Cochrane Age-Friendly Initiative

Phase 1: What We Heard



cochrane

fcss Cochrane Family and Community Support Services

FRN FAMILY RESOURCE NETWORK COCHRANE & AREA

CALGARY FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY, FOREVER

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Cochrane Age-Friendly Initiative

Spring 2024 Prepared by Intelligent Futures, 2024.

Town of Cochrane
101 RancheHouse Road
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Contributor Acknowledgment

We thank everyone who contributed to the Cochrane Age-Friendly Initiative. Your dedication and invaluable contributions exemplify the spirit of our community and the need for an Age-Friendly Action Plan.

We appreciate the community members who actively engaged in the process. To the diligent members of the Cochrane Age-Friendly Working Groups, we extend our deepest thanks for your commitment and groundwork.

Lastly, we express our gratitude to the members of the Cochrane Age-Friendly Steering Committee. Your collective efforts have been instrumental in shaping this process, and we are grateful for your invaluable contributions.

- **Chairra Nicolle,** Town of Cochrane, Family and Community Support Services
- **Councillor Susan Flowers,** Town of Cochrane
- **Drew Hyndman,** Town of Cochrane
- **Gwynneth Butler,** Member at Large/ Faith Community
- **Hillary Cornelius Storman,** Town of Cochrane, Family and Community Support Services
- **Jason Johnson,** Bethany Cochrane
- **Jodi McKay,** Rocky View County, Family and Community Support Services
- **Kevin McDonald,** Cochrane Society for Housing Options/ Town of Cochrane
- **Kim Krawec,** Town of Cochrane, Family and Community Support Services
- **Michelle Delorme,** Town of Cochrane
- **Ozzie Sawicki,** Chamber of Commerce
- **Sharon Moore,** Town of Cochrane, Family and Community Support Services
- **Spencer Schneider,** Alberta Health Services/Addiction & Mental Health
- **Susan Flynn,** Seniors On The Bow
- **Sylvia Chambers,** Seniors On The Bow
- **Yolanda Martens Van Hilst,** Primary Care Network

Project Vision

"The Cochrane Age-Friendly Action Plan envisions a collaborative process that transcends traditional boundaries, creating a plan that resonates widely and is seamlessly integrated into the fabric of Cochrane.

This plan, rooted in diverse insights, aspires to foster a shared understanding of what it means to be 'Age-Friendly,' cultivating engagement and contributions from the community as a whole.

This inclusive and dynamic process aims to inspire leadership, celebrate small successes, and build momentum toward a future where Cochrane stands as a model for intentional, impactful, and people-centric progress."

Executive Summary

As one of Canada's fastest-growing municipalities, Cochrane is experiencing exponential growth in its senior population. To ensure that future development aligns with the needs of all residents, regardless of age, the Town of Cochrane, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) is collaborating with the community to develop an Age-Friendly Action Plan.

Extensive public engagement opportunities from June 2023 to April 2024 invited community members to share their insights regarding the current state and desired future of an age-friendly Cochrane, illuminating several key themes and priorities of our community.

This engagement will inform the development of the Cochrane Age-Friendly Action Plan, which will address the evolving needs of current residents while remaining adaptable to accommodate future growth. Expected to be completed by October 2024, it represents a proactive step towards fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all members of our community.

Section 1.0

Introduction

The Town of Cochrane is embarking on a crucial initiative to enhance the quality of life for its rapidly growing aging population by establishing an Age-Friendly Action Plan. The initiative aligns with strategic priorities, addressing the challenges a surging senior population poses. The Cochrane Age-Friendly Action Plan will be built on foundational work, emphasizing interconnections between domains of healthy aging, providing clearly defined actions, and delineating roles for efficient collaboration. With a focus on efficiency, accountability, and holistic senior well-being, the initiative aims to create a vibrant and inclusive community not only for aging residents, but for all residents to enjoy.

8 Domains of Community Life

The engagement process was informed by the following eight domains of community life, which have been identified as key elements to help communities become more age-friendly:



Communication & information



Outdoor spaces & buildings



Civic participation & employment



Transportation



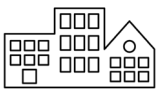
Respect & social inclusion



Community support & health services



Social participation



Housing

Section 2.0

Process and Participation

Extensive public engagement opportunities from June 2023 to April 2024 invited community members to share their insights regarding the current state and desired future of an age-friendly Cochrane.

How We Engaged

Survey

A community survey was conducted from **June 6 to August 15, 2023**, to understand the existing assets and challenges with respect to an age-friendly Cochrane. Through a series of both closed and open-ended questions, participants were invited to share their thoughts on a host of topics, including buildings and public facilities, parks and open spaces, transportation, housing, and social participation. The survey received **353** responses from participants.

Workshops

The workshop series invited members of the public to discuss the opportunities, barriers, and trends towards age-friendly community design and, more generally, healthy approaches to aging. Outcomes from this discussion were then used as the basis for brainstorming potential actions that could be included in a final Age-Friendly Action Plan.

Between **March 12 and March 27, 2024, five workshops** were held, with **61** participants in total.

Targeted Focus Groups

The workshop format was translated into three targeted focus groups. These sessions sought to understand the experience of growing up in Cochrane (on the basis that several issues impacting older adults also impact youth similarly), growing old outside of Cochrane, and the experience of delivering services and care to older adults.

The youth focus group was held at The Club (BGC Cochrane and Area) on April 11, 2024, and saw the participation of **7** youth aged 12 to 17. The rural focus group was held at Cochrane Family & Community Support Services (FCSS) on March 26, 2024, and saw the participation of **11** community members. The service provider focus group was held at the Cochrane Alliance Church on April 24, 2024, and saw the participation of **30** service providers from Cochrane and area.

User Experience Interviews

When addressing significant systems change, the lived experiences of residents are often missed. This can lead to proposed changes or solutions missing important contextual information and nuance that would otherwise improve the implementation and effectiveness of an eventual Action Plan. To address this issue, a series of user experience interviews were conducted with local residents to understand their lived experiences - leading to a more contextualized understanding of age-friendly community design in Cochrane.

Between March 5 and April 26, **7** older adults were interviewed to understand the diversity of lived experiences regarding aging in Cochrane.

Website

Through the Let's Talk Cochrane website, the team shared project details, advertised engagement sessions, provided means for feedback and displayed ongoing developments as the engagement process unfolded.

Between June 2023 and April 2024, the website received **688** visits.

Engagement Communication

Engagement opportunities were communicated using the following:

- The Let's Talk Cochrane website
- Social media advertisements
- Town of Cochrane Digital Signs
- Newspaper advertisement in the Cochrane Eagle

Who We Heard From

The engagement process engaged **1,157** community members. The number of responses or points of contact and conversation are detailed below:

- **Online Survey:** 353 responses
- **Workshops:** 61 participants
- **Focus Groups:** 48 participants
- **User Experience Interviews:** 7 participants
- **Website:** 688 visitors

