

2012

Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council Interim Evaluation



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary..... | 1 |
| Section 1: Background..... | 2 |
| History of ESCC | 3 |
| Mission..... | 3 |
| Purpose of Evaluation..... | 3 |
| Goals of Evaluation..... | 4 |
| Methodology | 4 |
| Section 2: Results..... | 5 |
| Key Accomplishments..... | 5 |
| Mandate | 7 |
| Capacity Building..... | 9 |
| Collaboration..... | 10 |
| Information Sharing | 12 |
| Additional Benefits | 13 |
| Challenges Moving Forward..... | 14 |
| Future Direction..... | 15 |
| Section 3: Recommendations..... | 16 |
| Section 4: Summary | 18 |
| Appendix A – List of Organizations Interviewed | 20 |
| Appendix B – Interview Questions | 21 |
| Appendix C – Respondents to Online Survey..... | 22 |

Executive Summary

Since its inception, Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) has played an important role within the seniors sector in Edmonton. ESCC has become a trusted voice and resource for organizations that provide services to seniors. The Council has also taken on an important role in identifying service gaps and beginning the process of developing frameworks for responding to the needs of a growing seniors population in Edmonton.

Over the past several years, ESCC has been closely involved in the development of several key plans aimed at supporting seniors in Edmonton. These include the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton*, *Core Community Support Project*, *Helping Seniors Age in Place* and the *Seniors Assisted Transportation Project*. Each of these documents was developed through a collaborative process that brought together a range of community stakeholders to share ideas, provide input and create a vision for service delivery. Based on feedback from stakeholders, it is clear that the development of these documents would not have been possible without the leadership of ESCC.

Prior to the creation of ESCC, there was no formal mechanism to support a coordinated effort in responding to the needs of seniors in our community. The existence of ESCC has been a vital step in moving from a group of agencies working in isolation and competing for scarce resources, to what is now a more coordinated system working together to plan for the delivery of services to Edmonton's seniors.

Based on feedback from key stakeholders, it is clear that ESCC continues to play an important role in strengthening the capacity of senior-serving agencies which provide services that support the well-being of seniors within Edmonton. This capacity building function of ESCC is accomplished through continued information sharing, networking opportunities and ongoing support to ESCC members.

While virtually all stakeholders share a belief that ESCC should continue to support and coordinate the work of senior-serving organizations, there appears to be a need for clarity regarding the role that ESCC will play with respect to the implementation of the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton*. A clear definition needs to be established regarding what taking on the "Lead Partner" role for various goals within the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton* means for ESCC. It is clear that successful implementation of the *Vision* will require the coordinated support of the City of Edmonton, its Managers, as well as ESCC and its membership.

A common theme heard throughout the interviews for this evaluation was how impressed people are with what ESCC has been able to accomplish with relatively few resources. Credit was frequently given to the Executive Director for her leadership and ability to get the most out of the resources that ESCC has to work with. A recent funding

contribution from the City of Edmonton is expected to enhance the capacity of ESCC to fulfill its mandate.

Based on feedback from ESCC members and key stakeholders, there is a strong consensus that ESCC is achieving its mandate which includes the development of capacity within the seniors sector as well as the facilitation of collaboration among senior-serving organizations. ESCC is valued for its ability to bring focus to the big picture surrounding seniors issues while supporting individual agencies in delivering quality services to seniors.

In response to the feedback received during this evaluation, the following recommendations, explained in greater detail within the report, have been made to ensure the continued effectiveness of the Council:

Recommendation #1: Define and articulate the mandate of Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council.

Recommendation #2: Ensure that members have a solid understanding of the actions that ESCC is currently undertaking.

Recommendation #3: Develop Implementation Plans for the Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton, Transportation, Outreach and Core Support Services Plans.

Recommendation #4: Clarify and articulate the relationship between ESCC and the City of Edmonton.

Recommendation #5: Increase the frequency and/or regularity of Executive Director and shared Board of Director meetings.

Recommendation #6: Address issues of tension between ESCC members.

It is important to note that ESCC is still relatively early on in its evolution, having been formed less than ten years ago. In a period of only a short few years, ESCC has effectively established itself as a credible voice within the seniors sector. Based on the feedback received from the ESCC membership and community stakeholders, it is clear that ESCC is well-positioned to continue making a positive impact within the seniors sector in Edmonton.

Section 1: Background

History of ESCC

The establishment of the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) was the major recommendation from the Task Force on Community Services for Seniors' Blueprint for Action report published in January 2004. The Council was initially created as a three-year pilot project and has subsequently been formalized as a non-profit organization with charitable status granted by Canada Revenue Agency in March 2006.

