

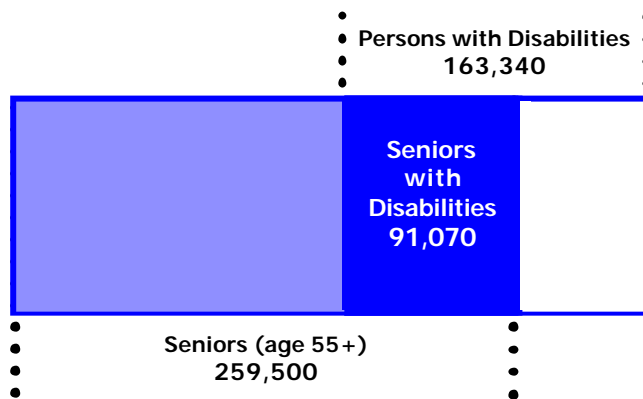
Aging and Disability in Manitoba: Converging Opportunities

The aging of the population in Manitoba and across the country is a well-known trend. One important but less publicized trend about our aging population concerns people with disabilities.

Seniors and people with disabilities are often considered as two discrete groups. In reality, there is a very large overlap among these two populations; seniors make up a large percentage of people with disabilities, and vice versa.

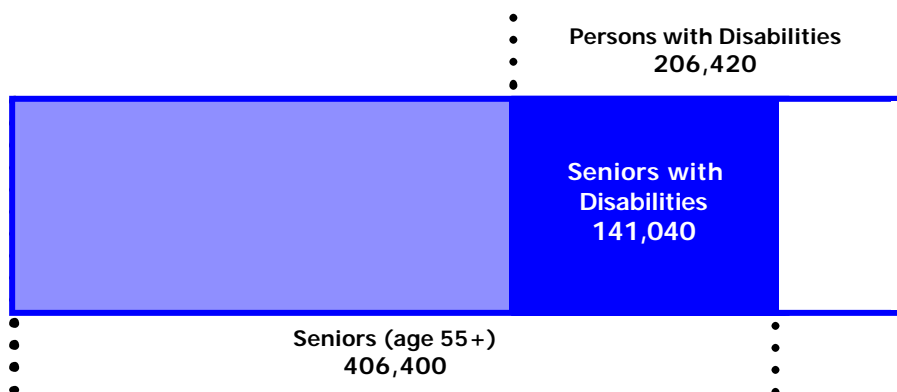
According to Statistics Canada, in 2001 there were 259,500 Manitobans who are seniors (age 55+), and 163,340 Manitobans with a disability. The overlap group - seniors with disabilities - is 91,070 people. Among Manitobans with disabilities, the majority (56%) are seniors.

**Manitoba Seniors and Disability Populations
2001 Statistics Canada Figures**



As the population ages over the coming years, the size of the overlap group will increase sharply. Assuming that age-based disability rates remain constant, there will be 141,040 Manitoba seniors with disabilities in 2026 – that's 50,000 more than in 2001, an increase of close to 50%. More than 2/3 of all Manitobans with disabilities (68%) will be seniors in 2026.

**Manitoba Seniors and Disability Populations
2026 Projected**



Changing demographics mean new challenges

The current size and projected growth of the seniors with disabilities population has important implications for public policy and service delivery to both seniors and people with disabilities in Manitoba.

Currently, government service to seniors and people with disabilities tends to be structured, managed, and delivered in two separate systems; there are separate community advisory groups, government offices, and programs for the two groups. As the two populations increase, government faces a greater and greater challenge to provide these groups with appropriate service in a cost-effective way.

In planning for this challenge, the size of the seniors with disabilities sub-group presents an opportunity; it is worthwhile to consider how policy and practice could be integrated or re-oriented toward this sub-group to make the best use of available resources and to best ensure their needs are met.

In attempting to address this challenge, three main questions emerge:

- How will seniors-focused policy and services need to be adjusted to account for the growing number of people with disabilities among this population?
- How will disability-focused policy and services adjust to the increasing number of seniors in the disability community?
- Will new policies or services need to be developed specifically for the large and growing number of seniors with disabilities in the community?

