

**Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project**

**Seniors' Survey Report**

prepared by:

Jamie Reschny, Laurel Van De Keere, Chelan Hoffman, Don Manson, Greg Halseth,  
and Neil Hanlon

Community Development Institute  
University of Northern British Columbia

May 22 2007

## Table of Contents

---

|  | Page Number |
|--|-------------|
| 1.0 Project Description                        | 1           |
| 2.0 Methodology                                | 3           |
| 3.0 Evaluative Variables                       | 5           |
| 4.0 Who Responded to the Survey                | 8           |
| 5.0 Housing                                    | 15          |
| 6.0 Transportation                             | 24          |
| 7.0 Community Participation and Local Services | 28          |
| 8.0 Physical Environment                       | 37          |
| 9.0 Family, Friends, and Care Networks         | 39          |
| 10.0 Retirement and Retirement Planning        | 43          |
| 11.0 Pensions                                  | 46          |
| 12.0 Summary                                   | 48          |
| List of References                             | 51          |
| Additional Sources of Information              | 51          |

---

## List of Tables

|            |   | Page Number |
|------------|---|-------------|
| Table 1.1  | Timeline  | 2           |
| Table 2.1  | Response rates  | 4           |
| Table 3.1  | Evaluative variables  | 7           |
| Table 4.1  | Respondent marital status   | 8           |
| Table 4.2  | Age profile of respondents  | 8           |
| Table 4.3  | Gender  | 9           |
| Table 4.4  | Level of education  | 9           |
| Table 4.5  | How long have you lived in the community?   | 10          |
| Table 4.6  | Respondent employment status  | 11          |
| Table 4.7  | Annual household incomes  | 12          |
| Table 4.8  | Does your household income draw from the following sources?                                 | 13          |
| Table 4.9  | Do you have any dependants in your household?   | 13          |
| Table 5.1  | Housing profile   | 15          |
| Table 5.2  | Housing characteristics   | 16          |
| Table 5.3  | Are there stairs to the house, and in the main living area of the house?                    | 16          |
| Table 5.4  | Housing maintenance needs   | 17          |
| Table 5.5  | Monthly rent/mortgage payments  | 18          |
| Table 5.6  | Types of seniors' housing needed  | 19          |
| Table 5.7  | Who should pay to build housing for older residents?  | 20          |
| Table 5.8  | Who should maintain housing for older residents?  | 21          |
| Table 5.9  | Seniors' need for accommodation   | 21          |
| Table 5.10 | What kind of seniors' housing are you looking for?  | 22          |
| Table 6.1  | How do you normally travel within your community?   | 24          |
| Table 6.2  | Road and sidewalk maintenance in your community   | 25          |
| Table 6.3  | What types of transportation services should be provided to older residents?                | 26          |
| Table 7.1  | Seniors' participation in clubs/organizations   | 28          |
| Table 7.2  | Satisfaction with clubs/organizations in which you participated                             | 29          |
| Table 7.3  | If your participation has changed in any of the above groups, why has it changed?           | 30          |
| Table 7.4  | How satisfied are you with the following facilities?  | 31          |
| Table 7.5  | How satisfied are you with the following services?  | 32          |
| Table 7.6  | Does your community need a housing complex and/or an activities centre for older residents? | 33          |

|            |  |    |
|------------|--|----|
| Table 7.7  | If created, what activities should a seniors' centre provide?  | 34 |
| Table 7.8  | What services do you think are needed in the Peace River Regional District to help older residents maintain their health and independence? | 35 |
| Table 8.1  | What barriers might prohibit older residents from walking around town?   | 37 |
| Table 8.2  | What needs to be done to allow older residents to move about the community and go to various stores and buildings?                         | 38 |
| Table 9.1  | Do you have family and/or close friends in the area?   | 39 |
| Table 9.2  | In the past 12 months, have you needed help with any of the following activities?  | 40 |
| Table 9.3  | If you needed assistance, what was the reason?   | 41 |
| Table 9.4  | What is the relationship to you of the person(s) who provided assistance with these activities?  | 41 |
| Table 10.1 | Retired/retirement plans   | 43 |
| Table 10.2 | Advantages of retiring in the area   | 44 |
| Table 10.3 | Disadvantages of retiring in the area  | 45 |
| Table 11.1 | Do you belong to any of these pension plans?   | 46 |
| Table 11.2 | Pension rules  | 47 |

---

## Acknowledgements

From May 2006 to May 2007 the Peace River Regional District and the Community Development Institute at UNBC worked on a project to enhance the understanding of the housing and service needs of older residents. In the late Fall of 2006, a survey was circulated in the Regional District (outside of Fort St. John and Taylor, where an earlier survey had been completed). We would like to thank all those who took the time to complete and return the survey. Also, we would like to thank the community contacts who assisted in the distribution of the survey, including Mike Redfearn and Janine Disher of Chetwynd, Elaine Peterson of Dawson Creek, Mayor Lenore Harwood of Hudson's Hope, Peter Thomas of Pouce Coupe, and Roxanne Gale of Tumbler Ridge.

In the Winter of 2007, our research team visited Dawson Creek, Pouce Coupe, Tumbler Ridge, Chetwynd, Hudson's Hope, and rural areas of Electoral Areas B, C, D, and E of the Peace River Regional District. The research team conducted key informant interviews and roundtable discussions as part of the Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project. We wish to thank all the residents, community groups, business members, service providers, policy makers, and municipal staff who took the time to help out and to participate in the interviews and roundtable discussions. Also, we would like to thank community contacts who assisted in the organization of the roundtable discussions, including Harold Borass, Barb Braun, Chris Broad, Darlene Campbell, Ian Campbell, Rose Colledge, Jill Copes, Elaine Ferguson, Doug Foerster, Marcie Fofonoff, Nicole Garbitt, Peter Kut, Annie Madden, Susan Michaud, Sharon Sullivan, John and Martha Wall, and Eleanor Wilfur. The response and enthusiasm demonstrates the importance of this issue within the region.

Special thanks to members of the Peace River Regional Hospital District Board (previously known as the Health Liaison Committee) who helped to provide input and feedback on the project. This includes Director Karen Goodings, Electoral Area 'B'; Director Larry Houley, Electoral Area 'C'; Director Wayne Hiebert, Electoral Area 'D'; Director Tim Caton, Electoral Area 'E'; Mayor Evan Saugstad, District of Chetwynd; Mayor Calvin Kruk, City of Dawson Creek; Mayor Jim Eglinski, City of Fort St. John; Councilor Lori Ackerman, City of Fort St. John; Mayor Lenore Harwood, District of Hudson's Hope; Mayor Barb Smith, Village of Pouce Coupe; Mayor Fred Jarvis, District of Taylor; and Mayor Mike Caisley, District of Tumbler Ridge. On our research team, we would like to thank Laura Ryser, Jamie Reschny, Catherine Fraser, Kyle Kusch, and Laurel Van De Keere for conducting the roundtable discussions and key informant interviews.

Funding for this project came from the Peace River Regional District. We would like to extend a special thanks to Faye Salisbury for her assistance in coordinating the project, and for putting us in contact with key local individuals and groups across the Regional District.

Jamie Reschny, Laurel Van De Keere, Chelan Hoffman, Don Manson, Greg Halseth, and Neil Hanlon  
Prince George  
May 2007

## Availability

Copies of all reports associated with the Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project are available in a number of locations. In Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Hudson's Hope, Pouce Coupe, Taylor, and Tumbler Ridge, copies are available at local municipal halls and public libraries. In Dawson Creek and Fort St. John, copies have been deposited with the Peace River Regional District offices. In Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Hudson's Hope, and Pouce Coupe, copies have also been given to the local seniors' hall. At the University of Northern British Columbia, copies have been deposited at the Geoffrey R. Weller Library. Reports can also be accessed on the Community Development Institute website:

<http://www.unbc.ca/cdi/research.html>

## Project Reports

- Methodology Report
- Population Background and Trends Report
- Survey / Interview Report
- Roundtable Theme Report
- Executive Summary Report

## Contact Information

For further information about this topic and the project, feel free to contact Greg Halseth, Acting Director of UNBC's Community Development Institute:

Greg Halseth  
Geography Program  
University of Northern BC  
3333 University Way  
Prince George, BC  
V2N 4Z9

tel: 250-960-5826  
fax: 250-960-6533  
email: [halseth@unbc.ca](mailto:halseth@unbc.ca)  
<http://web.unbc.ca/geography/faculty/greg>

# Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project Survey Report

---

## 1.0 Project Description

Since the 1980s, Canada's population has been aging. In small towns, the provision of housing, services, and facilities influences the decisions of individuals when choosing to retire in a community. In the Peace River Regional District, there were about 3,300 people over the age of 65 in 1991, but by 2001 there were about 4,350 people over age 65 (Statistics Canada, 1991; Statistics Canada, 2001a). The increase in the number of older residents, and the increase in the number of residents who wish to remain in the region when they retire, have raised the level of interest in how the community, local services, and available housing options will meet the needs of a growing seniors' population. As a result, UNBC's Community Development Institute and the Peace River Regional District are working together to assess the needs of older residents.

The purpose of the Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project is to examine housing and support service needs for seniors in the communities and rural areas of the region. The work was carried out by a research team from UNBC with the goal of providing local leaders with information relevant to decision-making regarding community planning and infrastructure investments. The project was carried out in the Fall of 2006 and Winter of 2007 (Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Timeline**

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>May – July 2006</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project application developed</li> <li>• Funding confirmed</li> <li>• Project Contribution Agreement confirmed</li> <li>• UNBC Research Ethics Board process completed</li> <li>• Research team established</li> </ul>  |
| <b>August 2006</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant local planning documents identified and obtained</li> <li>• Project logistics schedule completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Field work</li> <li>○ Household survey</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| <b>September 2006</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft household survey</li> <li>• Draft interview guides</li> <li>• Draft roundtable guides</li> </ul>  |
| <b>October 2006</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of draft household survey and information letters by Project Advisory Group</li> <li>• Teleconference meeting with Project Advisory Group</li> </ul>   |
| <b>November 2006</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate household survey distribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Rural mail out</li> <li>○ Municipal partnerships</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Construct survey databases (SPSS and WORD)</li> <li>• Media releases to publicize household survey</li> </ul> |
| <b>December 2006</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete household survey distribution</li> <li>• Household survey data entry begins</li> <li>• Finalize contacts for interviews and roundtables</li> </ul>   |
| <b>January 2007</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household survey data entry completed</li> <li>• Initiate population change report</li> <li>• Edit interview and roundtable guides</li> </ul>   |
| <b>February 2007</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize interviews and roundtables for assessment of seniors' needs</li> <li>• Preliminary analysis of household survey</li> <li>• Conduct key informant interviews</li> <li>• Conduct community roundtables</li> </ul>  |
| <b>March 2007</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of interview and roundtable data</li> <li>• Complete population analysis</li> <li>• Complete interview and roundtable analysis</li> <li>• Complete survey analysis</li> </ul>  |
| <b>April 2007</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete draft project reports</li> </ul>   |
| <b>May 2007</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of draft project reports with Regional District and Project Advisory Group</li> <li>• Final reports completed and distributed</li> </ul>   |



## 2.0 Methodology

The data and information for this project was collected through four methods. These include:

- a review of Census population data (see Population Report),
- a household survey,
- community roundtable discussions (see Theme Report), and
- key informant interviews.

