![Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council logo] EDMONTON SENIORS COORDINATING COUNCIL

Seniors Sector Inclusion Project

What We Heard
Through Community-Based Conversations

March 2025

We respectfully acknowledge that the land in which the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council has conducted and continues to conduct work on is Treaty 6 territory, on the traditional lands of the Cree, Blackfoot, Iroquois, Dene, Nakota Sioux, and Saulteaux / Anishinaabe / Ojibway nations. This is also the area of Métis homelands and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4.

We acknowledge and respect the past, present, and future generations of all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis People who continue to strengthen Edmonton and Canada.

Seniors Sector Inclusion Project

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Executive Summary

In 2024, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) secured capacity-building resources to further inclusion work throughout the sector. The Seniors Sector Inclusion Project offers support to develop, implement and strengthen Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices to help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all seniors in Edmonton. The Project began in Fall 2024 and will continue until June 2026.

The first two steps in implementing the project were: a) conducting a literature review of relevant knowledge about EDI related to the sector, and b) engaging directly in conversations with a diverse range of seniors as well as those who work in seniors-serving organizations. These facilitated conversations collected a wide range of perspectives on barriers, needs, and opportunities.

The findings from the academic research and the facilitated conversations have informed this *What We Heard* report. This report identifies barriers expressed by diverse seniors as well as challenges that organizations are experiencing in meeting the needs of diverse seniors. Furthermore, the research and findings from the facilitated conversations will inform our work to co-create equitable policies, procedures, and guidelines informed by community learnings to foster inclusion in the Community-Based Seniors Serving Sector.

Background

As a capacity building organization, the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) is acutely aware of Edmonton's growing population of seniors, and the ways in which that growing population is becoming increasingly diverse in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, race, income, religion, and more. Many seniors-sector organizational leaders have indicated the need for support in pursuing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices in their organizations. They are looking for new mechanisms to better support the diverse communities of seniors that are situated near them.

Funders agree that now is the time to invest in these resources. In 2024, ESCC secured capacity-building resources to further inclusion work throughout the sector. The Seniors Sector Inclusion Project offers support to develop, implement and strengthen EDI practices to help create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all seniors in Edmonton. The Project began in Fall 2024 and will continue until June 2026.

Methodology

To acknowledge the current state of the seniors sector as relates to EDI, we used a two-pronged approach: 1) exploring current research through a literature review, and 2) listening directly to diverse seniors and those who work in community-based seniors serving (CBSS) organizations.

We convened community-based conversations, using a Community-Based Participatory Research approach to ensure that the voices of diverse seniors were central. Between November 2024 and March 2025, semi-structured conversations were held with approximately 90 seniors as well as with staff/leaders from 23 diverse seniors-serving organizations.

A fundamental concept inherent to our work is "intersectionality", which refers to "overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination."[1] Intersectionality describes how multiple social identities, such as age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, race, and religion, overlap and impact people's experiences. It can help us understand that many individuals face multiple, overlapping barriers to inclusion.

The Intersectionality Wheel shows how various social identities and systemic factors interact to shape opportunities, barriers, and access to resources. Each slice represents one aspect of a person's identity, and they "intersect" in complex ways.

Intersectionality Wheel
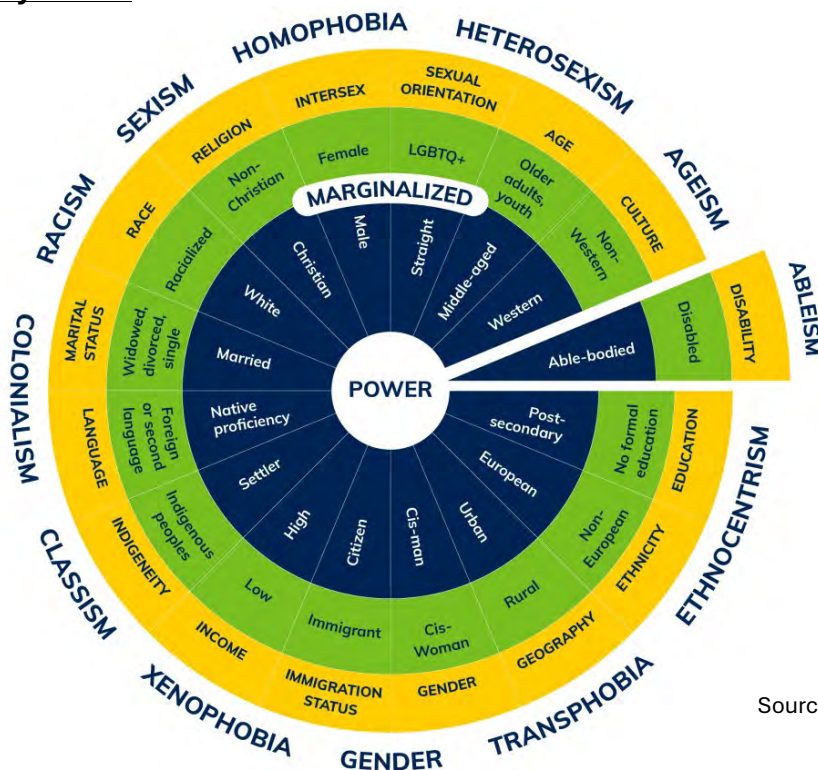
Source: Duckworth, Sylvia. 2020.
"Wheel of Power/Privilege."

