing options. The two options with the most interest were the OASIS model and Facilitated Homesharing. Both of these models lend themselves to a pilot initiative that could ‘test’ the feasibility of the model for seniors in the community with low risk. A possible approach for each is outlined below. Pilot funding could be pursued from a variety of sources, including Age Friendly BC Healthy Communities, New Horizons for Seniors, or other local or philanthropic funding sources.

OASIS MODEL

There are existing housing concentrations of seniors in the community, including apartment buildings such as Boitano Place (56 units on Donald Road), mobile home parks (Western Estates, Fran Lee), and Terra Ridge Strata. The first step would be to approach landlords or strata councils for these facilities to introduce the idea of providing shared services. Benefits for the landlord would include tenant retention, reducing safety risks (tenants accessing services would be less likely to engage in higher risk activities that could contribute to things like falls, fires, or damage to units), and increased tenant satisfaction. Once a specific community or apartment building is identified, tenants could be approached to explore what their current and future needs are, what services they currently access, and their level of interest in

participating in some shared services. Based on this, a service offering could be outlined and used to develop a business case in partnership with the landlord/facility manager.

Facilitated Home Share

We know that there are a number of seniors living in single family homes who have more space than they need and are also reaching the point where they no longer want or are able to manage household maintenance. We also know that there is a shortage of housing, and in particular single young people and university students struggle to find affordable housing. Seniors in this project confirmed that they had interest in exploring this model as a possible option to allow them to stay in their own home as long as possible.

Supported by the Canada Home Share¹ model, there could be a pilot project to develop and test the model with a small number of homeshare matches supported. The project should have a development, trial, and evaluation phase to learn what works, how to adapt the program if needed, and to build a case for scaling if there is enough interest and support for the model from participants. There are several funding possibilities, including Age Friendly BC Healthy Communities, United Way, New Horizons, and others.

¹ www.canadahomeshare.com