To some extent, these questions are all one: ***Are there ways to integrate seniors and disability policy to provide the most effective and efficient programs and services?***

Common issues, converging opportunities

One approach to begin responding to the questions is to identify key issues for the two groups, and determine where there is convergence. In preparing this paper, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities conducted a review of major policy documents from government and the voluntary sector (both provincial and national) for people with disabilities and also for seniors. Among the many key issues identified, several are common to both groups:

- Social isolation
- Home care
- Technology supports
- Income supports
- Case management
- Pharmaceutical compliance
- Transportation
- Affordable housing
- Accessible primary health care
- Access to government
- Abuse, neglect, and discrimination

Both groups also advocate for government to consider the needs and aspirations of their population. For disability issues, a “disability lens” has been developed in some jurisdictions as a tool for applying a disability perspective in the planning and delivery of programs and services. Federal/provincial/territorial governments also use the National Framework on Aging to apply a “seniors lens.” For both populations, the lens is essentially a series of questions that directs attention to their issues and perspectives (i.e., how are seniors/people with disabilities affected by a given initiative).

Despite the broad range of common issues, the research shows that the two groups tend to view the issues through their own lenses, and address issues separately. Seldom has a “double lens” perspective been used to view or address the issues.

Converging opportunities & the “double lens”

There may be many benefits to applying a “double lens” perspective to the convergent issues of the disability and seniors populations. There are two main reasons why.

First, seniors with disabilities are a large and growing group in Manitoba (and in all other provinces in Canada). Second, as presented on the previous page, the two groups share a wide range of issues, such as housing, assistive technologies, caregiving supports, transportation, inclusion, and others. A double lens review of policy and practice could result in more effective and efficient service delivery for a population that will number 140,000 by the year 2026.

Some policies and practices jointly serving the two groups are being implemented in Canada. In Manitoba, the Province has just completed a new \$375,000 accessible housing project to serve seniors and people with disabilities in Brandon. Examples from other provinces include:

Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Council on Disability Issues sponsored a Saskatchewan Disability Action Plan (published June 2001). The Plan has not received an official response from the Saskatchewan government, but some aspects of the Plan have been acted on. The Plan highlights areas where a joint focus is either applied or recommended:

- Saskatchewan Assisted Living Services - a seniors housing initiative with some innovative elements (such as partnering among health districts) that could also benefit people with disabilities
- Respite care and other supports to caregiving families
- Day supervision programs for older children, youth, and seniors
- Home modification programs
- Paratransit services - including training for drivers, passenger safety, and improved services

Alberta

Three initiatives of the Ministry of Transportation focus jointly on seniors and people with disabilities:

- Publication of *Driver's Guide for Seniors & People with Disabilities*
- Publication of *Let's Plan On It: A Guide to Providing Transportation Services in Rural Areas for Seniors and People with Disabilities*
- Parking Placard Policy – takes into account needs of both seniors and people with disabilities

New Brunswick

The Ministry of Family and Community Services has organized some areas of policy and service delivery as inclusive of adults with disabilities and seniors:

- Long Term Care Services for Adults and Seniors – one program for all adults focusing on functionality
- Adult Protection services are structured with a focus on seniors and adults with disabilities who are victims of abuse or neglect.
- Adult Victims of Abuse Protocols have been written to apply to seniors and people with disabilities.

These examples were found as part of a brief scan of seniors and disability policy and practice in Canada. There may be many more areas of policy and practice where a joint seniors/disability focus may be appropriate and beneficial.

Limitations of seniors/disability service convergence

Any joint seniors/disability strategies must be mediated by the fact that seniors issues and disability issues are not always convergent. For example, the disability community has far more direct interest in child development, post-secondary education, and employment. These issues matter to the seniors population, but are far from being a high priority. Meanwhile, mandatory retirement is an important issue for seniors, but not a high priority of the disability community.

