

# New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group – Final Recommendations Report

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To: The Community Safety and Well-being Plan Advisory Committee

Prepared by: New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group with Municipal Staff Support

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## Executive Summary

This report captures the work of the New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group, a volunteer group of local seniors and caregivers who came together in 2024 to make lived experience informed recommendations for the next iteration of the Prince Edward County Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB) Plan, and to develop initiatives that would benefit seniors in the community. Formed through funding from the New Horizons for Seniors Federal Grant Program, the group was supported by municipal staff and community partners to engage seniors from across the County in exploring issues that matter most to them.

Over several months, the Seniors' Advisory Group learned about the CSWB Plan, hosted inclusive in-person events, engaged with MLP residents and the St. Mary Magdalene Women's Group, distributed surveys, developed an Online Seniors Hub proposal, and created the "Take the Gym Home" seniors fitness kit program, soon launching through the local libraries. Drawing from over 100 unique perspectives and lived experiences, this report highlights the main themes raised by local seniors, and puts forward actionable, collaborative recommendations for improving well-being and safety as residents age in Prince Edward County. These recommendations aim to advance local policy and planning through a collective impact lens—emphasizing the strengths, contributions, and leadership of older adults themselves.

## Background

The New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group was formed in September 2024 as a branch of the Seniors Support Action Team of the CSWB Plan. This initiative, funded through Employment and Social Development Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program, was rooted in the belief that local seniors must play a central role in shaping the policies, programs, and environments that affect them. Recognizing that over 33% of County residents are over the age of 65—nearly double the provincial average—seniors' support was identified as a critical pillar of the CSWB Plan.

The Seniors' Advisory Group was designed to reflect the diversity of PEC's senior population, including people living alone, caregivers, retirees, newcomers, and long-time

residents. Eight seniors and caregivers were recruited and supported with honoraria, transportation, and facilitation to ensure equitable participation. Over the course of the project, the group co-designed and led four engagement opportunities: two public town hall style events with shared meals and transportation support, and two smaller private conversations with specific senior groups. In addition, they developed a survey asking the same core questions that were explored during their conversations.

1. What matters most to you as you think about your safety and well-being as a resident of Prince Edward County?
2. Can you suggest specific actions that can be taken or things that can be done to enhance your feelings of safety and well-being?
3. What do you see as the challenges, or opportunities for PEC to become a place where seniors feel safe and well?

These efforts culminated in a report that blends lived experience, community data, and collaborative visioning.

In addition to identifying key concerns, the group brainstormed local, actionable solutions that could be achieved through multi-partner collaboration. Their efforts also planted seeds for legacy projects, such as the Seniors Fitness Kits and the proposed Online Seniors Hub—demonstrating that grassroots leadership can build meaningful change. This report, and the community behind it, reflects a shared desire for dignity, safety, and connection at every stage of aging in Prince Edward County.

## **Themes Collected from Community Conversations & Surveys**

### **1. Transportation & Mobility**

- Lack of evening or rural transit access; existing services do not meet mobility needs
- No safe pedestrian pathways (e.g., sidewalks to grocery store from MLP)
- Desire for a transit loop connecting seniors housing to downtown hubs

### **2. Housing Affordability & Aging in Place**

- Shortage of affordable rental and transitional housing for seniors
- Isolation among seniors living alone in large homes due to lack of alternatives
- Desire for multi-level care models (e.g., retirement + LTC in one facility)

### **3. Accessibility & Infrastructure**

- Poor road maintenance, sidewalk clearing, and lighting impacting safety
- Inadequate accessible parking downtown and at health services
- Buildings and services not compliant with accessibility standards

### **4. Health Care & Mental Health**

- Limited access to local doctors and urgent care services

- Need for mental health support for isolated or bereaved seniors
- More preventative and mobile care options desired

#### **5. Community Connection & Inclusion**

- Lack of affordable social activities, especially in winter
- Volunteer application processes are not senior-friendly
- Libraries, community halls, and churches underutilized or inaccessible

#### **6. Communication & Information Access**

- Many seniors are not online and unaware of available resources
- Desire for a central hub or directory for senior services
- Calls for improved municipal communication (e.g. newsletters, bulletin boards)

#### **7. Senior Active Living**

- Strong interest in more accessible fitness, wellness, and recreational opportunities
- Barriers to participation include cost, transportation, programming options and locations, and a lack of understanding around the importance of active aging
- Desire for community-based education, walking groups, nature programs and more

#### **8. Senior Voice & Representation**

- Seniors feel unheard in municipal planning processes
- Desire for continued involvement through advisory groups and consultations
- Recognition that the lived experience of aging individuals should inform policy and program development

### **Recommendations for the Next Community Safety and Well-being Plan**

These recommendations are framed using a collective impact model, encouraging collaboration among government, service agencies, community groups, and seniors themselves. The goal is to align efforts under shared outcomes and work toward a more senior-inclusive County.