Section 3.0

What We Heard

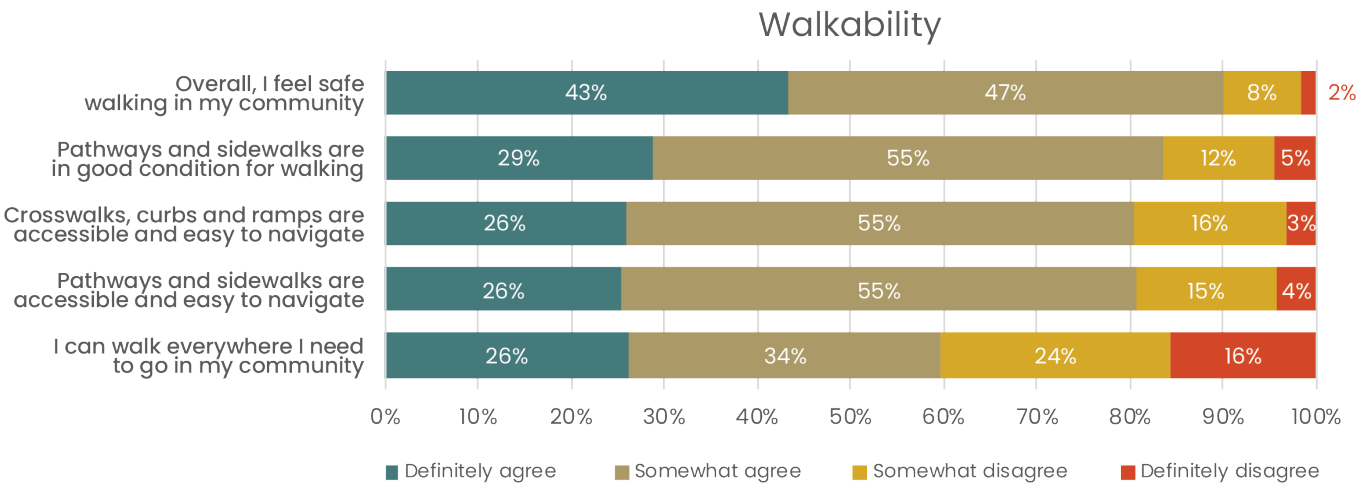
Online Survey

The online survey asked the questions on the following:

- Walkability
- Buildings and Public Facilities
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Alternate Transportation Options
- Housing
- Social Participation
- Respect and Inclusion
- Civic Participation and Employment Opportunities
- Communication and Information
- Community Support and Health Services
- Other



Walkability



How can the walkability of your community be improved?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Sidewalks (56)	More sidewalks (18) Accessibility (13) Maintenance (9)
Connectivity (48)	Connecting communities (24) Sidewalk connection (18) Pathway connection (13)
Pathways (36)	Maintenance (11) More pathways (7)
Neighborhoods (33)	Downtown access (12) Complete communities (11) Fireside, Heartland, and Sunset connectivity (19)
Bicycles (20)	Separated bike and walking paths (14) E-bike and scooter speed control (6) Bike lanes (6)
Ice and snow removal (18)	

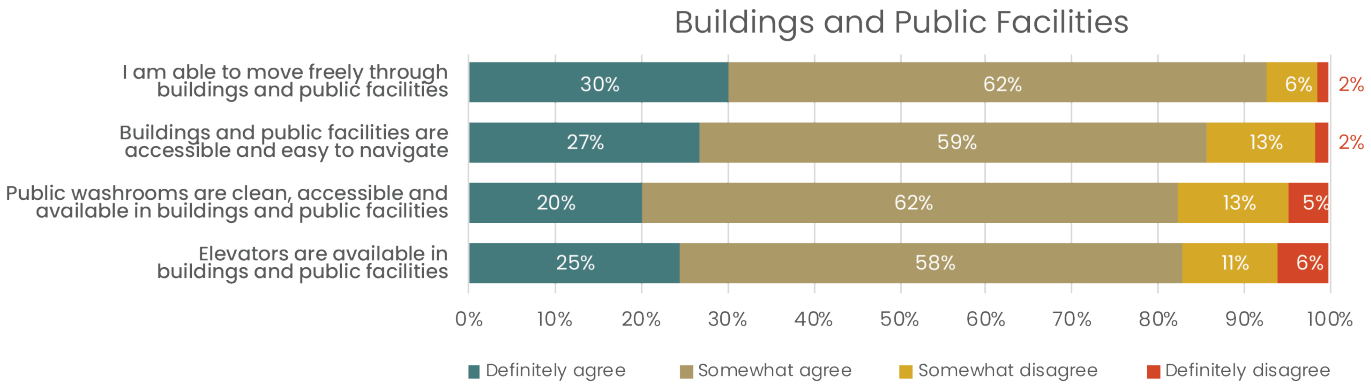
"My wife and I live in Sunset, although they are developing an array of pathways in our neighborhood, it is not easy to navigate from one neighborhood to another. With regards to improvement, I wonder whether the graduated dirt road running east/west about the Cochrane Ranchehouse could be developed as a permanent more accessible means of dealing with the steep hill?"

"Curb ramps need to be uniformly installed at trail curb interface."

"Excessive bike speeds (even non-motorized) and lack of bells or warnings are a real safety hazard especially to seniors who may have reduced hearing and mobility. Adults should also not be biking on sidewalks."

"The red shale paths need to be paved. These are hard to use for seniors."

Buildings and Public Facilities



How can the buildings or public facilities in your community be improved?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Public washrooms (33)	More washrooms (19) Accessibility (12) Downtown (7) Trails and paths (5)
Accessibility for those with mobility impairments (20)	
Automatic doors (12)	
Elevators (9)	
Town / community hall location and accessibility (8)	
Wayfinding to public facilities (online and in person) (7)	

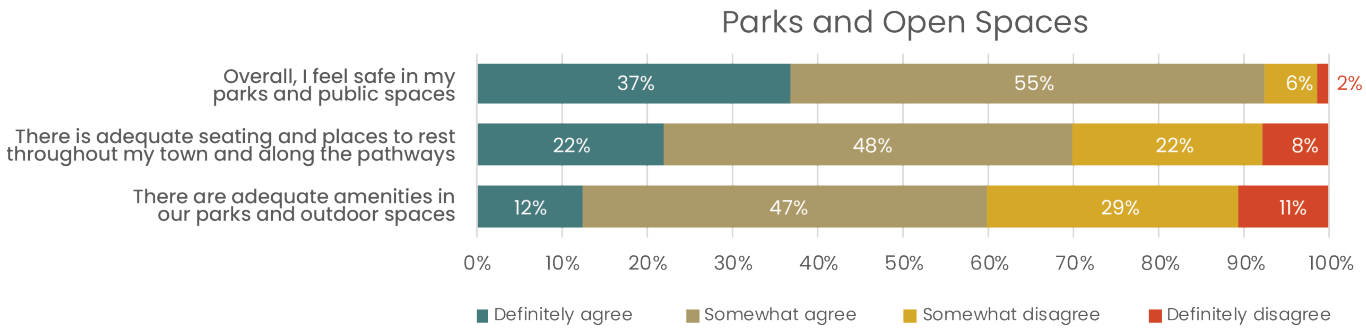
"Public washrooms along walking paths are few and far between. We need more public washrooms. In the downtown area, most businesses do not have public washrooms."

"Doors that open automatically are better than ones that have to be activated by pushing a button, for people using walkers."

"There is always room for improvement, particularly around accessibility for people with disabilities."

"I'm particularly thinking about Spray Lakes and the access with the elevator going to Seniors Centre."