ESCC builds on the work of the Edmonton Seniors Community Network formed in 2000 to encourage information sharing and discussion on issues of common concern. The Council benefits organizations that primarily serve seniors, as well as groups and organizations that serve seniors as part of a larger mandate.¹ Currently, ESCC's membership consists of 38 regular members, 23 associate members representing organizations and 4 individual associate members. The primary funders for ESCC include the City of Edmonton and United Way of the Alberta Capital Region.

Mission

The mission of ESCC is "To enhance the capacity of organizations that provide social support and recreational services to seniors through facilitating collaboration and resource sharing."

Purpose of Evaluation

The last comprehensive evaluation of Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council occurred in late 2008. The current evaluation represents an update on activities and accomplishments that have taken place since the completion of the previous evaluation. Specifically, the purpose of the current interim evaluation is:

1. To determine the progress ESCC has made towards the goal of encouraging coordination and collaboration among senior-serving organizations.
2. To determine whether the strategies/program areas achieved the desired outcome and why or why not.

¹ Source: Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council website

3. To formulate action-oriented recommendations for ESCC operational improvement.

Goals of Evaluation

The specific goals of the evaluation are:

1. To determine whether ESCC work/activities has resulted in increased, effective collaboration among senior-serving organizations.
2. To illustrate what the collaboration entailed and whether the activity undertaken strengthened positive efforts amongst senior-serving organizations.
3. To identify ways to support collaboration.
4. To provide input and inform the future direction of the Council.

Methodology

As ESCC is a member-driven organization, the primary means of data collection for the evaluation was through one-on-one interviews with ESCC members and stakeholders. Interviews were completed with 15 ESCC Members, two Associate Members, four City of Edmonton staff, one City Councillor and a representative of United Way of the Alberta Capital Region. All interviews for this evaluation were conducted between May and July of 2012.

With respect to the interviews, an Evaluation Steering Committee assisted in identifying a mix of agencies who would be representative of the larger ESCC membership. The members who were interviewed reflect the diversity that exists within ESCC and the seniors-serving sector. Included in this group (see Appendix A for a list of specific agencies) were both large and small seniors centres as well as organizations who provide a variety of services to seniors in the community. The diversity of the agencies and stakeholders interviewed was important as ESCC exists to support and represent the needs of all of its members, regardless of size or activities.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, an online survey was also developed and distributed to all ESCC Members and Associate Members. The purpose of this online survey was to gather additional feedback and to ensure that all members who desired to provide feedback were presented with an opportunity to do so. A total of 21 responses were received for the online survey.

In all, feedback was received from a total of 28 ESCC members through the combination of face-to-face interviews and the online survey. Additional weight was not placed on the responses of agencies that were both interviewed and responded to the online survey. To encourage open and candid feedback, agencies were assured of their anonymity and therefore, specific comments in this report have not been attributed to individuals. Where quotes are used, they were selected as being representative of common themes heard throughout our interviews.

As per the request from ESCC, the evaluation was completed utilizing a qualitative approach to data collection. The emphasis within the evaluation was on collecting rich information that allowed members and stakeholders to share their experience with ESCC and speak to the benefits of the Council as well as to the future direction that they would like to see ESCC take. As a qualitative evaluation, the emphasis of this report is placed on the identification of key themes and the development of recommendations to support the work of ESCC moving forward.

The overall work on the evaluation was overseen by a Steering Committee comprised of ESCC Board Members, the ESCC Executive Director and a representative of the City of Edmonton. The ESCC Board of Directors was also consulted on the development of the evaluation and provided feedback on the initial draft.

Section 2: Results

Key Accomplishments

Over the past number of years, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council has brought together a range of stakeholders to assist in the development of several plans aimed at responding to the needs of seniors in the Edmonton area. These include:

- The *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton Action Plan* lays out a strategic plan and identifies goals designed to guide the direction and delivery of services to seniors over the next five years. This plan touches on a range of strategic areas including community support services, health services, communication and information, social and recreational participation, transportation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation, volunteerism and employment, housing, and outdoor spaces and buildings. ESCC is identified as the lead partner for a number of the goals and actions identified throughout the plan.
- The *Core Community Support Project: Elements for Community Supports for Aging in Place in Edmonton* was completed in June 2011. The purpose of this project was to identify the essential community supports that are necessary to allow seniors to age in place. Through a series of five meetings, participants in this initiative identified 11 essential service elements that must be addressed if seniors are to successfully age in place: financial, legal, food security, health services, home supports, information and education, multicultural support, recreational activities, safety, social services and transportation.