This report covers the information collected through the seniors' survey and key informant interviews.

The initial stage of the project involved a household survey that was distributed across the study area. The survey was administered with the assistance of the Peace River Regional District in November and December of 2006. In the rural areas, the Peace River Regional District mailed copies of the survey to rural residents using the property tax roll list that is prepared by BC Assessment, but is managed by the Regional District. Additionally, publicity notices were made available to rural political leaders and municipal staff.

Each survey was accompanied by a cover letter outlining the purpose of the survey, the ethics and confidentiality arrangements, and how respondents should return their completed forms. The survey included both open-ended and closed response questions on eight topic areas:

- household composition,
- housing,
- transportation,
- services,
- physical environment,
- family, friendships and care networks,
- retirement plans, and
- pension information.

A copy of the seniors' survey is attached in Appendix C of the Methodology Report.

A total of 7,167 surveys were distributed. The response rate of 22.3% to a general mail-out is considered quite good (Table 2.1). (see Methodology Report).

**Table 2.1: Response Rates**

---

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Total Distributed            | 7,167  |
| Total Completed and Returned | 1,602  |
| Response Rate                | 22.3 % |

---

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

When interpreting the survey results, it is important to keep in mind that responses are from a sample of the local population. There is always a level of 'sampling error' when you do not have results from every household in the community. With 1,602 completed surveys, the sampling error for this work is between 3 and 5 percent, 19 times out of 20.

### ***Key Informant Interviews***

The research project also involved key informant interviews, conducted between February 19<sup>th</sup> and February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, with individuals from community groups, service providers, and local government in order to obtain views from people actively engaged in seniors' issues. The key informants were selected from publicly available lists as well as suggestions received from the Peace River Regional Hospital District. A total of 15 people were interviewed.

Potential interview participants were contacted by telephone to describe the project, how they were identified as a key informant, and to ask if they would be willing to participate. For those willing to participate, we arranged a meeting at a time and place convenient to the key informant. Prior to the interview, they were advised about the purpose of the research, the issues in the consent form outlining ethics and confidentiality arrangements, and the completed consent form was collected. During the interview, the interviewer took handwritten notes for the responses. Following the interview, a draft of the notes was shared back with the interviewee to ensure that all key points were properly captured. Themes that emerged from the interviews were then used in conjunction with the survey data to generate the survey report. A copy of the interview guide is attached to Appendix 'C' in the Methodology Report.

Interview topic areas included: general background information, housing, health care, social/support services, transportation, physical and social environment, and quality of life and cost of living. Data gathered from the interviews is used throughout the report to identify specific concerns and suggestions.

### 3.0 Evaluative Variables

#### *Evaluative Variables*

The survey data reported in the Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project presents the totals for respondent answers to the various questions asked. However, in undertaking any analysis of this sort, it is common practice to ask about whether particular issues or characteristics play a role in affecting how people answered. For example, does the age of the respondent affect their views on the availability of local services, or is the respondent's decision about where they choose to retire influenced by their perception of how the community meets the needs of seniors? As a result, our analysis also used a set of 'evaluative variables' that may point out differences from the 'overall' pattern of responses. These evaluative variables include:

#### *Community*

The experiences which people have living in different places can affect their opinions around services and housing needs for older residents. Thus, we compare responses by whether people live in Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Hudson's Hope, Pouce Coupe, or Tumbler Ridge.

#### *Rurality*

Following the thought that where a person lives affects their experiences of services and housing needs, we also compare responses by whether a person lives in a municipality or in a rural area. Municipalities include Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Hudson's Hope, Pouce Coupe, and Tumbler Ridge. Electoral areas B, D, and E of the Peace River Regional District are classified as 'rural' areas. Although Electoral Area C is technically a rural electoral area, it is geographically the smallest of the four electoral areas and is the most populous, as it includes the area immediately surrounding Fort St. John and Taylor. As a result, Electoral Area C has unique circumstances and has not been classified as a municipality or a rural area, but has been considered on its own.

#### *Age*

Age is a very important factor in any study of the service and housing needs of older residents. Research shows that there are differences between age groups, often reflecting the experiences that they have had with aging and retirement. In our analysis, we compare responses and attitudes between people who are 54 years of age and younger, those 55-74 years of age ('younger' seniors) and those who are over 75 years old ('older' seniors).

### *Pension access*

The benefits and the amount of income provided by an individual's pension plan can influence their quality of retirement life and their choices with respect to meeting housing and service needs. Those individuals with substantial pensions (i.e. a comfortable amount of income, and where medical, dental, and health care travel costs are covered) may have more choice in where they retire. Given that all Canadians are covered by the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), but that people make their own decisions about plans such as RRSPs and RIFs, we created an evaluative variable that compares those with 'only CPP' coverage to the 'others' who have multiple pension sources.

### *Length of residency*

The length of time over which people have lived in a community is a good indicator of the degree to which they have a vested interest in the service and housing needs of its residents. Given this, our analysis compares the actions and attitudes of 'newcomers' (10 years or less) with 'long-term' residents (more than 11 years).

### *Planning to retire locally*

We also include a review of potential differences in actions or attitudes between those who want to retire locally, and those who are not planning to retire locally.

These six evaluative variables – community, rurality, age, pension access, length of residency, and plans to retire locally – are used to explore possible differences in responses across the survey sample (Table 3.1). In the analysis, the evaluative variables are mentioned only if there are notable differences between the groups and if the differences are 6% or greater so as to account for sampling error.

**Table 3.1**      **Evaluative Variables**

---

|                                   |   |      |
|-----------------------------------|---|------|
| <i>Community</i>                  | Electoral Area C                              | 27.0 |
|                                   | Dawson Creek                                  | 21.8 |
|                                   | Electoral Area D                              | 13.6 |
|                                   | Electoral Area B                              | 13.0 |
|                                   | Chetwynd                                      | 11.2 |
|                                   | Electoral Area E                              | 4.6  |
|                                   | Hudson's Hope                                 | 3.8  |
|                                   | Pouce Coupe                                   | 2.7  |
|                                   | Tumbler Ridge                                 | 2.2  |
| <i>Rural / Urban</i>              | living in a municipality                      | 41.8 |
|                                   | rural   | 31.2 |
|                                   | Electoral Area C                              | 27.0 |
| <i>Age</i>                        | 54 years and younger                          | 37.3 |
|                                   | 55-74 ('younger' seniors)                     | 50.2 |
|                                   | 75+ ('older' seniors)                         | 12.6 |
| <i>Pension access</i>             | "only CPP"                                    | 33.1 |
|                                   | multiple pension sources                      | 66.9 |
| <i>Length of residency</i>        | "newcomers" (10 years or less)                | 18.5 |
|                                   | "long-term" residents (more than 11 years)    | 81.5 |
| <i>Planning to retire locally</i> | retire locally, or planning to retire locally | 53.8 |
|                                   | not sure about retiring locally               | 46.2 |

---

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

## 4.0 Who Responded to the Survey

This section provides a brief review of the survey respondents' characteristics. In terms of marital status, over three-quarters of respondents were married, while only 23% were single, separated, divorced or widowed (Table 4.1). This pattern is quite typical of populations over 45 years of age across northern BC.

**Table 4.1 Respondent marital status**

| <b>Marital Status</b> | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Single                | 2.8                   |
| Married/common-law    | 77.3                  |
| Separated / Divorced  | 7.8                   |
| Widowed / Widower     | 12.2                  |
|                       | n= 1588               |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

When we look at the age distribution of respondents, roughly half of the respondents were 'younger seniors' between 55 and 74 years (Table 4.2). The coming 'bubble' of retirees from the workforce means growth in the local seniors' population (see Population Report). As the seniors' population continues to grow in this region, especially in municipalities, and as more retirees are choosing to stay, care and support needs for an aging population will become a pressing local concern. One interesting note across the evaluative variables is that the majority of respondents from Electoral Area C were under 55 years of age.

**Table 4.2 Age profile of respondents**

| <b>Age Profile of Respondents</b> | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Under 44 years                    | 15.4                  |
| 45-54 years                       | 21.9                  |
| 55-64 years                       | 27.1                  |
| 65-74 years                       | 23.1                  |
| 75-84 years                       | 10.4                  |
| 85+ years                         | 2.2                   |
|                                   | n= 1581               |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

In terms of gender, most survey respondents were female (Table 4.3). This is true across all the evaluative variables. However, it is not representative of the region, which recorded 51% of the population consisting of males in 2001, according to Statistics Canada (2001).

**Table 4.3 Gender**

| <b>Gender Profile</b> | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Male                  | 41.9                  |
| Female                | 58.1                  |
| n= 1580               |                       |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

In terms of education, about 43% of respondents noted grade school education as their highest level (Table 4.4). In addition, about 38% obtained some form of college, trade, or technical training. An additional 18% had some university level training. The presence of post-secondary opportunities in the Peace River Regional District through the Northern Lights College programs reflects the demand for trades oriented training and education. Across the evaluative variables, older and younger seniors were less likely to have completed secondary school and/or some form of post-secondary education compared to those less than 55 years of age. This may be the result of an increase in educational opportunities in the area.

**Table 4.4 Level of education**

| <b>Highest Level of Education</b>  | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Elementary school  | 5.9                   |
| Secondary school (incomplete)  | 17.8                  |
| Secondary school (graduated)   | 18.9                  |
| Some trade, technical, business<br>or community college                  | 13.5                  |
| Diploma/certificate: trade, technical,<br>business, or community college | 24.6                  |
| Some university  | 8.1                   |
| University degree (bachelor's)   | 7.0                   |
| Graduate work at university  | 3.3                   |
| Other  | 0.8                   |
| n= 1564  |                       |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Most of the survey respondents have generally lived in the Peace River area for a long time (Table 4.5). While about 19% of respondents are ‘newcomers’, having come to the area in the last 10 years, about 81% have lived in the area for more than 10 years (including almost 32% who have lived in the area for more than 40 years). Length of time lived in a place is a good indicator of the degree to which people have a vested interest in the community.

Across the evaluative variables, those respondents who are not sure about retiring locally were more likely to be newcomers and under 55 years, while, not surprisingly, older seniors reported living in the area longer. One interesting note is that nearly three-quarters of respondents from Tumbler Ridge were newcomers, with the majority having lived in the community 2-5 years. The number of newcomers to Tumbler Ridge reflects the housing sale in the community following the closure of the Quintette coal mine in 2000 (Halseth and Sullivan 2002).

**Table 4.5      How long have you lived in the community?**

| <b>Length of Time</b> | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 year or less        | 1.2                   |
| 2 to 5 years          | 7.6                   |
| 6 to 10 years         | 9.7                   |
| 11 to 20 years        | 17.1                  |
| 21 to 40 years        | 32.8                  |
| 41 to 60 years        | 23.5                  |
| 61+ years             | 8.1                   |
|                       | n= 1542               |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

In terms of employment status, fewer than 34% reported that they were employed in a range of full-time, part-time, or temporary jobs (Table 4.6). Interestingly, over 24% of respondents reported that they were self-employed. Most other respondents were retired. However, about 5% are homemakers. This pattern of employment will play a role in the distribution of respondent annual household income.