Parks and Open Spaces



How can the accessibility of parks and outdoor spaces in your community be improved?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

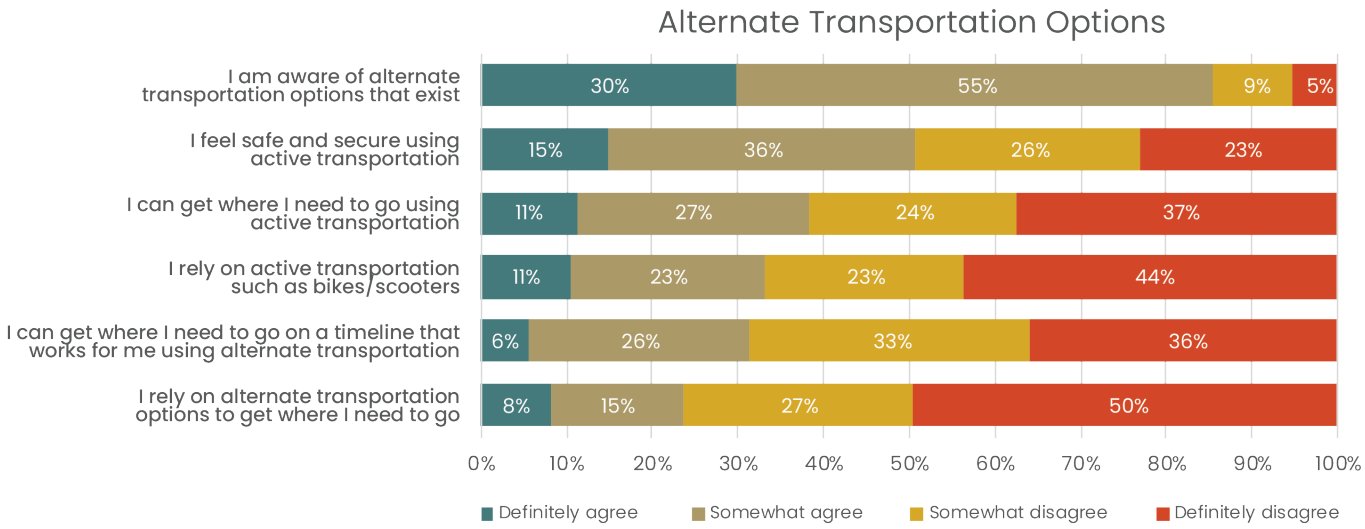
Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Rest stops / seating (48)	More benches (42) Rest areas (9)
Public washrooms (47)	More washrooms (39) Washrooms at dog park (7) Cleanliness (5)
Garbage bins (26)	More garbage bins (24)
Pathways (9)	Paved paths (3) Separate bike lanes (3) Separate from off leash areas (3)
Parking (8)	Accessible / Senior parking (5) More parking (3)
Outdoor fitness equipment (8)	

"More benches to sit on to rest when parts of your body are not working well."

"More public washrooms available like the ones at Mitford Park. I love a walk, but often need the facilities and have to turn around and stop. If walking by the river I always worry about where I can go"

"I greatly appreciate the many parks benches available along the pathways and parks available for rest and reflections. Keep it up!"

Alternate Transportation Options



How can alternate forms of transportation be improved?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

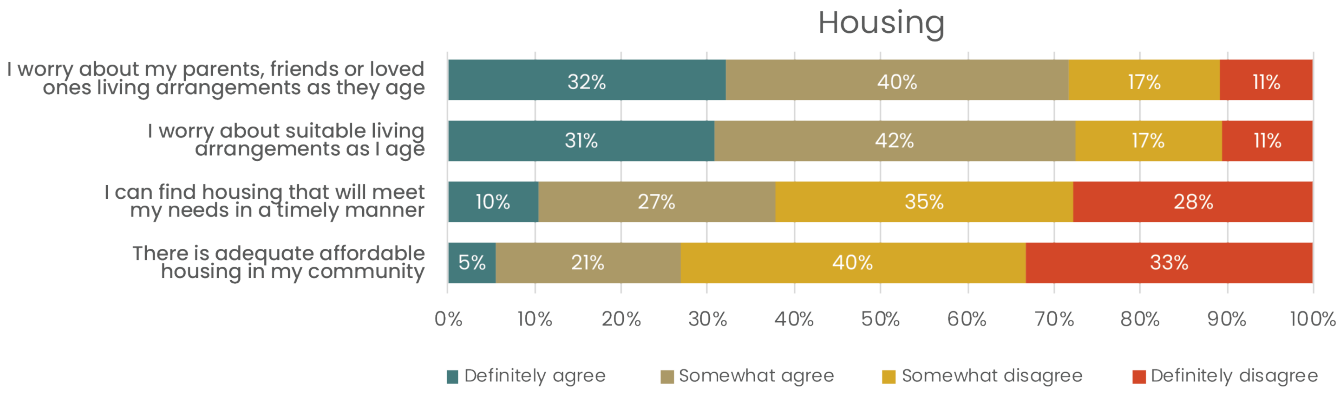
Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
COLT (79)	Regular / scheduled COLT routes (45) Difficult to book (17) Unreliable (4)
Bicycles (33)	More pathways / separated lanes (18) Increased cyclist safety (6) Bike storage (2)
Scooters (16)	Increased safety (6) Hazardous for other trail users (4) Storage solutions (3)
Pedestrian (12)	Increased safety (10) More sidewalks / pathways (6)
Increased options (12)	Access to neighboring communities (7) Volunteer drivers (5)
Bus service (8)	Route to Calgary (8)

"The COLT service is extremely frustrating. The booking process is frustrating, being put on hold, needs a regular schedule every hour."

"Ensure there are pathways to get downtown so that people using bikes/scooters/ walking/etc. don't need to use major roadways."

"The bridge (old) pedestrian/ bike lane is too narrow and is prone to be splashed on if puddles and a vehicle is in the lane beside. A designated pedestrian / bike bridge would be super at that end."

Housing



How can housing accessibility be improved in your community?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Housing affordability (85)	General affordability (72) Seniors housing (24) Rental housing (21) Low-income housing (8)
Seniors housing (64)	Single level / bungalow homes (24) New seniors lodge / complex (19) Apartments / more options (10) Independent living (8)
Diverse housing options (54)	Mix of housing types (32) Apartments (15) More housing (8)
Housing policy (14)	Requirements for new developments (6) Rent control (3) Information and communication (3)
Accessible housing design (10)	

"There needs to be real affordable housing, what is being built is not affordable for lower income folks. I worry about the lack of housing (particularly accessible housing) as myself and my spouse age."

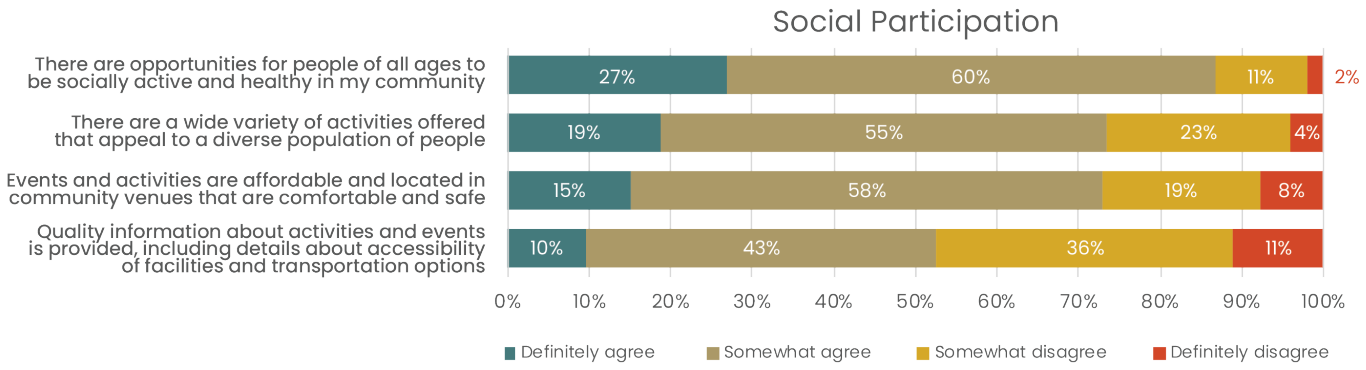
"Ensuring that all housing types (condos, townhouses, single detached, etc.) are incorporated into communities, and dispersed throughout communities."

"Definitely a need for seniors independent living, single level housing such as apartments or bungalows that have accessible showers and comfort toilets ... Wider doorways for wheelchairs, etc."

"Advocate for our growing vulnerable segments - seniors on fixed incomes, seniors requiring different housing options (i.e. affordable one level living - bungalows), more multifamily and entry level options to enable young adults to remain in the community, more options for low wage earners to maintain reasonable housing options."

"The new proposed Big Hill Lodge is desperately needed."

