



Edmonton Seniors Home Supports Program

2020 Evaluation Report

JANUARY 2021

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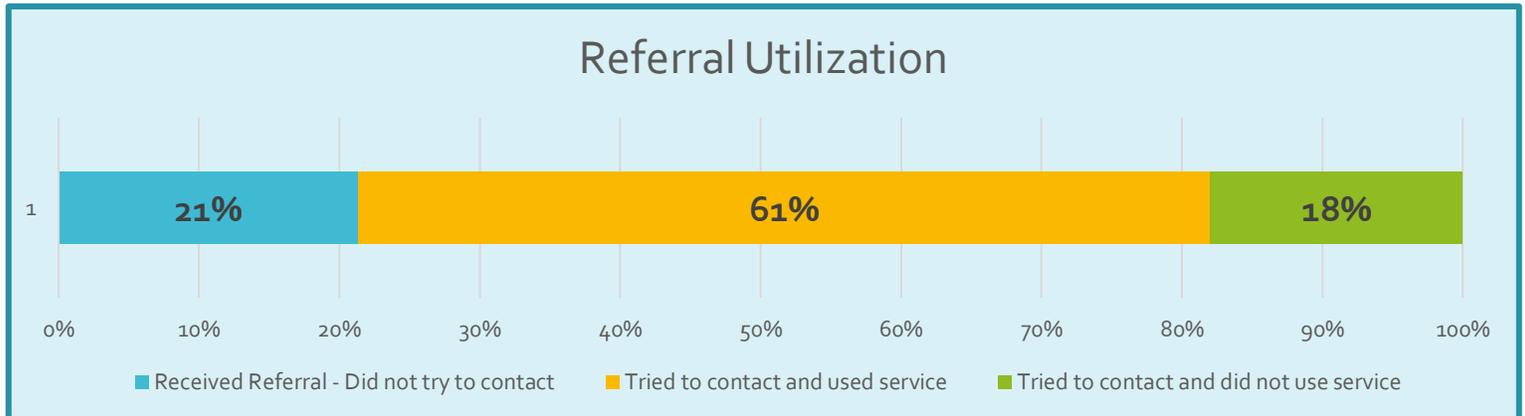
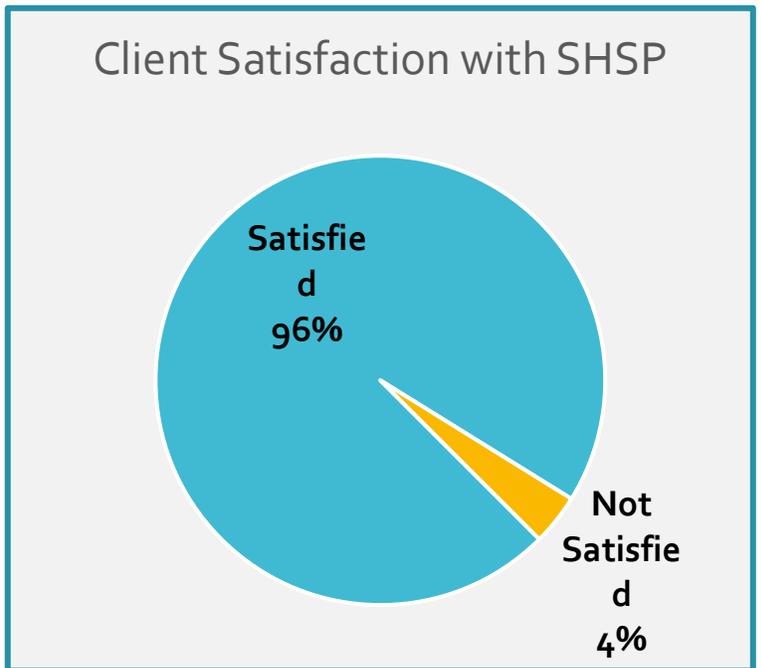
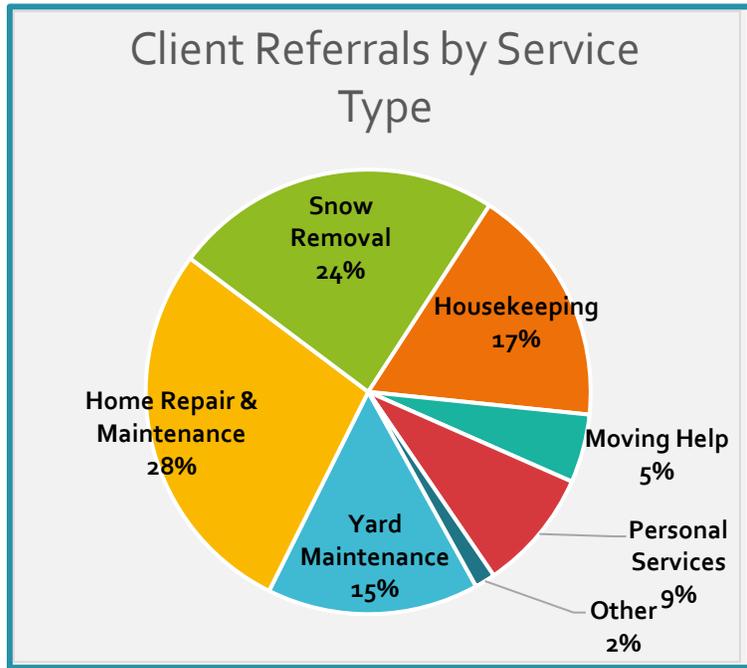
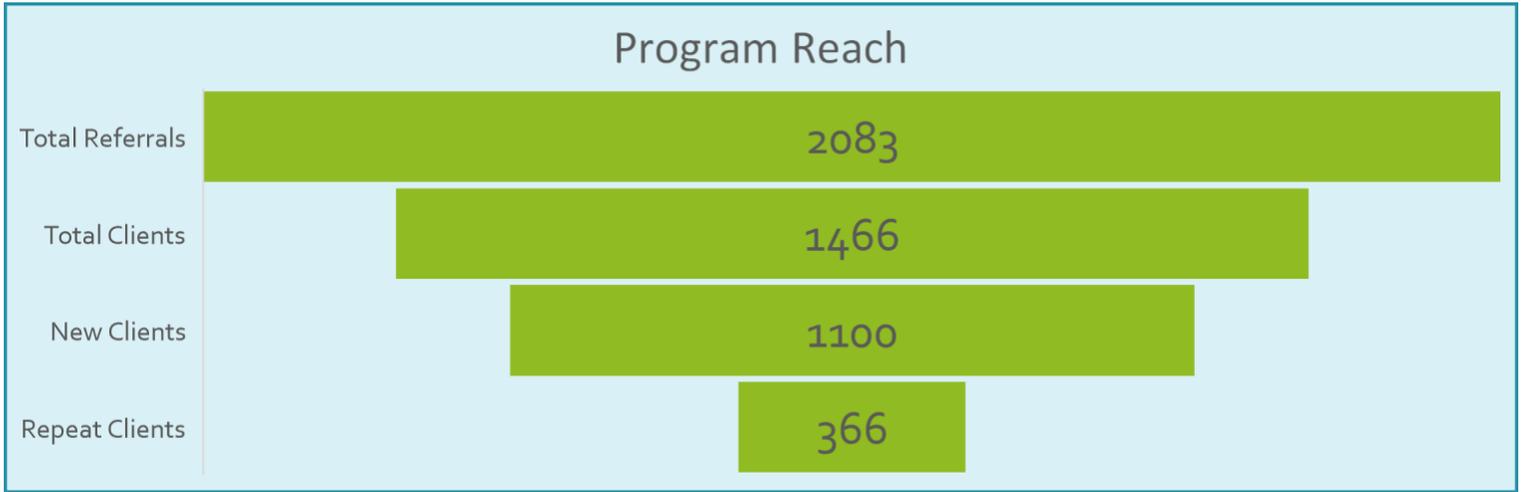


KRD Consulting Group

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Year at a Glance



Summary

In March 2020, the province of Alberta began to see the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the middle of the month the province was in lockdown and everyone had to adapt to a new reality. Older adults became a high-risk group with increased vulnerability to the virus. As an older adult serving program, Edmonton Seniors Home Supports adapted and showed resilience through the 2020 calendar year.

