

# Healthy Aging and Seniors Engagement through the Arts

## General

As the baby boom generation ages and life expectancy continues to increase, the number of people in Ontario over age 65 will nearly double over the coming decades. In fact, Ontario's and Canada's seniors' populations now outnumber those of their children for the first time in history. These older Ontarians are our grandparents, our parents, our uncles and aunts, our brothers and sisters, our neighbours, and our friends.

Seniors are as diverse as any population in Ontario and have different requirements at different times of their lives. Half of Ontario's seniors say they will require help over the next five to 10 years to access vital services such as transportation, and safe and affordable housing options; nearly half worry about social isolation; and over one-third have difficulty accessing information about community services. Also, as people grow older, disability can occur, health can decline, and functional capacity can decrease.

Ontario is committed to helping seniors across Ontario age well and confidently, recognizing their diversity and giving them choices, with a variety of new initiatives.

That is why the government has introduced ***Aging with Confidence: Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors***, an ongoing commitment to seniors that builds on successful initiatives launched through the 2013 *Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors*. The plan will support seniors so they can live independent, healthy, active, safe and socially connected lives.

The government's goal is to shape a province where seniors at all stages can stay independent as they age by providing the supports they need to remain connected, engaged, healthy and safe.

The Strategy is as wide-ranging as the population it serves. Ontario's two million seniors have different backgrounds and interests. Their incomes, education and health vary. They have helped to grow Ontario into a prosperous, innovative and inclusive province, and we continue to benefit from their contributions and vast experience.

***Aging with Confidence: Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors*** is a government-wide strategy for Ontario's seniors to remain socially connected, safe, healthy, and engaged across all phases and types of senior life.

- Seniors (65 years and older) are the fastest-growing age group in Ontario; the senior population in Ontario is projected to almost double by 2041.
- Seniors are living longer and often in better health than ever before.
- Regardless of their needs, seniors want a high-quality of life – one that maximizes their health, safety, and connections with family, friends and community.
- The senior population is as diverse as any population in Ontario.

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## From the Cabinet Submission:

Public opinion research captured two key themes based on adult expectations and desires for the future: that seniors are interested in remaining socially connected and engaged regardless of where they live, and they want to live independently with a good quality of life for as long as possible.

### Ontario is facing a significant demographic shift:

- Older adults are the fastest growing segment. As of 2015, there are more Ontarians 65+ than children under 15.<sup>1</sup>
- Older adults (65+) make up more than 16% of Ontarians (2.3 million seniors), reaching 25% (4.6 million) by 2041.<sup>2</sup>
- Life expectancy continues to increase steadily.<sup>3</sup>

### Oldest age groups will experience the fastest growth:

- By 2041, the number of adults aged 75+ will grow from 1 million to 2.7 million, and the number of adults aged 90+ will almost quadruple.<sup>4</sup>

### Ontario's seniors population is becoming increasingly diverse:

- The number of visible minority seniors (65+) in Ontario increased by 35% between 2006 and 2011, compared to 9% increase among non-visible minority seniors.<sup>5</sup>

### Older women outnumber older men:

- Female seniors continue to outnumber their male counterparts substantially. In 2016, there were 82 men per 100 women in the 65+ group, and only 42 men per 100 women in the 90+ group.<sup>6</sup>

### The prevalence of disability increases steadily with age:

- 37% of Ontario seniors aged 65+ report having a disability, compared with 11% of Ontarians aged 15-64.<sup>7</sup>
- Although age does not define of health, generally health tends to decline with age, and losses of functional capacity become more common and more severe, particularly among people aged 75+.<sup>8</sup>

### Common challenges with aging include:

- **Ageism:** 89% of seniors enjoy learning new skills and 65% indicate they are or intend to volunteer, but almost three-quarters feel there is little appreciation for older people's skills and wisdom and almost half sometimes feel they are invisible.<sup>9</sup>
- **Social Isolation:** Almost half of seniors are worried about being alone.<sup>10</sup> Social isolation is a risk factor for an array of negative outcomes, including elder abuse, higher risk of falls, hospitalization, depression and suicide.<sup>11</sup>

**All seniors want a high quality of life** – one that maximizes their health, safety and connection to families, friends and communities, regardless of their needs.

