# **Community Conversations**Diagram  Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Summary of discussion at ‘Community Conversations: Supports and Services to Age in Place’ on Nov. 23, 2022.

Watch the recording here: <https://youtu.be/H_gTymakRH8>

Stay up to date with the series here: <https://parachute.ca/en/program/for-seniors-by-seniors-community-conversations/>

*Parachute would like to express their appreciation of Taylor Nicholls and Caitlin Dundee for their work on this resource.*

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| **Poll Results** |
| **Poll 1:** Do you have all the supports and services you need to live independently **now**? | **Poll 2:** Do you have all the supports and services you need to live independently **in the future**? |
| YesNoI don’t know | 74%19%7% | YesNoI don’t know | 12%42%47% |

# Supportive independence

The goal of independence is often thought of as doing everything on your own but new understandings have expanded to supportive independence, where independence is created through building your support network to help you meet your goals. You should be able to live independently and receive support when needed by prioritizing your safety and accessibility. Being proactive was mentioned many times as being important to independence, people reported changing their home to suit their needs, adapting their daily activities, practicing self-care and learning to access help when needed. Older adults should be encouraged to speak with someone they trust about adaptations that need to be made and consider supports and services they may need as they continue to age.

# How being proactive helps participants live independently

Older adults mentioned many things they were proactively doing now to support their ability to live independently, including:

*Health*

The most common theme mentioned was how older adults are working to maintain their health by recognizing the importance of good overall health. They are doing this by:

* Continuing to exercise, getting outside, and staying mentally and physically active, even on days when they did not feel up for it
* Monitoring and assessing any changes in their own health
* Utilizing blister packs to ensure medications are being taken as prescribed
* Getting their vaccinations, including the annual flu shot and COVID-19 boosters
* Participating in research studies, which allow them to receive information and to assist with future research on various illnesses
* Going to reflexology, massage, or hot pools to relieve muscle and body aches and pains
* Adapting routines to meet their current and future health needs

*Home*

Participants also mentioned how they were proactively adapting their home and living situation to better meet their current and future needs, such as:

* Installing a walk-in shower and raised garden beds
* Renovating the kitchen and installing pull out drawers making it easier to reach items
* Removing carpeting, scatter rugs, and clutter to reduce fall risks
* Living in a rent-controlled apartment or condo building
* Moving to a new location which is close to a bus stop, and within walking distance of a mall and library

*Assistive Devices*

Participants frequently mentioned how they were using assistive devices to help them with mobility and safety, including:

* Purchasing and using a long handed reacher for items
* Temporarily using a walker after a bad fall (although, at first they struggled to accept the need for one)
* Wearing a fall detection device
* Installing a doorbell camera to reduce the risk of falls from rushing to the door

*Other*

Older adults understood the importance of living in a safe and supportive community, hiring paid services (if financially able to), and understanding their limits, by:

* Starting a housing co-op where people of all ages live in one home to help and support one another
* Starting a Red Hat chapter to build a connection with others in the community while having fun and providing support and showing care for each other
* If financially able to, paying for services such as: lawn care, snow removal, grocery shopping, grocery delivery, etc.
* Continuing to do things they can do now before they get to a point where they are unable to

# Concerns participants have about continuing to live independently

Participants also mentioned concerns they had about their ability to continue living independently considering the uncertainty of future needs, including:

*Costs/Affordability*

Importantly, many participants expressed concerns about the cost of living, affordability of services for seniors, and cost of home modifications, including:

* Being eligible for senior programs as the cut offs are at or just above the poverty line and if you are above that then services are not available to you
* Some programs and services available for older adults require payment, which makes them inaccessible to some people
* The cost of goods and services, food and housing are rising
* The ability to support yourself with your personal finances

*Health*

Older adults discussed their concerns about their changing and declining health as they age and how it may affect their ability to live independently, such as:

* Needing to ensure health care decision making documents are done before a medical event or change occurs
* Feeling nervous or fearful about falling
* Needing medical support devices, mobility aids, and assistive devices
* Being unsure how to adapt to possible changes in health
* The implementation of Bill 7 in Ontario, where you may be sent to a long-term care facility from a hospital up to 150 km away or be fined

*Home*

They also mentioned the concerns they have about the home they are currently living in, including:

* Accessibility of their home and what may have to be adapted as health changes
* Their spouse/partner getting sick or passing away and being unsure about how to manage the home by themselves
* No longer being physically able to maintain their home
* The neighbourhood they live in can have a lack of diversity in ages, meaning they may not have someone to call on for support in their community
* Not having family or friends to provide informal support, and being unsure who may be able to take care of them