These societal shifts contributed to a decrease across total intakes, new clients, and referrals. 2020 saw 1466 unique clients served compared to the 1940 individuals in 2019. There was 32% decrease in new clients from 1633 in 2019 to 1100 in 2020 and a 21% decrease in referrals from 2647 in 2019 to 2083 in 2020. However, program utilization for repeat clients grew by 19% this year, from 307 in 2019 to 366 in 2020.

Apart from external turbulence, SHSP also experienced staff turnover and the addition of two new coordinators in 2020. Despite adapting to a new role and mitigating the challenges of navigating a pandemic, the program staff were able to complete the onboarding process and succeed in their positions. This is a clear reflection of internal stability and program maturity. Although there was an increased demand for tech supports and service shifts due to COVID-19 implications, the broad service types offered by SHSP remained consistent throughout the full year. The maintenance of overall stability while shifting to meet the needs of a constantly changing world indicates the relevance and growth of SHSP. From the service perspective, the program continued to solidify its relevance in terms of demographics. The clientele remains overwhelmingly female-identifying, with the largest age category being above 80, 36% identifying as low income, and 59% living alone. Across these various demographic categories, population statistics continued the trend of previous years.

Calendar year 2020 was the fifth year of the program's operation. Despite internal and external changes, it was clear the collaborative program has matured and is able to show resilience through trying times. This year's evaluation included a deeper look into shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that an increased amount of emotional labour was required to support older adults through the mental health and loneliness components of the pandemic, and more time was spent following up with service providers and clients to ensure the program was best serving Edmonton's older adult population. Learnings from the pandemic should be embedded into the program model moving forward.

Findings and Discussion

The questions that guided the current evaluation parallel the previous years', with the noted addition of highlighting changes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting five evaluation questions are as follows:

1. *Who are the clients?*
2. *Who are the Service Providers?*
3. *How is the program being used?*
4. *What are the outcomes?*
5. *How did the program and coordinators roles shift amidst the pandemic?*

Each question is addressed in turn in this section. The report is structured similarly to previous evaluation reports, in order to facilitate easy comparison.

Who are the clients?

In 2020, 1100 intakes were recorded in the system, along with 366 repeat clients. These 1466 unique individuals received a total of 2083 referrals to Home Support Service Providers. These numbers show a decrease compared to 2019, which was likely contributed to by the pandemic.

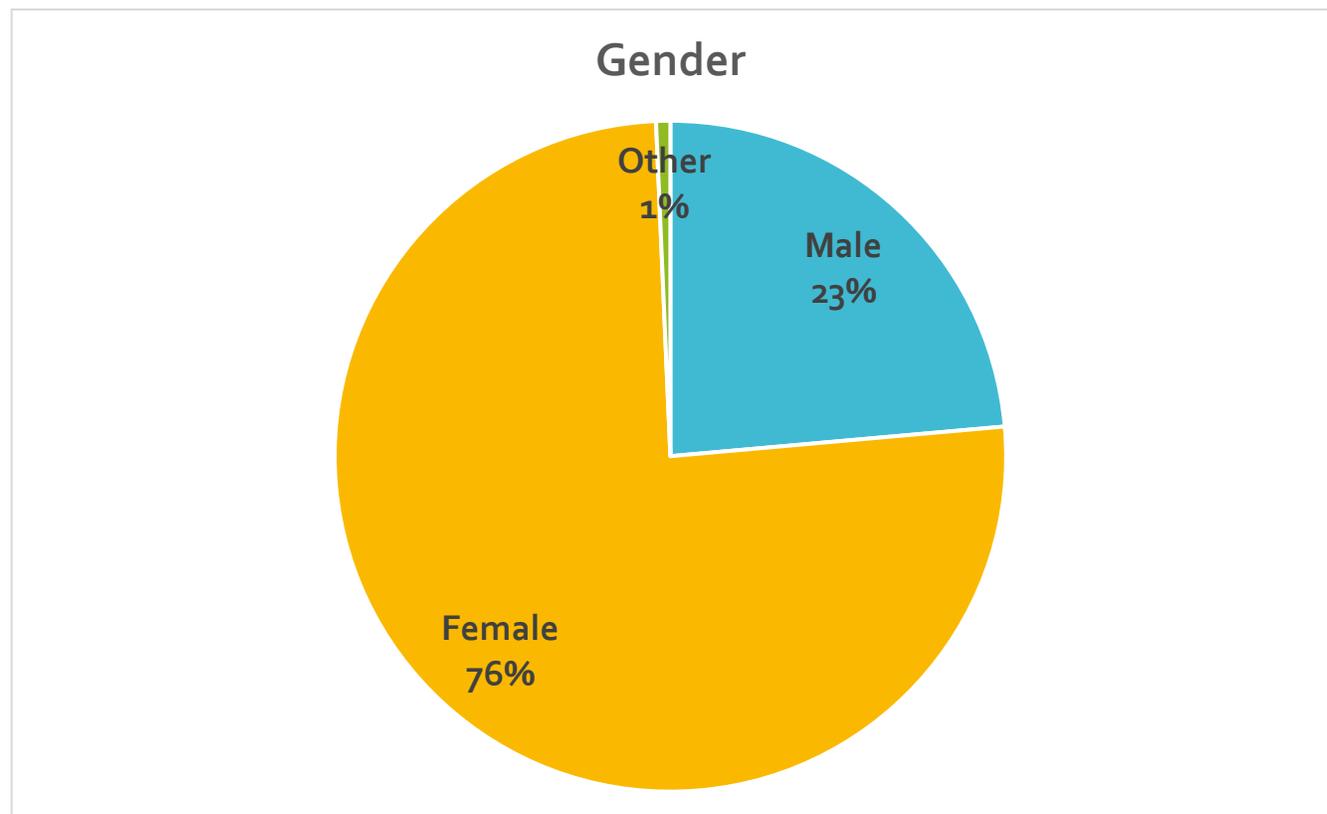
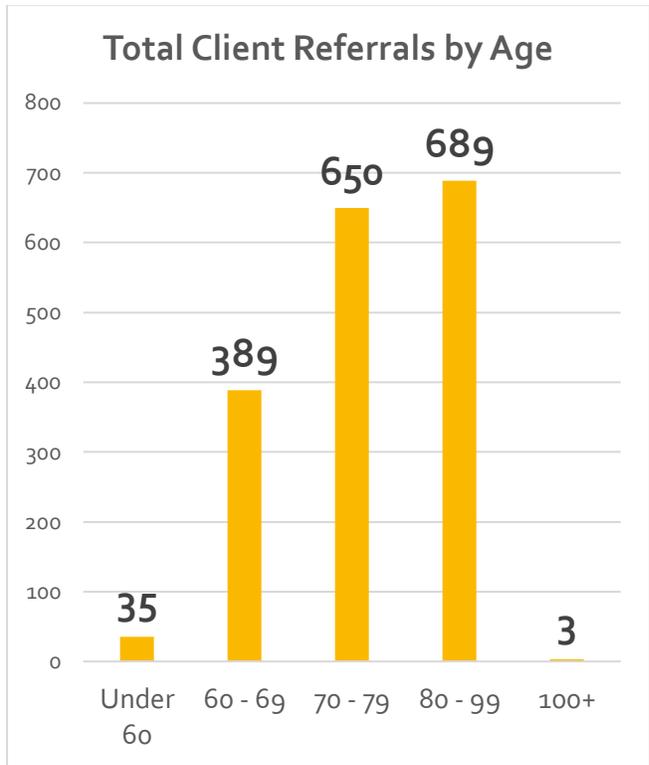
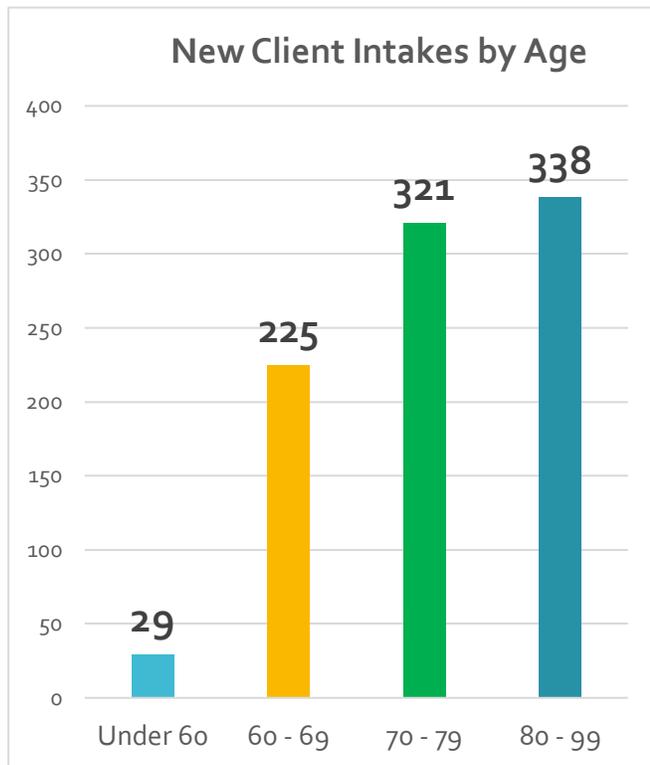
Over the course of its history, the SHSP program has now provided services to 6525 of Edmonton's seniors. Before the pandemic, these numbers were recording higher intake numbers in each of its years in operation. Despite a year-over-year decrease, the ability of the program to maintain high service numbers in 2020 while working with a high-risk population should be an indicator of the relevance and need of the program within community.