**Table 4.6 Respondent employment status**

| <b>Employment Status</b>                           | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Employed full-time (>35 hrs / wk)                  | 23.4                  |
| Employed part-time (<35 hrs / wk)                  | 7.1                   |
| Temporary & full-time (>35 hrs / wk with end date) | 0.8                   |
| Temporary & part-time / casual & call in           | 2.6                   |
| Self-employed (full-time & part-time)              | 24.4                  |
| Contract worker                                    | 1.1                   |
| Retired  | 31.9                  |
| Homemaker  | 5.2                   |
| Not employed by choice                             | 0.4                   |
| Other  | 3.2                   |
|  | n= 1568               |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

The largest area of employment reported in the region is agriculture (with older seniors reporting this most often), but as respondents were allowed to answer more than once, agriculture may not have been their primary source of income. Across the evaluative variables, those from urban areas were more likely to be retired, especially in Tumbler Ridge where nearly three-quarters of the respondents were retired.

When respondents were asked about their annual household incomes, 59% identified middle (\$40,000 - \$79,999) to high incomes (\$80,000 or greater) (Table 4.7). Significantly, only about 12% identified low incomes or those below \$20,000. While over 20% reported low-middle incomes (\$20,000 - \$39,999). Across the evaluative variables the majority of older seniors had household incomes under \$40,000 per year. On the other hand, respondents from Electoral Area C and those who were not sure about retiring locally were more likely to report higher incomes. The higher incomes could reflect the typically higher wages associated with natural resource development in the region.

**Table 4.7 Annual household incomes**

| <b>Annual Income</b>  | <b>Survey Percent</b> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 0 - \$19,999          | 12.1                  |
| \$20,000 - \$39,999   | 20.6                  |
| \$40,000 - \$59,999   | 15.1                  |
| \$60,000 - \$79,999   | 12.1                  |
| \$80,000 - \$99,999   | 9.6                   |
| \$100,000 - \$119,999 | 7.6                   |
| \$120,000 +           | 14.6                  |
| Do not know           | 8.4                   |

n= 1440

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

When asked about the sources of that household income, most of the survey respondents were relying upon wages and salaries, income from self-employment or farm income (Table 4.8). However, 30% were using Old Age Security (OAS), 27% accessed benefits from the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP), while still others used retirement pension sources. Across the evaluative variables, respondents in Electoral Area C and newcomers were more likely to draw from wages and salaries, where as nearly 44% of those from rural areas drew from farm income. By comparison, older seniors living in urban areas were more likely to access OAS or CPP. However, about 40% of respondents who accessed CPP or OAS were also employed or self-employed full-time.

**Table 4.8 Does your household income draw from the following sources?**

|  | Percent<br>'yes' |
|--|------------------|
| Wages & salaries                                     | 49.6             |
| Old Age Security                                     | 30.0             |
| Benefits from Canada or Quebec Pension Plan          | 27.2             |
| Income from self-employment                          | 25.8             |
| Retirement pensions, superannuation or annuities     | 22.5             |
| Farm income  | 22.3             |
| Dividends and interest (i.e. on bonds, savings)      | 13.3             |
| Guaranteed income supplement                         | 6.8              |
| Child tax benefit                                    | 4.3              |
| Worker's Compensation                                | 2.4              |
| Employment insurance                                 | 2.1              |
| Child support  | 0.4              |
| Provincial or municipal social assistance or welfare | 0.3              |
| Alimony  | 0.2              |
| Other  | 6.8              |
|  | n= 1432          |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

When asked, a number of households identified having dependents living with them. Almost 24% had children, 2% had someone with special needs, and 3% had an elderly dependent living in their home. However, when asked if anyone in their household required special medical attention, nearly 22% of respondents answered 'yes'.

When we look at the evaluative variables, participants living in Electoral Area C and Chetwynd were more likely to report still having children living in their household than other areas.

**Table 4.9 Do you have any dependants in your household?**

|               | Percent<br>'yes' |
|---------------|------------------|
| Children      | 23.8             |
| Elderly       | 3.3              |
| Special needs | 1.9              |
| Other         | 3.7              |
|               | n= 1574          |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

## Summary

In summary, over 75% of respondents were married, while almost one-quarter were single, separated, divorced or widowed. In terms of age, nearly two-thirds of respondents were 64 years of age and under. In terms of gender, most survey respondents were female. Over half of the respondents noted some form of post-secondary training. The knowledge demand of trades, especially with the mechanization of industry, is reflected in the high number of respondents who reported having some form of post-secondary training. Most of the people who responded to the survey have generally lived in the Peace River area for a long time. In fact, almost one-third had lived in the area for more than 40 years. Most respondents were employed in some position, including self-employment, and relied on wages and salaries as their main source of household income. Finally, respondent household incomes were generally above \$40,000 per year. One emerging area of interest is that some respondents had moved to the Peace River Regional District in recent years, perhaps to access local employment opportunities and services, including seniors' services. Yet, Tumbler Ridge has had an influx of newcomers that have been in the community for 2-5 years due to the closure of the Quintette coal mine and a drastic reduction in the price of houses. Growth in population puts direct strain on services, making the need for improved and upgraded seniors' services a regional priority.

## 5.0 Housing

The survey asked people a number of questions related to housing. These covered not only the housing status of respondents, but also their views on housing needs for older residents.

In terms of housing tenure, approximately 94% of respondents owned their dwelling compared to approximately 6% who rented (Table 5.1). In terms of housing types, 86% of respondents lived in a single detached house, while about 3% lived in a seniors' housing complex (these were typically 'older' seniors) (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1 Housing profile**

|   | <b>Survey<br/>Percent</b> |
|---|---------------------------|
| <hr/>                                       |                           |
| Tenure                                      |                           |
| Owned                                       | 94.2                      |
| Rented                                      | 5.8                       |
|   | n= 1575                   |
| <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> |                           |
| Type  |                           |
| Single detached house                       | 86.0                      |
| Modular/ mobile home on<br>independent lot  | 5.0                       |
| Seniors' housing complex                    | 2.5                       |
| Apartment                                   | 2.4                       |
| Mobile home park                            | 1.7                       |
| Duplex                                      | 0.6                       |
| Row housing                                 | 0.3                       |
| Condominium/town house                      | 0.2                       |
| Other                                       | 1.3                       |
|   | n= 1569                   |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

To explore the fit between household population size and housing, the survey asked about the number of rooms in dwellings. Older households in large dwellings face a number of challenges including the cost of heat, maintenance, and property taxes.

The majority of respondents (about 82%) reported having 6 or more rooms in their household (Table 5.2). Approximately, 18% reported that their dwelling had 5 or less rooms. Across the evaluative variables, older respondents and those living in urban areas were more likely to report having 5 or fewer rooms in their household.

In terms of the number of bedrooms in the dwelling, most respondents reported having more than 1 (Table 5.2). Almost three-quarters reported that their dwelling had three or more bedrooms.

**Table 5.2 Housing characteristics**

|                    | Survey<br>Percent |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Number of rooms    |                   |
| 0-5                | 18.2              |
| 6-8                | 40.3              |
| 9-11               | 26.7              |
| 12 or more         | 14.9              |
|                    | n= 1530           |
| -----              |                   |
| Number of bedrooms |                   |
| 1                  | 6.9               |
| 2                  | 20.9              |
| 3                  | 42.0              |
| 4                  | 22.7              |
| 5 or more          | 7.5               |
|                    | n= 1513           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Stairs in houses are an important consideration for older households. The survey asked if there were stairs at the main entrance to the house, and if there were stairs between the main living area and the bedrooms (Table 5.3). About two-thirds of respondents said there were stairs at the main entrance to the house, while almost 37% reported stairs between the main living section of the house and the bedrooms. Across the evaluative variables, the majority of respondents in Tumbler Ridge reported stairs to the bedrooms. This is an area that needs to be addressed in order to enable seniors to stay in their homes longer, particularly in Tumbler Ridge where the original housing was designed for young working families and not for seniors or persons with special needs.

**Table 5.3 Are there stairs to the house, and in the main living area of the house?**

| Percent answering 'yes'               | Survey<br>Percent | n=   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------|
| Are there stairs at the main entrance | 75.5              | 1575 |
| Are there stairs to the bedrooms      | 36.7              | 1559 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Respondents were also asked about whether their dwelling was in need of repairs (Table 5.4). For this question we used Statistics Canada (2001b) definitions:

- ‘regular maintenance’ (painting and cleaning),
- ‘minor repairs’ (missing floor tiles, railings in need of replacement), and
- ‘major repairs’ (structural repairs, major plumbing or wiring).

Our respondents’ housing was generally in good shape. Approximately 64% reported that their dwelling was in need of only regular maintenance. Only about 12% reported needing major repairs. Respondents from Electoral Area C were more likely to report ‘major repairs’ needed for dwellings.

**Table 5.4 Housing maintenance needs**

|                                    | Survey<br>Percent |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Only regular maintenance is needed | 63.9              |
| Minor repairs are needed           | 23.7              |
| Major repairs are needed           | 12.4              |
|                                    | n= 1567           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

The next questions asked about the cost of housing (Table 5.5). For those respondents who were renting, most paid between \$401 and \$600 per month. An additional 30% paid between \$201 and \$400 per month.

For homeowners, approximately 70% said they paid \$500 or less per month in mortgage payments (Table 5.5). Even older seniors tended to pay \$500 or less per month. The differences between rental and mortgage costs must be taken with some caution as homeowners are also responsible for ongoing maintenance costs and annual property taxes. Each of these adds to the costs of homeownership. Interestingly, newcomers and those from Electoral Area C were willing to pay more in mortgage payments.

Speaking on the topic of the cost of home maintenance, one interview respondent from Dawson Creek explained, *“if they (seniors) have affordable housing, they are alright. If not, home maintenance costs are well outside the budget of most seniors.”*

**Table 5.5 Monthly rent/mortgage payments**

|                           | Survey<br>Percent |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Monthly rent              |                   |
| \$0 to \$200              | 7.1               |
| \$201 to \$400            | 30.3              |
| \$401 to \$600            | 43.4              |
| \$601 to \$800            | 16.2              |
| \$801 to \$1,400          | 3.0               |
|                           | n= 99             |
| -----                     |                   |
| Monthly mortgage payments |                   |
| \$0 to \$500              | 69.6              |
| \$501 to \$750            | 7.9               |
| \$751 to \$1,000          | 10.0              |
| \$1,001 to \$1,500        | 8.5               |
| \$1,501 to \$2,000        | 2.7               |
| \$2,001 +                 | 1.3               |
|                           | n= 1369           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

### **Housing for older residents**

Respondents were then asked if current housing meets the needs of older residents and seniors. Nearly 90% of respondents reported that it does not. There was little difference across any of the other evaluative variables. This high demand for all types of seniors' housing is especially relevant in communities with little to no established housing for seniors', as in the case of Tumbler Ridge. One respondent noted that the creation of seniors housing in Tumbler Ridge is important on multiple levels, stating that,

“we need something built in Tumbler Ridge to attract and retain seniors, such as housing for interim care patients. Our seniors are the ones that define the town. They are a core group of individuals that will always be here. We have to make efforts to keep the ones we have and attract more.”