*Transportation*

Older adults talked about their concerns on transportation and how they may get to different places, especially if they were unable to continue driving, which included:

* Needing to rely on walking (if able) or transit alone to get to where they need to go
* Transit systems being unreliable or inaccessible to people living with a disability
* Being unsure on how to access or find out about transit services available to people who cannot take regular transit
* Changes in mobility and being unable to walk distances
* Newer housing developments being designed so that people require their own car to get around

*Services*

Participants discussed concerns about availability of services and resources to further support their ability to live independently, including:

* Lack of access to supports available through organizations or health authorities
* Being unsure about available resources if one does not work for you
* Not having family or friends to provide informal support, and being unsure who may be able to take care of them
* Not fitting into the right categories to qualify for available services
* Being unsure about where to go if a service or program is not performing or delivering as advertised
* Lack of knowledge about available programs unless you are a member or part of a specific organization or group

# Anticipated future concerns

Participants also discussed areas of concern for them as they continue to age:

*Supports and Services*

Participants mentioned various concerns about what supports and services will be available to them when they need it, such as:

* Having a strong enough support system, especially if health declines
* Worrying about not having any family or friends who can help
* Inability to access some programs as some criteria is restrictive or the process for getting the service is slow
* Declining health may restrict their ability to stay independent in accessing services available to them

*Costs*

With the rising costs of food, housing, programs and services, many participants mentioned their concerns regarding being able to afford their independence as they continue aging, including:

* Struggling currently with the cost of living, and concern about affordability in the coming years, especially if they also need more services
* Being unsure about how much money they need to save as they were unsure how many years they will live after they retire
* Anticipating any unexpected costs that may impact their savings
* Any physical or mental restrictions in accessing and managing their finances as both online and in-person have challenges
* Loss of physical ability may lead to further restrictions accessing certain physical spaces

*Transportation*

Participants mentioned their concerns regarding transportation in the future, including:

* Considering the best option in commuting places (i.e., a doctor’s appointment), while keeping in mind possible changes in ability on a day-to-day basis
* Lack of transportation options were stressed as a source of anxiety and a contributing factor in an ability to age in place. This includes individuals’ capacity to drive combined with lack of public or alternative transportation options in their communities

*Psychological Readiness*

A recurring theme of the discussion was the physical, mental, and emotional readiness to age while maintaining their independence as long as possible. This included:

* Learning how to plan ahead and all the possible concerns of aging
* If both people in a couple get sick at the same time
* The social stigma around aging and feeling like they have been forgotten
* Feeling that moving from their home is inevitable
* Fears surrounding isolation

*Caregiving*

Lastly, the issues with becoming a caregiver themselves:

* A lack of respite care options that align with your personal schedule
* Having to care for a fellow senior family member

# Knowing what is available and how to access it

Participants discussed certain barriers that prevent them from finding and accessing programs and services available to them. Participants who had success in finding and accessing programs and services shared information about these resources with other participants.

*Barriers*

Participants identified multiple barriers to accessing supports and services, including:

* Having no unified point of access to services and programs
* Unsure where to access a list of services available
* Having no internet access and unsure how else to find necessary information
* Disappearing community newspapers, which were always a source of local services and information
* Doctors and specialists not being a source for this information
* Previous services have been discontinued or are unavailable
* Knowing which services mentioned online are reliable and legitimate and how to identify potential scams
* “Choke point” – having to go through certain people/programs to access services which usually have months-long waitlists

*Accessing Information*

Participants readily provided information to the group on accessing supports and resources, such as:

* Organizations such as the Legions and Red Cross lend out mobility aids
* Organizations such as the Arthritis Society and Alzheimer Society are great for resources and education on specific diseases/illnesses
* Seniors fairs
* Public advertising
* Community centres, especially senior centres

# Summary

Following the webinar, the most discussed concern was the inaccessibility of available services and being unsure where to begin looking for them. The participants mentioned being unable to find a list of available resources, unable to meet the requirements for services, unable to pay for supports, and unable to drive or take transit to the services. As a group, they recommended a central database with reputable resources for every community that is easily accessible.

Participants also discussed the rising cost of living making services unaffordable and out of their financial capacity. The participants mentioned concern with unreliable transportation and that most newer cities were designed specifically for those able to drive.

Lastly, the participants focused on the need to think proactively on unexpected health changes, the uncertainty of future needs, and the possibility of becoming a caregiver. They expressed a fear of isolation, and not having enough services available to support their desire to age in place.