

Ethnocultural Seniors Network

Assessment Brief

March 2024

SOCIAL PLANNING
COUNCIL
of Ottawa

A Catalyst for Sustainable Social and Economic Development Since 1928



Le CONSEIL de
PLANIFICATION SOCIALE
d'Ottawa

Un catalyseur du développement social et économique durable depuis 1928



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Background

The Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPCO) is actively engaged in supporting the ethnocultural senior community in Ottawa as part of its core mission. This involvement includes collaborative efforts with grassroots organizations and the ethnocultural seniors network to address social isolation and promote healthy aging.

The Cultural Outreach Systems Navigator Program (COSNP), operational from April 2023 to March 2024, is designed to enhance the social participation and inclusion of ethnocultural seniors. This initiative involves recruiting, training and supporting a team of bilingual volunteers who serve as Cultural Outreach Systems Navigators. These navigators are readily available locally to provide information and resources to members of the ethnocultural seniors networks. The program is structured around three national priorities: supporting healthy aging, celebrating diversity and inclusion and helping seniors to age in place.

Within the framework of COSNP, from October to December 2023, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPCO) undertook a comprehensive assessment aimed at understanding the intricacies of healthy aging within the ethnocultural senior population. This assessment delved into a multitude of factors that impact the well-being and independence of seniors. By focusing on eight critical themes crucial for healthy aging, the report aims to offer a holistic perspective on the current situation, identify barriers to improved well-being and suggest potential pathways to empower Ottawa's ethnocultural seniors.

Themes	Demographic variables
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to information 2. Social activities 3. Home repairs and maintenance 4. Groceries and medications 5. Transportation 6. Outdoor activities 7. Digital access 8. Sense of belonging and mental health 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender 2. Education 3. Language 4. Age 5. Family size

Previous studies suggest that other factors such as lifestyle and environment also impact healthy aging, however, this assessment is limited to these eight common themes and does not explore other factors in-depth. The barriers to their social participation and any other challenges are, however, captured which helped understand any other factors seniors wanted to share.

Methodology

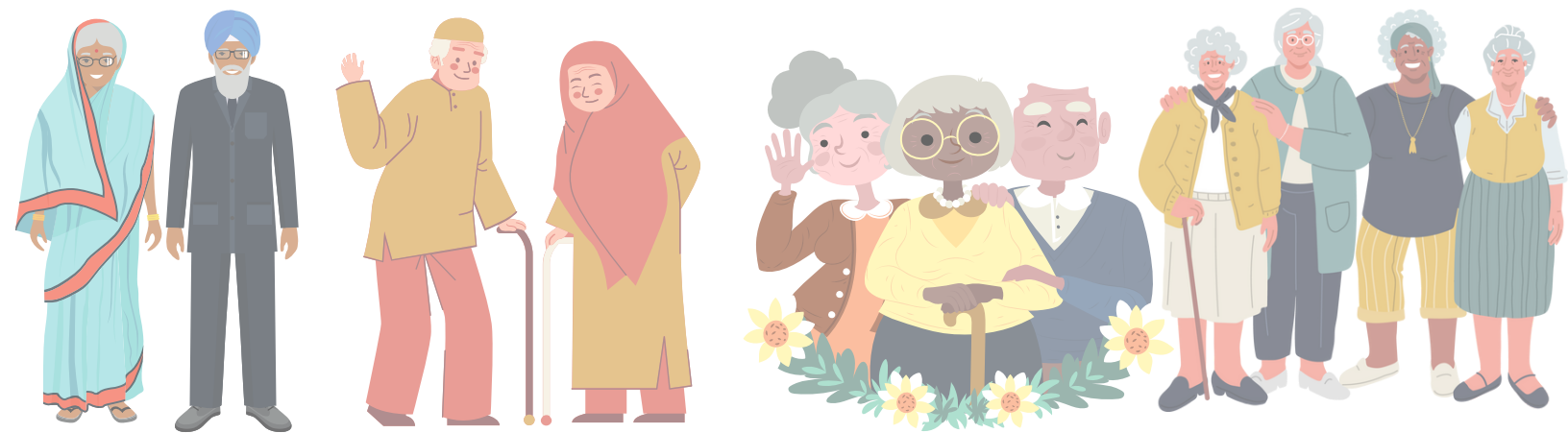
The assessment used snowball and purposive sampling methods, and the questionnaire tool was made available in MS Forms and Google Docs print for recording the responses. Ethnocultural senior leaders supported the data collection process by reaching out to senior members in their network to encourage their participation in the assessment. The statistical analysis software, IBM SPSS v26, was used to perform all quantitative analysis, and open-ended responses were coded, categorized and summarized in the report.

Sampling Profile

A total of **76 seniors** took part in the assessment, with the majority (77%) being female (59F, 17M). Due to the limited sample size and purposive approach, the results may not be fully representative of the larger population and thus **should not be generalized**. Instead, they should be viewed as an initial or emerging trend.

Furthermore, all respondents who provided their age were aged 50 or older - with 38% in the 50-69 age group, 37% in the 70-79 age group, and 23% in the 80 or older age group. Only 2% did not provide their age and were thus placed in the unknown age group. 70% of the respondents had a university or higher level of education.

The assessment recorded **a total of 16 native languages**, with 55% originating from European languages and 45% from non-European languages. Additionally, 90% of the respondents had been in Canada for more than five years, and 26% were currently living alone. It was observed that more seniors from the 80 or older age group were living alone compared to the two younger age groups, which could be attributed to the use of retirement homes potentially more by these age groups of seniors but further comparison has not been made.