- The *Seniors Assisted Transportation Project: A Coordinated Shared Services Model* was completed in June 2011. The purpose of this project was to develop a model that would respond to the growing needs for seniors transportation in Edmonton. The result was the development of a coordinated shared services model which features a network of service providers utilizing shared software, procedures and reporting principles.
- *Helping Seniors Age in Place: A Strategic Framework to Improve Outreach to Edmonton's Isolated and/or At-Risk Seniors* was completed in October 2010. The purpose of this initiative was to recommend a strategic framework for the delivery of outreach services to isolated and at risk seniors. The framework was developed through the collaborative efforts of 14 senior-serving organizations as well as representatives from the City of Edmonton and ESCC.

Each of these documents was prepared through a collaborative process that brought together a range of agencies and stakeholders in an effort to share information and define a vision for future service delivery. The primary method for developing these plans was through face-to-face meetings and workshops with additional feedback being provided through email. Each of these plans must now be operationalized so that the identified strategies may be successfully implemented within the community.

ESCC has also played an important role in the incubation and launch of the Creative Age Festival (CAF). The Creative Age Festival showcases the power of the arts as a means for older adults to express themselves in ways that lead to increased well-being, quality of life and connection with community. The Festival also celebrates the artistic accomplishments of seniors while encouraging more seniors to become involved in the arts. ESCC provided a leadership role in the establishment and development of the festival, and will continue to oversee the formation of CAF Edmonton as it evolves to become its own not-for-profit.

In 2009, ESCC co-hosted the Seniors Services Conference, a two-day event that created an opportunity for senior-serving organizations to network, learn about existing resources and discuss issues of importance to seniors and their caregivers. This event will once again be hosted by ESCC in 2012 as *Grey Matters 2012: Creating Age-Friendly Communities*.

Over the past number of years, ESCC has worked closely with the City of Edmonton on a number of initiatives that have placed an emphasis on the importance of seniors in Edmonton. The first such initiative was the development of the *Edmonton Seniors Declaration* which clearly defined City Council's commitment to seniors. The *Declaration* speaks to how seniors are valued, recognizes the contributions seniors provide and outlines how the City of Edmonton will work towards making Edmonton

more “age friendly.” Secondly, through the work of ESCC and the City of Edmonton, in 2011 Edmonton became only the fourth city in Canada to be granted membership in the World Health Organization’s Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities.

In addition to the specific documents, plans and events listed above, ESCC plays a continually active role in supporting its member organizations throughout the year. This is achieved through ongoing information sharing, networking and the availability of ESCC to respond to questions and requests for support from its member agencies. An example of the type of ongoing networking opportunities provided by ESCC are the Conversation Cafés facilitated by ESCC, most recently hosted this past summer, which bring together Board Members from ESCC members to share ideas and learn from the experience of others.

Mandate

As part of the evaluation process, stakeholders were asked to define what they saw as the mandate of the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. The most common theme, mentioned by nearly all stakeholders, was to support coordination and collaboration amongst senior-serving organizations in Edmonton. Stakeholders described the role that ESCC can play in ensuring that agencies are not duplicating services and that plans are developed to prepare for a coordinated approach to service delivery. A comment that reflects the mandate of ESCC to play a coordinating role and to facilitate collaboration was expressed as follows by an Executive Director of one of ESCC’s members:

“I believe the mandate of ESCC is to address social issues for seniors as they relate to service delivery. This is beyond the mandate of any single organization and therefore is an important function of the Council. The Council is also there to ensure that we work more collaboratively and to facilitate the discovery of efficiencies within the sector.”

Supporting networking and connecting organizations was also frequently mentioned as the mandate of ESCC by those who were interviewed as part of this evaluation. ESCC was seen as having a mandate to bring together organizations with similar interests and clients to learn from each other’s experience as well as to increase the awareness of available programs and services in the community. This aspect of the mandate is illustrated in the following comment from one of ESCC’s members:

“The ESCC is there to create opportunities to share learnings and to create a non-partisan, unbiased platform for growth.”

Most of the stakeholders who were interviewed suggested that the mandate of ESCC includes being a voice for the needs of both senior-serving organizations as well as seniors themselves. ESCC was seen by nearly all who were interviewed as having a mandate to speak on behalf of the senior-serving sector to City Council and the Government of Alberta. Many of the members with whom we spoke suggested that the presence of ESCC has raised the profile of seniors within the City of Edmonton. Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council was seen as having more clout than any individual organization and therefore better positioned to speak on behalf of the sector.