Benefits of Embedding Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations

Organizational Sustainability:

For organizations to thrive and remain sustainable, they must adapt and respond to diversity. Building sustainability and community requires ongoing investment in knowledge, skills, and internal capacity to ensure equitable and relevant service delivery.[2]

Building Internal Capacity to Meet Diverse Needs:

Embedding EDI principles can strengthen an organization's ability to effectively meet needs, by ensuring that governance/leadership, staff, policies, program delivery models, evaluation and accountability are aligned to include diverse senior populations.[3] [4]

Ethical Responsibility:

Addressing systemic inequities is a core value for nonprofits, and EDI practices are essential to upholding this commitment.[5]

Talent Acquisition and Retention:

A commitment to EDI can attract a wider pool of qualified staff and volunteers, fostering a more inclusive and engaged workforce.[6]

Donor Engagement:

A diverse and inclusive organization can appeal to a broader donor base, potentially increasing funding opportunities.[7] [8]

Credibility and Reputation:

Actively working towards EDI demonstrates a commitment to inclusion and can enhance an organization's public image.[9]

Summary of Findings from Conversations

What We Heard from Seniors

Barriers to Inclusion

- Language Barriers
- Lack of Information
- Cost of Participation
- Transportation Barriers
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- Lack of Community Connectors
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The following pages expand on each of these areas by showing alignment between 'what we heard' in our local conversations and what the current research tells us.

(See Appendix A for Summary Handout.)

What We Heard from Seniors

Barriers to Inclusion

Language Barriers

Literature says...

Language barriers significantly hinder diverse seniors from accessing community-based programs and services, leading to isolation and unmet needs. [10] Many immigrant seniors have limited proficiency in English or French, making it difficult to navigate essential social programs due to the lack of interpretation services and translated material. [11] [12]

Conversations confirmed...

"Most of us here, we need translation."

"I think one of the problems is, how are we received in the seniors association in the community where we live? And how do they accommodate our language, if it is in French or Spanish? You know how do we fit in? Because we're still on the outside you know as seniors trying to participate in a group that doesn't seem to want you or welcome you."

Lack of Information

Literature says...

A lack of accessible information is a major barrier preventing diverse seniors from utilizing community-based programs and services. Many immigrant seniors struggle to find details about available community-based programs and services, often relying on word-of-mouth through friends, family, or community organizations rather than formal channels [13] [14] Language barriers further exacerbate this issue, as information, is often not translated. [15]

Conversations confirmed...

"We don't have enough information about the centre."

"They haven't the special banners, or other visual information about the different services for the seniors."

"There should be some announcements about the centre. ... so, [the] community should [receive] different announcements by their families, by their friends and [through] other papers. They have to get announcements to [come] here and to get benefits from this centre."

Cost of Participation

Cost is a significant barrier for diverse seniors, limiting their access to programs and services.[16] [17] [18]

Diverse seniors living in low-income conditions, struggle to afford fees for programs and services, and express dissatisfaction with the high cost of programs.[19] [20]

Economic constraints further contribute to social isolation, as financial barriers prevent participation in paid activities and community engagement. [21]

Conversations confirmed...