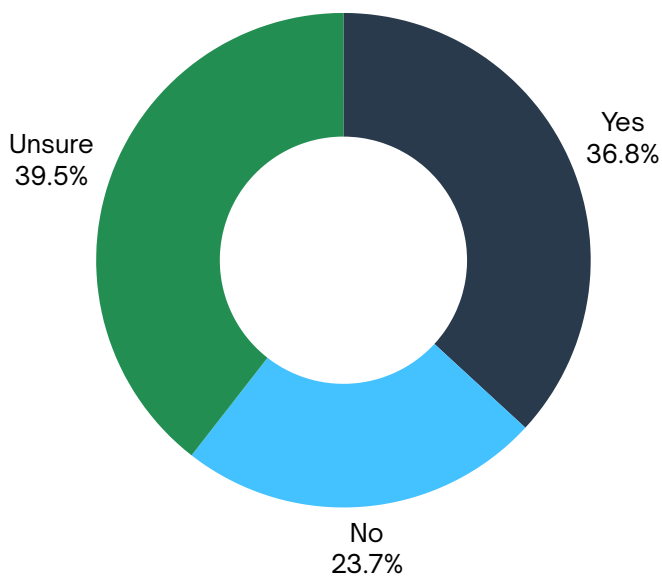


Findings

THEME 01: Access to information

The results indicate that 27% of senior respondents **seek information** on senior-specific services at least once a week, while 37% do so at least once a month. Additionally, 25% rarely search for this information, while **10% never do**. Furthermore, 37% of seniors feel that the available information in their native language is inadequate, and 40% are unsure, possibly having missed exploring those resources.

Sufficient information in the native language?



Upon further exploration, it was found that while many seniors were comfortable with English or French and did not require resources in their native languages, there was a **significant demand for information in other languages, particularly Punjabi, Chinese, Urdu, and Spanish**. This demand is especially notable in areas such as health, senior home care and legal matters.

Many resources related to seniors are not available in Urdu language.

- 50-59 age group, woman, Urdu

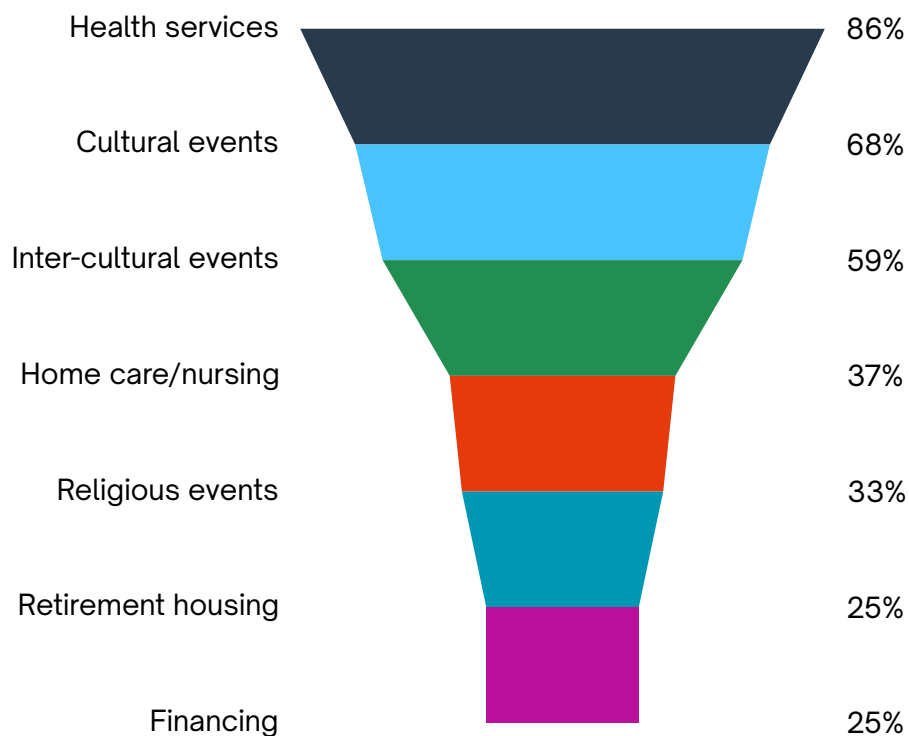
Information such as getting around the city, health and support services, seniors club, and groups in areas close to my house would be great to have in my native language.

- 70-79 age group, woman, Polish

The findings indicate that a higher percentage of women search for information related to senior-specific services as compared to men. Specifically, while 19% of the female respondents reported that they 'always' search for such information (at least 2-3 times a week), only one male respondent expressed the same. In contrast, while 24% of the male respondents shared that they never seek such information, only 7% of the female respondents expressed the same.

