

Speaking Notes

Improving the Quality of Life of Saskatchewan Seniors

Below is a generic presentation that is about 20 minutes long. Please adapt this presentation as appropriate for the audience and the time available. Please use your own words and your own examples. Some of this presentation is in point form. You can enrich these sections with your own words and your own examples. This presentation only hits the highlights of the Action Plan in order to keep the presentation short. If more time is available, you can add more detail and additional examples.

The last page of this presentation is a graphic which shows the seven factors that influence seniors' quality of life. Use this page as a master to make an overhead for display during your presentation or to make handouts to distribute to your audience.

My name is _____. I am a member of the Seniors' Quality of Life Coordinating Committee. The Seniors' Quality of Life Project is a Canada-wide project funded by Health Canada. Activity is taking place in eight Canadian cities including Regina. In Regina, the project is being managed by the Seniors' Education Centre at the University of Regina.

The focus of the project was to learn more about factors that influence seniors' quality of life and to identify actions that governments and individuals can take to enhance seniors' quality of life.

During the project we did interviews with seniors in the Regina area. We worked with the Regina Health District which did interviews with rural seniors and with the City of Regina which did a survey of Regina seniors.

We found that seven factors are of concern to seniors in southern Saskatchewan. These seven factors are: health, income, belonging, making life meaningful, housing, safety and security, and getting around. I'm going to talk briefly about each of these factors.

► **Health** – The people that we interviewed fell into two groups when it came to health. Some were doing a lot to maintain their health. For example, they talked about eating right and exercising every day. The second group were people who seemed to believe that they have no control over the state of their health. They viewed health as something that is dependent upon interventions by doctors. Poor health detracts from seniors' quality of life because it prevents people from doing things they want to do or used to do. A couple of people we interviewed said that they could no longer dance and this caused them immense frustration. Three points in particular stand out in regard to health.

1. Seniors are very dissatisfied with the provincial drug plan. The deductible is too high and some high-cost, experimental and specialized drugs are not covered.
2. People's attitude toward home care is ambiguous. Most of the people interviewed recognized that home care allows them to stay in their own homes longer than would be possible otherwise. At the same time, there was dissatisfaction with the quality of service provided by home care. A particular concern was that different home care workers come every few days and that there isn't an opportunity to establish a routine or a personal relationship with a worker.
3. Family caregivers need recognition and support for the work they do. When a spouse or other family member cares for an elderly or ill person at home, there is a saving to the health care system. Caregiving has many rewards, but it also takes a heavy toll on the caregiver. For example, depression, loneliness, physical illness, stress, and isolation are common among caregivers. Our Project Coordinating Committee believes that additional support is needed for caregivers. We advocate increased access to respite care and financial recognition for the very valuable work that caregivers do.

- ▶ **Income** – Seniors’ quality of life is influenced by their income. Having an adequate income allows seniors to do things they want to do like going to movies, eating in restaurants, and travelling. Similarly, income influences the quality of housing a senior has. There is also a link between income and health. Generally, in all age groups, poverty is associated with poor health. This is true for seniors as well.

The people we interviewed expressed a lot of concern about the Old Age Security Program and the Canada Pension Plan. Many said that they depend on these government programs for some or all of their income. They are worried that benefits paid under these plans will be cut back or that benefits will not keep pace with inflation. Some said that they are fearful that these programs will be eliminated altogether and replaced with private pension schemes.

- ▶ **Belonging** – Belonging refers to being part of a social network, the feeling of being part of a family, a community, a circle of friends. A sense of belonging makes seniors (and most other people, too) feel good. It provides a circle of meaningful relationships. Being part of a social network also provides safety and security for seniors. Seniors who have frequent phone calls and visits from others have more people checking on them and looking out for their well-being.

Because the telephone is such an important link to others for many seniors, our Project Coordinating Committee believes that basic telephone service must be maintained at affordable levels for all seniors.