"One of the factors that comes into play for some of these senior centres is the amount that they charge for a membership, a lot of seniors, especially particularly in the case of Aboriginal seniors and senior women that maybe didn't work, maybe don't get much, if any, CPP, and all they get is OAS. They're on a strict income and they can't afford to go ... And anything that you do with them; you've got to come up with more money and more money. So, it's cost prohibitive."

"Everybody [here] is in low income. So, we need help. We need help for low income. We need to come, [but have] no transportation, and we need food, ...so everything we need [requires] help."

"One drawback for a lot of seniors that are, especially over 65 that are on pensions and on a fixed income, you know, if you've got to pay, you know, $50 a year for your membership, and then you've got to pay $100 for this and $100 you just can't afford it."

Transportation Barriers

Literature says...

Transportation barriers significantly impact diverse seniors limiting their mobility, independence, and access to community-based seniors services and programs.[22] [23]

Challenges include financial constraints, inaccessible transit routes, harsh weather conditions, unreliable public transportation, difficulties navigating public transit, and complex scheduling.[24] [25] [26] [27]

Conversations confirmed...

"I think the most annoying thing for us as seniors is the transportation."

"If it is winter, the taxi [takes] longer, I mean, the money, even [if] they want [to come and] they are ready to come... They [have to] take two or three bus[es]. That is [a] lack of transportation too. If you pay taxi $20 or $30 [at] minimum, that $30 [could] buy you two days groceries."

"Because DATS, you have to book three days in advance, and then they give you a window. And if your program runs over, you have to leave early, and you have to be prepared to, you know, ... You have to pre plan everything. And for some seniors, that's just not feasible."

Limited Accessibility

Literature says...

Accessibility barriers in community-based seniors-serving programs make it difficult for seniors with disabilities to fully participate, often due to mobility challenges, financial limitations, and environmental obstacles.[28] Many require accommodations such as wheelchair-accessible spaces, adapted materials, assistive technology and additional support.[29] [30]

A lack of preparedness within organizations is a significant barrier as senior serving organization may not fully integrate disability-inclusive practices, and disability organizations may struggle to meet the needs of aging members.[31] [32]

Conversations confirmed...

"'Another issue for some of these senior centres, is they say they're accessible, but, you know, they're not really [physically accessible]: ramps, washrooms, doors that are automatic, that kind of thing, because there [are] a lot of seniors that don't go out and do things. They'd like to, but they don't, because they can't get access to the building. The doors aren't wide enough for a walker never mind a wheelchair, and all buildings are supposed to be accessible."

"We should have people who know exactly what the condition is [because] every condition is different, [and] everyone is unique...they should come talk [to] the person individually before a program starts or before we all get together like this find [to] out about each person's condition and what they need and what if something happens and how they're doing."

"We haven't figured out that we have to build in the price of [closed] captioning to participate at these events. The seniors are in very big need of it, and I really believe that if that started to become a norm you would see them coming out a lot. If you were saying, this is going to be a captioned cooking class, you will be able to read what the instructor saying, you don't have to worry.
{CBSS organization representative}

Lack of Cultural and/or Religious Appropriateness

Literature says...

Culturally and religiously responsive services and programs are crucial for ensuring that diverse seniors can fully access and benefit from community-based programs.[33] [34] Diverse seniors encounter barriers related to cultural traditions, social norms, and religious practices, such as the need for halal food and prayer spaces, that limit their participation, underscoring the need for more inclusive and responsive programs [35] [36] [37]

Conversations confirmed...

"When we go to other seniors' group, they have to give you place to pray, they have to have halal."

"Even they don't respect that there are people of colour living in the community. That's a struggle we have, this is our home, because wherever we live, we're not as accepted, we're not seen as equal or as welcome. So that is why this is our base [the organization they frequent], and this is where our family of seniors meet."

"Additional for this is to know, to know our about our culture in our country, for each country."

Exclusion of 2SLGBTQ+ Seniors

Literature says...

2SLGBTQ+ seniors face significant inclusion barriers when accessing community-based seniors-serving programs and services, often leading to social isolation and unmet care needs. Many fear discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia from staff and other residents, which discourages them from openly expressing their identities or seeking support.[38] The historical marginalization of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals has lasting impacts, making it crucial for service providers to adopt culturally competent and affirming practices that address their unique needs.[39]

Without targeted inclusion efforts including adopting an intersectional lens, staff training, policy changes, and safe spaces, many 2SLGBTQ+ seniors remain invisible or closeted, further exacerbating their vulnerability.[40] [41]

Conversations confirmed...