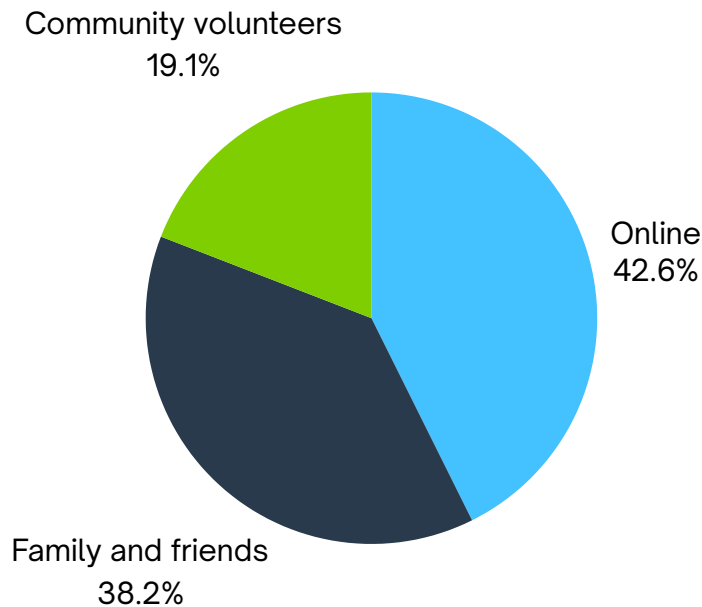
The findings also suggest the information-seeking behavior of seniors varies across different age groups. The highest frequency of seeking information ('Always') is most common in the youngest age group of seniors recorded in the assessment i.e. the 50-69 age group. Furthermore, the data suggests that the tendency of information-seeking behavior also seems to reduce slightly with the increase in age, as 31% of the 50-69 age group shared that they search for senior-specific information often or always, compared to 25% in the 70-79 age group and 23% in the 80+ age group. These findings provide valuable insights into the information needs of seniors across various age groups.

Public information of interest



The **information most sought after by seniors** was related to **health services**. Upon further exploration, it was found that more women than men were interested in intercultural events. Additionally, seniors with less than a university education showed the least interest in retirement housing information compared to those with a university or higher education. Similarly, seniors aged 80 or older were more interested in religious events and less interested in retirement housing and financing as compared to the younger age groups.

Key sources of information



Although **online sources remained the most prevalent** information channel overall, there were slight variations based on the level of education. Seniors with less than a university education most commonly relied on family and friends for information. Similarly, the mention of community volunteers as an information source was higher among seniors with less than a university education.

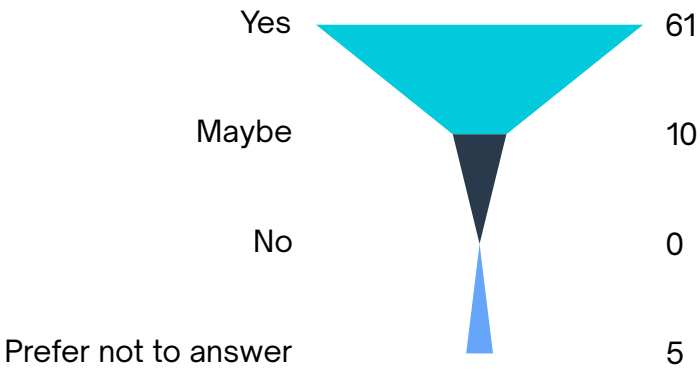
Further to this, it is also noted that while the use of online sources decreased gradually with the increase in age groups, the community volunteers as an information source increased gradually for the same. Additionally, more of the male respondents were found to be assessing information through community volunteers as compared to the female respondents.

THEME 02: Social activities

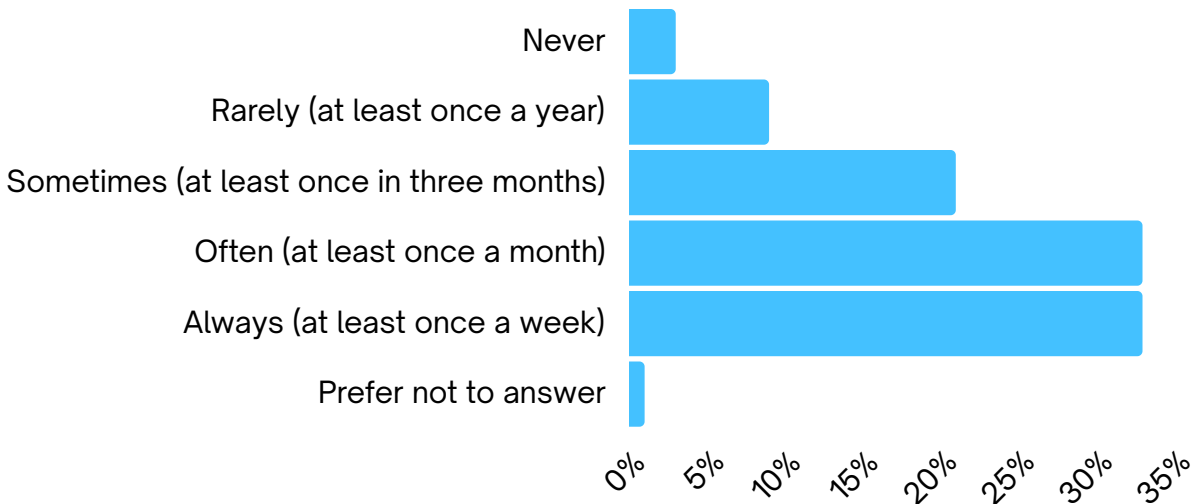
The seniors in general showed interest in social activities. While 7% of respondents preferred not to answer whether they generally enjoy engaging in social activities, none of the respondents expressed a negative inclination.

In terms of frequency of participation, one-third of the seniors indicated that they participate in social activities at least once a week, while another one-third reported participating at least once a month.

Interested in social activities?