While the clear majority of agencies support ESCC acting as a voice for the sector, there were one or two exceptions who felt that they would rather speak on their own behalf than have ESCC provide that voice. It should be noted that ESCC does not claim to speak for any single agency, but rather shares the perspectives that they have heard from their collective membership.

A strong majority of the membership who provided feedback for this evaluation expressed that defining a vision for more effective service delivery was an important part of ESCC's mandate and future direction. There were, however, three agencies who suggested that ESCC should focus only on providing support to agencies and should not venture into planning efforts such as the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton*.

Over the past five years, the City of Edmonton and ESCC have worked closely on a number of strategic initiatives, with the City of Edmonton providing considerable resources in the form of funding as well as staff time and expertise. This collaboration has resulted in numerous significant accomplishments. Likely as a result of this close partnership, a perception was expressed by six respondents that the City of Edmonton, at times, has a strong influence on the direction of ESCC. Additionally, some uncertainty exists as to the specific roles that ESCC and the City of Edmonton will play with respect to implementing the various activities within the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton*. The City and ESCC will benefit from, and are in the process of, clarifying these roles while working together to define the vision of service-delivery for seniors in Edmonton.

Overall, the vast majority of those interviewed felt that ESCC was indeed meeting its mandate. Most ESCC members and partners expressed that they were very impressed with how much ESCC has been able to accomplish over the past number of years with limited resources. The manner in which ESCC has been meeting its mandate was expressed by one member as follows:

“The Council has been building relationships, establishing credibility and developing plans that, once implemented will significantly enhance the capacity of the sector.”

Capacity Building

An important goal of ESCC is to increase the capacity of its members to deliver services. The manner in which this goal is accomplished varies depending on the size and needs of individual agencies. Throughout the course of this evaluation, there were a number of tangible examples provided as to how ESCC is successfully building capacity with the sector.

To begin with, the information shared by ESCC with its members plays an important role in building organizational capacity. Examples of information that has assisted agencies in their work include the sharing of job descriptions, definitions and criteria for outreach and information about mileage reimbursement rates. Some of this information is shared through the weekly *Link-Letter* while other pieces have been shared separately as a result of requests from agencies. Information sharing is also achieved through the delivery of workshops for ESCC members on topics such as strategic planning and understanding financial statements.

A large number of agencies suggested that the awareness of their organization within the community has been enhanced through their involvement with ESCC. Through the *Link-Letter* and networking opportunities, agencies were able to get more information out about the programs that they offer without having to spend additional dollars on marketing.

The capacity of ESCC members has also been enhanced through the linkages that the Council helps form between agency staff, Executive Directors and Board Members. An example of this type of capacity building is the annual Conversation Café that ESCC facilitates which brings together Board Members from a range of ESCC members. Board Members with similar positions are able to spend time together discussing issues of shared interest and learning from the experiences of others who may be dealing with similar challenges.

Many agencies indicated that they highly valued the opportunity to come together with similar organizations to learn about their approach, services and organizational structures. The value placed upon the networking opportunities created by ESCC is illustrated in the following comment from an ESCC member:

“The networking facilitated by ESCC has allowed us to learn from the experiences of other seniors-sector agencies and apply that knowledge, as appropriate or where relevant, at our Centre.”

While ESCC is not a funding body, it was interesting to hear many agencies give ESCC credit for the increased availability of funding for seniors centres. Many described ESCC

as having raised the profile of the seniors sector, thereby leading to an increased focus on funding from the City of Edmonton. While this funding cannot be directly attributed to ESCC, it is worth noting as many agencies feel that it was a tangible way in which ESCC has increased their organizational capacity. ESCC also makes organizations aware of potential funding opportunities that they may be eligible to apply for such as foundation grants and bursaries.

The work that ESCC has led on the development of plans for future service delivery was also cited as a tangible way in which ESCC is building capacity within individual organizations. As described by one agency:

“The work ESCC did in defining outreach assisted us in clarifying our own definition of outreach. The final report helped to provide my outreach worker with a better sense of her core work. Having outreach criteria defined by ESCC was very helpful and allowed us to be more professionalized in our approach.”

The likelihood that an organization expressed that their capacity to deliver services had been enhanced by ESCC appears to be related to the overall size of the organization. While most agencies did feel that their capacity had been enhanced, this sentiment appeared to be the strongest among smaller agencies.