"And we know that seniors' social isolation is a big issue already so just throw the queer aspect in and it goes up."

"One of the things is that being queer is intersectionality on steroids: Indigenous got it, uh White got it, [People of] Colour got it. Disabled got it. So, it's really intersectional. And I think for people my age who grew up with really you know mass oppression, a lot of people just said it's not safe to come out. Period. And they've maintained that throughout their lives. And even now there might be you know [be] three or four people in their social circle who actually know who they are."

"This organization has [an EDI] policy. Which is why he [potential participant] had the expectation he was going to be treated equitably. But the organization didn't follow through, and that was devastating. So, it's the follow through [that's important]."

Lack of Community Connectors

Literature says...

A lack of community connectors poses a significant barrier for diverse seniors in accessing seniors-serving programs and services. Many seniors, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, struggle with language barriers and unfamiliarity with available services, forcing them to rely on family members or immigrant-serving organizations (ISOs) for support.[42]

Conversations confirmed...

"We need someone to connect us with them."

"So, if there will [be] any facilitation [by their current ethnocultural organization], or if [an] enabling environment is created for them in the future, they have, [a] strong interest to connect"

"You know, the other problem migrants like me have [is] sometimes, you might be afraid [of making] a problem, [you] don't feel comfortable [with] yourself. You're saying you need at least someone that can help you."

Organizations' Lack of Knowledge About Diversity

Literature says...

A lack of knowledge about the specific needs of diverse seniors among organizations creates significant barriers to accessing community-based seniors-serving programs and services.[43] [44]

When seniors serving organization lack the knowledge about the cultural, linguistic, and social and economic realities of diverse seniors it results in services and programs that fail to meet their unique needs.[45] [46]

Additionally, seniors-serving organizations often overlook the historical and systemic factors that shape aging experiences for diverse seniors, reinforcing exclusion and inequitable service provision.[47] [48]

Conversations confirmed...

"I think it's important for the centre to know my background, my social background, economic background, all this will help them to help me."

"How can an organization plan for a particular group like this, if they don't know what our financial limitations are, what our transportation limitations are, our physical limitations, those types of things, they need to know that in order to be able to plan to accommodate. If they don't have that information, then they're flying blind."

"I think it does cause a misunderstanding for seniors and disabilities, because it's very difficult for someone with an able body to understand someone with a disabled body"

"I don't know whether what you have in mind, you have me in mind, from my point of view, or you have [me] in mind from your point of view. Because the two are not the same."

Lack of Agency/Involvement in Decision Making

Literature says...

Without efforts to engage diverse seniors in decision-making, these gaps in knowledge will persist, further marginalizing seniors who require responsive and inclusive support.[49][50]

Conversations confirmed...

"I'd like to not be neglected, [and for] our voice [to be] heard. That's very important for us."

"I think it would be extremely important to have the input coming from the Aboriginal and First Nations, the Metis and the Inuit, because each of us have a little bit different take on our cultures. But to have that input into how programming is set up, that kind of thing is important."

"I think simply, it's important to let seniors participate in decision making, and it will give [them] a sort of self-satisfaction for it, for the first thing, and it's so democratic."

"The goal of the centre is to improve the problem of the seniors. So, the seniors must participate in the designing. That means they have to know their culture from where they come and what they expect when they come here."

"We tried forming an EDI [at a seniors serving organization], and they told me clearly, we don't need that here, that at the time, you know, they had no recognition that we have value, or that we could contribute resources, mental and physical resources, that could be respected. So, this was a barrier for me."

Mistrust of the System

Literature says...

Mistrust in the system is a significant barrier preventing diverse seniors, including Indigenous seniors, from accessing community-based seniors-serving programs and services. A lack of culturally safe services, coupled with a failure to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonialism, reinforces feelings of exclusion, fear, and alienation among Indigenous seniors.[51]

Conversations confirmed...

"The atmosphere, it has to be welcoming...And if I'm dressed, you know, like right now, layers and stuff, oh, my God, that's a homeless person. Oh, yeah, we can't let them in... So they asked me at the door, what is your purpose here. I said excuse me. I said, this is a Senior Centre, and I'm a senior. I'm coming to whether it's [socialization] you have, like bingo, whatever it is, and stuff. I want to get some information. Oh, okay. And how long will you be staying?"