Age and Gender

The program has reached stability in regard to the demographic characteristics of its clientele. Client demographics for both age and gender have stabilized. The client cohort remains approximately 3/4

female at 76% in 2020, and the 80+ age group retains its plurality with approximately 37% of clients (which is the same as in 2019). Clients aged 70+ represent 72% of the people served.



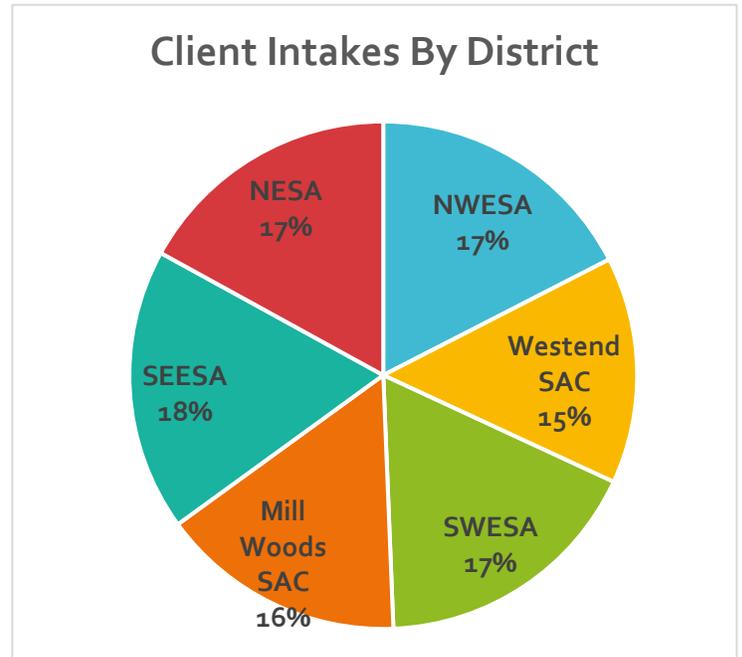
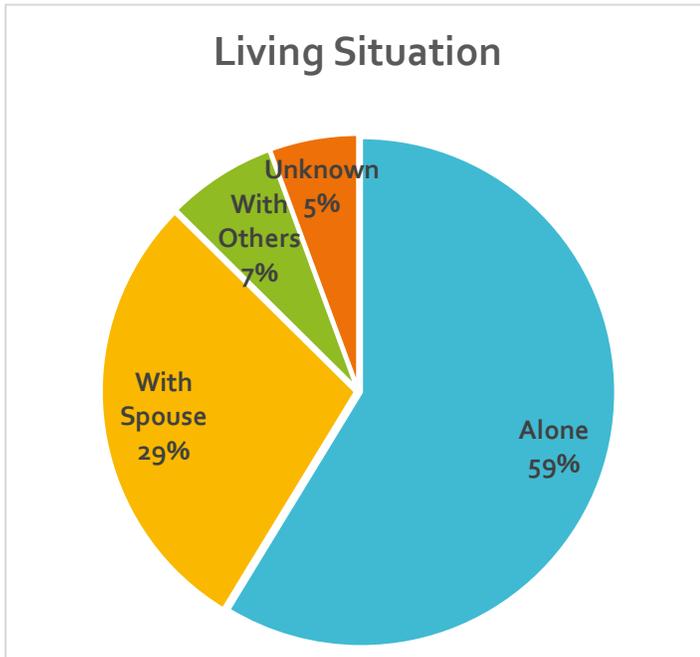
Socio-Economic Status

In 2020, SHSP service coordinators continued to provide services to all seniors who expressed interest. The program does not have a means-testing component and participation is not limited by socio-economic status. However, as financial insecurity is a significant barrier to service access, SHSP retains its strategic focus on providing appropriate services to low-income individuals. In 2020, 36% of those served reported being low-income. 2020 saw a 10% of clients 'unassessed' compared to 19% in 2019. This decrease is positive in ensuring the data tells the complete story.