Not surprisingly, smaller organizations were able to more clearly articulate the ways in which ESCC has enhanced their organizational capacity. ESCC performs functions that would be beyond the scope and capacity of many of the smaller organizations who are challenged by limited resources.

Collaboration

One of the key strategic goals of ESCC is to support collaboration among senior-serving organizations in the delivery and evaluation of social and recreational programs and services. The ability to bring key stakeholders to the table to work collaboratively appears to be a strength for ESCC. Based on the strong membership base that the Council has developed, ESCC is well-positioned to pull together relevant stakeholders to discuss key issues of importance for seniors.

There have been numerous activities over the past several years that have demonstrated ESCC's ability to support collaboration. The most obvious examples of supporting collaboration are the development of the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton Action Plan*, the Core Support Services Project, Outreach Project and the Seniors Assisted Transportation Project. Each of these projects required pulling together critical partners

to discuss current and future needs of seniors and the agencies who support them within our community.

The majority of members, roughly 85%, felt that the collaborations that they were involved with were effective. Face-to-face meetings played an important role in all collaborative processes. Interviewees expressed the importance that these meetings played in providing stakeholders with an opportunity to share their ideas and discuss a range of options for providing services to seniors.

The vast majority of agencies, approximately 85%, felt that they had an opportunity to provide input into these processes and that their perspective was valued by the group. Throughout each of the processes, draft documents were shared with the group and stakeholders were able to suggest changes as necessary.

Support for the role that ESCC plays in fostering collaboration was described as follows by an agency involved in the Transportation Project:

“We all work in our own corners of the city. ESCC brought us together and it is now much more clear how to collaborate. We feel less threatened now. ESCC was able to bring us together. This process would not have happened without ESCC and we are now in a position where we can take a plan forward to City Council.”

A strength of the collaborative processes that ESCC has led has been to assist the senior-serving sector in the creation of a vision that gets beyond the collection of services that exist today. By bringing together the wisdom of key stakeholders, ESCC has supported the development of a broader, coordinated vision of how to meet the needs of seniors moving forward. Additionally, several interviewees expressed that through working collaboratively, there is now a more informed group of Executive Directors within the sector who have increased knowledge of issues, needs and available services for seniors. As described by an ESCC member:

“We have been able to bring the major service delivery partners to the table. There is a lot of brainpower that we have been able to harness for the good of seniors.”

An ongoing challenge in any collaborative effort is to balance the needs of individual agencies with those of the sector as a whole and the seniors who receive services. ESCC has played an important role in helping agencies look at the bigger picture of how agencies can work collaboratively to meet the needs of seniors in Edmonton. As one Executive Director, speaking specifically regarding the Outreach Project described:

“The process went very well. It helped us to identify challenges and assisted agencies in seeing opportunities for growth. The process simply

wouldn't have happened without the Coordinating Council. We are now less territorial as a sector. ESCC has allowed that to happen."

It appears that one of the challenges with respect to collaboration is the tension that exists between a small number of ESCC members. This tension appears to arise with respect to differing opinions on who should deliver services and take leadership roles within specific service delivery areas. The fact that these tensions exist is not a reflection on the leadership of ESCC, but rather, a common occurrence in the collaborative process. What will be important for ESCC is to continue to play a role in ensuring that these issues are discussed in a timely manner to ensure that momentum is not lost.

While a large majority of stakeholders appear to be pleased with the collaborative processes that ESCC has facilitated, three agencies expressed a concern that not all options were fully explored. While this perception was not predominant, it will be important in moving forward to ensure that all stakeholders feel that their ideas have been heard and ESCC will need to ensure that the plans that have been developed have the support of all partners.

While collaboration is not without its challenges, ESCC has done a good job of bringing agencies together to work on issues of shared interest. Without an organization such as ESCC, it is unlikely that plans could have been pulled together around areas such as outreach, transportation and core support services that would have reflected the range of knowledge and expertise that exists within our community.

Information Sharing

One of the strongest areas of consensus amongst the stakeholders that were interviewed was around the sharing of relevant information by Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council. Nearly every agency who we spoke with expressed a great deal of appreciation for the information that is collected and shared by ESCC in the form of the weekly *Link-Letter*.

Those who we spoke to suggested that there would be no way for them to stay on top of important community information on their own and they therefore greatly valued the service that ESCC provides in compiling and distributing this information. The appreciation for the information-sharing function of ESCC was expressed often by members and is summarized well through the following comment from an ESCC member:

“The weekly Link Letter is the best example of [ESCC providing relevant information]. We would not know about much of this information if it wasn't provided by ESCC.”