"Unfortunately, a lot of these organizations feel that you know that First Nations are lazy, they're this, they're that. That mentality is still there. Too many blind thoughts, and until those barriers can be broken down, and the only way that's going to happen is through communication."

Treatment as Passive Recipients Rather Than Valued Contributors

Literature says...

Diverse seniors have expressed that they are often treated as passive recipients rather than valued contributors. Diverse seniors bring significant skills, caregiving experience, and cultural knowledge, yet their contributions are frequently overlooked, which can lead to feelings of isolation and diminished self-worth.[52][53]

Programs that actively engage seniors in activities where they feel like they are contributing demonstrate that providing opportunities for participation enhances their sense of purpose and strengthens community cohesion.[54][55]

Recognizing and integrating seniors' knowledge and skills into service planning not only validates their contributions but also fosters more inclusive and responsive community programs.[56]

Conversations confirmed...

"We bring value, we bring talent, we bring art, we bring culture. Is your mind open to us?"

"But here, when I come to you... I've just been going through a program we receive, just receiving, don't contribute. So, we, we might [have] a lot, but here is the other way around. When you go, you sit here, prisoners. I don't know that's how I see myself."

"We feel we contribute until the last minute to our community. We are really contributing now, and we will continue contributing."

<u>Wants & Interests</u>

Desire for Employment

Literature says...

Diverse seniors, particularly immigrants, face significant barriers in accessing employment support, limiting their ability to achieve financial stability and social integration. Many encounter age-related stereotypes from employers, who may view them as less capable or unwilling to adapt to new work environments.[57]

Additionally, foreign credentials and work experience are often not recognized in Canada, making it difficult for immigrant seniors to secure jobs that match their skills and expertise.[58]

Addressing these barriers through tailored employment programs, credential recognition initiatives, and anti-ageism policies can help ensure that seniors have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the workforce and maintain economic independence.

Conversations confirmed...

"Maybe we can work. So, we are trying to find jobs. Why not? We can still move... So, we need, why don't you think of finding some jobs for us?"

"And the seniors, in order to be productive, they have to be trained. They have to be trained, and they have to get jobs."

"Many of us are different professions, teachers, nurses, people who make clothes and so forth. So, for you can either do two things. You can maybe, if you can work out with them you can work with those organizations and say, okay, you want to teach some of those people who make clothes, or they want to teach them on how to market their things."

Desire for Skills Development

Literature says...

Skill development related to hobbies was noted as essential for diverse seniors as it enhances their confidence, social engagement, and sense of purpose. Many seniors feel more valued when they can apply their skills in a practical setting, reinforcing their sense of usefulness and belonging.[59]

Conversations confirmed...

"I think the best you can do for us in future, you can connect us to certain areas where we can benefit, for example... digital skills, so at least when I come home, I can communicate with my children online. I can also operate a laptop."

"We go with the program and say, Me, I want to learn how to fix doors when I go back home. Another one says, me, I want to learn how to make a table so that is retooling us, so that we don't just sit there and remain beggars, but you can contribute. They don't mind; we can go as volunteers."

Interest in Cross-Cultural Exchanges

Literature says...

Cross-cultural exchanges are essential for diverse seniors as they help reduce social isolation and foster meaningful connections within their communities. Many immigrant seniors express concerns about living in culturally homogenous environments, which can limit their interactions with other groups and hinder their full integration into Canadian society.[60][61]

Successful integration is a two-way process, requiring both immigrants and the broader community to engage in mutual learning and cultural exchange.[62]

Encouraging cross-cultural interactions through senior programs can enhance social cohesion, increase understanding, and create more inclusive and welcoming communities for aging populations.

Conversations confirmed...

"It's important because of social inclusion, understanding each other, learning new ideas or new things, new experience, like it could be an information sharing hub... because they are seniors, so they can give help to each other."

"So, first of all, they say that we love and we have empathy with the Indigenous and First Nation people. It's good to know their background, their history, which we understand we have limited knowledge now, but still...So, it's important we have multiple visits to them, [to] meet them and know them closely."

