



Age Friendly Lethbridge – A Community Profile – Executive Summary

The World Health Organization (WHO) age-friendly designation recognizes age-friendly cities and communities that promote healthy and active aging. People in age-friendly communities are supported in maintaining their independence and have access to the community supports and services they need.

The Government of Alberta age-friendly designation is awarded to municipalities who have completed an age-friendly community profile, have developed an age-friendly action plan, and have secured a council resolution to actively support, promote and work towards being age-friendly. The community profile and action plan are based on the eight age-friendly domains: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion civic participation and employment, communication and information, community support and health services.

Age Friendly Lethbridge is a collaboration of community stakeholders working together to provide input into and shape an age-friendly community. In order to develop the community profile and action plan, the committee commissioned a review of demographic information, documents, strategies and action plans, a telephone survey with a random sample of 500 Lethbridge residents who were aged 45 or older, four focus groups and four interviews with 19 unique individuals.

Lethbridge has an aging population, with 16.4% of all residents being 65 years or older. Seniors make up a higher percentage of the population in Lethbridge compared to Alberta overall (13.9%) and to comparable cities, such as Red Deer (12.8%). Age groups with the highest growth in Lethbridge are children under 15 and seniors aged 65 to 80.

The City of Lethbridge Strategic Plan demonstrates a strong commitment towards meeting the age-friendly principles. The community vision states that, *“We will continue to work together to ensure that Lethbridge demonstrates active leadership in environmental stewardship and innovation and is recognized as being a **safe, healthy, vibrant, prosperous, economic viable place where all people can fully participate in community life**”*. Of the five strategic goals, three of them specifically contribute to making our community age-friendly: people places for all, compassionate communities, and livable communities.

Other City of Lethbridge plans and strategies, such as the Community Wellbeing Needs Assessment and Safety Strategy, the Capital Improvement Program Plan the Housing Needs Assessment and Housing Strategy, the Lethbridge Transit Master Plan, the Mobility



Access Plan, the Downtown Clean and Safe Strategy, and the CMARD Building Bridges Community Action Plan, all include a public consultations, and are designed to improve safety, accessibility and inclusiveness for all, including seniors.

The HarGroup 2018 telephone survey respondents agreed that Lethbridge is perceived as a great place for seniors. The highest priority areas in need of improvement, according to respondents, were housing, community support and health services, and transportation. Respondents also had concerns about affordability of housing, access to health services, and basic needs as they grow older.

The 2019 focus groups and interviews confirmed the telephone survey findings.

- All agreed that Lethbridge was a great place to retire because of its size, the climate, and the availability of services and support for seniors.
- They identified snow removal on sidewalks, bus stops and intersections as the greatest challenge faced by seniors.
- They expressed concerns about the personal safety of seniors, especially in downtown Lethbridge.
- Seniors who used public busses and/or Access A Ride were pleased with the transportation options and the friendliness and helpfulness of drivers, but stated that scheduling appointments with AAR, especially during peak hours was difficult.
- They appreciated the wide range and availability of senior housing options. They would like to see newer affordable housing opportunities, and more spaces within the City limits (as opposed to the South region served by Alberta Health Services) for seniors requiring high levels of care.
- They believed that Lethbridge offered various opportunities for social participation for those who are able to afford them and are willing to participate, but agreed that a large number of seniors experience loneliness. They acknowledged that more information is needed on how age-friendly Lethbridge is for Indigenous seniors, recent immigrant seniors, and seniors who identify as LGBTQ2S+.
- They felt that many seniors and their caregivers lacked information and understanding about the services and supports available to them. Often, seniors don't know what they are eligible for, and how to apply, and processes are cumbersome. They greatly appreciated the social workers and other employees who provide systems navigators at the seniors' centers and in senior residences and indicated that more of them were needed.

Age Friendly Lethbridge reviewed the findings and jointly developed an action plan with 16 unique actions.

- Develop a volunteer snow removal program.



- Document barriers faced by seniors, identify burning issues, and collectively address or share the issues with relevant City Departments.
- Advocate for improved usability of Access a Ride busses and public transit.
- Advocate for senior housing.
- Share information about housing options and subsidies.
- Gather additional information on social inclusion of some senior groups, such as Indigenous seniors, recent immigrant seniors, and seniors who identify as LGBTQ2S+.
- Document existing initiatives and pilot new initiatives to address seniors' loneliness & isolation issues.
- Partner with Lethbridge Diversity and Inclusion Alliance.
- Host a yearly Age-Friendly Forum.
- Develop an information strategy specific to services for seniors.
- Share consistent and accurate messages about Age Friendly Lethbridge and its member agencies across Lethbridge agencies.
- Provide input in implementation of City of Lethbridge strategies from an age-friendly lens.
- Increase availability of systems navigation for seniors.
- Increase caregiver support options.
- Review and update Age Friendly Lethbridge Terms of Reference.
- Create outcome measurement plans for each initiative, based on desired outputs and outcomes.
- Pass a resolution to formalize Lethbridge's commitment to be an age-friendly community.
- Apply for the Age-Friendly Alberta Recognition, the first step toward the WHO designation.