Frequency of participation in social activities



The assessment showed that **seniors enjoy a diverse range of social activities**, including cultural events, volunteer activities, social gatherings, exercise and various forms of entertainment. Specific activities include group walking, dancing, reading, art classes, attending inter/cultural events and festivals and participating in informative workshops and seminars.

Social activities have been highlighted for their positive impact on both physical and mental health, including improved mobility, reduced loneliness and enhanced social connectivity. **A strong majority of seniors (80%) shared that they noticed positive impacts** on their health by participating in social activities and another 11% felt it may be the case, while 9% did not feel any health benefits.

The findings suggest that male respondents were participating in social activities more often than female respondents. Specifically, 76% of men reported participating in social activities often or always, while 62% of women expressed the same. Further to this, the data indicates that a higher education level is associated with a higher tendency to participate in social activities and a greater perceived improvement in health due to such participation.

Seniors with a non-European language of origin were found to participate in social activities more frequently and report a more positive impact on their health compared to those with a European language of origin. Furthermore, the findings showed that seniors living with family or friends preferred participating in social activities and reported a more positive impact on their health due to such activities as compared to those living alone.



Benefits of social activities

They are important to share joy and happiness and help each other.

- 50-59 age group, woman, Polish

The more you participate in social activities, the more you don't feel alone.

- 60-69 age group, woman, Creole

Social activity improves my health and enjoyment.

- 70-79 age group, man, Punjabi
-



The assessment showed that **25% (19 of 76) of seniors had faced barriers** to accessing social activities. Significant barriers include language and cultural differences, health issues, and transportation challenges. All of these underline the need for more accessible and inclusive social opportunities that consider the diverse needs of ethnocultural seniors.



Barriers to social activities

*I face mainly a language barrier that affects communication.
(Original: Mainly language barrier 主要是语言障碍, 影响交流)*

- 80+ age group, man, Mandarin

No bus near my house.

- 70-79 age group, woman, Spanish

Not enough programs for seniors that are subsidized helping seniors with low income.

- 70-79 age group, woman, Polish

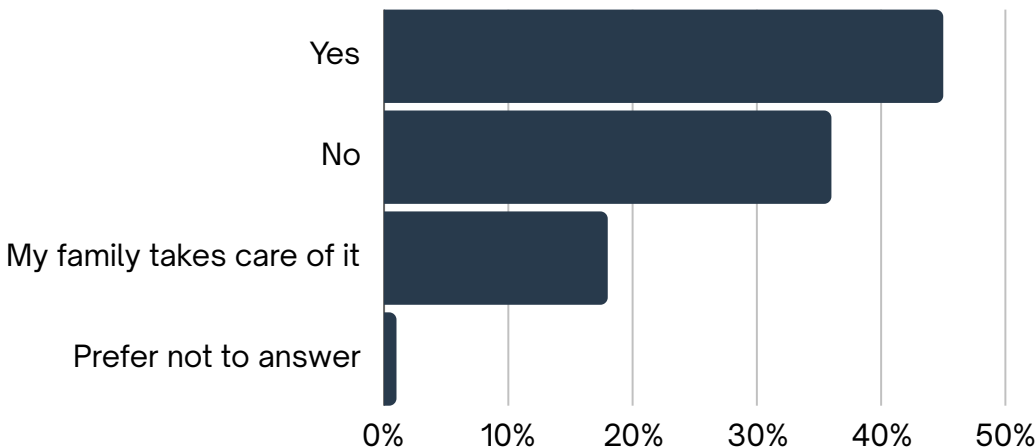
As an older person, doing things at my own pace is the most important.

- 70-79 age group, man, Khmer

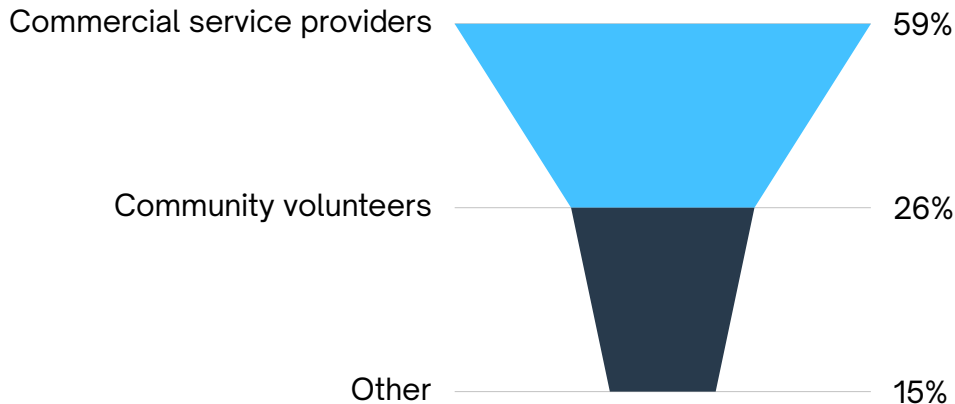
THEME 03: Home repairs and maintenance

Overall, **45% of seniors shared they need and deal with repairs and maintenance services for their homes on their own.** The remaining seniors, either, did not require these services or had their families take care of them. Among those who needed these services, 44% found it challenging or extremely challenging to access them.

Require home repairs and maintenance services?



Who provides repair and maintenance support?