"And I have been involved with East Indian senior groups on the other side of town, in Mill Woods and that was rather interesting. You know, gone to their cultural thing... learn a bit about them, and they learn, have been to some Aboriginal things and learn a bit about us" {Indigenous senior}

"They want to be part of society, so yes, they have their own communities. Yes, they have their own activities. Yes, they have their worshiping places on Sundays, on Fridays, on Saturdays, but they also want to participate in mainstream organizations." {CBSS organization representative}

Interest in Group Activities

Literature says...

For diverse seniors, culturally relevant and identity-based group activities help maintain their identity and create a sense of belonging, which is crucial for mental health and quality of life.[63]

Research highlights that older Somali men benefit from social gatherings that allow them to reminisce and engage in shared cultural and religious practices, while LGBTQ+ seniors find support in identity-affirming groups that reinforce their sense of community.[64]

Expanding access to culturally responsive group activities can help bridge gaps in programs and services and ensure that diverse seniors receive meaningful social support.

Conversations confirmed...

"The more they grow, the more they age, the more they get wisdom, the more they get stronger, and that's why we have this senior group here because we gather, we have social skills, we share. We share our stories, we share our backgrounds, we share our foods, we share everything. Okay, so that's why we like when we get older, we get more closer to our religion to our wisdom."

"If we just work with one senior, their system literacy, is growing, but it's still along our side, but within in a group of other seniors who have different experiences, different types of system literacy, they help each other, and we're not the only one they lean on. They have others that they mutually lean on." {CBSS organization representative}

"We used to have little socials, you know, two, three times a week. I enjoyed that. There was a lot of people showed up. We all had fun doing really nothing. We [were] just sitting around [and] have coffee ... maybe play some games or ... sit down and relax, not be alone... I knew they were just like my family, kind of like."

What We Heard from Seniors-Serving Organizations

Knowledge Gaps within Organizations

Literature says...

Knowledge gaps among seniors-serving organizations significantly hinders their ability to meet the diverse needs of seniors from marginalized communities. Many service providers operate with a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to recognize the intersectional barriers faced by immigrant, Indigenous, and disabled seniors.[65]

Even organizations striving for inclusivity may fail to recognize how their existing policies and practices unintentionally exclude diverse seniors by not signaling an inclusive environment and placing the burden of adaptation on seniors rather than the organization. The lack of understanding results in culturally inappropriate services, inadequate accommodations, and persistent institutional barriers that exclude seniors from accessing necessary support.[66][67]

Without targeted training, engagement with diverse seniors, and the integration of culturally responsive and inclusive policies, organizations risk perpetuating inequalities and neglecting the evolving needs of an aging, diverse population.[68][69]

Conversations confirmed...

"It's a matter of readiness as well how comfortable the person feels at the end to engage in an activity that can be very intimidating."

"Sometimes is not too open yet in this, you know, a range of age to talk about your…sexuality."

"I don't believe I've ever come across someone who identifies [as 2SLGBTQ+] but I'm sure that they will have been given the respect, and you know…we would have applied the same treatment that we reserved for everyone."

"The staff need the training… to understand this population that they're working with, because they're not doing the simplest of things, the face to face."

"I just really want us to anticipate into the future, there will be those who could incrementally grow and become more able to serve by hiring more diverse staff, having policy and guidelines that actually is honoring of the most marginalized."

"Those who might want to serve the seniors better, they currently don't have relationship. That's where the barriers come in, from lack of mutual awareness to even if they come into contact there's language barrier and cultural distance and also the lack of trust, right? There's no relationship."

Funding Limitations

Literature says...

Funding challenges significantly hinder seniors-serving organizations' ability to meet the needs of marginalized seniors. Funders often restrict funding to narrowly prescribed projects, limiting the flexibility organizations need to address complex and intersecting issues within diverse senior populations.[70] [71]

Additionally, misalignment of priorities between funders and organizations servicing marginalized seniors creates gaps in service pro-vision, as funders may not recognize the nuanced needs of these communities.[72] [73]

Differences in frameworks further complicate funding access, as many funders prioritize short-term, outcome-based models, while organizations working with racialized, immigrant, and Indigenous seniors emphasize long-term, holistic approaches.[74] [75]

Other constraints, such as competition for limited resources, capacity constraints, and the preference for well-established organizations, further disadvantage smaller community-based groups that are meeting the needs of diverse seniors but struggle to secure sustainable funding.[76] [77]

Conversations confirmed...