Program coordinators noted that they found finance to be a significant barrier for seniors to access the supports they required. Finding enough low-cost options in various service categories is a continuing challenge for the program coordinators. Although the portion of low-income clients decreased slightly, the general turmoil in 2020 may have added financial pressures or stress across multiple socio-economic strata. It was noted by the coordinators that service providers, specifically housekeeping services, raised their prices to adhere to additional PPE requirements. There was also a greater demand for some services, which allowed providers to increase prices. Furthermore, several providers which had been offering services at no charge became unavailable during the course of the shutdown.

Living Situation and Geography



Staying consistent with previous years, 2020 saw a majority of clients living alone (59%). This was followed by 29% who resided with a spouse, 7% who resided with others, and 5% whose living situation was unknown.

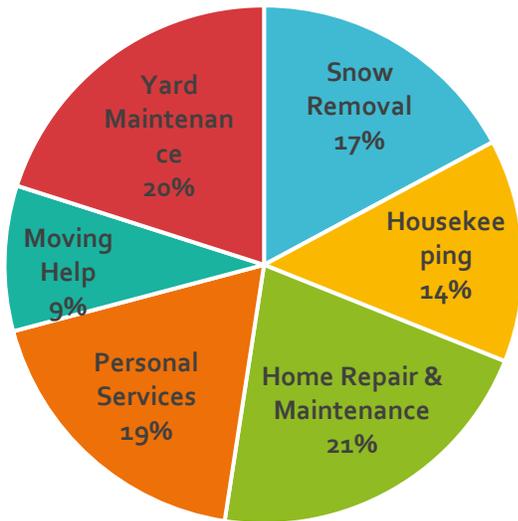
SHSP services continue to be used across the City, with nearly even intake numbers across all 6 service districts, ranging from 15% to 18% with 17% being the most common percentage of intakes for districts.

The stability of geographic distribution in light of changing total intakes speaks both to the broad-based relevance of the program and to the effectiveness of locally-situated services across the six districts.

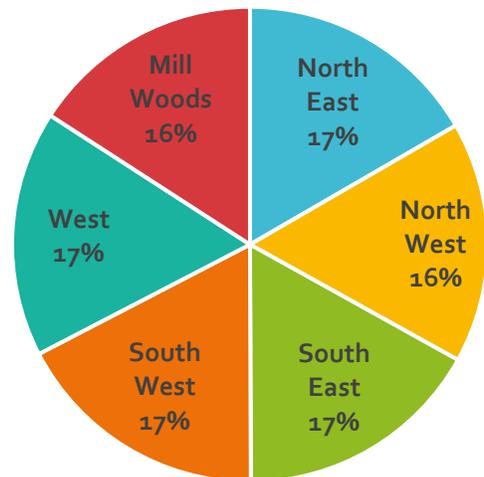
Who are the Service Providers?

191 Service Providers were screened or re-screened in 2020, showing a slight increase from 184 in 2019. However, the number of providers able to receive referrals was at 135, compared to 147 in 2019.

Service Type and Availability



Service Providers by Area Availability



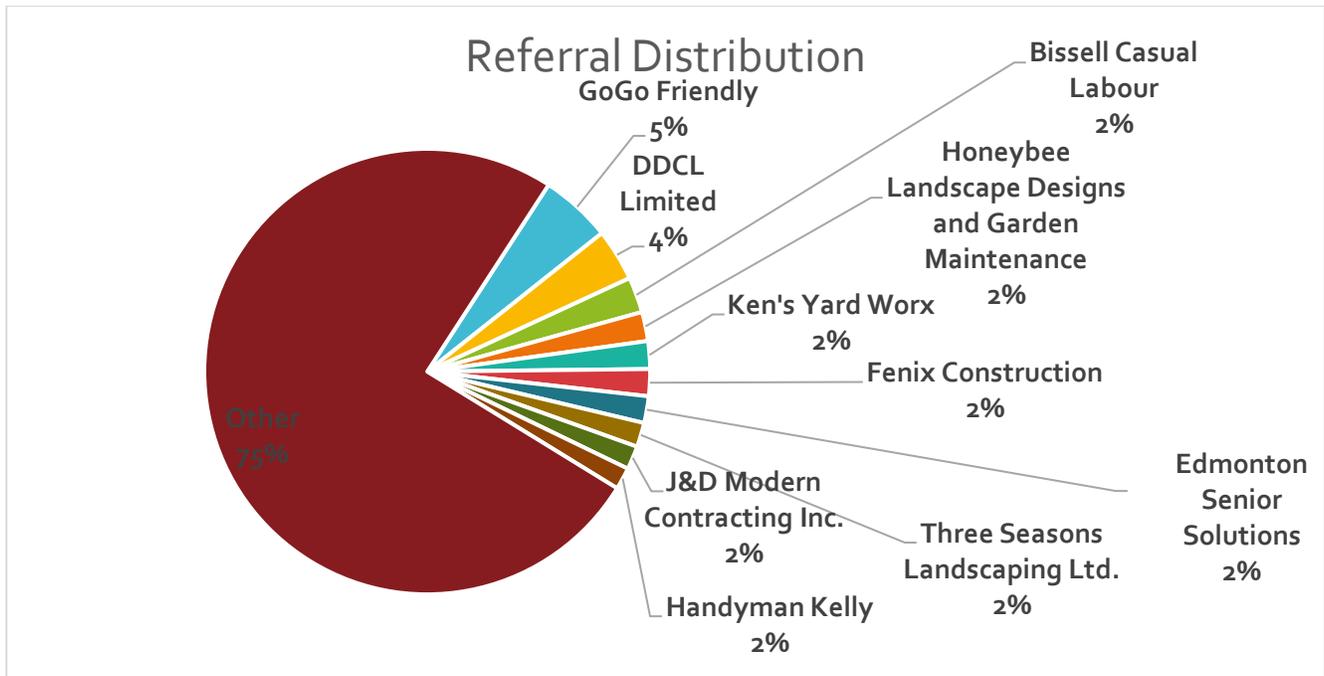
Service Providers continue to be spread evenly among geographic areas served, with a decrease in “Home Repair & Maintenance” (from 28% in 2019 to 19% in 2020). These changes showcase program responsiveness and adaptation to changing community needs during the pandemic.

2020 saw an increased amount of time spent dedicated to contacting service providers. With societal changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinators needed to regularly follow up with service providers to ensure they were open, following safety recommendations, and maintaining advertised prices.

With the pandemic, there was an increased number of providers looking to support seniors and inquiring about the onboarding process. Unfortunately, many of the small companies lacked the administrative time and resources to complete the screening. The barrier to onboarding has been discussed with coordinators and ways to ensure older adults have access to the best and most affordable service providers is being further looked into as part of program continuous improvement for 2021.

A noted shift regarding referral distribution is the increased number of referrals to a select few service providers. In 2019, the top 10 service providers ranged from between 1% and 2% of referrals; 2020 saw this increased to 4-5%. This was attributed to an increased number of clients looking for tech support, which was available through the top few providers.