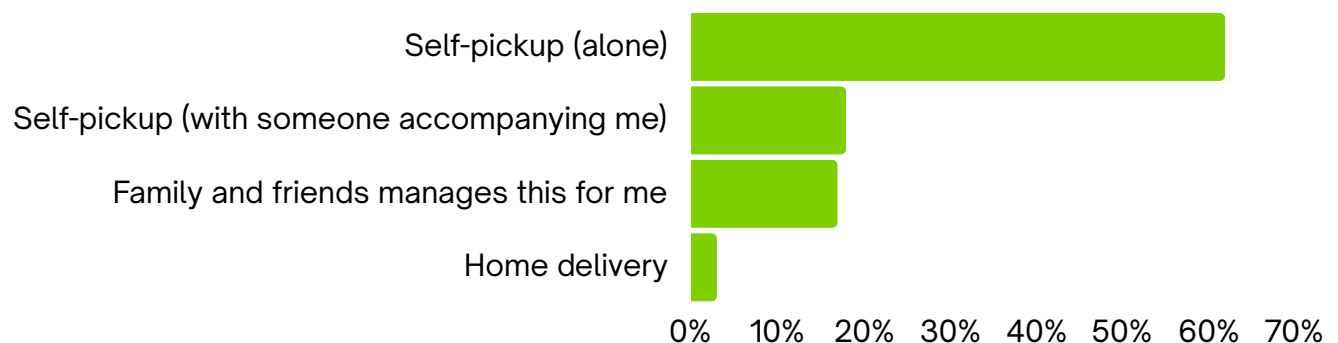


Among seniors responsible for home repairs and maintenance, the majority of these services were provided by commercial service providers, followed by community volunteers and others. Further exploration showed that men were seeking assistance from community volunteers more than women for home repairs and maintenance support. Additionally, seniors with less than a university education relied more on community volunteers for such support. Community volunteers were also utilized more by seniors living with family members than those living alone.

THEME 04: Regular groceries and medications

The assessment showed that **62% of seniors independently handle their regular grocery and medication needs in-person**, with an additional 18% managing these tasks themselves but with some accompanying support. However, 17% of seniors have their friends and families fulfill these needs and 3% use home delivery services through phone calls. Moreover, 80% of seniors expressed satisfaction with their access to groceries and medications.

Managing regular groceries and medications

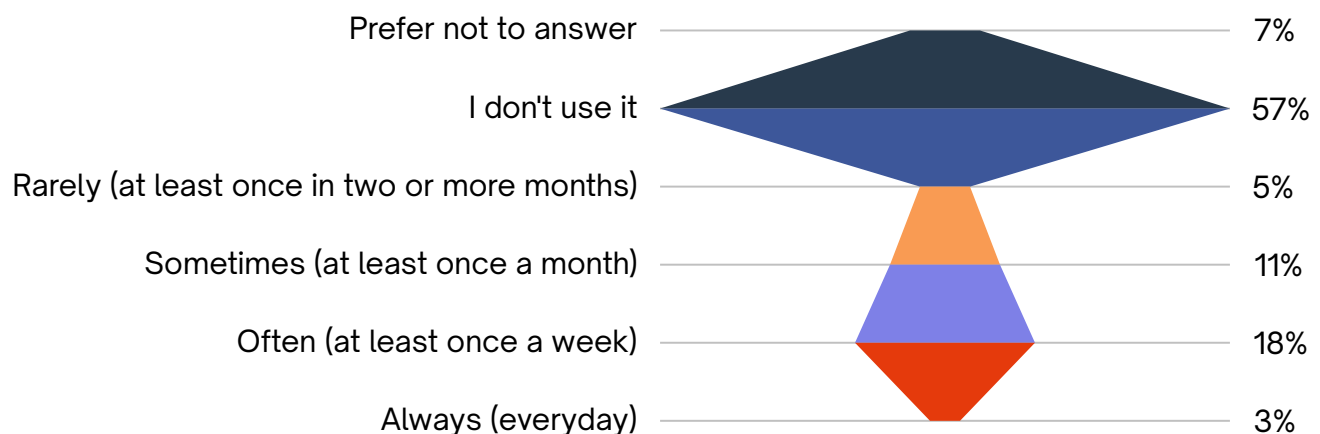


The findings also indicate that a higher proportion of female respondents obtain their groceries and medications by themselves alone as compared to male respondents. While self-managing these tasks was prevalent across all age groups, it gradually decreased with the increase in age group, with 72% of the 50-69 age group managing it alone, compared to 61% and 53% in the 70-79 and 80 or older age groups, respectively.

THEME 05: Transportation

The assessment found that **37% of seniors utilize public transportation services** such as OC Transpo or Para Transpo. Specifically, only 3% of the overall respondents use these services daily and 18% use them at least once a week, while the rest were using it less frequently or did not answer.