Therefore seniors' housing is about more than taking care of seniors' needs. Such infrastructure plays an important role to attract and retain residents, and contributes a foundation in community development.

On the other hand, when asked whether long-term care was needed in their community, the majority of respondents in Hudson's Hope said it was not. Those from Hudson's Hope felt that long-term care housing would be better served in the region's larger communities, such as Fort St. John and Dawson Creek. One respondent elaborated on the demand for seniors housing and the reality of service provision in smaller communities in the region by noting that, “*the community (Chetwynd) wants this (long-term care housing), but they do not understand that the*



community does not have the supportive staff to develop long-term care facilities.” This exemplifies the complex and comprehensive planning that is required to make a community compatible for seniors to live in.

Respondents were asked about the types of housing needed to meet the needs of older residents. Six general types of housing were listed:

- *Independent living* units can include private apartments with available meals, housekeeping, laundry, and home care services.
- *Assisted living* units are like independent living but with greater care available in meals, grooming, medication, and home care services.
- *Intermediate living* units are like assisted living but with all meals provided, and greater care in grooming, medication, and supervision,
- *Long-term care* facilities are often referred to as nursing homes and provide a high level of care.
- *Respite care* facilities provide adult daycare services designed to give temporary relief for the primary caregivers of seniors with ongoing care needs.
- *Palliative care* facilities are designed to provide care for terminally ill residents.

Respondents were allowed to identify any and all types of facilities they felt were needed.

As shown in Table 5.6, the highest support was for housing with modest levels of assistance. Approximately 88% called for independent living units and about 83% called for assisted living units. There is also a demand for housing with higher levels of assistance, as over 77% supported the need for long-term care facilities. Respite care and palliative care facilities were also supported by over 64% and nearly 63% of respondents, respectively. Interestingly, support for all forms of housing was generally lower amongst older seniors compared to those under age 55.

**Table 5.6 Types of seniors’ housing needed**

|                          | <b>Survey<br/>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Independent living units | 88.2                      |
| Assisted living units    | 82.8                      |
| Long-term care           | 77.4                      |
| Respite care             | 64.2                      |
| Palliative care          | 62.9                      |
|                          | n= 1450                   |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

Respondents were then asked who should pay for building housing for older residents (Table 5.7). In this case, respondents were again allowed to identify all sources that they felt should participate in paying for seniors' housing. Most respondents felt that the provincial and federal government should be responsible. In addition, approximately 42% of respondents felt that the municipal or band government and the individuals living in the housing should contribute to these costs. Across the evaluative variables, newcomers, those living in rural areas, and those who are not sure about retiring locally were more likely to support the role of municipal and/or band government in building housing for older residents. Those living in rural areas were also more supportive of the voluntary sector and the people living in the building to help with the cost.

**Table 5.7 Who should pay to build housing for older residents?**

|                                       | Survey<br>Percent |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Provincial government                 | 88.3              |
| Federal government                    | 79.1              |
| Municipal government/ Band government | 42.2              |
| Individuals who will live in it       | 42.1              |
| Private sector                        | 24.2              |
| Voluntary sector                      | 18.0              |
| Other                                 | 3.3               |
|                                       | n= 1476           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Respondents were then asked about who should be responsible for maintaining seniors' housing (Table 5.8). Again, respondents were allowed to identify all sources that they felt should contribute. In this case, the provincial government was identified as the key player. The federal government was also identified as an important contributor, while the municipal government and the individuals living in the housing were third and fourth on the list respectively.

When examining the evaluative variables, we find that respondents in urban centres were generally less likely to support a role for the voluntary sector or the individuals living in the housing to maintain it. As well, newcomers and those aged 55 and under were more likely to support a role of the municipal/band government.

In addition, the majority of interview respondents felt that the government, mainly provincial and federal governments, should play a role in maintaining seniors' housing. One interview respondent from Dawson Creek even went as far as to state that, "*seniors have given a lot to their communities...so now its time to give back to them*". In contrast, another interview respondent felt that it should be the responsibility of those living in the units to maintain them. When discussing seniors' housing options, one interview respondent from Chetwynd outlined a potential partnership between the federal and provincial governments, which could help seniors maintain their independence over a longer period of time. The respondent explained that the "*Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and BC Housing could partner to*

*maintain the current CMHC program to retrofit homes to provide people with wheelchair access, ramps, and bathroom assistance. This is a service that exists to help people age in place.”*

**Table 5.8 Who should maintain housing for older residents?**

|                                       | Survey<br>Percent |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Provincial government                 | 80.6              |
| Federal government                    | 61.4              |
| Municipal government/ band government | 42.2              |
| Individuals who will live in it       | 40.4              |
| Private sector                        | 20.8              |
| Voluntary sector                      | 15.4              |
| Other                                 | 3.2               |
|                                       | n= 1459           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

There was specific interest in the Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Survey around immediate needs for seniors’ accommodation. As a result, the survey asked several questions on this topic (Table 5.9). When asked if they needed accommodation at this time, about 4% of respondents said ‘yes’. However, approximately 11% of respondents reported that the current housing situation met the needs of seniors’.

**Table 5.9 Seniors’ need for accommodation**

|   | Percent<br>‘Yes’ | n=   |
|---|------------------|------|
| Do you need accommodation at this time?                       | 3.6              | 1544 |
| Does the current housing situation meet the needs of seniors? | 10.8             | 1398 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

When asked about whether they were actively looking for housing, 228 respondents or 14% of the total number of completed surveys identified that they were. The most commonly identified housing type involved single family dwellings, especially among rural respondents (at approximately 49%) (Table 5.10). This is not surprising given the relatively ‘young’ age profile of the seniors’ population in the region, as well as the coming ‘bubble’ of new retirees. The next most commonly identified housing type was an apartment. Again, this housing type speaks to the efforts many aging households undertake to reduce their housing maintenance tasks.

Interview respondents pointed to the need for all types of seniors housing, and highlighted the need for proper location, *i.e.* close to shopping and services, and design of the individual units and complexes. For example, interview respondents generally outlined a number of design issues, including a lack of elevators, bathrooms that are not big enough for wheelchairs, common living areas, laundry facilities on the same level as living units, tubs with doors, and heated floors.

**Table 5.10**    **What kind of seniors' housing are you looking for?**

| Type                      | Survey<br>Percent |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Single family dwelling    | 42.1              |
| Apartment                 | 28.1              |
| Condominium               | 24.6              |
| Intermediate living units | 22.8              |
| Long-term care            | 18.4              |
| Other                     | 8.3               |
|                           | n= 228            |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

## Summary

Housing is one of the key issues for older residents, and our seniors' survey asked a number of housing questions. Most of the respondents in this particular survey owned their dwelling. When asked, most of those who were renting paid between \$201 and \$600 per month. For homeowners, almost 70% paid \$500 or less per month in mortgage payments. As noted above, differences between rental and mortgage costs must be taken with caution as homeowners are responsible for maintenance and property tax costs as well.

The majority of respondents lived in a single detached house, while only a small number, approximately 3%, lived in a seniors' housing complex. Older households in large dwellings face a number of challenges including the cost of heat, maintenance, and property taxes. In looking at the fit between households and the size of their dwelling, just over half of respondents lived in homes with more than 6 rooms and with 3 or more bedrooms. This suggests that some seniors may be living in housing that exceeds their household needs. Stairs can be a risk and a barrier for older households, and in the survey, about two-thirds of respondents said there were stairs at the main entrance of their house, while almost 20% reported stairs between the living area and the bedrooms. One bright note is that most respondents reported that their dwelling is in good condition and needs only regular maintenance.

When asked about the types of housing needed to meet the needs of older residents, the highest support was for housing with modest levels of assistance (independent living, assisted living, and intermediate living). There was also strong demand for long-term care facilities. Respite care and palliative care facilities were also supported. When asked about who should build seniors' housing, responsibility largely went to the provincial and federal governments, with contributions from the municipal government and the individuals living in the housing. When asked about who should maintain seniors' housing, the provincial government was identified as the key player. Partnerships were also supported between the federal government, municipal government, and the individuals living in the housing.

## 6.0 Transportation

This section includes questions dealing with how people move about their community. Consideration of seniors' needs must address issues of mobility since they include not only daily needs, but access to social activities, shopping, and various health care needs.

When asked about how people normally travel within their community, most respondents used their personal car or truck (Table 6.1). As with some of the housing questions, people were allowed to check off all the forms of transportation that would normally apply to them. Some respondents reported reliance upon family and/or friends, while others referenced walking.

When we examined the evaluative variables, the use of a personal car or truck was more common among younger seniors and those under 55 years of age. By comparison, older seniors were more likely to use family and/or friends for travel. Not surprisingly, walking was less commonly referenced by those from rural areas and more commonly referenced in smaller communities, such as Hudson's Hope and Tumbler Ridge. In fact, Tumbler Ridge's town centre was specifically designed to encourage walking and social interaction (Halseth and Sullivan 2002: 53). In previous research, walking was cited as a popular winter and summer recreational activity in Tumbler Ridge (Halseth and Ryser 2002).

**Table 6.1 How do you normally travel within your community?**

| Mode               | Percent<br>'Yes' |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Personal car/truck | 95.3             |
| Friends/family     | 9.7              |
| Walking            | 9.5              |
| Transit            | 2.0              |
| Bicycle            | 1.8              |
| Carpool            | 1.5              |
| Taxi               | 1.2              |
| HandyDART          | 1.0              |
| Other              | 0.8              |

n= 1569

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Road and sidewalk maintenance is an important part of the service needs for older residents. This involves not only safe travel by vehicle, but also the ability to move about by foot, especially in the winter when snow and ice may create hazards. In the survey, respondents recognized the important contribution of their communities to road and sidewalk maintenance (Table 6.2). Yet there is room for improvement, as only a slight majority of respondents in all but winter sidewalk maintenance felt that maintenance was adequate.

In addition, a greater percentage of long-term respondents, those from Dawson Creek, and those from rural areas felt that road maintenance in their communities and the region was inadequate.

By comparison, older seniors were more likely to report that road maintenance in the community and region was adequate throughout the year.

**Table 6.2 Road and sidewalk maintenance in your community**

| Opinions                                   | Percent<br>'Yes' | n=   |
|--|------------------|------|
| Do you think roads are well maintained     | 56.6             | 1523 |
| Is winter road maintenance adequate        | 56.4             | 1515 |
| Do you think sidewalks are well maintained | 52.2             | 1261 |
| Is winter sidewalk maintenance adequate    | 45.0             | 1245 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Mobility issues are very important in the region. This is highlighted by the importance of sidewalks (availability, suitability, and maintenance), the importance of a range of transportation options, and the need to locate new seniors' housing or activity options close to places where multiple services (shopping, medical, etc.) are available.