"Sometimes it's about language only. But we can't hire an interpreter because we don't have funds for this, and none of the projects, unfortunately, fund this. So, it's a challenge, yeah, and we start to be as creative as possible."

"And when grant comes, they heavily invest on that kind of recreation or centers, but they just are skeptical or suspicious of the activities that are done by [immigrant] grassroot nonprofit organizations, which could directly serve the racialized or [immigrant] communities."

"The policy makers are making the policies the way they wanted, not the way community wants it, and they really dismiss grassroot communities who are really doing the number one job for those newcomers... if you're not getting funded and you can't hire staff, what can you do?"

"Just myself and a half time person to do the work for the largest population of people with disabilities, because our government also does not recognize it. We have zero funding. Everything we get is by donation or fundraising or a project, which is a hard way to survive."

Data Gaps

Literature says...

Gaps in disaggregated identity data prevent seniors-serving organizations from effectively addressing the needs of diverse seniors, identifying systemic inequities, and tailoring interventions to better support aging communities.[78][79]

Without comprehensive, standardized, and intersectional data collection, these organizations struggle to design equitable and responsive programs that truly reflect the realities of diverse seniors.[80]

Ethical data collection and utilization are essential to ensuring that collected data is not misused or harmful and informs meaningful change.[81]

Conversations confirmed...

"There aren't a lot of conversations in terms of systemic challenges, in terms of the policy and the demographics. Our statistics data collections, it's very difficult to find the numbers to support us, all these issues for African seniors, Black and Caribbean."

"There should have been data collected prior, you know, maybe things, services would have been a lot better, funding would have been a lot better... I feel like we're 20 years back still, trying to attain good services for people."

"We've been encouraging everybody to gather this, because not only will you improve care one on one, you will begin to see the pattern of who the seniors are. And how could you tweak your program? How do you tweak hiring and so on or volunteer recruitment?"

"Data is being collected, but I don't think it's being utilized for the proper resources and proper effectiveness of the funding."

Macro-Level System Policies

Literature says...

Diverse seniors are significantly impacted by macrolevel systems and structures in areas such as housing, healthcare, immigration, transportation, and income security, which are beyond the control of seniors-serving organizations. Housing policies often fail to address affordability challenges and inadequate accommodations, disproportionately affecting racialized and immigrant seniors.[82] [83] Healthcare access is further restricted by immigration status and systemic barriers, limiting the availability of culturally appropriate and affordable services.[84] [85]

Immigration policies exclude many seniors from social benefits, increasing their financial and social vulnerability.[86] [87] Transportation barriers further isolate seniors by limiting their ability to access essential community-based programs and services.[88] [89]

Additionally, income insecurity, driven by employment discrimination and pension ineligibility, leaves many diverse seniors struggling to meet basic financial needs.[90] [91]

Conversations confirmed...

"If our ultimate goal is to build up the sector, we must look at the full ecosystem... the larger systems and government policy that actually have brought many of our seniors the vulnerability, right?"

"Elders raising grandkids and sometimes great grandchildren. And this posed a problem because a lot of them don't want Children Services involved, and they're living on a fixed income of CPP or Canadian pension, and they don't have coverage for that, or they can't access help from Children's Services, because it's not guardianship through guardianship"
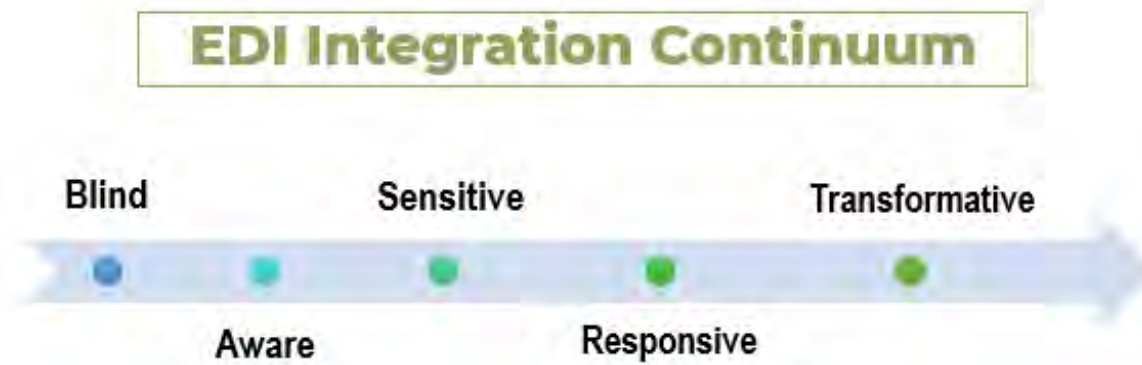
"We're talking about, you know, making things available for everybody, no matter...But that's not what we see, and it's at government level. So, its systematic."