Use of Ottawa public transportation services

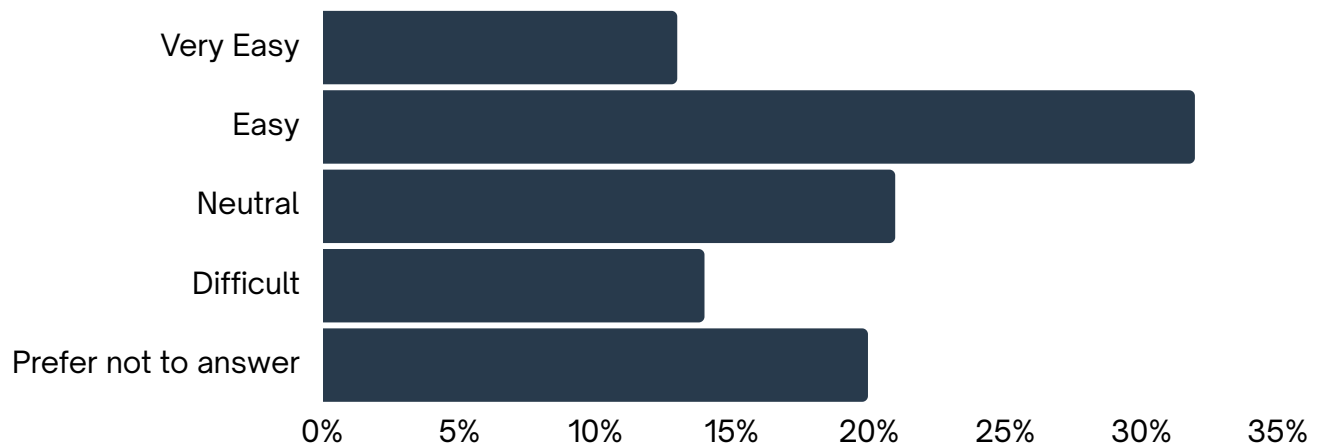


The use of public transportation was most common among seniors from the younger age groups. Moreover, 75% of those using these services consider public transportation in Ottawa to be accessible and senior-friendly. The primary issue with these services pertains to the longer time required to reach the destination compared to private transportation, with no concerns reported regarding physical accessibility.

THEME 06: Outdoor activities

The assessment showed that **one-third of seniors frequently or occasionally require assistance for errands outside the home**, such as doctor's visits, cultural events and grocery shopping. Moreover, when needed, finding or getting accompanying support for errands outside the home is difficult for 15% of total senior respondents, while 16% of seniors also reported using some form of aid or support for their mobility.

Getting accompanying support when needed

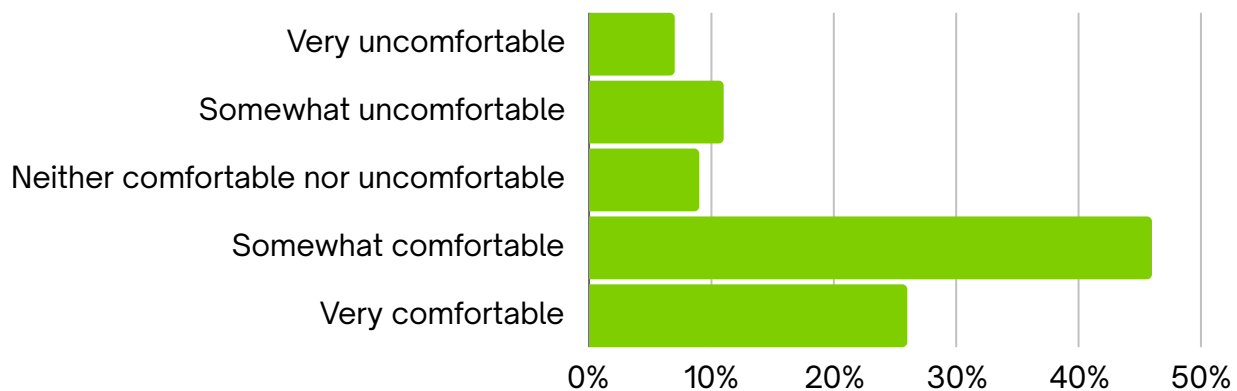


The findings showed that men had easier access to accompanying support compared to women, with 76% of men and 35% of women reporting easy or very easy access to such support. It was also found that seniors in the older age group were using the mobility aid more than those in the younger age group. 35% of seniors aged 80 or older use aid or support for their mobility, as compared to 10% in the 50-69 age group and 7% in the 70-79 age group.

THEME 07: Digital access and comfort

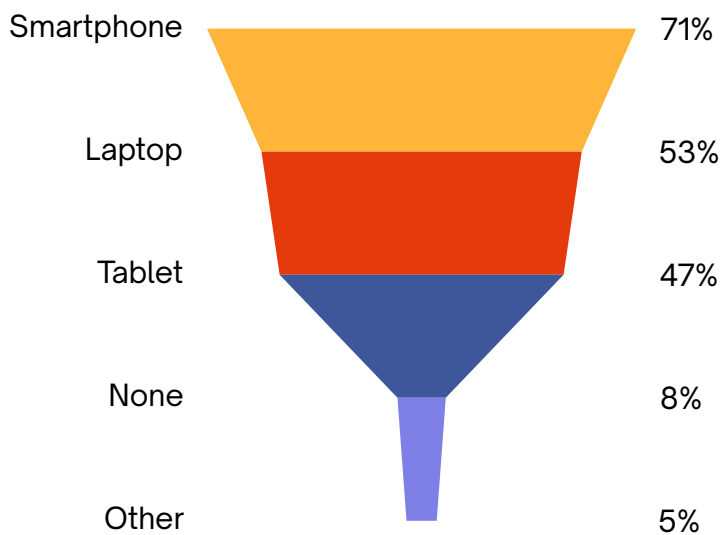
The assessment showed that **while 72% of seniors are either somewhat or very comfortable using digital devices and platforms, 55% of seniors seek technical assistance to enhance their digital usage.** The primary challenges encountered include a lack of familiarity with digital platforms, security concerns and physical or sensory limitations. This feedback underscores the need for user-friendly design, improved support and enhanced education on digital literacy for seniors.