In some of the region's smaller communities, such as Hudson's Hope and Pouce Coupe, interview respondents recommended an additional transportation need. As one respondent stated, *"a daily bus service to Fort St. John, Dawson Creek and Chetwynd would help seniors tremendously. An independent service like that would do well in Hudson's Hope."* Transportation options to improve mobility between communities should receive special attention if services will only be offered in regional centres.

When asked about the types of transportation services that should be provided to older residents within their communities, the most common responses were for HandyDART, standard buses, mini-buses, shuttle buses, and taxi services (Table 6.3). An interview respondent from Tumbler Ridge highlighted a range of transportation needs in the community, stating that, *"we need a Handibus (HandyDART) or a vehicle that can take wheelchairs, something with a lift or a ramp. We even need little things like walkers and canes."* Therefore, in addition to the availability of transportation options, design issues for transportation and support for medical equipment is equally important to improve mobility.

Interview respondents also felt that there should be an increase in the types of transportation options available, as well as a reduction in fare for seniors. As one respondent from Chetwynd reported, *"there should be a community van/small bus to take seniors to health appointments or other services"*. In terms of financial assistance, another respondent noted,

*"the Taxi Saver program is important. The Peace River Regional District should participate in the program so that people in the immediate area (i.e. Jackfish Lake and Lone Prairie) can come into Chetwynd for doctor's appointments or the diabetes clinic and to participate in senior's activities."*

The ‘Taxi Saver’ program, designed by BC Transit, enables registered HandyDART clients to save up to 50% on the cost of taxi rides through the purchase of ‘Taxi Saver’ coupons. The program is offered through BC Transit to participating municipalities with available taxi services. Currently, Chetwynd is the only municipality in the Peace River Regional District that participates in the program.

**Table 6.3 What types of transportation services should be provided to older residents?**

|  | <b>Survey<br/>Percent</b> |
|--|---------------------------|
| HandyDART                                | 31.0                      |
| Standard buses                           | 23.0                      |
| Mini-bus / shuttle/ taxi service         | 11.8                      |
| Improvements to existing transit service | 8.7                       |
| More transportation (general)            | 7.3                       |
| Transportation subsidies                 | 5.4                       |
| Wheelchair-accessible vehicle            | 5.0                       |
| More medical transportation              | 2.3                       |
| Transportation by informal networks      | 2.2                       |
| Other                                    | 3.1                       |
|  | n=1363                    |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Study.



## Summary

Seniors' transportation and mobility issues are important as they not only affect basic daily needs, but also quality of life and personal safety. While most of the seniors in our survey travel within their community by personal car or truck, some also rely upon family, friends, and walking. This wide use of personal vehicles means that road and sidewalk maintenance (general and winter) is especially important. While a slight majority of respondents are generally satisfied with road and sidewalk maintenance, it is recognized as an area for additional investment. As the population ages, support seems to be moving towards increasing the use of HandyDART, bus, and taxi service to help people move within their community. Transportation will play an even greater role for seniors living in rural areas and smaller towns if the current trend of centralizing services in the region's larger areas continues.

## 7.0 Community Participation and Local Services

Community participation and local service provision are critical parts of planning for older residents. In northern British Columbia, instant towns, such as Tumbler Ridge, were planned with an extensive array of civic and community services to enhance local quality of life. While designed for young families with children, many of these services create a foundation for older residents. This section reviews the engagement of respondents in community groups and their level of satisfaction with a range of local services.

### Community Participation

Participation in local clubs and organizations is one way by which people become engaged in their communities. It creates connections and has been shown to affect how people evaluate their satisfaction with both their community and their life circumstances. In the survey, we asked respondents to state whether they participated in any clubs or organizations, and to rate their level of satisfaction with those groups.

The survey respondents were active people (Table 7.1). Just over 40% reported that they participated in one or more local clubs or organizations. In fact, 28% of respondents reported that they participated in at least two local clubs or organizations. Respondents in Tumbler Ridge were more likely to report belonging to multiple clubs.

**Table 7.1 Seniors' participation in clubs/organizations**

| <b>Participation</b>             | <b>Survey<br/>Percent</b> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 or more clubs                  | 40.6                      |
| 2 or more clubs                  | 28.0                      |
| 3 or more clubs                  | 17.1                      |
| 4 or more clubs                  | 9.4                       |
| 5 or more clubs                  | 4.7                       |
| 6 or more clubs                  | 2.9                       |
| 7 or more clubs                  | 0.5                       |
| No club participation identified | 59.4                      |
|                                  | n= 1592                   |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

As shown in Table 7.2, 83% of those participating in a local club or organization are satisfied with the group. When connected with the high level of participation in such local groups, this bodes well as a foundation for community building and support.

**Table 7.2 Satisfaction with clubs/organizations in which you participated**

|                   | Survey<br>Percent |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Very dissatisfied | 3.2               |
| Dissatisfied      | 4.3               |
| Neutral           | 9.5               |
| Satisfied         | 39.5              |
| Very satisfied    | 43.5              |
| n=1617            |                   |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

When asked if their participation in community groups and organizations had changed over time, respondents indicated that it had as a result of a lack of time, transportation barriers, and their children growing up (Table 7.3). Closely connected with this result is a change in participation as a result of age and physical limitations. These results speak to the need to look closely at physical access and transportation issues in our communities as the population ages. Participants were allowed to list as many reasons as they liked. The percentages reflect these multiple responses.

The voluntary sector continues to face challenges associated with a lack of members and total participation by members. For example, one interview respondent outlined what they believed to be a growing trend in the region:

“People are trading off money for time because they are so busy, so instead of volunteering, they donate financially. Like the people from the oil sector donating a lot of money when they found out the local Salvation Army was in trouble.”

In addition, Respondents from key informant interviews also identified other key factors in changes to the level of participation in community groups or organizations. One interview respondent from Dawson Creek identified lack of consistency in the community group as a factor in why he/she chose to no longer participate:

“I used to belong to the ‘Circle of Friends’, an organization that was started years ago. It had a good start, but I had a hard time staying in it. The people who were coming to my house to help were being constantly switched and they eventually stopped coming. I would still recommend the program though. It was a good program, but it didn’t work for me.”

By comparison, another interview respondent from Chetwynd explained how the District of Chetwynd and Civic Properties Commission have kept participation in clubs and organizations affordable, primarily by providing discounts for seniors at local facilities. The respondent went

on to discuss how this could work more effectively in Chetwynd and other communities in the region,

“Elders could be eligible for a certain amount of money each year if the funds were targeted towards health promotion activities. They could receive a punch card and have it subsidized to encourage them to go to the pool, Wheels to Meals, social groups, and other activities. It could be similar to the incentive offered by the federal government to offer tax incentives for youth involvement in sports.”

**Table 7.3 If your participation has changed in any of the above groups, why has it changed?**

|                         | Survey<br>Percent |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Lack of time            | 16.8              |
| Transportation barriers | 12.4              |
| Children grew up        | 11.2              |
| Age                     | 10.9              |
| Physical limitations    | 10.2              |
| Group no longer offered | 9.9               |
| Change of interests     | 8.7               |
| Politics within group   | 5.9               |
| Personal reasons        | 3.7               |
| Cost                    | 3.1               |
| Other                   | 7.1               |
|                         | n=322             |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Study, 2007.

## Local Services

This section covers questions related to local services and facilities. As noted above, these make an important contribution to local quality of life and can create the foundation for meeting the needs of an aging population.

Table 7.4 shows the level of satisfaction across a range of community facilities. The scale applied to these questions ranges from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. A score of 3.00, therefore, can be considered relatively neutral in terms of satisfaction. In this table, it is important to note that the number of respondents varies among facilities. This influences the way some of the responses are interpreted. For example, the hockey rink, library, and golf course all scored over 4.00, with the number of responses all over 700. This is significant as a large number of respondents felt that these facilities needed to be recognized for their important contribution to the community.

A wide range of other services scored between 3.30 and 4.00, including the curling rink, baseball diamonds, grocery shopping, swimming pool, fitness facilities, cross-country ski trails,

aerobic/multi-purpose room, tennis courts, health unit/hospital, and community outdoor rink. There were over 500 responses for each of these services. However, there were fewer than 600 respondents for some services, such as cross-country ski trails, aerobic/multi-purpose room, tennis courts, health unit/hospital, and community outdoor rink. While these services are rated relatively high, respondents either did not feel that these services needed to be recognized or they were not available in their community or area. Important for this survey is that the facilities that scored below 3.00, and were reported by greater than 1000 respondents, are ‘other shopping’ and seniors’ housing.

Younger seniors and respondents from Tumbler Ridge were more satisfied with the fitness facilities, local golf course, hockey rink, and aerobic/multi-purpose room. By comparison, long-term residents were generally more dissatisfied with many facilities, including the local golf course, baseball diamonds, community outdoor rink, shopping, and seniors’ housing facilities.

Older seniors and long-term residents were generally more dissatisfied with the health unit/hospital. For many interview respondents, the issue was not simply about the availability of health facilities available in their municipality, but accessing health care services that are only offered in regional centres. One interview respondent in Tumbler Ridge outlined how, “*the only real problem is the air ambulances. (BC) Med-Evac helicopters won’t fly into our area until we repair and improve the helipad by the clinic.*” This poses challenges, due to distances between Tumbler ridge and Dawson Creek or Chetwynd, especially in the winter with poor road conditions.

**Table 7.4      How satisfied are you with the following facilities?**

|                            | Score | n=   |
|----------------------------|-------|------|
| Hockey rink                | 4.43  | 844  |
| Library                    | 4.19  | 1136 |
| Golf course                | 4.02  | 735  |
| Curling rink               | 3.98  | 778  |
| Baseball diamonds          | 3.91  | 721  |
| Grocery shopping           | 3.88  | 1338 |
| Swimming pool              | 3.85  | 1067 |
| Fitness facilities         | 3.63  | 617  |
| Cross-country ski trails   | 3.59  | 566  |
| Aerobic/multi-purpose room | 3.49  | 522  |
| Tennis courts              | 3.49  | 583  |
| Health unit/hospital       | 3.41  | 1327 |
| Community outdoor rink     | 3.38  | 538  |
| Other shopping             | 2.88  | 1252 |
| Seniors housing facilities | 2.15  | 1090 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

Very dissatisfied = 1, Dissatisfied = 2, Neutral = 3, Satisfied = 4, Very satisfied = 5

Respondents were also asked about their level of satisfaction with a range of services (Table 7.5). Again, the scale applied to ranges from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied, with a score of 3.00 being relatively neutral.

Most local clubs and services ranged between 3.50 and 4.00, indicating a modest level of satisfaction. Medical services were rated at 3.33 and the delivery of goods and services were rated closer to neutral.

One interview respondent felt that there should be more educational opportunities for seniors. The respondent suggested that in the Regional District, service clubs could partner with educational institutions to offer life longing courses. This would help socialize seniors and allow those who may not have had the opportunity to attend post-secondary courses the opportunity to attend them now. As the participant put it, *“Colleges moved to cost recovery and have offered oil and gas training programs. However, there is no proactive encouragement for seniors to become involved in life long learning programs.”*

Across the evaluative variables, older seniors were more likely to be satisfied with most services, including service clubs, churches, volunteer groups, the delivery of goods and services and medical care. Long-term residents were also more satisfied with churches, while newcomers and urban respondents were more satisfied with medical care. By comparison, those who are not sure about retiring locally were less satisfied with all services, with the exception of medical care.