Social Participation



How can the opportunities for participation in the community be improved?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Communication (50)	Event promotion through diverse channels - physical and digital (36) Better communication (16) Central website (8)
Events and programming (46)	Transportation options (20) Events for seniors (7) Events for adults (5)
Accessibility (16)	Seniors on the Bow location (7)
Facilities (13)	Seniors Centre (4) More facilities (4)
Affordability (12)	Increased safety (10) More sidewalks / pathways (6)
Spray Lakes Recreation Centre (11)	Affordability (4) Open longer hours (3)

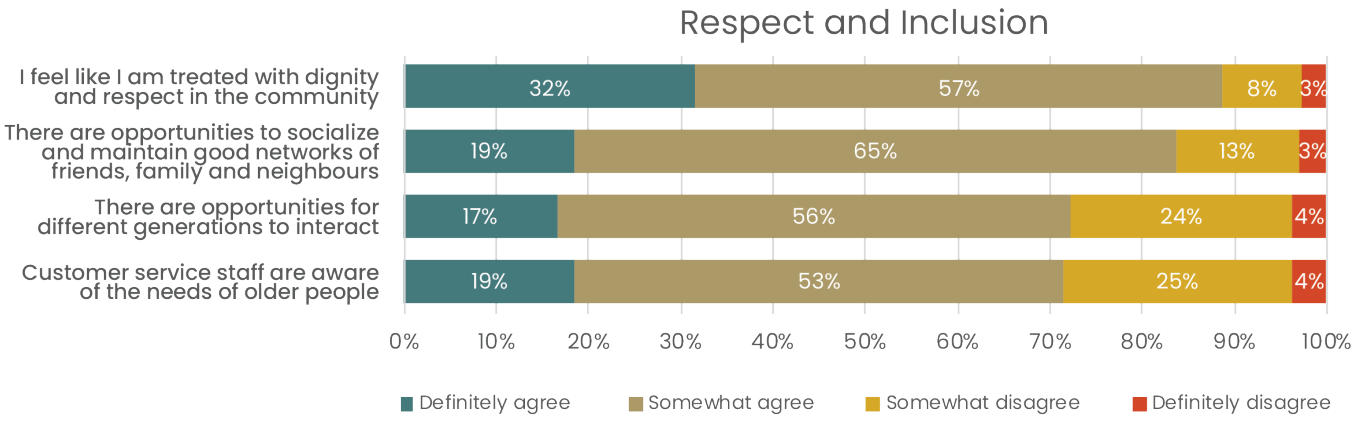
"We often read about events after they have happened in the Eagle. I'd like to see anticipatory notices. I know there are announcement online but I often forget to look there."

"Have transportation available for more events, including ones on Sundays and holidays (i.e.: Foodfest, Labour Day parade, Cochrane Light Up)."

"Accessibility to SOTB is challenging - it is out of the way for far too many and too difficult to walk to due to the distance from parking lot to the centre for those who have physical challenges."

"Sliding scale events, free tickets given to organizations to distribute to low-income clients."

Respect and Inclusion



How can social inclusion be improved in your community?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Events (21)	Inclusivity (5) Newcomers (5)
Cochrane is inclusive and respectful (15)	
Awareness and education of aging (11)	
Diversity (9)	2SLGBTIA+ (4) Religion (3)
Neighborhood specific events (8)	
Multi-generational programming (7)	

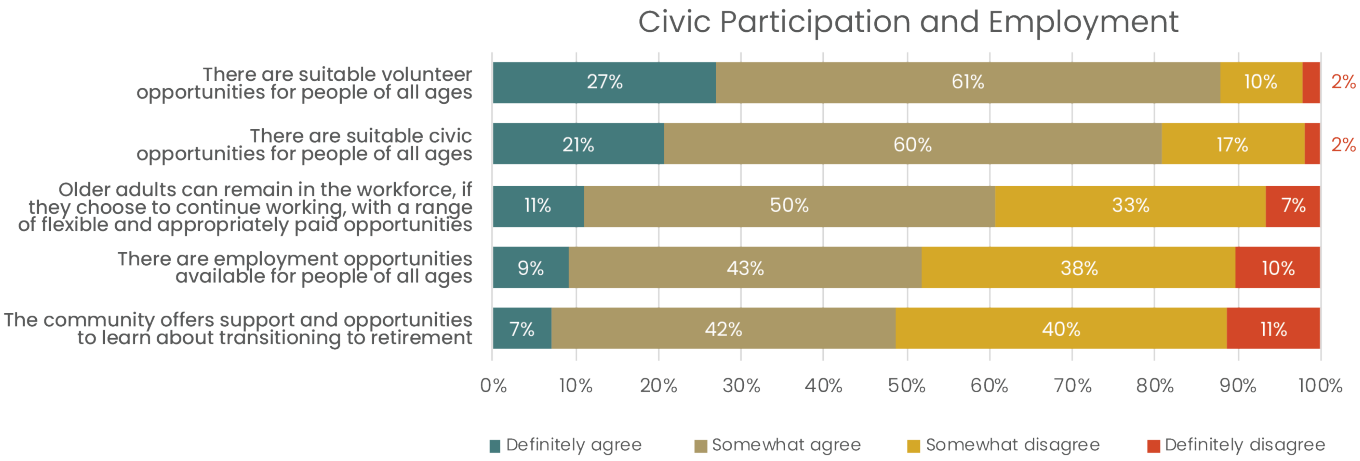
"I moved to Cochrane just prior to the start of Covid shutdown and still trying to find out about available programs and social activities that I can participate and navigate to."

"I believe Cochrane is very good re: social inclusion, of course improvement in any regard is a good thing. Basically, I (we) love living in Cochrane "our happy place.""

"Education and awareness of how seniors have built and contributed to this community and how we all change as we age."

"The Town needs to make substantive and meaningful decisions towards supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion - celebrating Pride month would have been a good start, particularly with the anti-LGBTQ+ upswell in the past six months."

Civic Participation and Employment Opportunities



How can participation in civic, volunteer and employment opportunities be improved in your community?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Communication (32)	Advertising opportunities (23) Diverse communication channels - physical and digital (7)
Employment (15)	Limited opportunities (7) Non-retail opportunities (5) Cost of living (5)
Encourage volunteering (10)	
Support community organizations (8)	
Accessible opportunities (8)	
Retirement planning courses (4)	

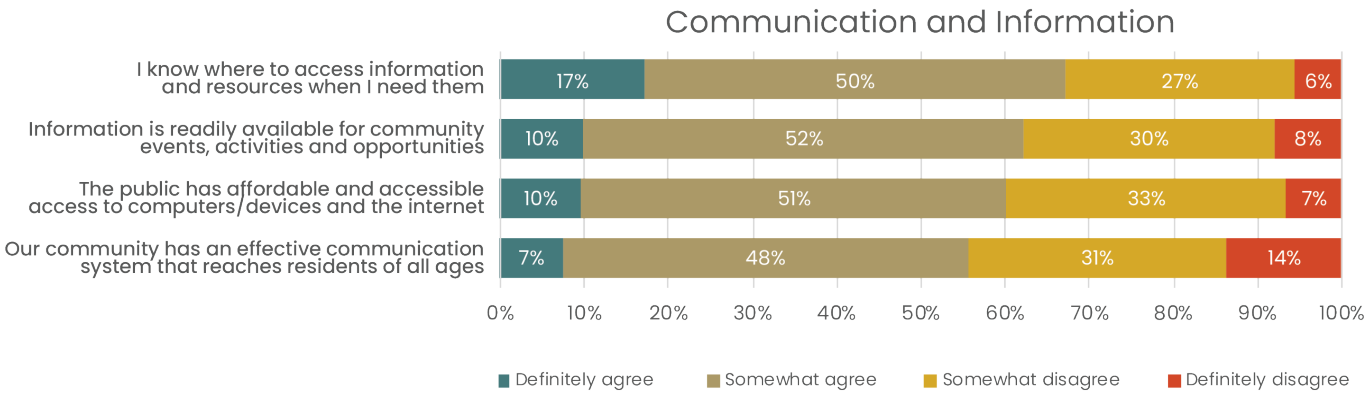
"Most employment opportunities are in the service or retail industry which often demands standing for long periods of time. Physically this is too demanding for those who are aging."