Additional Benefits

As part of the evaluation, ESCC members were asked to identify what they see as the main benefits of the Council. In addition to previously discussed aspects such as information sharing, capacity building and collaboration, a number of other themes also emerged.

One of the main benefits identified was the ability of ESCC to look at the “bigger picture” with respect to seniors in Edmonton. ESCC is able to look at the needs of Edmonton as a whole while the majority of seniors centres are primarily geographically focused. One Executive Director expressed gratitude for this “big picture” focus as her involvement with ESCC provided her with the knowledge that she needed to articulate the larger issues to her Board of Directors.

ESCC is also well-positioned to take on projects that are beyond the scope of a single agency. While the benefits of developing a shared services model for transportation of seniors, as an example, are far reaching, it is unlikely that an individual agency would take on the task of developing such a plan for the entire community as it would be beyond their scope or capacity. ESCC has been able to take a leadership and facilitation role in pulling together several plans that will address the needs of seniors in Edmonton.

A further benefit identified through our evaluation is ESCC’s ability to bring agencies and stakeholders together to work for the betterment of seniors. ESCC is largely perceived as a neutral party and therefore, as direct service delivery is not part of their mandate, are able to facilitate discussions and information sharing without self-interest being a motivating factor. As described by one of ESCC’s funders:

“ESCC serves as a sort of backbone for the seniors sector. There are so many varied senior centres and ESCC is able to help bring them together and provide the support that they require in developing plans for moving forward.”

Several agencies also spoke to the credibility that ESCC brings to the seniors sector in general. Partners such as the City of Edmonton view ESCC as a key sounding board that is in touch with the needs of senior-serving organizations as well as seniors in general. Due to their membership in the Council, agencies are able to position themselves as part of a larger sector. Doing so allows agencies to justify the work and the direction that they

are undertaking as it aligns with the work of ESCC. This sentiment was illustrated by the following comment from an Executive Director:

“ESCC has provided me the opportunity to meet my counterparts. Being part of ESCC has allowed us to position ourselves as part of a sector.”

Finally, the information that ESCC is able to gather through its research and needs analysis is critical for planning future service delivery to meet the needs of a growing seniors population. The information that ESCC pulls together has been utilized by a number of stakeholders including ESCC members, the City of Edmonton and other funders to assist in the development of strategic plans for the coming years as demonstrated by the following comment:

“The work of ESCC has included events to highlight pilot project findings and reports that are available for the community to read and download. The information is timely and helps us make decisions in our work with seniors.”

Challenges Moving Forward

Interviewees were asked to identify what they see as the greatest challenge for ESCC moving forward. Overwhelmingly, a key concern from members is the ability of ESCC to carry on a range of projects with limited resources. While the work accomplished to date has been considerable, taking several of the plans to the next phase will likely require additional resources if it is to be successful. A recent funding contribution by the City of Edmonton is expected to assist ESCC in moving several key plans forward over the coming years.

Related to the resource challenge is taking the work that has already been completed on plans such as the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton* and the *Core Community Support Project* and moving to the implementation plans. Each of these plans was completed over one year ago and there is an expectation and desire to see the work move forward.

A specific challenge with respect to the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton Action Plan* will be to clarify what exactly ESCC’s role will be. ESCC has been identified as the lead partner for numerous pieces of the plan and there is a need to define exactly what being the lead partner means. A number of varying perspectives were expressed as to ESCC’s specific role including: making the plan happen, facilitating meetings and acting as a liaison or conducting an audit of what steps of the plan have been completed and reporting this information back to City Council.

Providing leadership to a diverse group of agencies has also been identified as a challenge moving forward. There have been occasions over the past few years where ESCC and a small number of its members are not speaking with a unified voice and this leads to considerable challenges in implementing the various plans. While it is not realistic to expect that everyone will agree on all decisions, it will be important to make decisions that all partners are willing to accept and support moving forward.

Continuing to strengthen the level of engagement from the ESCC Board of Directors was also mentioned as an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of the Council. Identifying the strengths that various Board members bring and subsequently utilizing their skills appropriately will allow ESCC to maximize its effectiveness in the coming years. As new Board Members are brought on, it will be important to examine the composition of the Board so as to ensure that a variety of skill sets and strategic connections are represented.

Future Direction

Members and stakeholders were asked through interviews and the online survey to indicate what they felt should be the main focus of ESCC moving forward. The vast majority of responses indicated a desire for ESCC to continue with the work that is already underway. Most respondents are quite happy with the direction of the Council, the actions that it has taken over the past number of years, and would like to see the work continue.