This indicates a trend that may continue in future years. Nevertheless, the system illustrated its capacity to make referrals that are responsive to client needs.



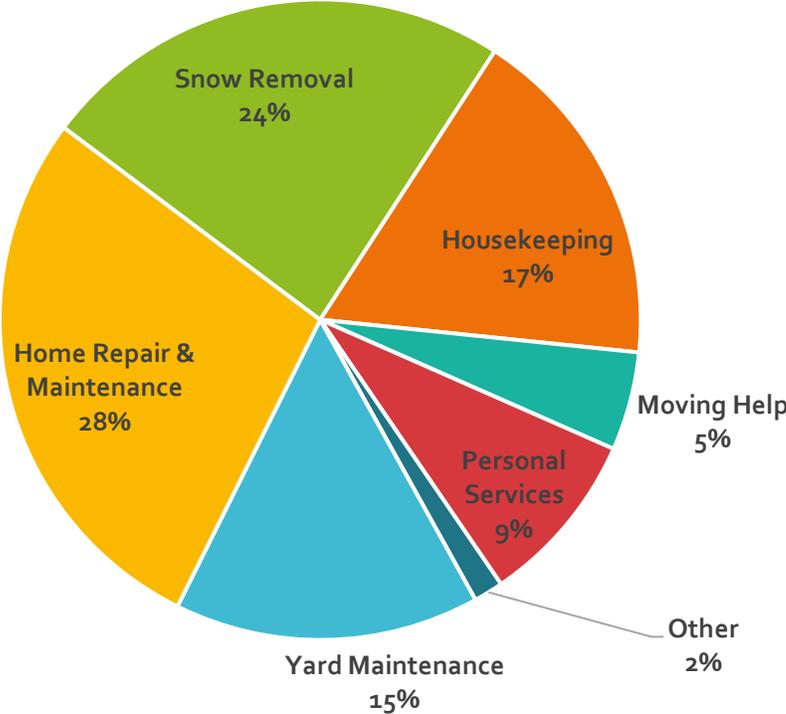
How is the program being used?

Service Category Relevance

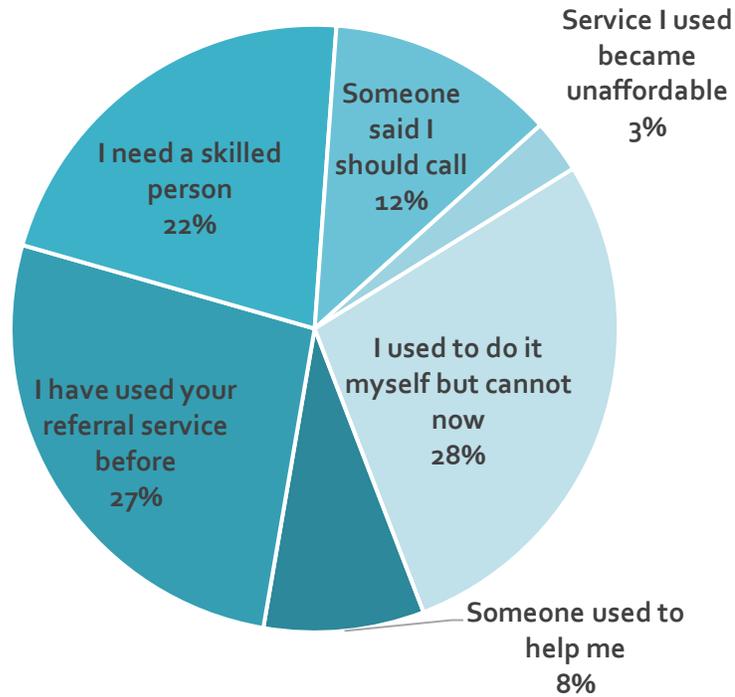
Mimicking 2019, the Service Categories have remained unchanged over the course of the year and were directly relevant in 98.5% of referrals. The six current categories are: Yard Maintenance, Snow Removal, Home Repair & Maintenance, Housekeeping, Personal Services and Moving Help. When a referral is made that does not fit into one of the main categories, it is marked as “Other”. “Other” referrals comprised 26% of all referrals in 2017, 8% in 2018, 3% in 2019, and just 2% in 2020. This movement represents a consistency of service and, in parallel, a clarity of community expectations.

Seasonal services (Snow Removal and Yard Maintenance) accounted for a combined 39% of referrals (no change from 2019), and “in-home” services (Home Repair & Maintenance and Housekeeping) for a combined 45%. These totals were not significantly different from the previous year. However, the coordinators noted an increased number of requests surrounding tech support, as COVID-19 increased reliance on virtual platforms for connection and socialization.

Client Referrals by Service Type



Client Motivation for Calling

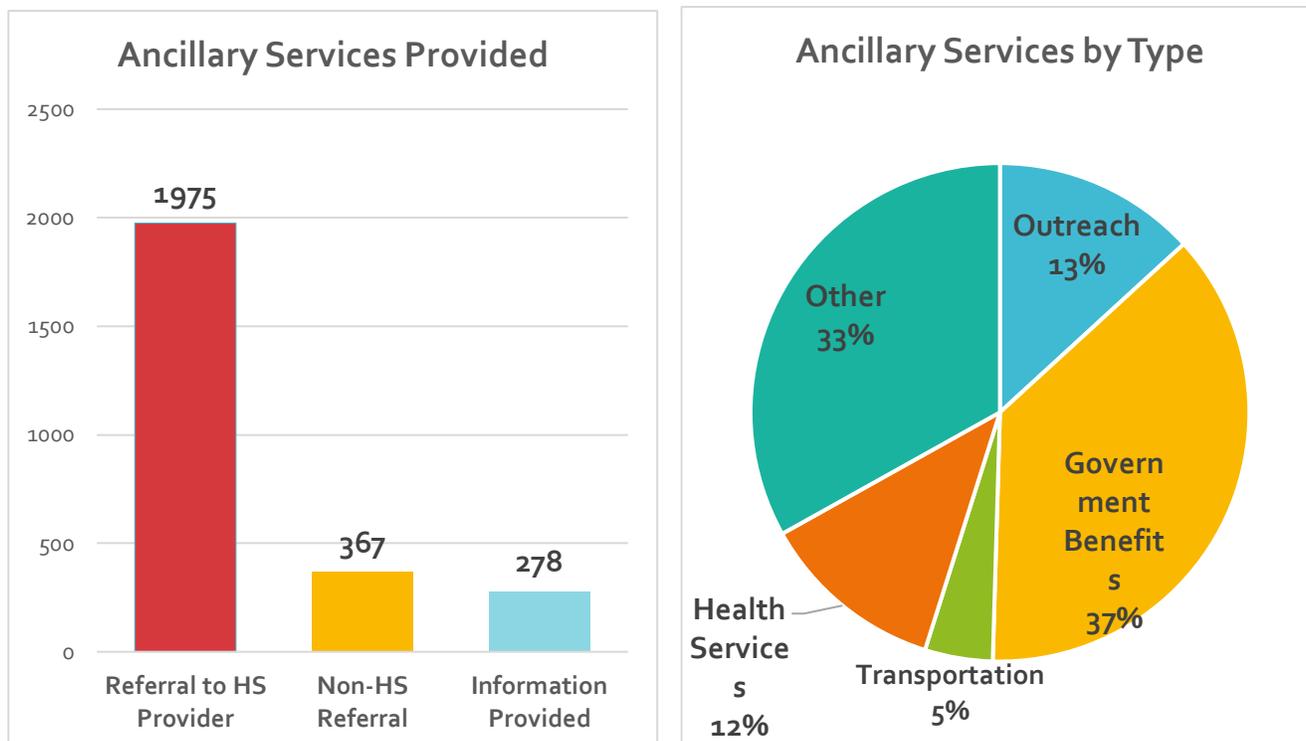


Meeting Client Needs

With 27% of clients noting they had used SHSPs referral service before (up 4% from last year), it is evident that the program is becoming a trusted resource within the broader system of services and supports for older adults in Edmonton. Motivation for calling remains varied; for the second year in a row there is a very limited number of callers reporting a financial barrier as a reason for the call. Most callers reported that they used to do it themselves but are now unable. Nevertheless, the high percentage of repeat clients indicates the effectiveness and success of the program.