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Many seniors will **remain independent at home and in their community** with physical and mental well-being through their older years, continuing to work, volunteer and act as caregivers. They may require opportunities to stay active, plan for their futures and reduce the risk of social isolation in the years to come.

Some seniors may experience declining ability over time or enter their later years with chronic health conditions or disabilities, creating moderate care needs that **require enhanced help and support** to live safely and as independently as possible at home. They may require home and community care and housing options to delay entry to higher-level care settings.

Others will become dependent with **high and complex needs** as they age due to cognitive and physical decline and conditions such as dementia. They may require supports like long-term care homes, but may encounter waitlists and levels of care and safety that may not always be acceptable.

### Footnotes:

1. Ministry of Finance. 2017. Ontario population projections update, 2016-2041. Available at <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/>.
2. Ministry of Finance. 2017. Ontario population projections update, 2016-2041. Available at <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/projections/>.
3. Statistics Canada. 2012. Table: Life expectancy at birth, by sex, by province. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/health26-eng.htm>.
4. Ministry of Finance. 2017. Ontario seniors socioeconomic review: Highlights.
5. Wellesley Institute. 2017. Diversity, Aging, and Intersectionality in Ontario Home Care: Why we need an intersectional approach to respond to home care needs. Available at <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Diversity-and-Aging.pdf>.
6. Ministry of Finance. 2017. 2016 Census Highlights: Factsheet 3. Available at <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/cenhi16-3.html>.
7. Statistics Canada. 2013. Canadian survey on disability, 2012. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2013001-eng.pdf>.
8. Canadian Institute for Health Information. 2011. Health care in Canada, 2011: A Focus on seniors and aging. Available at [https://secure.cihi.ca/free\\_products/HCIC\\_2011\\_seniors\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://secure.cihi.ca/free_products/HCIC_2011_seniors_report_en.pdf).
9. Strategic Counsel. 2017. State of Ontario's seniors: Attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. Research commissioned by Ministry of Seniors Affairs.
10. Strategic Counsel. 2017. State of Ontario's seniors: Attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. Research commissioned by Ministry of Seniors Affairs.
11. National Seniors Council. 2017. Report on the social isolation of seniors. Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/national-seniors-council/programs/publications-reports/2014/social-isolation-seniors.html>.

# Healthy Aging and Seniors Engagement through the Arts

## Engaging Seniors Through the Arts

### What it does:

- Increases arts programming and activities for seniors in community settings, retirement homes, hospitals and long-term care homes.
- Supports art therapy programs and treatments for seniors with physical and cognitive ailments and disorders.
- Helps professional, not-for-profit arts organizations to better engage with seniors in their communities, not only as audience members, but as volunteers, ambassadors, trustees and active participants in the organization.

### Key Messages:

- The arts offer a wide range of benefits to seniors, including reduced isolation, increased sense of community, and improved overall well-being.
- Accessible, inclusive, age-friendly social and physical environments, services and programs make a difference in the everyday lives of older adults.
- Greater engagement of seniors by mainstream arts organizations will contribute to the development of age-friendly communities throughout Ontario.
- Formal art therapy treatment can also be effective in resolving emotional conflict, behavioural issues, and can also be successful in treating physical and cognitive ailments and disorders that often accompany aging (e.g., dance for Parkinson's disease, music for dementia).
- With increased access to arts programming, art therapy, and opportunities to participate in the arts community, seniors will be better supported in all aspects of their health and well-being.
- Establishment of this program addresses one of the goals in the Ontario Culture Strategy (July 2016) – to **promote cultural engagement and inclusion** – and the action to: *“Identify and promote ways to increase opportunities for Ontario’s seniors to engage with arts and culture in their communities in many different ways, including as artists, mentors, volunteers, and participants.”*