- ▶ **Making Life Meaningful** – Having something meaningful to do greatly enhances seniors’ quality of life. Seniors, like most other groups in society, want to feel that they are contributing to society or growing personally. Some seniors want to continue on doing the things they did before retirement. For example, some retired teachers do volunteer tutoring. Other seniors use their retirement years to do things that they couldn’t do before. Some are more active politically, because they have more time and they no longer fear that speaking up will cost them their jobs.

Seniors do a tremendous amount of volunteer work. They are the backbone of many organizations that serve others. For example, most volunteer drivers with Meals on Wheels are seniors.

We found that you cannot make blanket generalizations about the kinds of activities that are of interest to seniors. Seniors are like any other age group in society and their interests vary greatly.

Our Project Coordinating Committee urges community groups to promote their activities among seniors. They can provide seniors' organizations with information about their activities and hold meetings and other events in buildings that are physically accessible.

- ▶ **Housing** – Seniors vary in their lifestyle preferences and in their income, so their preferences concerning housing vary as well. There are literally dozens of different housing options for seniors. Many housing options provide some level of support which may range from simply a community of other people of the same age, to help with housekeeping, to offering three meals a day. For seniors, the key is a feeling of self-determination and independence. They want to feel that they are making their own decisions about where and how they live. They don't want this decision to be made for them.

Our Project Coordinating Committee believes that government policy should provide for more low-income housing units for seniors and also a broader range of housing options for older adults.

- ▶ **Safety and Security** – Some seniors are concerned about their personal safety and security. They worry about break-ins and are afraid of muggings and purse snatchings on the street. Some of the people we talked to said that the police aren't helpful in this regard. Talks and booklets on how to protect your home from break-ins and how to be safe on the street only increase fear. What is needed is increased recreational activity for youth so they have something meaningful to do and more community policing.

Our Project Coordinating Committee is also concerned about telephone con artists. These individuals seem to prey on seniors. We need more public information about recognizing telephone scams and about the importance of saying “no” or hanging up on con artists.

- **Getting Around** – Getting around refers to getting out into the community. Transportation is one component of getting around. For seniors who live in rural areas, transportation is a big issue. They need affordable transportation in their own communities for shopping, visiting and participating in community events. They also need transportation into the nearest big city for medical appointments, visiting and shopping.

Transportation was also an issue for some people living in Regina. Buses don’t run on Sunday morning and there is often a long wait for the bus. Taxis are too expensive for many.

Grocery shopping is a particular problem for most seniors who don’t have cars. Groceries are too heavy to carry any distance and a taxi costs too much.

A second component of getting around is accessibility. Icy sidewalks and streets limit some seniors’ mobility and buildings with steps can be a problem.

Our Project Coordinating Committee believes that we need to work at making public transportation more responsive to the needs of seniors. This may involve exploring the potential of new and innovative means of transportation such as small buses, tele-buses and volunteer or subsidized driver programs. We also need to rigorously enforce regulations concerning the physical accessibility of buildings.

Each one of us can take action to enhance seniors' quality of life.

We can tell government about changes that are needed to government policy.

At the simplest and most basic level, this means voting and working for political candidates who are supportive of seniors' issues. It can also mean writing or phoning elected officials to make our opinions known and writing letters to the editor to influence public opinion. It can mean organizing networks of people who feel strongly about seniors' issues and systematically lobbying government.

We can also enhance seniors' quality of life at a personal level. If you are a senior or soon will be, you can take responsibility for your health by not smoking, by exercising regularly and eating a low-fat diet. If you know someone who is a caregiver, you can give that person a break by offering to sit with the person to whom they are providing care. This will give the caregiver a bit of time to do errands, go shopping or simply have personal time. If you belong to a community group or club, you can be sure that your group meets in buildings that are physically accessible and that are on a public bus route.

I want to invite each one of you in this audience to do one thing to enhance seniors' quality of life. Individuals can make a difference and by working together toward common goals we can make a tremendous difference.

Thank you for asking me to speak to you today.

I'd be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Factors that Influence Seniors' Quality of Life