Integration and System Navigation

SHSP continued to act as a gatekeeper for its clients in 2020, providing 367 non-SHSP referrals (down slightly from 383 in 2019). Instances of providing information (without a referral) to callers continued to decrease from 780 in 2018, to 395 in 2019, to 278 in 2020. Ancillary services shifted from a majority being outreach in 2019, to a majority being government benefits in 2020 (at 37% compared to 28% in 2019). This aligns with the greater context of the year, with new government supports emerging in response to the pandemic and therefore an increased need for system navigation assistance. The



‘other’ category represents food services/shop-for-you services, community leagues, and particular services such as tax clinics, financial resources, digital services/supports and housing.

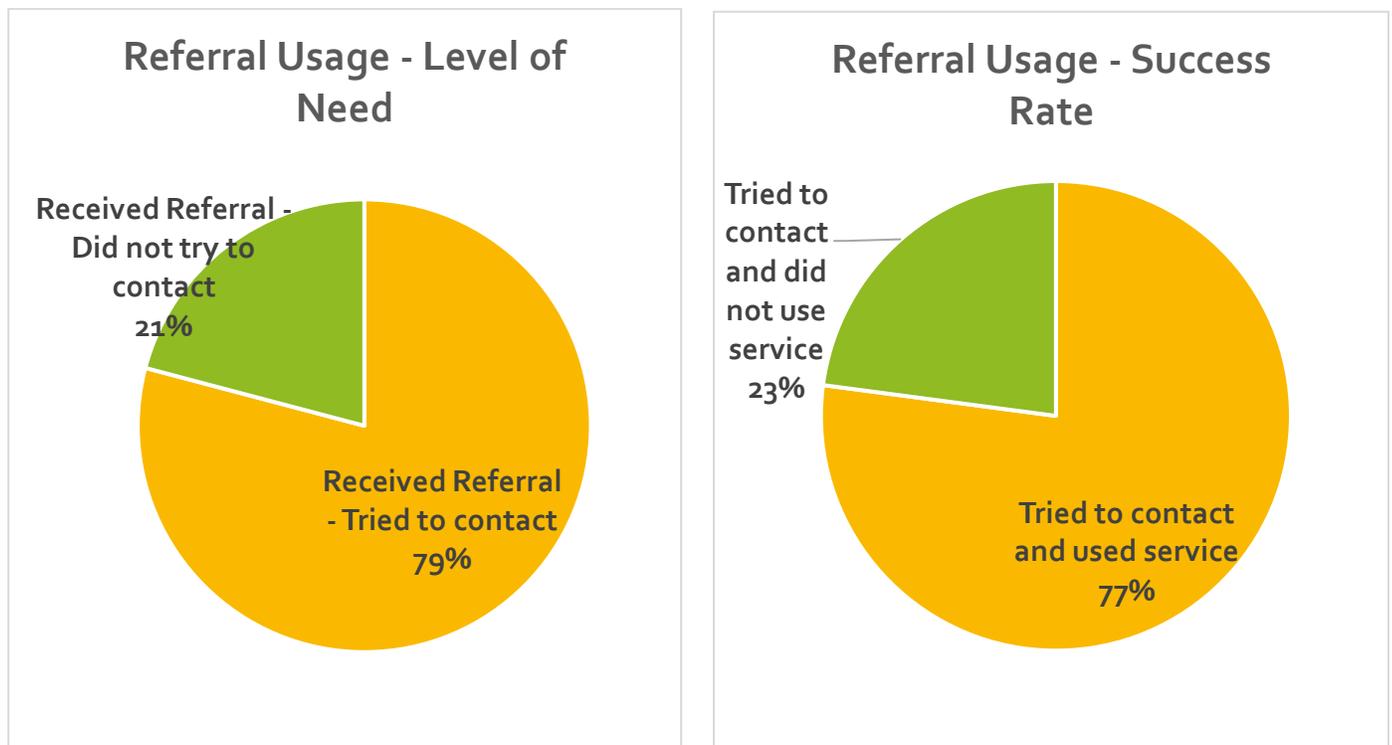
What are the outcomes?