"Need for more public information of the opportunities."

"We are a volunteer-based community and rely on it. We need to encourage younger people to participate more."

"Suitable! Many places only want volunteers for least popular tasks. Make sure volunteering involves enjoyable tasks - not just set up/take down."

Communication and Information



How can communication and sharing information be improved?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Digital media / Internet (31)	Access to the Internet (13) Access to public computers (8) Seniors uncomfortable accessing (7)
Communication strategies (30)	One centralized location (13) Earlier sharing of events (8) More information (7) More frequent (6)
Social media (24)	Not everyone uses Facebook (16) Valuable communication tool (5) Community social media pages (3)
Town website (21)	One centralized location (10) Improve accessibility / navigation (7) Improve website (7)
Newspaper (18)	Valuable resource (7) Seniors need print media (4) Value printed newspapers (4)
Public library (13)	Invaluable resource (7) Access to the internet (6) Expand facilities (5)
Monthly Town / community newsletter (13)	

"Community access to computers/internet beyond the library"

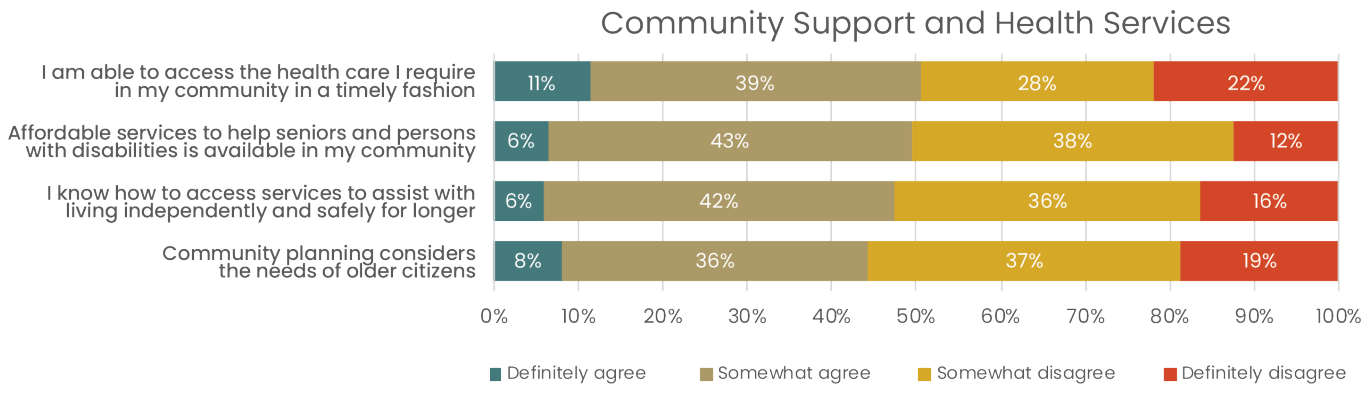
"Seniors newsletter - essential, monthly, add material from SOTB and Alberta 55+"

"Most community information is provided only on Facebook, not everyone wants to use Facebook."

"Earlier dissemination of information regarding opportunities and activities would assist in planning."

"We have a welcome wagon for newcomers to town, maybe we implement a welcome to retirement registry where people can sign up for retirement activities and support."

Community Support and Health Services



What community support and health services are needed in your community?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Health services (62)	Need a hospital (13) Sharing information on available health services (12) Lab work wait times (11) More walk-in clinics (8)
24/7 Urgent care (38)	
More family doctors (28)	
Home care (24)	More affordable home care services (13) Home maintenance services (9)
Transportation (20)	Transportation to health services (10) Transportation to Calgary (10)
EMS / ambulance service (17)	Improved service and reliability (10) More ambulances (7)

"We are well beyond 24-hour urgent care as a nice to have. It is a requirement with our population. We also need greater mental health supports and lab services that can handle the demand."

"For most, our health services are in Cochrane, Calgary, or Canmore. It would be nice to have a medical person come to the village maybe on a planned rotation."

"I really do not know what type of support is available or the costs. "

"We need family doctors and better health care services 24 hours a day."

"At present my own needs are being reasonably met. I am concerned about the future when it would be ideal to still live independently but some tasks become more difficult such as snow removal."

"Also, we need more than 2 ambulances. Being a senior, I am afraid I will never get to a hospital in a timely manner if I have a stroke or Heart Attack."

Other

What is needed to help citizens remain in the community and age actively?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Housing (71)	Affordable housing (43) Seniors housing (23) Diverse housing options (11)
Affordability / cost of living (54)	
Healthcare (47)	Home care (15) 24/7 Urgent Care (5) Hospital (5)
Transportation (35)	More options (22) Public transit / COLT reliability (17) Regional transportation (7)
Communication (28)	Information on events and services (12) Directory of services (7) Community engagement (6)
Active living (22)	Recreation services and classes (17) Bike lanes / safety (4) Fitness equipment (3)
Community support networks (19)	

"Multi-generational housing facilities. From independent care to full care. More mixed housing so singles or seniors can downsize at a reasonable price point."

"Transportation for medical appointments in Calgary more medical services in Cochrane."

"Affordable housing and reliable bus system."

"Easy access and direction to know where to find what's available for seniors, especially newcomers."

"To be active and provide more opportunity for exercise, keep moving, active sports. Help with socialization."

"Networks and volunteer structures to help residents make their needs known and get their needs met."



What are some priorities our community can address to become more age-friendly?

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Housing (34)	Affordable housing (17) Seniors housing (15) Diverse housing options (10)
Transportation (29)	Improved public transit (9) Regional transportation (5) Planning road network (4)
Health care (24)	24/7 Urgent Care (6) Home care (4)
Events and activities (20)	Multi-generational opportunities (9) Social networking events (9)
Active living (20)	Outdoor fitness / sports (8) Sidewalk improvements (8) Pedestrian safety (5)
Communication (15)	Community education on aging (8) Improved communication (6)

"Mixed demographic focus for all communities especially new neighborhoods it's rare to find a house suitable for an older person or couple in a sea of two-story, 3-bedroom houses and townhouses."

"Outdoor active living! Easier access between neighborhoods and even better access to Calgary for those who don't drive (right now there is just On-It, and you have to be in Calgary for 8 hours."

"Better access for wheelchairs in the shops on main street"

"Combating, isolation and loneliness through engagement and deliberate inclusion. Promoting active living (Active Forever at SLS is a great example!)"

"Build a seniors Center in downtown Cochrane."