There is strong support for a focus on building the capacity of senior-serving organizations to work closely together in the planning and delivery of services. Specific actions for building capacity that were identified include information sharing, developing continued opportunities for networking and sharing promising practices among agencies.

Playing a role in the implementation of the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton Action Plan* was identified by a substantial number of stakeholders as a key activity for the Council in the coming years. The nature of the role that ESCC should play, however, will require clarification as there are differences amongst partners as to what ESCC's involvement should look like.

Specific comments that were reflective of the overall view regarding the future direction of ESCC and the role that it can play in addressing the needs of seniors moving forward included the following:

- *Continue to facilitate opportunities for collaboration and strive to bring new partners into the work being undertaken.*

- *Continue to share information to support the work of agencies and community partners.*
- *Represent the interests of Seniors Centres as well as look at the role that Seniors Centres can play in creating an age-friendly community.*
- *Assist in the implementation of the Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton. I don't mean that they have to do it all themselves, but rather facilitate the process of making things happen.*
- *I think they can serve a liaison or facilitator role. They are well-positioned to bring together agencies, non-profits and government bodies to help those groups address their needs.*
- *ESCC should continue to take on a coordination and leadership role in implementing the plans that have been developed for Edmonton's seniors.*
- *Continue to provide support to the smaller organizations and identify opportunities for possible partnerships.*
- *Explore the implications of providing services to a new generation of seniors (e.g. Baby Boomers).*
- *Prioritize what can be accomplished with the Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton. Determine who takes the lead, how to best engage the community and how to engage agencies in their success.*
- *Continue to model and facilitate effective collaboration within the sector.*

Section 3: Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Define and articulate the mandate of Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council.

While several points of agreement exist regarding ESCC's mandate, specifically the support that is offered to senior-serving agencies, there were a small number of agencies who were uncertain as to the role that ESCC should play in the development and implementation of service-delivery plans. As this is likely to be a main focus of ESCC's efforts over the coming years, it will be important to define ESCC's role in consultation with the membership and strategic partners of the Council. It will be critical to engage ESCC members and stakeholders in a discussion of the mandate moving forward and a communications strategy should be developed to ensure a common understanding of the agreed upon mandate.

It is further recommended that a discussion about the roles and expectation of ESCC members be included in any conversations surrounding the mandate of ESCC. Successful collaboration requires not only continued leadership from ESCC but also the ongoing support of ESCC members. Individual members can have a tremendous impact on the outcome of ESCC's work and their roles must therefore be included in a conversation around ESCC's mandate.

Recommendation #2: Ensure that members have a solid understanding of the actions that ESCC is currently undertaking.

Through the process of gathering information for this evaluation, it became apparent that there are several members who do not feel they have a solid understanding of the activities that ESCC is currently undertaking. While ESCC activities are highlighted at the beginning of each *Link-Letter*, it is recommended that ESCC seeks additional ways of sharing updates about their activities. This could include enhancements to the ESCC website, specific email updates dedicated exclusively to ESCC news or an increased focus on ESCC updates at Executive Director meetings.

Recommendation #3: Develop Implementation Plans for the Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton, Outreach, Transportation and Core Support Services Plans.

Now that plans have been developed, it will be critical to take what has been developed and prepare plans for implementation. An initial step in the development of implementation plans will be to bring stakeholders together to confirm the plans that have been identified.

As mentioned previously, it will be critical to define the specific role that ESCC will play with respect to the implementation of the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton*, recognizing the resource limitations that may exist. ESCC will need to work closely with the City of Edmonton on this initiative as many of the goals and activities will require the support and commitment of several City departments.

Recommendation #4: Clarify and articulate the relationship between ESCC and the City of Edmonton.

The relationship between the City of Edmonton and ESCC requires clarification and communication to ESCC members and partners. Specifically as it relates to the implementation of the *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton*, it will be important to have clarity on the functions that ESCC and City of Edmonton staff will play in moving the Action Plan forward.

Recommendation #5: Increase the frequency and/or regularity of Executive Director and shared Board of Director meetings.

Given the value placed upon networking opportunities by the stakeholders of ESCC, it is recommended that a quarterly schedule for Executive Director meetings be developed and adhered to. There was a perception from several members who were interviewed that the frequency of Executive Director meetings has reduced and they would like to get back to regular meetings.

Recommendation #6: Address issues of tension between ESCC members.