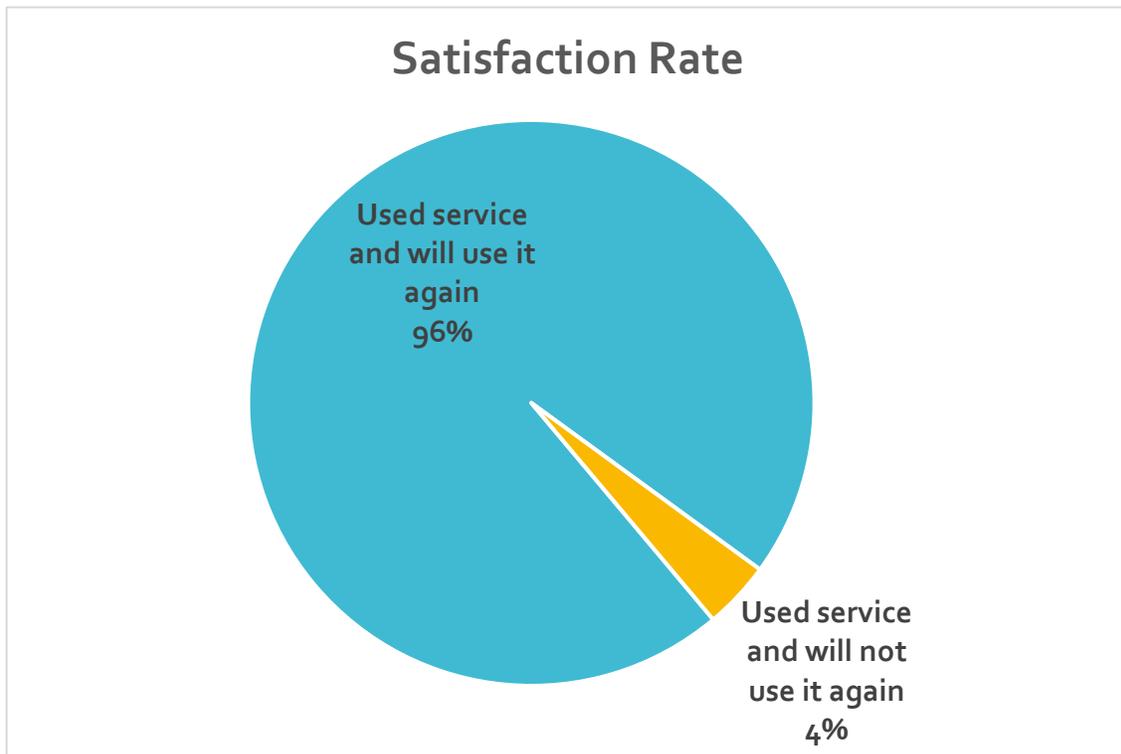
Service Utilization

Paralleling last years evaluation, service usage was measured along three stages of a client’s journey with SHSP. Clients “Level of Need” is assessed through looking at the percentage of referral-receiving clients who attempted to contact a service provider. The “Success Rate” is analyzed through looking at the percentage of those who used the service out of those who attempted to contact a provider. Lastly, the “Satisfaction” rate is measured by the percent of clients who used the service and intend on using the same provider again.

Of the three stages in the client journey, SHSP is most able to influence the “Success Rate”. While making relevant referrals increases the likelihood that clients make a call to a service provider (“Level of Need”), nothing SHSP does can prevent callers who are just “shopping around.” Similarly, once a Service Provider has performed their service, it is a reflection of the experience that impacts the client’s intent to use them again and therefore the “Satisfaction” rate. The “Success Rate” however, is a direct reflection of the quality of the full set of referrals provided by the program.

With that said, there was an increase in two of the three stages and one stage that stayed the same in 2020 as compared to 2019: 79% in “Level of Need” (compared to 76%), 77% in “Success Rate” (same as 2019) and 96% in “Satisfaction” (compared to 91%). Although a lack of increase in Stage 2 may reflect stagnancy in ‘normal’ years, the ability of SHSP to maintain a level of quality in referrals that mirrored the last year, despite enduring a global pandemic, is noteworthy.





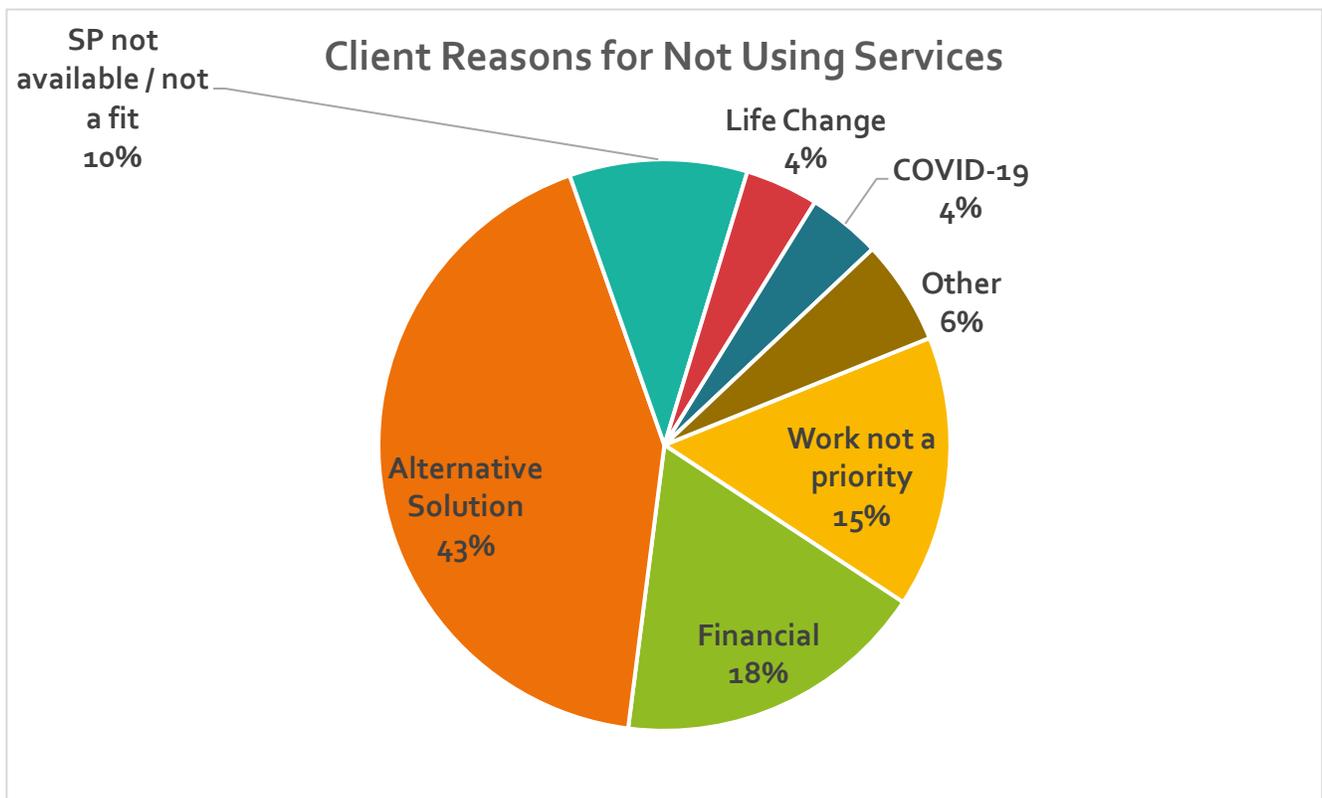
Barriers to Service Use

As in previous years, Home Support Coordinators asked clients who did not use referrals for the reason they did not use them. The question is the same for those who do not get through Stage 1 (i.e. never make an attempt) and those who move to Stage 2 (call at least one provider but do not use any services). The responses are recorded narratively, and subsequently coded during the evaluation process into a set of 7 categories as follows:

- Alternative Solution – these include both natural supports (friends, family or neighbours) and paid services outside of SHSP.
- Financial Barrier
- Work not a priority
- Service Provider not available or not a fit – including instances of miscommunication, failure to show up, or incompatibility
- Life Change – includes health-related changes, moving to care facilities, and deaths.
- COVID-19
- Other