Comfort with using digital media and platforms



The findings also indicate that a higher percentage of seniors with a university or higher education are comfortable using digital devices and platforms compared to those with less than a university level of education. However, the need for technical support in using digital devices was similar across both education groups. Additionally, the comfort level with using digital devices was higher among the 70-79 age group, however, this comfort was found to be more dependent on educational status than age. Moreover, other studies also suggest that older adults or seniors are open to using technology, but there may be barriers such as cognitive decline and technology-related usability issues.

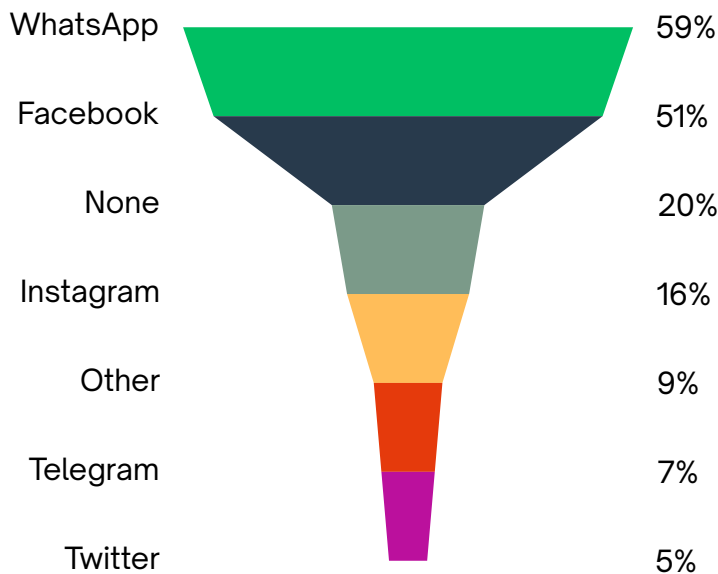
Digital devices owned



The majority of seniors own smartphones, with 8% of seniors not owning any digital devices and expressing discomfort in using them. The reasons for not owning digital devices were not explored in the assessment.

The ownership of laptops was more prevalent among men than women and among seniors with a university education or higher compared to those with less education. Similarly, more among the seniors with less than a university education and the seniors aged 80 or older reported not owning any digital devices.

Use of social media platforms



Social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook were highly popular among seniors, however, **20% (15 out of 76) of seniors reported not using any social media platforms at all**. The use of social media was found to be dependent on demographic variables, with non-users more likely to have lower levels of education, be in the oldest age group of 80 or older, or be male. Additionally, all seniors in the 50-69 age group were found to be using at least one social media platform.

Among the seniors requiring technical support for digital media and platforms, the findings showed that only 8% are paying for this support and the rest are getting it from family, friends, community volunteers and/or others.



For most of the routine work I can handle myself but should there be a highly technical issue then I need help and my family helps me.

- 70-79 age group, man, Hindi

The challenge is to find technical support for computer problems.

- 80+ age group, man, Punjabi

I have difficulties with the applications online.