**Table 7.5 How satisfied are you with the following services?**

|                                 | Score | n=   |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|
| Churches                        | 3.94  | 1069 |
| Volunteer groups                | 3.76  | 1025 |
| Recreation and leisure services | 3.74  | 1050 |
| Community clubs                 | 3.70  | 962  |
| Service clubs                   | 3.70  | 922  |
| Medical care                    | 3.33  | 1356 |
| Delivery of services and goods  | 3.18  | 996  |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

One of the key questions in the survey was whether the community needed a housing complex for older residents and what would be the best location for that housing complex. In terms of need, over 95% of respondents supported the need for a seniors’ housing complex, while slightly over 70% supported the need for a seniors’ activity centre (Table 7.6). When we examined the evaluative variables, a larger percentage of respondents under age 55 felt that their community needed a seniors’ activity centre.

**Table 7.6 Does your community need a housing complex and/or an activities centre for older residents?**

| Needs                                 | Percent<br>'Yes' | n=   |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|------|
| A housing complex for older residents | 95.3             | 1434 |
| A seniors' activity centre            | 70.5             | 1249 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

In addition to seniors' housing, one issue closely associated with meeting the needs of older residents involves access to activities. The benefits of these activities are many as they play a key role in maintaining social networks, quality of life, healthy lifestyles, and assisting with the provision of care. In some cases, an activity centre may be combined with a housing complex; in other cases the activity centre may be a separate facility or it may be integrated with some other form of a community recreation complex. As shown in Table 7.6, over 70% of respondents felt that a seniors' activity centre is needed in their community.

People were then asked about what kind of activities a seniors' centre should provide. A long list of activities (Table 7.7) was provided, and respondents were asked to prioritize the options using a scale from 3 = very important to 0 = not needed. As shown, a number of activities scored between important and very important. These included health and wellness activities, fitness programs, hot lunches, activity groups, foot care clinics, coffee and snacks, and special events nights. A number of other programs scored close to "2" (important), including coordination of bus tours, card games, seasonal lights tours, pool table/shuffle board, and arts and crafts.

Across the evaluative variables, there was a clear division between what older seniors and those under 55 thought would be important in a seniors' activity centre. For example, older residents were more likely to report that barber/beauty salons, foot care clinics, dance and computer lessons, and bingo were important. By comparison activity groups, fitness programs, workshop/tool lending, hot lunches, coffee and snacks, and special event nights were more important to those under 55 compared to older seniors.

Interview respondents made a number of suggestions with respect to the offering of activities targeted towards seniors. They highlighted a significant need for more visiting programs and social events for seniors. An interview respondent in Dawson Creek reported that there is a definite need for, "*more gathering places to build the social component aspect.*" This is significant as gathering places are important for sharing information with others in a community (Halseth *et al.* 2006). Another interview respondent identified some of the activities that the Pine Valley Seniors' Association (PVSA) is currently developing in Chetwynd, including: "*outdoor horseshoe pits; training for volunteers/board members; culture/art classes, such as sketching, water colour painting, and scrap booking; and physical classes, such as, music and movement, Tai Chi, and stretching.*"

Other recommendations from interview respondents included, more physical fitness programs, dancing programs, and bus tours/day trips to the Bennett dam or to Grande Prairie.

**Table 7.7 If created, what activities should a seniors' centre provide?**

|                                  | Score | n=   |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| Health & wellness clinics        | 2.33  | 1130 |
| Fitness programs                 | 2.26  | 1135 |
| Hot lunches                      | 2.23  | 1120 |
| Activity groups                  | 2.18  | 1060 |
| Foot care clinics                | 2.14  | 1122 |
| Coffee & snacks                  | 2.12  | 1108 |
| Special events nights            | 2.03  | 1092 |
| Coordinate other bus tours       | 1.92  | 1118 |
| Card games                       | 1.88  | 1111 |
| Coordinate seasonal lights tours | 1.84  | 1077 |
| Pool table/shuffle board         | 1.74  | 1077 |
| Arts & crafts                    | 1.73  | 1101 |
| Bingo                            | 1.62  | 1056 |
| Computer lessons/Internet        | 1.61  | 1076 |
| Darts                            | 1.61  | 1037 |
| Barber/beauty salon              | 1.59  | 1074 |
| Workshop/tool lending            | 1.58  | 1046 |
| Dances/lessons                   | 1.43  | 1057 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Not needed = 0, Needed but not very important = 1, Important = 2, Very important = 3

The survey also asked about the services people feel are needed to help older residents maintain their health and wellness. All of the services listed received very high levels of support. That said, there are clearly two sets of services which people thought to be important. The first set concerned the care and wellness services which older residents need to remain healthy and in their own homes. A number of services that fall under this category were identified by more than 80% of survey respondents (Table 7.8).

Interview respondents also highlighted the importance of care and wellness services, pointing to the reduction in services performed by home care workers and the need for more such workers, as major weaknesses in services provided in the Regional District. Improvements in these types of services would allow seniors to stay in their homes longer.

When examining the evaluative variables, care and wellness services, such as assistance with medical trips, were found to be more important among those who were looking to retire locally. Moreover, respondents from urban centres were more likely to highlight the need for more visiting programs. One interview participant from Chetwynd did, however, outline a program currently being developed by the PVSA entitled the 'Buddy Program':



*“The program is designed to bring new seniors to the PVSA and to recruit ‘junior seniors’. We are trying to bring in seniors from Jackfish Lake and Lone Prairie. The Buddy Program is part of the PVSA’s Silver Anniversary Legacy Project that is funded through New Horizon’s by the Federal Government.”*

The second set of needed services concerned those commonly associated with the physical maintenance of residences. A number of these services were identified by more than 80% of respondents, including yard work, and home repair and maintenance (Table 7.8). Again, interview respondents also highlighted the importance of services associated with the physical maintenance of residences. One interviewee from Dawson Creek mentioned a service they had used in the past which allowed them to stay in their homes longer, *“the Psych Ward [which] used to have a group of patients that would do things like house cleaning for a set price and for the most part they were really good.”* Another interview respondent reported difficulties in finding services associated with housing and home maintenance in the region, saying that it *“is not reasonable. It is largely unavailable due to the economic boom. It is tough to find a trades person.”* There were few differences across the evaluative variables with respect to the need for services to maintain the residences of older people.

**Table 7.8 What services do you think are needed in the Peace River Regional District to help older residents maintain their health and independence?**

|   | Survey<br>Percent | n=   |
|---|-------------------|------|
| Home care                               | 99.5              | 1301 |
| Nursing care                            | 98.5              | 1236 |
| Assistance with medical trips           | 97.4              | 1202 |
| Transportation to doctor’s appointments | 97.1              | 1178 |
| Personal care                           | 96.8              | 1157 |
| Respite care                            | 96.7              | 1148 |
| House cleaning                          | 95.4              | 1196 |
| Meals on Wheels                         | 95.2              | 1132 |
| Delivery of services & goods            | 92.1              | 1057 |
| Help with shopping                      | 91.3              | 1093 |
| Yard work                               | 87.6              | 1136 |
| Home repair & maintenance               | 86.7              | 1116 |
| Help with meal preparation              | 85.3              | 1037 |
| Visiting                                | 84.6              | 1015 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

## Summary

Community participation and local service provision are critical parts of planning for older residents. Survey results highlight that our survey respondents are active people, often belonging to multiple local clubs or organizations. Such activity needs to be sustained as it helps to maintain social networks, contributes to health and quality of life, and influences how people evaluate their satisfaction with both their community and their life circumstances. Changes in local participation are linked to physical limitations and aging, results that reinforce a need to look closely at physical access and transportation issues in our communities as the population ages.

A number of questions were asked about local services and facilities, both of which add to local quality of life for an aging population. Most respondents found local services and facilities to be satisfactory. Of interest, the facility that had the lowest satisfaction rating was seniors' housing. In terms of local services, respondents were very satisfied with churches, while a range of other clubs and services also scored well. There were more concerns with the delivery of some goods and services.

On the key question of whether the community needed a housing complex for older residents, nearly every respondent supported the need. When asked, slightly over 70% of respondents felt that a seniors' activity centre was needed in their community. The benefits of these activities are many and they play a key role in maintaining quality of life, healthy lifestyles, and assisting with the provision of care. In some cases, an activity centre may be combined with a housing/recreation complex, while in other cases it may be a separate facility. When asked about what kind of activities a seniors' centre should provide, key results focussed on health and wellness activities, fitness programs, hot lunches, activity groups, foot care clinics, coffee and snacks, and special events nights.

Finally, the survey asked about the services people felt were needed to help older residents maintain their health and wellness. Respondents identified a number of care and wellness services which older residents needed to remain healthy and in their own homes, including, for example, home care, nursing care, assistance with medical trips. They also identified a set of services needed to support the physical maintenance of residences, such as, yard work and home repair and maintenance.

## 8.0 Physical Environment

As highlighted earlier, mobility is an important issue for older residents. The physical environment influences how older residents might move around the community.

In terms of barriers to walking around town, more than 82% of respondents identified weather and snow (Table 8.1). Ice on sidewalks was also identified as a significant barrier. In addition, long distances, a lack of sidewalks, concerns over safety, and loose gravel on roads and walkways were also identified.

Interview respondents also highlighted issues with sidewalks, snow, and weather as the most significant barriers that prohibit older residents from walking around town. One respondent in Hudson’s Hope reported that, “*snowclearing (is) generally done well. In the winter, this is a barrier because sidewalks aren’t always cleared, especially from the school to the post office.*”

In terms of the evaluative variables, long-term residents were more likely to recognize safety concerns and heavy doors as barriers that limit mobility for older residents. On the other hand, for those under 55 years of age, distances, lack of sidewalks, ice on sidewalks, and stairs were more problematic. By comparison, stairs, loose gravel on roads and walkways, and heavy doors were more of a barrier for older seniors. Interestingly, participants from Tumbler Ridge were more likely to note that concerns for safety, distances, or lack of sidewalks were not a barrier for older respondents. This may again be in reference to the way in which the community of Tumbler Ridge was designed to encourage pedestrian traffic by having an accessible downtown core.