While it is not the responsibility of ESCC to act as a mediator, the reality is that the conflicts that exist between a small number of agencies has the potential to substantially impact the implementation of several important pieces of work. As part of the implementation plans for these projects, it is suggested that time be dedicated to the development of proactive strategies which support consensus building between ESCC members.

Section 4: Summary

Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council continues to play an extremely valuable role within the seniors sector in Edmonton. As demonstrated through its key accomplishments and based on feedback from ESCC members and stakeholders, ESCC is successfully meeting its mandate of facilitating collaboration within the sector and enhancing the capacity of organizations to deliver services.

The *Vision for an Age-Friendly Edmonton* will be a critical document in defining the work of the Council over the coming years. ESCC has been identified as the lead partner for several key goals and activities. Given the importance of this plan and the reality of limited resources, ESCC will need to spend time defining what is realistic in terms of its leadership to this project.

The role that ESCC plays in bringing together agencies to coordinate service delivery remains an important function of the Council. ESCC has the ability to focus on the big picture for seniors in Edmonton and is therefore well-positioned to facilitate discussions between key stakeholders as they relate to the development of a system of service delivery within our community. While collaborative efforts are not without their challenges, there is no question that ESCC has been critical in bringing together key partners to plan for the future.

The capacity of senior-serving agencies in Edmonton has clearly been enhanced through the work of ESCC. Through the dissemination of information, development of networking opportunities and ongoing support provided by ESCC, agencies are better positioned to effectively deliver services to seniors. ESCC remains a valuable resource both to agencies as well as partners such as the City of Edmonton and United Way of the Alberta Capital Region through its leadership, support and direction.

To ensure their continued effectiveness, a number of recommendations have been suggested. These include taking time to define and clearly articulate the ESCC mandate, developing implementation strategies for key plans and addressing the tension that exists between a small number of ESCC members. By taking these actions, ESCC will

continue to play an important role in supporting the work of senior-serving organizations and supporting the vision of Edmonton as an age-friendly community.

Appendix A – List of Organizations Interviewed

As part of this evaluation, interviews were conducted with the following organizations:

Alberta Caregivers Association
Central Lions Seniors Association
Calder Seniors Drop In Society
City of Edmonton
Edmonton Lifelong Learners Association
Edmonton Meals on Wheels
Edmonton Seniors Centre
Mill Woods Seniors Centre
Multicultural Health Brokers
North Edmonton Seniors Association
Operation Friendship Seniors Society
Seniors Assisted Transportation Society
Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)
Society of Seniors Caring About Seniors
South East Edmonton Seniors Association
Southwest Seniors Outreach Society
United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
West End Seniors Activity Centre

In addition, one individual member and a representative of Edmonton City Council were interviewed. Twenty-one responses were also received through an online survey that was sent out to all ESCC members.

Appendix B – Interview Questions

1. Tell us about your involvement with ESCC.
2. What do you see as the mandate of ESCC?
3. To what extent do you feel ESCC is meeting its mandate?
4. What do you see as the main benefits of ESCC?
5. What function of ESCC do you value the most?
6. In what ways do you see ESCC contributing to the vision of an age friendly community?
7. How has your involvement with ESCC impacted the work being done by your organization?
8. In what ways has the capacity of your organization to deliver services been impacted by ESCC?
9. Please tell us about a collaboration that you have been involved with through ESCC? What worked well? How could it have been improved?
10. What would you like to see improved about how ESCC operates?
11. What do you see as the major challenges for ESCC moving forward?
12. To what extent do you feel that you have a voice within ESCC?
13. What do you feel should be the main focus of ESCC moving forward?
14. What impact do you think ESCC can have in addressing the changing needs of seniors over the coming decade?
15. To what extent do you feel that you receive relevant information from ESCC?
16. Additional comments?

Appendix C – Respondents to Online Survey

An online survey soliciting feedback regarding the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council was sent by email to the entire ESCC Membership List which includes members, associate members and individuals. A total of 21 responses were received from the following agencies:

Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories

The Arthritis Society

CARP Edmonton

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association - Edmonton Branch

Catholic Social Services

Central Lions Seniors Association

Edmonton Seniors Centre

Edmonton Seniors Slo Pitch Association

Ital-Canadian Seniors Association

Parkinson Alberta Society

SAGE

S.C.O.N.A Seniors Center

South East Edmonton Seniors Association

South-West Seniors Outreach Society

Strathcona Place

St. Albert Family and Community Support Services

University of Alberta

West End Seniors Activity Centre

Additional responses did not indicate the name of the organization.