Please provide any other feedback or comments:

The following themes surfaced as a result of the open responses:

Themes (# of occurrences)	Subthemes (# of occurrences)
Cochrane is great (15)	
Roads / transportation (15)	Better planning / construction (7) Improved transportation options (4) Pedestrian safety (4)
Grateful for survey/ opportunity (13)	
Community building (4)	
Multi-generational opportunities (3)	
Seniors oriented services (3)	

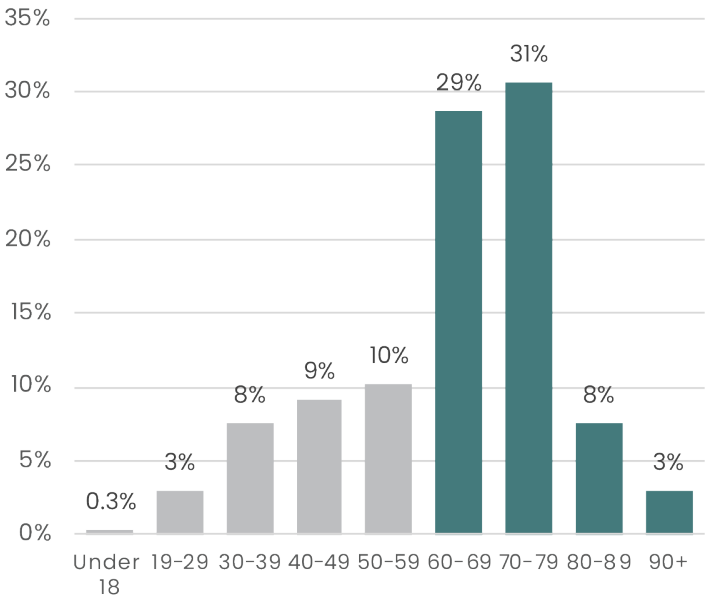
"I really love Cochrane, it's a great community and I think there's a lot of good planning and development done by administration. However, I really encourage the development of affordable housing stock and the expansion of regional transit."

"Thank-you for being proactive in looking for ways to help seniors age in place. As much as external entities can organize all the physical, social, and economic services, it is really important that people look for ways to work together in their communities to make it happen for themselves."

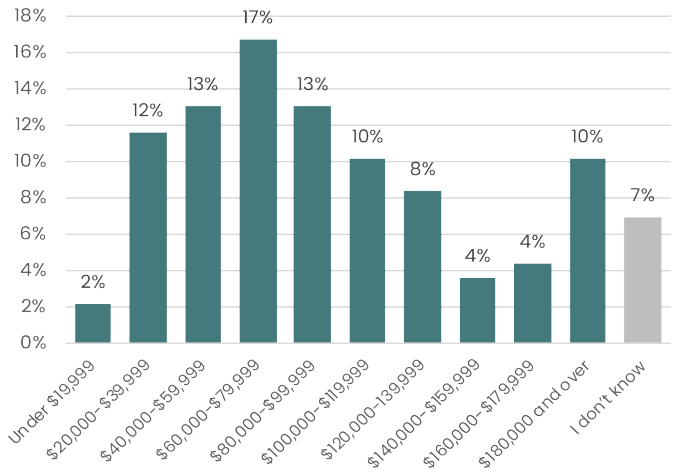
"Cochrane is a beautiful community with a lot to offer. Right now, roads and transportation are top of mind. The current situation tends to keep us in our communities because it's challenging to get around town or leave Cochrane. It deters engagement in community activities."

Survey Demographics

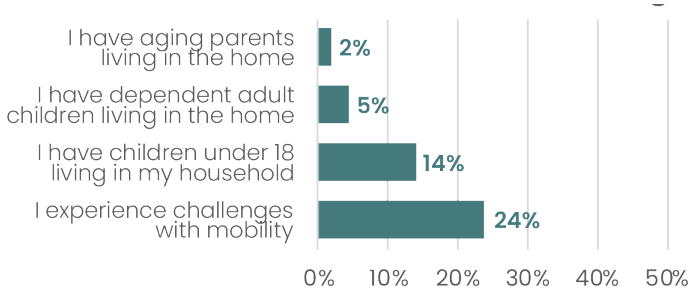
My age:



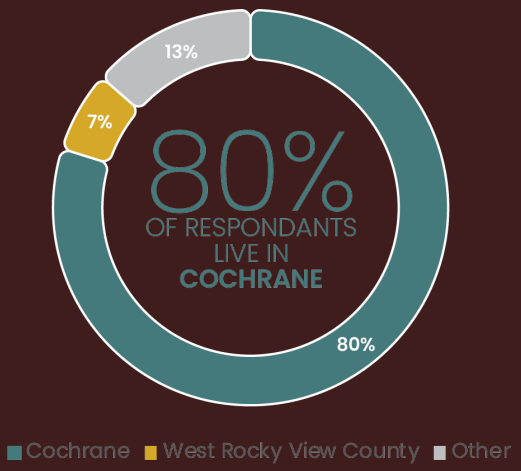
My household income, before taxes for 2022:



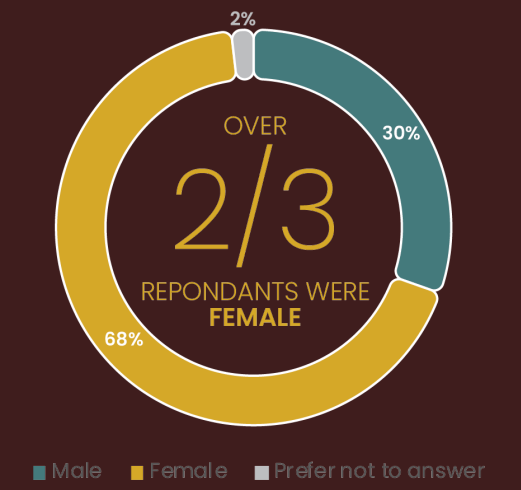
Remaining demographics:



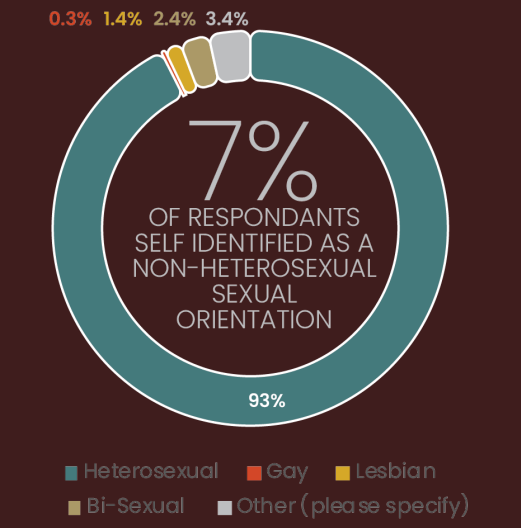
I live in:



My gender:



My sexual orientation:



Workshops

A series of five workshops aimed at understanding the community's current state realities and future state vision for an age-friendly Cochrane. The primary activities focused on understanding:

- The current state in Cochrane (barriers, strengths, trends)
- The ideal future state (ideas for action)

Current State

Barriers

Transportation challenges
Inconsistent and limited public transit services provided by COLT emphasize the need for set schedules and expanded operating hours. Concerns were raised about the accessibility of COLT buses for individuals with mobility issues, as well as the reliance on private vehicles due to transit limitations.

Housing affordability and accessibility
Limited availability of affordable housing options for seniors, citing automatic rent increases and a lack of wheelchair-accessible units as significant challenges. Zoning restrictions and inflexible regulations were identified as barriers to the development of diverse housing forms, particularly for disabled individuals and those requiring long-term care facilities.

Infrastructure and accessibility
Physical barriers such as uneven sidewalks and inadequate snow clearance were cited as obstacles to mobility, impacting the ability of residents to navigate the community safely. Participants also noted challenges related to accessibility in commercial businesses and public facilities, as well as geographic barriers such as the Bow River and train tracks dividing communities.

Healthcare access and services
Concerns were raised about the limited access to 24-hour urgent care services and the lack of accessibility to healthcare facilities, especially for vulnerable populations. Participants highlighted the challenges of accessing dialysis services, particularly in rural areas, and emphasized the need for greater education and awareness about available healthcare resources.

Communications and information accessibility
Need for improved communication channels and information accessibility regarding available resources and services in Cochrane. Concerns were raised about the lack of awareness of programs and opportunities, particularly among older adults, highlighting the importance of clear and accessible communication strategies that aren't heavily reliant on technology.

Economic and development challenges
Participants discussed the economic challenges facing businesses and services due to high commercial rents, as well as the strain on infrastructure and services resulting from rapid community growth. Environmental concerns regarding encroachment on natural spaces and infrastructure demand were also raised.