**Table 8.1 What barriers might prohibit older residents from walking around town?**

|                                  | Survey<br>Percent |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Weather                          | 86.5              |
| Snow                             | 82.1              |
| Ice on sidewalks                 | 74.5              |
| Distance                         | 52.6              |
| Lack of sidewalks                | 41.2              |
| Concerns over safety             | 34.9              |
| Loose gravel on roads & walkways | 33.1              |
| Stairs                           | 26.3              |
| Heavy doors                      | 22.3              |
| Doorways/access to buildings     | 13.7              |
| Other                            | 5.3               |
|                                  | n= 1500           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

When asked about some of the things that needed to be done to allow older residents to move around the community, snow and ice clearing on sidewalks and in parking lots were the most

supported (Table 8.2). Other common suggestions included automatic entrance doors and more paved sidewalks and wheelchair ramps. Long-term respondents were especially concerned with automatic entrance doors. There was also a general concern with retrofitting older buildings to make them more accessible to those with limited mobility. For example, one interview respondent from Dawson Creek mentioned that there was a need for “*retrofitting older buildings is an area that the city is focusing on. We need better access to the older buildings, especially for those with decreasing mobility.*”

**Table 8.2 What needs to be done to allow older residents to move about the community and go to various stores and buildings?**

|                                     | Survey<br>Percent |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Snow & ice clearing on sidewalks    | 82.4              |
| Snow & ice clearing in parking lots | 75.9              |
| Automatic entrance doors            | 55.3              |
| More paved sidewalks                | 50.7              |
| Wheelchair ramps                    | 43.5              |
| Elevators                           | 21.4              |
| Canopies/covered entrances/awnings  | 19.1              |
| Other                               | 5.7               |
|                                     | n= 1397           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

### Summary

Winter weather, especially snow and ice, were the key barriers identified by respondents for seniors to walk and move about in their communities. In addition, there were more general concerns around long distances and safety, and loose gravel on roads and walkways. When asked about some of the things that needed to be done to allow older residents to move around their communities, snow and ice clearing on sidewalks and in parking lots were frequently mentioned, as was a need for automatic entrance doors, more paved sidewalks, and wheelchair ramps.

## 9.0 Family, Friends, and Care Networks

Access to care networks is an important source of support for older residents. It can play a crucial role in quality of life, how long seniors maintain their independence, and how long they remain in their own homes. The presence of a support network may also influence whether older residents decide to stay in a community after they retire.

Nearly all of the respondents identified that they had other family or close friends living in the area (Table 9.1). When asked if having these personal connections makes them want to stay in the community, over 80% of those with local family and close friends said ‘yes’. Finally, when asked, over 87% of respondents reported that local family and friends act as a support network when help is needed. Those who were not sure about retiring locally were less certain about whether family and friendships would make them want to stay in the area - and much less certain that these family and friendships could act as a support network for them as they age. The importance of providing for those who have or will be retiring in the area, but may not be near family and friends, was expressed by as one interview respondent from noted,

*“The biggest issue, in my experience, is that people age around their family. However, we need to provide for the other part of the population who do not have family or friends to help them in the area, including transportation, recreational, social opportunities, and companionship.”*

**Table 9.1 Do you have family and/or close friends in the area?**

|  | Percent<br>‘Yes’ | n=   |
|--|------------------|------|
| Do you have family in the area?                                | 80.5             | 1555 |
| Do you have close friends in the area?                         | 91.9             | 1552 |
| Do family connections make you want to stay in the area?       | 86.1             | 1256 |
| Do friendships make you want to stay in the area?              | 81.7             | 1494 |
| Do you have family/close friends who act as a support network? | 87.4             | 1540 |
| Do you receive assistance from someone who lives with you?     | 7.3              | 1305 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

To test the issue of support networks, respondents were asked if, in the preceding 12 month period, they had needed help from another person or organization to participate in a range of everyday activities. As shown, very few households reported needing assistance with these activities (Table 9.2). The items or activities most often identified included house maintenance, housecleaning, driving, and grocery shopping. Not surprisingly when we examined the evaluative variables, older residents reported needing help in the past 12 months more often, with the exception of assistance in meal preparation.

One interview respondent spoke of the particular need for home and yard upkeep, “*House cleaning is very important - as important as bathing, because a clean environment is required to ensure physical and emotional wellness.*”

Another interview respondent elaborated on the state of seniors’ yards and postulated as to the reason for this,

*“Often...you can spot where they (seniors) live because they can’t keep up. They can’t always afford to hire the help that is needed to do their yard work. They come from a time with a different mindset: you don’t pay for someone to do something for you, you do it yourself.”*

These statements exemplify the important role that such activities play in a senior’s quality of life.

**Table 9.2 In the past 12 months, have you needed help with any of the following activities?**

|  | Percent<br>‘Yes’ |
|--|------------------|
| House maintenance & outside work           | 19.8             |
| Housecleaning                              | 16.1             |
| Driving                                    | 14.1             |
| Shopping for groceries & other necessities | 10.8             |
| Meal preparation & clean up                | 7.5              |
| Laundry & sewing                           | 6.1              |
| Banking & bill paying                      | 5.6              |
| Managing medication                        | 3.3              |
| Other                                      | 3.5              |
| Not applicable                             | 64.4             |
|  | n=1457           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

When asked why they may have needed assistance with these activities, the most common response involved long-term health or physical limitations (Table 9.3). Long-term health or physical limitations were less likely to be identified by respondents in Pouce Coupe, those under 55, and those collecting multiple pension sources. By comparison, temporary difficulties and long-term health or physical limitations were more likely to be identified by older seniors.

**Table 9.3 If you needed assistance, what was the reason?**

|  | Percent<br>'Yes' |
|--|------------------|
| Long-term health or physical limitations               | 18.3             |
| Temporary or difficult times                           | 13.1             |
| Time constraints do not allow you to do it by yourself | 6.5              |
| Way these activities are shared in your household      | 3.5              |
| Other  | 5.9              |
| Not applicable   | 61.7             |
|  | n=1315           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

When asked about who provided assistance with these activities, it most often fell to family and friends (Table 9.4). The next most common place to turn for support was neighbours. As identified above, the connections of family and friends are important as support networks. Reliance upon family was much stronger among older seniors and those accessing CPP and OAS only.

**Table 9.4 What is the relationship to you of the person(s) who provided assistance with these activities?**

|                        | Percent<br>'Yes' |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Family                 | 28.5             |
| Friend                 | 18.6             |
| Neighbour              | 10.3             |
| Private organization   | 3.6              |
| Government             | 2.4              |
| Volunteer organization | 1.0              |
| Other                  | 3.1              |
| Not applicable         | 57.6             |
|                        | n=1331           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Most of those who required assistance depended upon people who had to come to their residence. When asked, only 7% of those who needed assistance were able to get that assistance from people who lived with them.

## Summary

The results suggest that older residents are able to draw upon a high level of support from family and friends living in town. This is important as social networks are critical for seniors to obtain support and care when needed. When asked if the presence of family or close friends makes them want to stay in the community, nearly all said ‘yes’. When asked if local family and friends act as a support network, again nearly all respondents said ‘yes’. At present, very few of these older households reported needing assistance, but for those that did, most of the support is for basic activities of daily living, including house maintenance, housecleaning, driving to do errands, and grocery shopping. Most of this assistance came from family and friends. The need for assistance increased in response to long-term health or physical limitations.



## 10.0 Retirement and Retirement Planning

Besides asking whether a person is retired, the survey was also interested in perceptions about options, advantages, and disadvantages of retiring in the Peace River Regional District. As noted earlier, most of the survey respondents were not retired (Table 10.1). Of those who were not retired, nearly 54% were planning to retire in the area. A particular concern was expressed about the cost of living in the region, with only 43% of respondents agreeing that such costs were reasonable for older residents. While this is a very subjective measure, it does hint at the stresses that people are feeling. Interview respondents were also split as to whether the cost of living is reasonable for older residents, believing it to be, on one hand, “*more (reasonable) than other places*”, yet, on the other hand, “*not significantly different here than in the Okanagan, for example.*”

Across the evaluative variables, approximately 6% of those who were not sure about retiring locally were retired, with the majority (nearly 80%) reporting that they were not sure whether they were going to retire in the area. For this group, retention is clearly an issue. For those who planned on retiring in the area, a greater percentage felt that the cost of living for older residents was reasonable. This group was supported by long-term respondents and those over 55 years of age, who were also more likely to retire in the area.

**Table 10.1 Retired/retirement plans**

|  | Percent<br>'Yes' | n=   |
|--|------------------|------|
| Are you retired?   | 38.1             | 1538 |
| If not retired, are you planning to retire in the area?                | 53.8             | 1037 |
| Is the cost of living in the area reasonable for older residents?      | 43.1             | 1437 |
| Does the local cost of living affect older residents' quality of life? | 85.4             | 1408 |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

Respondents were also asked about the advantages/disadvantages they could identify with respect to retiring in the area. Key among the advantages was the presence of family and close friends (Table 10.2). As noted earlier in this report, family and friends can have a significant impact on people's quality of life and on support for older residents. The presence of family and friends is also a key predictor of whether people plan on retiring in the community. Also noted as important were familiarity with the area and the benefits of living in a small community.

Interview respondents were more inclined to report that small town lifestyles, area familiarity, and the cost of living as the main advantages of retiring in the region. One interview respondent noted that their community is, “*still more affordable compared to other places. The majority of disposable incomes still do not go to housing.*”

Another, advantage of retiring in the area, according to interview respondents, were the friends they had made. Interestingly, nearly a quarter of respondents put friends before family as an advantage. As one respondent stated, “*I don't live near my family, but I have friends here.*”

**Table 10.2 Advantages of retiring in the area**

|   | <b>Survey<br/>Percent</b> |
|---|---------------------------|
| Presence of family / friends                          | 41.3                      |
| Area familiarity                                      | 11.5                      |
| Small town  | 11.1                      |
| Amenities / facilities / services                     | 5.4                       |
| Area beauty / environment                             | 4.4                       |
| Cost of living  | 4.3                       |
| Climate/weather                                       | 3.0                       |
| Peace & quiet   | 2.9                       |
| Recreational opportunities                            | 2.6                       |
| Own home  | 2.4                       |
| Transportation / ease of commuting within town        | 2.4                       |
| Farming / rural lifestyle                             | 2.2                       |
| Low crime rate  | 2.1                       |
| Clean air   | 2.0                       |
| Centrally located / convenient for out-of-town travel | 0.5                       |
| Quality of life                                       | 0.5                       |
| Don't want to live elsewhere                          | 0.4                       |
| Employment  | 0.3                       |
| Area culture / history                                | 0.1                       |
| Other   | 0.5                       |
|   | n=3165                    |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Study.

Amongst the disadvantages of retiring in the area were the implications of climate, inadequate medical services, housing, and high costs of living (Table 10.3). Also identified were the distance from a regional centre (which many people noted was important for health services) and a lack of services and amenities. Interview respondents were also concerned about the lack of housing options and services, especially for seniors.

**Table 10.3 Disadvantages of retiring in the area**

---

|   | <b>Survey<br/>Percent</b> |
|---|---------------------------|
| Weather/climate                         | 26.4                      |
| Inadequate medical services             | 16.5                      |
| Housing                                 | 11.7                      |
| Cost of living                          | 10.4                      |
| Distance from urban centre              | 9.1                       |
| Lack of services/amenities              | 7.6                       |
| Poor road/sidewalk design & maintenance | 4.2                       |
| Transportation/travel costs             | 2.9                       |
| Poor public transportation networks     | 2.8                       |
| Limited opportunity for recreation      | 2.7                       |
| Distance from family/friends            | 2.6                       |
| Oil and gas encroachment                | 0.8                       |
| High crime rate                         | 0.5                       |
| Traffic                                 | 0.4                       |
| Other                                   | 1.4                       |
|   | n=2828                    |

---

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Study.