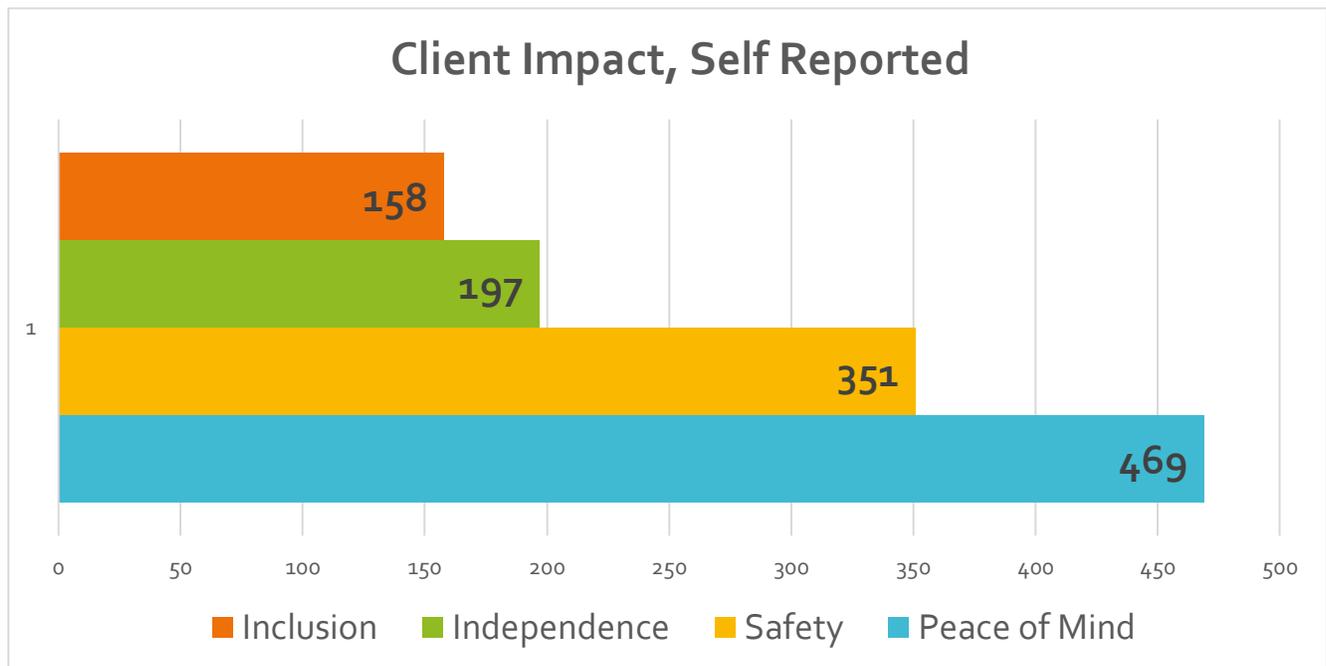
Although the COVID-19 category was added in 2020, the category does not accurately illustrate the impact the pandemic had in relation to preventing or limiting access to supports. Rather, the new category tracks the clientele who explicitly said COVID-19 was the cause of them not using the referrals. It does not include those who may have used an alternative solution to minimize contact or faced increased financial difficulty due to the pandemic. Therefore, the true impact of COVID is embedded across all five other barriers.

Barriers to utilization vary greatly. The category “SP not available/ not a fit” increased 4% in 2020 to 10%. Financial barriers decreased slightly from 22% to 18%, however, it is speculated that financial barriers are a main reason for finding an “Alternative Solution”. “Work Not a Priority” decreased from 24% to 15%. This indicates fewer people ‘shopping around’ and prioritizing service needs (i.e. putting off service until the risk of the virus is diminished). The largest category remains “Alternative Solution” at 43%. As with “Motivation for Calling”, self-reported financial hardship is a difficult indicator to take at face value. The possibility exists that some of those who found “Alternative Solutions” did so as a result of a different barrier, including affordability. This should be investigated further in 2021.



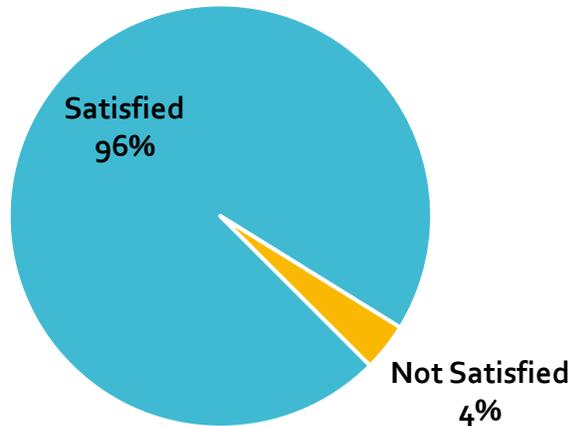
Client Impact

Conversations with program coordinators confirmed their belief that the main outcome SHSP aims to achieve is allowing older adults to age independently in their own homes. Through the self-reported client impact, it is clear older adults primarily link the service to “Peace of Mind”. This is followed by safety, independence and then inclusion. Although all outcomes link to keeping older adults in their own homes for longer, the most direct link is “independence” which represents only 17% of the responses. In 2021, it may be beneficial to delve deeper into program impacts to determine the cause of this gap.



Overall, clients continued to report satisfaction with the overall SHSP program in high numbers. This illustrates the continued success and need for the program.

Client Satisfaction with SHSP



How did the program and coordinators roles shift amidst the pandemic?

In addition to reviewing the data set of SHSP program activities, outputs and outcomes in the calendar year 2020, we conducted a condensed Narrative Evaluation focused on how the coordinator roles and program shifted while responding to the pandemic.

A focus group conversation with the coordinators group (representing service provision) was held in a semi-structured format. The conversation focused on:

- *What could the data not explain in relation to the 2020 calendar year?*
- *What is the story behind the numbers?*
- *How did the role of SHSP shift during the pandemic?*

The six program coordinators (two of which were new to the program in 2020), a coordinator from the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, and an evaluator participated in the discussion. In line with the rest of society, the coordinating team found more of their work occurring from home and having to adapt to temporary organizational closures and staff shifts in their retrospective associations. Two shifts in coordinator roles regarding SHSP emerged from the discussion, 1) a greater emphasis on emotional support, and 2) increased time spent on calls.

Emotional Support

Older adults are a high-risk population for COVID-19. Many people in society started to feel the isolation effects of ongoing lockdowns, an exacerbation of an already significant issue for the aging population. This has resulted in increased anxiety, mental health concerns, and loneliness. In response to these factors, coordinators provided increased emotional support during phone calls. They found more time was spent listening to older adults as they needed someone to talk to, whether the subject be directly related to the pandemic or just regarding life overall.

With this shift there was an overall tone change that allowed for greater connection with the clients. The first year the program was piloted, an unintended consequence that was identified was a reduction in the ill effects of social isolation and it continues to be a relevant and significant impact every year. The confirmed finding presents a strategic opportunity for program and impact design, both for the remainder of and after the pandemic.

In addition, 2020 saw increased time spent with individuals who did not become clients, and are therefore not recorded in the system. Many older adults called wanting to learn about the program. Coordinators explained the purpose of SHSP and walked them through government benefits which sometimes led to lengthy calls. These factors combined with increased time researching specific requests added to the coordinators regular workload and is not reflected in the client-focused dataset.

Increased Calls

The increased time spent on phone calls were a result of multiple factors. Some coordinators assisted with the Friendly Seniors Telephone program adding calls to their additional workload. There were also more follow ups needed with both service providers and seniors. Additional time spent with service providers was necessary as companies went through major shifts when responding to the pandemic. Follow ups were essential to ensure the providers were still in business and to determine any shifts in availability and pricing. In addition, as mentioned previously, there were many companies who wanted to support older adults during this time. Therefore, introduction conversations increased despite many not following through to fill out the paperwork.

The coordinators also found that older adults were requiring more follow ups and time spent during the call. This is in part due to the emotional support component and may also be due to uncertainties of health recommendations throughout the year. During these calls' coordinators found that there was a lack of awareness regarding the role of SHSP. Many older adults did not know what the program did and or that the service was available. Finding new methods of building program awareness should be explored moving forward.