Strengths

Community support and engagement
The community has strong ties, with residents exhibiting helpfulness and fostering a friendly and supportive environment.

Accessible amenities and services
The availability and accessibility of essential facilities like the SLS Centre, the Library, and medical services like doctors and dentists, contribute to residents' convenience and well-being.

Diverse programming for seniors
An array of activities and programs tailored for seniors, offered through organizations such as Seniors on the Bow and Men's Shed, providing opportunities for socialization and engagement.

Volunteerism and civic engagement
Cochrane boasts an actively engaged community, with plentiful opportunities for residents to contribute through volunteerism. Organizations like Helping Hands and FCSS play pivotal roles in fostering a culture of service and support, enhancing the well-being and cohesion of the community.

Walkable community and outdoor spaces
The walkability of Cochrane and the presence of outdoor spaces like parks and trails, contributing to residents' well-being and quality of life.

Cultural vibrancy and community events
Community events, including art clubs, festivals, and traditions, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural richness.

Trends

Cost of living
The rising cost of living and the escalating cost of housing is a concern for older adults on fixed incomes.

Aging in place
Increased preference for older adults to live safely and independently in their own homes as they age. Underscoring the need for affordable housing options, accessibility modifications, and support services to facilitate this choice.

Technology
While technology is increasingly integrated into daily life, seniors face challenges in adopting and utilizing it effectively, resulting in more victims of fraud and scams.

Housing diversity
With the town's increasing population growth, there is a call for inclusive planning that addresses diverse housing needs and introduces accessible, affordable, and innovative housing options for seniors and newcomers.

Social connections and community engagement
Participants highlighted the significance of social connections for healthy aging, advocating for initiatives that foster intergenerational interactions and support networks.

Healthcare access and service demand
There's a growing demand for healthcare services among seniors, highlighting the importance of improving access and addressing gaps in service provision to meet the needs of an aging population.

Future State

Ideas for Action

Accessibility and mobility enhancement

- Implement "talking" crosswalk signals for visually impaired individuals.
- Install speed bumps to slow traffic and improve pedestrian safety.
- Create more accessible pathways and ensure signage for speed limits and motorized vehicles on trails.

Affordable housing solutions

- Advocate for subsidized housing options and affordable rentals, particularly for seniors.
- Explore alternative housing models such as co-housing and multigenerational housing.
- Review zoning regulations to allow for diverse housing options like secondary suites and garden suites.

Community engagement and support

- Establish community hubs and resource centers to connect residents with services and programs.
- Encourage intergenerational programming to foster connections between seniors and youth.
- Promote volunteerism and mentorship opportunities across age groups.
- Introduce technology support groups.

Communication and information dissemination

- Improve communication channels, including printed materials, websites, and social media, to share information on community events, services, and resources.
- Reintroduce community newsletters, physical newspapers, and community notice boards to promote the broader dissemination of information.

Environmental and community infrastructure enhancement

- Develop and maintain green spaces, parks, and trails with a focus on accessibility and shade provision.
- Advocate for the creation of more community gathering spaces and facilities, such as community halls and gardens.

Healthcare accessibility

- Lobby for 24-hour urgent care services and improved home care support.
- Increase awareness and education about available healthcare services, including ambulance coverage and insurance rules.

Cultural integration and ageism

- Combat ageism and harmful stereotypes through education.
- Promote cultural integration and understanding through multigenerational programming and events.

Transportation and accessibility

- Improve COLT services by introducing more frequent and reliable routes and moving away from the on-demand model.
- Providing a senior shuttle service to major town events.

Empowerment and Advocacy

- Establish advisory groups and committees, such as Accessibility Advisory Groups, to empower residents to advocate for their needs.
- Foster partnerships between non-profit organizations, government entities, and community associations to address common challenges collaboratively.

Focus Groups

The workshop format was translated for the three targeted focus groups. These sessions sought to understand the unique experience of these groups as their input is instrumental in developing an Age-Friendly Action Plan.

Youth

An informal session that allowed youth to participate and share their views on the community and what an age-friendly Cochrane looks like.

Barriers

- **Bullying:** Identified as a prevalent issue among youth.
- **Employment:** Difficulty finding work is a concern.
- **Public Transit:** Poor public transit, including issues with on-demand services, impacts accessibility.
- **Need for More Places:** Youth expressed a desire for more recreational and social spaces that are free to access.
- **Connections to Calgary:** Lack of adequate transportation options and connectivity to Calgary was mentioned.
- **Affordability:** Concerns about the affordability of housing options.
- **Availability of Essential Services:** Access to essential services in Calgary is noted as important.
- **Homelessness:** Lack of housing options for those experiencing homelessness in Cochrane was highlighted.

Strengths

- **Safety:** Youth feel safe while walking to school.
- **Volunteerism:** There are opportunities to get involved in the community.
- **Community Events and Activities:** Participation in community events.
- **Preference for a small town:** Appreciation for Cochrane not being overcrowded.
- **Proximity to Family:** Emphasis on the importance of community support and being close to family.

Ideas for Action

- **Expansion of Outdoor Event Facilities:** Interest in expanding outdoor event facilities, particularly in select parts of Cochrane like Fireside.
- **Improvement of Mental Health Supports:** There is a recognition of the need for enhanced mental health support services.
- **Vision for Cochrane at Age 65:** Desire for more active living trails, electrification of transportation infrastructure, and maintaining Cochrane as a smaller, independent community separate from or smaller than Calgary.

Rural

A session was held with community members who live in the rural areas surrounding Cochrane to understand their perspective on aging in a rural context.

Barriers

Transportation and access
Limited transportation options and difficulties accessing essential services in town pose significant challenges for older adults, particularly those living in rural areas with long driveways.

Transition and care needs
The transition from independent living to senior facilities can be challenging, compounded by issues such as caregiver burnout and insufficient resources for home care in a rural setting.

Emergency preparedness and safety
Concerns about emergency preparedness and safety extend to issues such as lack of awareness, long waitlists for medical care, and difficulties in accessing water supply for first responders.

Housing and community support
Limited housing options, high housing costs, and zoning regulations impact the ability of older adults to find suitable accommodation. Additionally, informal community networks may not adequately address social isolation and stigma around senior homes.

Healthcare access and services
Long waitlists for medical appointments and surgeries, coupled with difficulties in navigating the healthcare system, create significant challenges for older adults in accessing essential healthcare services.

Support for caregivers
Caregivers, often family members, face significant stress and challenges in providing care for older adults, leading to burnout and strained family dynamics.

Digital literacy and access
Limited digital literacy and access to technology present additional challenges for older adults in accessing vital information and services, exacerbating existing barriers to aging in place.

Strengths

Diverse care options and resilience
A diverse range of long-term care and assisted living options offers flexibility for older adults to choose the support that aligns with their needs. Despite financial challenges, robust community ties and familiarity with neighbors bolster resilience and enhance overall quality of life.

Robust support networks
Both formal and informal support networks are in place to support older adults age with dignity. Initiatives like Helping Hands and other volunteer efforts complement available services in Cochrane and Calgary.

Ideas for Action

Community communication, engagement, and collaboration
Establishing formal communication networks and utilizing community connectors to disseminate information, including key community events, utilizing platforms like FCSS as communication hubs.

Access to Information, services, and supportive initiatives
Implement measures to improve access to information, including targeted marketing efforts. Mobilize services to raise awareness of available resources and enhance communication channels through educational initiatives and forge consistent tech support partnerships.

Collaborative and innovative solutions

Explore collaborative opportunities, such as living storybook projects and intergenerational programs. Investigate innovative housing models like rural group homes and mini-ranch group homes to meet the evolving needs of seniors.