"But until we fix the root of the problem nothing is going to change, because we can have 1000 workers doing housing, but if it's not affordable housing, that doesn't really change anything."

Organizational Readiness for Embedding EDI Practices

The insights shared by staff/leaders from CBSS groups reflect a broad spectrum of organizational experiences with EDI-focused work. This could range from those just beginning conversations to those actively embedding equity into their policies and practices. EDI work is not a one-size-fits-all process but rather a continuum of progress.

The EDI Integration Continuum provides a reflective tool to help understand where organizations currently function and to suggest potential next steps. There is no right or wrong place to be, only opportunities for growth and advancement.

Blind	Aware	Sensitive	Responsive	Transformative
Organization does not see barriers.	Organization recognizes barriers and begins discussing equity, diversity, and inclusion, but has not yet implemented policies and practices.	Organization acknowledges barriers but does so in a limited way, without fully integrated intersectional approach.	Organization addresses barriers through an intersectional approach and actively embeds equity, diversity, inclusion into policies, practices, programs and services.	Organization designs policies, programs and services from an intersectional lens and challenges harmful norms and power structures to ensure equitable access to participation.

Source: Adapted from Pulerwitz Population Council's Gender Equity Continuum[92] and USAID IGWG 2013 [93]

Where to Next?

What we have heard from all sources to date is a good foundation from which to deepen and broaden ongoing conversations towards improving inclusion in our sector. The EDI Learning Community is launching in March 2025 to be a venue for listening and learning together. We will use existing tools, perhaps create new ones, and support one another on this very important shared journey of fostering inclusive communities and spaces.

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Appendix A: Summary Handout

What We Heard from Seniors

Barriers to Inclusion

	Language Barriers prevent diverse seniors from accessing programs and services.
	Lack of Information limits diverse seniors' access to programs and services.
	Cost is a barrier to participation in programs and services due to financial constraints.
	Transportation is a barrier that limits mobility, independence, and access to programs and services.
	Limited Accessibility limits seniors with disabilities from participating due to communication, mobility, and environmental barriers.
	Lack of Cultural and/or Religious Appropriateness results in diverse seniors facing barriers to participation in programs, services, and space.
	Exclusion of 2SLGBTQ+ Seniors historically and systemically created barriers to participation and inclusion for 2SLGBTQ+ seniors.
	Lack of Community Connectors is a barrier to diverse seniors' participation and inclusion.
	Organizational Lack of Knowledge about Diversity poses barriers to participation for seniors with diverse lived experiences.
	Lack of Agency/Involvement in Decision Making keeps many seniors marginalized.
	Mistrust of the System due to past harm and ongoing discrimination hampers diverse seniors from accessing programs and services.
	Treatment as Passive Recipients Rather Than Valued Contributors frustrates seniors and hampers their ability to share their skills and cultural knowledge.

Wants & Interests

Desire for Employment by many diverse seniors require organizational support to address barriers to employment.

Desire for Skills Development opportunities to foster connection and contribute meaningfully were favoured by diverse seniors.

Interest in Cross-Cultural Exchanges was expressed as a way to promote social inclusion by diverse seniors.

Interest in Group Activities particularly, identity-based groups foster belonging essential for diverse seniors' mental health and well-being.

What We Heard from Seniors-Serving Organizations

Knowledge Gaps within seniors-serving organizations impede their ability to effectively meet the needs of diverse seniors.

Funding Limitations make it challenging to advance equity-focused efforts to address the unique and intersecting needs of diverse seniors.

Data Gaps inhibit organizations from effectively addressing the needs of diverse seniors.

Macro Level System Policies outside organizational control deeply affect diverse seniors.

Learn more: https://seniorscouncil.net/ssip-march-2025/

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