Furthermore, it may be counter to the principles of inclusion and participation to structure services specifically for this overlap group within the two populations. Even within common issues, such as housing, convergence may not make sense; housing seniors and people with disabilities in the same facility may be a good idea in some contexts (the new accessible housing project in Brandon is one example), but this may not be an effective global housing strategy.

Another barrier to convergence is the extent to which the population will identify itself through a double lens of aging and disability. It is not uncommon among the seniors population to recognize a limitation as something other than a disability.

Moving forward with a double lens

The use of a double lens in informing seniors and disability policy is presented here as a useful concept for consideration. How to apply the concept in re-organizing practice is another question; one addressed here in only a preliminary way.

It appears that no jurisdiction in Canada has formally developed or applied a double lens perspective on policy and service delivery. Furthermore, no jurisdiction appears to have conducted a formal, cross-departmental review of service delivery to seniors with disabilities, or developed broader policy specific to seniors with disabilities. There is an opportunity for Manitoba to demonstrate leadership in this area, as the province has historically provided leadership in the development of disability policy and practice.

Moving forward on this opportunity could involve these first steps:

- Development of a draft seniors/disabilities double lens planning tool
- Further collaborative planning involving the Disabilities Issues Office and the Seniors Directorate
- Community consultations and/or a double lens planning conference/workshop
- Review of federal/provincial funding mechanisms to explore opportunities to maximize federal cost-sharing

It is the hope of the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities that this paper will generate further exploration and consultations regarding the double lens perspective and the beneficial convergence of seniors and disability policy and practice. We encourage the Province to engage the disability community, the seniors community, and its own relevant departments in a seniors/disabilities double lens initiative.

Sources:

Population figures on page 1 are from the Statistics Canada report *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories 2000-2026* (Catalogue no. 91-520-XPB) released in March 2001. Disability population counts are derived from customized cross-tabulations from the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS).

Information on Seniors:

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| FTP/Canada | Division of Aging and Seniors website National Framework on Aging (1999) |
| Alberta | Alberta Seniors 2001-2003 Strategic Plan |
| Saskatchewan | Proposed Provincial Action Plan/Framework (2000) Provincial Advisory Committee of Older Persons |
| Quebec | Secrétariat aux aînés Seniors Strategy (en français, year unknown) |
| Nova Scotia | Senior Citizens' Secretariat Business Plan 2004-05 |
| Newfoundland | Department of Health and Community Services website |
| National Advisory Council on Aging | 1999 and Beyond: Challenges of an Aging Canadian Society 2003 Interim Report Card |

CARP - Canada's Association for the FiftyPlus

Federal Election Questions (2004)

Presentation to federal Liberal Caucus Task Force on Seniors (2003)

Canada Coordinating Committee for International Year of Older Persons

1999 National Community Consultations Report

Information on Disabilities:

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| FTP/Canada | News Release: Seventh Meeting of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers responsible for Seniors (Halifax, Nova Scotia – Nov. 26-27, 2003) News Release: Sixth Meeting of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers responsible for Seniors (Toronto, Ontario - June 27, 2002) Office for Disability Issues (ODI) – Strategic Plan 2002-2007 Current Disability Issues in Canada: A Background Paper (2002) by the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities In Unison report (2000) Social Union Framework Agreement (1999) Federal Disability Strategy: Working in Partnership for Full Citizenship (1999) Future Directions: Working Together for Full Citizenship (1999) In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability (1998) |
| Alberta | Alberta Disability Strategy (2002) The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities |
| Saskatchewan | Saskatchewan Disability Action Plan (2001) Saskatchewan Council on Disability |
| Manitoba | Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Strategy on Disability (1999 White Paper) |
| Ontario | Independence and Opportunity: Ontario's Framework for Change for Persons with Disabilities (2001) |
| Nova Scotia | Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission Three-year Strategic Plan 2003-06 |
| New Brunswick | Response from the Government of New Brunswick to the report: Awareness, Action, Accountability: Disability Strategy 2001-2010 by The Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons |

Council of Canadians with Disabilities et al

A National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities: The Community Definition (1999)