Service Providers

A session was held with service providers to understand their unique experience supporting older adults in the community from a service provision perspective.

Barriers

Digital divide
As more and more services move to digital platforms, from COLT service to event communication and employment opportunities, older adults face increasing barriers to accessing the information they need to age in place.

Accessible and reliable public transportation
Public transportation services are limited for those with mobility issues. The limited flexibility of booking, and a lack of regular and reliable hours of the COLT buses limits uptake of these services with older adults.

Affordable housing
A lack of affordable and accessible housing, with limited diversity in tenure and design of housing stock.

Cost of living and fixed incomes
Many seniors planning for retirement are not equipped with the financial resources and information they need, resulting in a return to work due to fixed low incomes, while the cost-of-living increases.

Strengths

Service provider collaboration
Strong collaboration between nonprofit social service organizations, increasing overall capacity and impact. FCSS and Helping Hands Cochrane are two integral organizations to this interagency network.

Public facilities
Strong anchor institutions providing free and accessible services for older adults, including the library, SLS Centre, and the Legion.

Seniors programming and services
Seniors specific programming such as Seniors on the Bow, Seniors for Kids, and Widow to Widow.

Volunteerism and engagement
An active and engaged community, with meaningful opportunities for engagement and volunteerism.

Trends

Cost of living
The rising cost of living is a concern for older adults on fixed incomes.

Diverse needs
Older adults do not have uniform interests and needs. The 65+ age category represents a significant range in mobility, health care needs, housing needs, and social needs.

Family supports
A significant portion of newcomers to Cochrane are older adults, who may not have the family support networks in place to age in place.

Ideas for Action

Increased funding opportunities
Support community organizations and individuals through increased funding opportunities, such as grants, tax credits, grant coordinators, data gathering, and advocacy.

Communication and engagement
Increased engagement and communication opportunities to connect aging adults and service providers with the information they need (Newspapers, welcome wagon, surveys, flyers, etc.)

Activated central community hub
Create an active, accessible, and centrally located social space to meet the needs of visitors, seniors, newcomers, men's and women's groups, etc., and provide information on seniors resources in Cochrane.

Build awareness of seniors
Raise awareness to the value of old age in the community through seniors conferences, seniors exhibits, education, and engagement.

Increase COLT ridership
Increase COLT ridership with older adults through advertisement, promotion, and increased accessibility, with the long-term goal to develop a fixed route transit system.

User Experience Interviews

The user experience interviews were designed to understand the lived experience of older adults in Cochrane from different walks of life. Organized around the 8 domains of community life, these interviews offered participants a safe space to articulate the challenges they face and their hopes for the community .

This section highlights indicative quotes that arose during the interviews:

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

"Focusing on the "Curb Cut Effect" is a great way to illustrate how accommodations benefit everyone, not just those with disabilities. It's essential to shift the mindset away from viewing accessibility as a check box exercise and instead embrace it as a fundamental aspect of community design."

"The Event Centre does not have great bathrooms. Seniors on the Bow had an event there, but the bathroom was not accessible. This is a public building and its unacceptable. We had 4 people fall down the stairs trying to get to the bathroom."

"The snowy weather and sidewalk cracks in Cochrane make mobility difficult for me, especially with my walker."

Transportation

"Many feel like its hard to age in Cochrane if you don't drive."

"The handi bus has a very short wait time. Not enough time to get onto the bus."

"COLT challenges might have been compounded with COVID."

Housing

"The cost of living is very high and there are no places that I can live in cochrane on my own and live a life of dignity."

"Infrastructure is being build but its not being built where we seniors need it most. I feel like seniors are being overlooked and that money and resources aren't going towards seniors."

"I'm afraid for my future, especially my financial future, we need more housing in Cochrane that is cost effective."

Respect and Social Inclusion

"Emphasis on proactive measures, such as introducing adaptive technologies and fostering a more inclusive dialogue within the community, is key to creating lasting change. By addressing misconceptions and promoting understanding, we can work towards a society where everyone can fully participate and enjoy life without barriers."

"The community here is incredibly respectful, although I'm aware that not everyone may be as accepting. So far, everyone I've encountered has been respectful; for me, 'respect' is my favourite word."

"Unfortunately, there's a common assumption that if you're handicapped, it must affect your mental capacity, which is simply not true."

"We must shift our perspective on aging and recognize the immense value that older adults bring through their lived experiences. Sharing these experiences and asking questions like 'why are we here?' can help foster deeper connections and understanding within our community."

Social Participation

"As you transition into the role of a caregiver, you may not initially realize the extent to which your own needs may go unmet. You simply find yourself falling into the role, learning not to stress over the small things along the way. It's all about mindset."

"There are so many ways to meet people if you know about SOTB or FCSS."

"It's a struggle to engage people in community activities; many prefer the comfort of home and avoid driving or socializing. There's a sense of shame tied to aging and losing one's identity within a group."

Civic Participation and Employment

"What we truly need are individuals who are deeply committed and engaged. We require passionate advocates for accessibility issues who can serve on advisory boards, providing insights into the town's progress and areas needing improvement. It's essential to find individuals with the time, passion, and dedication to sustain these efforts and drive continued progress forward."

"Walmart actively hires seniors for various roles, including clerking and shelf filling, highlighting the store's commitment to providing employment opportunities to individuals of all ages."

"If anything is free I jump on it. I'm on a fixed income so I jump on anything that can help me stretch how far my money goes."

Communication and Information

"When I needed support to care for my husband, I was lucky because I knew where to look in the community. However, most people don't know where to look or how to ask for help."

"We had no idea that FCSS was here before this interview."

Community Support and Health Services

"Home care is under staffed and many people need support."

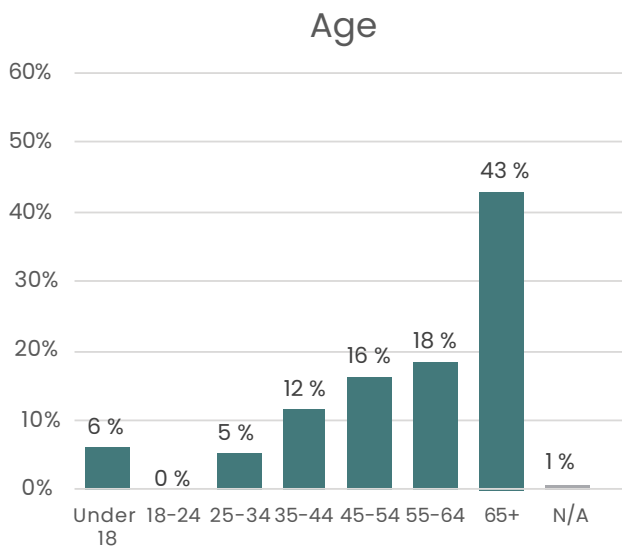
"I found dealing with the health care system to be very insensitive. I felt like the doctors we were dealing with didn't understand what my husband and I were going through after his stroke and they weren't helpful in getting us support. It was in that moment that I knew I needed to advocate for myself and find the support I needed on my own."

"What happens to couples or families when there is an 80-kilometre radius for long-term care?"



Engagement Demographics

My age:



I identify as:

2 Participants identified as Indigenous

8 Participants identified as a visible minority

2 Participants identified as 2SLGBTQIA+

Other Demographics:

19 Participants were born outside of Canada

27 Participants moved to Cochrane in the past 5 years

35 Participants have seniors in their household

26 Participants have children under 18 years old



Section 4.0

Next Steps

The information gathered from this engagement will guide the development of an Age-Friendly Action Plan. The Action plan will identify infrastructure needs and innovative service delivery models to enhance the breadth, quality, and accessibility of services for older adults. The Action Plan is scheduled to be complete by October 2024.

For more information on the project and to stay in touch with the process, please visit:

https://www.letstalkcochrane.ca/age-friendly-survey