## Summary

Most of the people who answered the survey were not yet retired. However, these people had a great deal of experience living in the area and were knowledgeable about the advantages and disadvantages of retiring locally. Of those who were not retired, just over half were planning to retire in the area. For those who were not sure if they would retire locally, the absence of family/friend networks underscored this uncertainty. One of the factors identified that may contribute to the ability to retain retiring residents in the community was the cost of living, which was seen by many as currently not being reasonable. While a subjective measure, it does hint at local stresses.

Respondents were also asked about the advantages and disadvantages they could identify with respect to retiring in the area. Key among the advantages was the presence of family and close friends - a common predictor of whether people will retire in the community. Also noted as important were familiarity with the community and the benefits of living in a small community. Amongst the disadvantages of retiring in the region were climate (underscoring again the need to attend to infrastructure like roads/sidewalks/building entrances), inadequate medical services, housing, and perceptions about high costs of living.

## 11.0 Pensions

Financial security is one of the central issues facing seniors. In addition to wealth (through savings or property ownership) which people might be able to accrue during their working life, the issue of pension plans is very important. Experiences from elsewhere in northern BC highlight, however, that in addition to pension plan access, it is important to understand that within many pension plans the benefits have changed over time.

When asked about which pension plans people belonged to, a range of options were identified (Table 11.1). Respondents were asked to identify all of the options that applied to them. While nearly all reported that they were covered by the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), over 55% reported Old Age Security (OAS) and nearly half reported that they had some form of personal RRSP/RIF. A smaller share of people in our seniors’ survey reported coverage by other forms of pension plans.

Across the evaluative variables, a greater portion of long-term and older residents reported belonging to OAS. Those under 55 were more likely to report belonging to some form of personal RRSP/RIF.

**Table 11.1 Do you belong to any of these pension plans?**

|                     | Percent<br>‘Yes’ |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Canada Pension Plan | 91.8             |
| Old Age Security    | 55.2             |
| Personal RRSP/RIF   | 46.2             |
| Union               | 18.3             |
| Company             | 14.4             |
| Other               | 5.6              |
| Private             | 3.9              |
| Military Pension    | 1.5              |
|                     | n=1447           |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors’ Needs Project, 2007.

Retired respondents were asked if they could draw benefits from more than one pension plan (Table 11.2). In this case, nearly half of those retired reported that they were able to draw funds from multiple sources.

When asked if their pension plan covered out-of-town medical travel or expenses (an important question in rural and small town Canada), only about 11% of respondents reported that their pension plans would cover medical travel and expenses. This can be particularly problematic as travel costs are high if you have to leave the community for medical reasons.

**Table 11.2 Pension rules**

|  | <b>Percent<br/>'Yes'</b> | <b>n=</b> |
|--|--------------------------|-----------|
| If retired, do you draw from more than one pension?        | 49.8                     | 821       |
| Does/will your pension cover out-of-town medical expenses? | 11.7                     | 1177      |

Source: Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project, 2007.

## **Summary**

Given that financial security is one of the central issues for seniors, the survey asked about access to pension plans. Nearly all respondents reported that they were covered by the Canada Pension Plan and about half reported that they had Old Age Security and/or some form of personal RRSP/RIF. RRSP/RIFs were more common among younger respondents, while accessing OAS was more common among long-term and older residents. When asked if they could draw benefits from more than one pension, just under half of retired respondents reported that they could. A potential problem area came up when very few respondents reported that their pension plans would cover medical travel and expenses.

## 12.0 Summary

There is an increased level of interest in the Peace River Region about how the community, local services, and available housing options will meet the needs of the growing seniors' population. The purpose of the Peace River Regional District Seniors' Needs Project was to examine housing and support service needs for seniors in the Peace River Regional District. The work was carried out by the UNBC Community Development Institute to provide local decision makers and service providers with information relevant to planning and infrastructure investments. The project was carried out in the fall and winter of 2006-2007, and included Census population information, key informant interviews, community roundtables, and a household survey. This report covers the seniors' survey results and incorporates findings from the key informant interviews.

A total of 7,167 surveys were distributed, with a response rate of 22.3%. When interpreting the results, it is important to keep in mind that responses were from a sample of the local population and that the 'sampling error' identified earlier must be considered in the evaluation of results. In sharing the results, the analysis also probed responses by 'community', 'age', 'rurality', 'pension access', 'length of residency', and 'plans to retire locally'.

Over three-quarters of respondents were married, while almost one-quarter were single, separated, divorced or widowed. By age, nearly two-thirds of respondents were 64 years of age and under. Most survey respondents were female, and most had lived in the Peace River area for a long time. Most respondents still relied on income generated from employment and had household incomes above \$40,000 per year.

Housing was a key issue for older residents. Most respondents owned their dwelling, while a small percentage rented. Older households in large dwellings faced a number of challenges including the cost of heat, maintenance, and property taxes. Stairs can be a risk and barrier for older households, and about two-thirds of respondents said there were stairs at the main entrance to the house, while one-fifth reported stairs between the living area and the bedrooms. One positive note is that most respondents reported that their dwelling was in good condition and needed only regular maintenance.

When asked about the types of housing needed to meet the needs of older residents, most supported housing with modest levels of assistance (independent living, assisted living, and intermediate living). There was also strong demand for long-term care facilities, respite care, and palliative care facilities. When asked about who should build seniors' housing, responsibility largely fell to the provincial and federal governments, with contributions from the municipal government and the individuals living in the housing. When asked about who should maintain seniors' housing, the provincial government was identified as the key player, with contributions expected from the federal government, the municipal government, and the individuals living in the housing.

Seniors' transportation and mobility issues are important as they not only affect basic daily needs, but also quality of life and personal safety. While most of the respondents travelled by personal car or truck, some also relied upon family/friends and walking. This wide use of

personal vehicles means that road and sidewalk maintenance (general and winter) is especially important. As the population ages, support seems to be moving towards increasing the use of HandyDART, bus, and taxi service to help people move within their community.

Community participation and local service provision are critical parts of planning for older residents. The survey respondents are active people, often belonging to two or more local clubs or organizations. Such activity needs to be sustained as it contributes to social networks, health and quality of life. Changes in such local participation, such as physical limitations and aging, reinforce a need to look closely at local access and transportation. In terms of local facilities, most of those listed in the survey scored positively. However, seniors' housing had the lowest satisfaction rating. In terms of local services, churches scored very positively, while a range of other clubs and services also scored well.

When asked if their community needs a housing complex for older residents, nearly every respondent supported the need. When asked, the majority of respondents also felt that a seniors' activity centre was needed in their community. The benefits provided by these centres/activities are many and they play a key role in maintaining quality of life, healthy lifestyles, and assisting with the provision of care. In some cases, an activity centre may be combined with a housing/recreation complex, while in other cases it may be a separate facility. When asked about what kind of activities a centre should provide, most suggestions focussed on health and wellness activities and daily/weekly special events. When asked about the services to help older residents maintain their health and wellness, respondents identified those which help older residents remain healthy and in their own homes.

Winter weather, especially snow and ice, were identified as the key barriers to seniors moving about their communities. Sidewalk issues, long distances, concerns over safety, and loose gravel on roads and walkways were also noted.

Family and social networks are critical for seniors to obtain support and care when needed. The results suggest that older residents were able to draw upon a high level of support from family and friends living in the community. Most respondents felt that it was the presence of these family or close friendship ties that made them want to stay in the community. At present, very few respondents reported needing assistance, but for those that did, most of the support was for basic activities of daily living, including house maintenance, housecleaning, driving to errands, and grocery shopping. Most of this assistance came from family and friends, and was in response to long-term health or physical limitations.

Most of the people who answered the survey were not yet retired. These people were aware of the advantages and disadvantages of retiring locally. Of those who were not retired, just over half were planning to retire in the area. This supports the Population Report suggestion that the local seniors' population is poised for growth. For those who were not sure if they would retire locally, it seems that the absence of family/friend networks underscores this uncertainty. The cost of living will also be a major consideration in determining whether residents will retire locally.

Respondents were also asked about advantages/disadvantages with respect to retiring in the area. Key amongst the advantages was the presence of family and close friends. Also important were

familiarity with the community and the benefits of living in a small community. Key disadvantages include climate (underscoring again the need to attend to infrastructure like roads/sidewalks/building entrances), inadequate medical services, housing, and perceptions about high costs of living.

Financial security is one of the central issues for seniors and the final part of the survey asked about access to pension plans. Nearly all respondents were covered by the Canada Pension Plan and about half reported that they have Old Age Security and/or some form of personal RRSP/RIF. RRSPs were more common among those under 55 years of age, while OAS was more common among long-term and older residents. Just under half of retired respondents reported that they could draw benefits from more than one pension. A potential problem came up when very few respondents reported that their pension plans would cover medical travel and expenses. The results reinforce suggestions about the need for seniors' housing, improved access to local health services geared to an older population, and regional shuttle service to facilitate access to a range of needed services.



## List of References

- Halseth, G. and L. Ryser. 2002. [Report on Perceptions of Community, Services, and Programming Needs](#). Tumbler Ridge Community Transition Study. Prince George: University of Northern British Columbia's Geography Program.
- Halseth, G. and L. Sullivan. 2002. Building Community in an Instant Town: a social geography of Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia. Social Geography of Northern Communities Series. Prince George: University of Northern British Columbia's Geography Program.
- Halseth, G., L. Ryser, K. Kusch, C. Hoffman, and S. Durkee. 2006. [Communication Tools and Resources in Rural Canada: A Report for Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia](#). Montreal, QC: Initiative on the New Economy, project of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, Concordia University.
- Statistics Canada. 2001a. *Census Population*.
- Statistics Canada. 2001b. *Definitions, data sources and methods*.
- Statistics Canada. 1991. *Census Population*.

## Additional Sources of Information

### Fort St. John Seniors' Needs Project (2006)

Hoffman, C., C. Martin, C. Fraser, L. Van De Keere, L. Ryser, G. Halseth, and N. Hanlon. 2006. *Fort St. John and Area Seniors' Needs Project: Interview Themes Report*. Prince George, BC: Community Development Institute, UNBC.

Van De Keere, L., C. Hoffman, G. Halseth, and N. Hanlon. 2006. *Fort St. John and Area Seniors' Needs Project: Seniors' Survey Report*. Prince George, BC: Community Development Institute, UNBC.

### Terrace and Area Seniors' Needs Project (2006)

Halseth, G., L. Ryser, C. Martin, and N. Hanlon. 2006. *Terrace and Area Seniors' Needs Project: Executive Summary Report*. Prince George, BC: Community Development Institute, UNBC. Available online: [http://web.unbc.ca/geography/faculty/greg/publications/TerraceSeniors/Executive\\_Summary\\_Report.pdf](http://web.unbc.ca/geography/faculty/greg/publications/TerraceSeniors/Executive_Summary_Report.pdf).

### Mackenzie and Area Seniors' Needs Project (2004)

Halseth, G., N. Hanlon, V. Pow, and R. Clasby. 2004. *"Looking to the Future, Now" Mackenzie and Area Seniors' Needs Project: Executive Summary*. Prince George, BC: Community Development Institute, UNBC. Available online: <http://web.unbc.ca/geography/faculty/greg/publications/SeniorsNeeds/ExecSummary.pdf>.