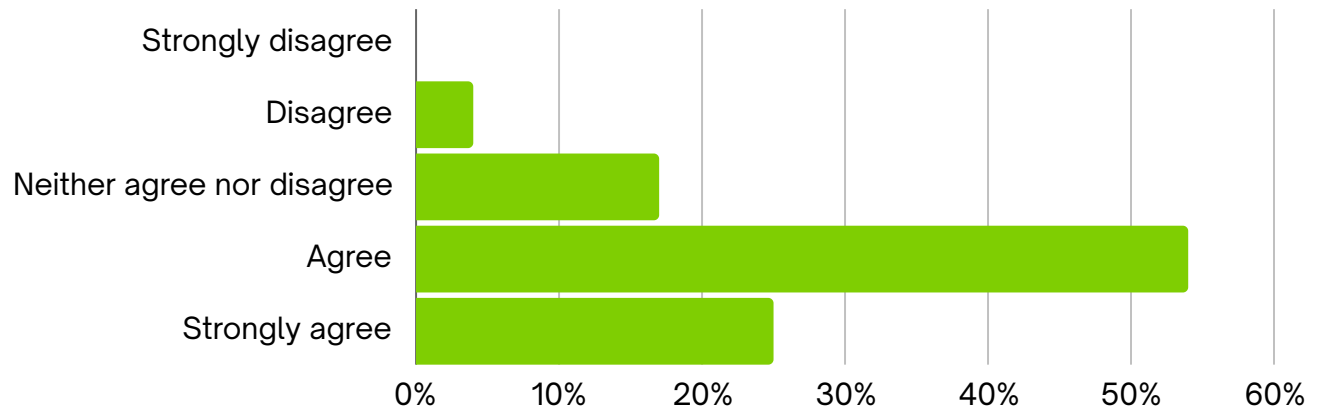
- 70-79, woman, Polish



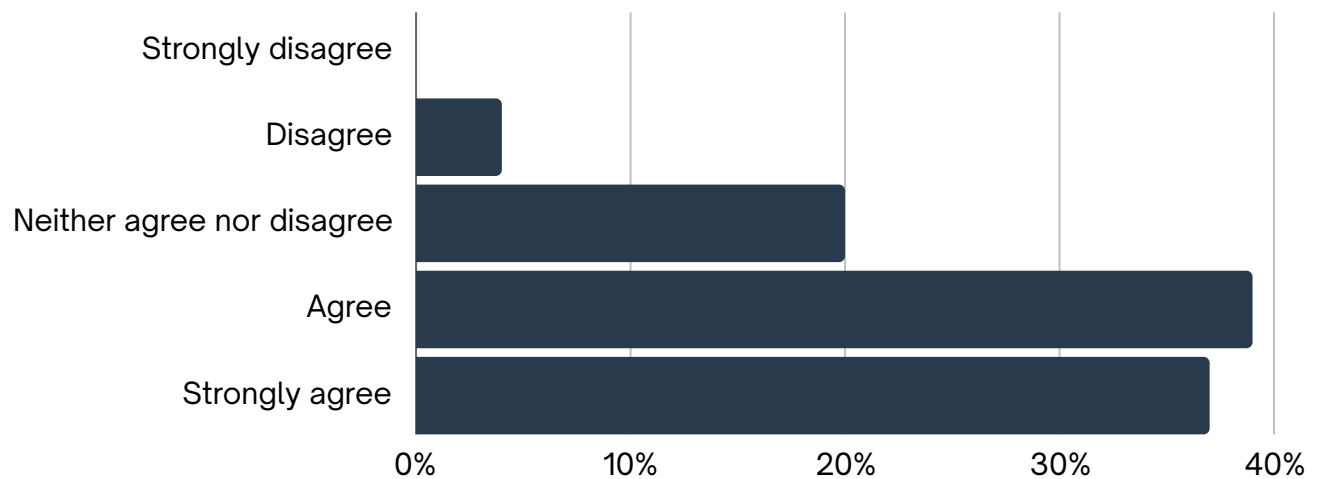
THEME 08: Sense of belonging and mental health

A significant number of seniors expressed a strong sense of belonging to their current community, with up to 78% indicating agreement or strong agreement. Likewise, a substantial 76% of seniors rated their mental health as excellent.

“I feel that I belong to the community where I am currently living”



“I feel that my mental health is excellent”



Upon further exploration, it was found that a higher percentage of men felt a sense of belonging to their current community and perceived their mental health as excellent compared to women. Similarly, respondents with a non-European first language, those in the youngest age group, and individuals with a university or higher education reported a stronger sense of belonging and a more positive perception of their mental health.

Conclusion

The assessment provides a general overview of the current state of well-being and healthy aging among the members and leaders of the ethnocultural seniors network in Ottawa, offering valuable insights into their needs and preferences. Similarly, the seniors also expressed gratitude for the continued support from the SPCO. As feedback to non-profits on seniors programming, the ethnocultural seniors highlighted the need for home physical activity equipment, improved information dissemination on events, affordable housing and medical support.

The following are the key conclusions based on the findings:

Information Access and Needs

- There is a significant demand for information in languages such as Punjabi, Chinese, Urdu, and Spanish, particularly in health, senior home care and legal matters.
- Women were seeking information on senior-specific services more than men.
- Seniors with less than a university education most commonly rely on family and friends for information.

Social Activities

- Social activities have a positive impact on the physical and mental health of seniors.
- Seniors with a university or higher level of education and those with a non-European first language were more inclined to participate in social activities.
- Language and cultural differences, health issues and transportation challenges are significant barriers for the ethnocultural seniors to accessing social activities.

Support for Repairs, Maintenance, and Mobility

- A significant percentage of seniors need and deal with repairs and maintenance services for their homes on their own.
- Finding accompanying support for errands outside the home is challenging for some seniors, particularly for women as well as seniors who are in the 80 or older age group.

Digital Literacy

- The majority of seniors are comfortable using digital devices and platforms, but many seek technical assistance to enhance their digital usage.
- Social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are highly popular among seniors, with usage dependent on demographic variables.

Sense of Belonging and Mental Health

- A strong majority of seniors have a sense of belonging to their current community and perceive their mental health as excellent.
- Male respondents, those with a non-European first language, seniors in the youngest age group, and those with a university or higher level of education reported a greater sense of belonging and a more positive perception of mental health.

Recommendation

Theme	Recommendation
Information needs and access	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide multilingual information on health, senior home care and legal topics. There is a high demand for Punjabi, Chinese, Urdu and Spanish languages.• Develop a multilingual e-manual for seniors and embed it on the SPCO website with accessibility options.• Tailor information dissemination for different groups like women and those with lower education levels.• Conduct community workshops and online webinars on healthcare, legal aid, housing support, etc.• Establish peer support groups for seniors.
Social activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop social activities that consider language and cultural differences, health issues and transportation challenges to ensure accessibility for all seniors.• Offer diverse engagement opportunities like cultural events, art classes and intergenerational programs.• Collaborate with schools for intergenerational programs to combat ageism and promote understanding.• Provide transportation aid for seniors through subsidized services or community volunteer drivers.
Support for maintenance, repairs and mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhance access to services, especially for women and individuals aged 80 or older.• Establish a senior home assistance program connecting seniors with affordable repair and maintenance services.



Recommendation

Theme	Recommendation
Digital access and literacy support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide technical assistance to support digital adoption by addressing platform familiarity, security, and physical and sensory limitations.• Conduct digital literacy workshops tailored for seniors covering computer basics, internet safety, online banking, and social media.• Offer personalized one-on-one training sessions in-person or via video calls for seniors requiring extra help with digital tools.
Sense of belonging and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster community engagement to strengthen relationships and social cohesion among seniors, especially those with non-European first language or living alone.• Provide cultural competency training for staff and volunteers to respect the diverse needs of ethnocultural seniors.• Support to establish peer support groups or networks for seniors to connect with others sharing similar backgrounds, offering emotional support and companionship.