#### **1. Pursue Age-Friendly Community Designation**

- Bring forward the previously completed Age-Friendly Community research to Council for endorsement and action
- Develop a working group to advance Age-Friendly Community goals and track the metrics associated
- Use the Age-Friendly Community lens as a guiding framework for all community development efforts
- Many of the following recommendations echo those in the Age-Friendly Community Report

2. Support Senior-Friendly Transportation
  - Advocate for more accessible, flexible transportation options that reflect the needs of aging residents, especially in rural areas
  - Support the exploration of a "Seniors Loop" shuttle route with designated stops at key senior locations, including stops at senior residences, grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors' offices, etc. (e.g. 2-3 days a week, 4x per day)
  - Advocate for a safe walking path from MLP to Foodland to reduce isolation and increase mobility for residents
3. Promote Safe and Affordable Aging in Place
  - Launch a collaborative campaign to share housing options, rebates, and services with seniors and their caregivers
  - Explore and/or support co-housing and shared housing pilots with input from older adults and case studies from other municipalities (e.g. Solo Seniors)
  - Advocate for walk-in seniors' clinics and regular geriatrician visits to improve access to care
4. Improve Accessibility with a Senior Lens
  - Conduct community accessibility audits co-led by seniors and local accessibility advocates
  - Fund and implement small-scale upgrades such as handrails, increased public seating, and crosswalk improvements
  - Use Age-Friendly and Universal Design principles in all new developments and refurbishments
5. Enhance Health & Wellness Supports for Seniors
  - Advocate for hiring a local geriatrician and increasing mental health support for seniors
  - Advocate for a Seniors Walk-In Clinic in collaboration with health providers
  - Explore funding opportunities to support senior caregivers, particularly those in the sandwich generation
6. Foster Social Belonging and Senior-Driven Programming
  - Expand community town halls and listening sessions specifically for seniors in underserved areas
  - Offer grants or in-kind support to older adults for peer-led programming in music, crafts, walking groups, etc.
  - Build partnerships between seniors and youth through mentorship, storytelling, and shared events
7. Ensure All Seniors Have Access to Vital Information
  - Develop and maintain a centralized hub for seniors' services, both online and in print, with contributions from local organizations

- Promote and normalize calling 311, 988, and 211 by advertising these supports in senior-friendly formats
  - Update municipal web pages related to seniors to reflect current services, events, and contact information
8. Champion Active Living for Older Adults
    - Maintain and expand free fitness initiatives such as the senior fitness kits program
    - Partner with organizations to create low-cost outdoor fitness and wellness opportunities
    - Celebrate Active Seniors Week with a calendar of inclusive events throughout the County
  9. Uplift Senior Leadership and Representation
    - Formalize a Seniors Advisory Committee to report directly to Council, building on the Age-Friendly Community report
    - Engage seniors in the design, development, and evaluation of CSWB initiatives
    - Include lived experience representatives on project teams and advisory boards
  10. Strengthen the CSWB Plan Structure and Transparency
    - Include clear language in the CSWB Plan around who is responsible, how progress will be tracked, and by when (accountability, timelines and transparency)
    - Provide an annual report to Council and the public on CSWB progress, with specific updates on seniors' initiatives
    - Adjust plan terminology for clarity (e.g., distinguish between goals, actions, strategies)
  11. Increase Community Participation and Public Understanding
    - Develop a plain-language communications plan for the community about how municipal governance works and the various working groups, advisory committees, ad hoc committees etc. are, what they do, how they work, and what they've accomplished. (e.g. The accessibility advisory committee is \_\_\_\_\_. This is how they fit into the governance structure: \_\_\_\_\_, and these are examples of what they've accomplished.)
    - Use local examples to highlight the impact of advisory committees and working groups (e.g., Accessibility Advisory Committee achievements)
    - Empower seniors and community members to get involved in municipal processes

## Final Reflections & Next Steps

The New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group began with a simple idea: that older adults should have a say in shaping the future of their community. What followed was a powerful

process of learning, connection, and action. Together, we identified real challenges and surfaced opportunities grounded in lived experience—not assumptions.

Through this work, we've seen the impact that community-led engagement can have—not just on policy, but on people. For many group members, this project reignited a sense of purpose and connection. For the broader community, it offered space to be heard, to be seen, and to imagine what aging well in Prince Edward County could look like.

As this report is shared with the CSWB Advisory Committee and other community partners, we hope it is not seen as an end point—but as a starting point. We hope it sparks continued investment in senior-led, community-based solutions. We hope it reminds decision-makers of the value seniors bring as leaders, mentors, caregivers, and neighbours. And most of all, we hope it leads to real, tangible actions that reflect the priorities and wisdom of older adults in our County.

Conversations have already begun about continuing the New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group beyond this project. There is strong interest in maintaining the group as an ongoing branch of the CSWB Plan's Seniors Support Action Team, to ensure that lived experience remains at the heart of planning and decision-making. This group could also help incubate and support continued senior-led initiatives across Prince Edward County. A Terms of Reference will begin development to formalize the group's future role, responsibilities, and structure.

The New Horizons Seniors' Advisory Group stands ready to support next steps—whether that means advising on implementation, participating in working groups, or helping to engage more seniors in the process. We are proud of what we've accomplished together, and even more hopeful for what comes next.