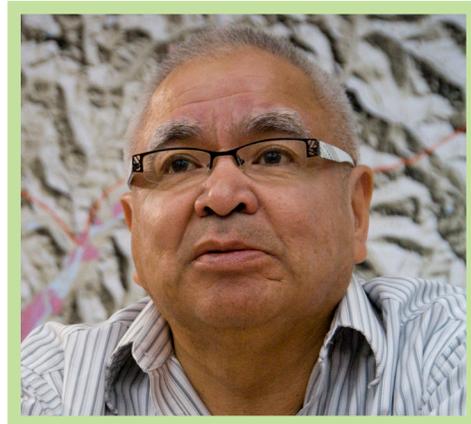


Creating an Age-friendly Business in B.C.



AgeFriendlyBC



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Why have an age-friendly business?

Satisfied customers focus their spending power where they have a long-term relationship. Older adults tend to be loyal customers. If your business is age-friendly, you can attract and keep customers within a large, and expanding, demographic.

Over 650,000 British Columbians are 65 or older, and the post-war baby boomer generation began to turn 65 in 2011. This vibrant group not only has a lot of purchasing power but also the time to shop.

Being a business that accommodates older customers is increasingly becoming a necessity. If you are planning a new business, are considering changes or renovations, want to attract additional older customers, or are already providing services for many seniors, this guide is designed to help.

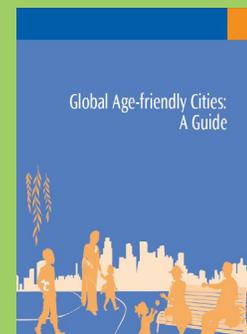
An age-friendly business is a people-friendly business

If a business is comfortable for older people it will also be comfortable for others, including:

- pregnant women;
- parents with children in strollers;
- people with injuries;
- people with sight, hearing or mobility limitations;
- people with limited English; and
- people with a mental illness.

Age-friendly businesses will appeal to all types of customers. Since word gets around, that's good for business.

The term “age-friendly” was coined in a world-wide study led by the World Health Organization in 2006. Governments, societies, researchers and older people in 33 cities (in 23 countries) collaborated to identify the characteristics of an age-friendly city. Later, Canadian researchers used the same process to describe age-friendly rural and remote communities. To see these reports, visit the Age-friendly BC website at www.SeniorsBC.ca/agefriendly.



How can you better serve older customers?

Most older people are healthy, independent individuals, but changes can occur with age. Attending to some of the common issues related to aging will increase the age-friendliness of your business.

Consider how your existing or planned business fosters safety, comfort, visibility and clarity, and respect. The accompanying age-friendly business assessment (see page 7) will help you determine what to look for to make your business more age-friendly, but here are some basic points to consider.

Safety

Consider how people with mobility limitations access your place of business. They will find it easier if you have:

- fewer stairs, sturdy railings, and non-slip surfaces (tripping hazards or shiny surfaces could lead to falls);
- wider aisles and uncluttered pathways to better accommodate walkers and wheelchairs; and
- easily opened or automatic doors that provide more accessibility.



Comfort

Consider places to rest and refresh, such as:

- a place to sit while waiting, and a place to put packages down;
- chairs that are sturdy and stable, with arms for people who need to push themselves up, and that are not too low or too soft; and
- an easily accessible customer washroom.



Visibility and clarity

People are able to see what you want them to see, and hear what you say when:

- lighting is adequate and glare-free;
- signage has good contrast, and wording is easy to follow – including website and phone service;
- telephone answering services are not automated or do not require pressing a lot of numbers before customers can connect with a “live” person;
- the service desk is clearly visible so people can ask for help;
- there is no background music and machine noise, which can be distracting and uncomfortable;
- staff speak clearly, and at an appropriate speed, while looking directly at the person;
- staff know how to assist customers with vision or hearing challenges (such as, reading labels and locating items); and
- a quiet space to discuss people’s business or concerns in privacy is available.

Respect

A business shows that it promotes respect when:

- older adults are not treated impatiently or dismissively;
- staff are sensitized to avoid condescending behaviours (e.g., speaking too loudly, speaking too familiarly – as in calling someone “dear,” or showing visible impatience).
- staff know how to address people’s needs without stereotyping or drawing conclusions about people based on their age or other characteristics;
- staff have options for serving customers in a more comfortable way;
- staff are rewarded for being respectful;
- staff respond to errors and complaints promptly and courteously;
- staff are trained to handle incidents like a fall or an outburst while preserving the customer’s dignity; and
- staff know how to recognize signs that a person needs help, or is being physically or financially abused.

If you notice signs that an older person may be experiencing physical or financial abuse, you can confidentially call or refer them to: BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support – Seniors Abuse & Information Line (SAIL) at: 1 604 437-1940 or toll-free at 1 866 437-1940 or VictimLinkBC at: 1 800 563-0808.

How to start making your business age-friendly

Take a look around your business or imagine your planned place of business...

What if you had a walker? What if you couldn't see or hear as well? What if it was painful to stand for more than a few minutes? Would you be comfortable patronizing this business? Ask an older friend or relative to walk around with you.

First, look outside. Are there steps without railings, slippery or uneven patches, or cluttered walkways? Is there a safe path from the transit stop? Are there curb cuts for walkers and strollers? At night, is the lighting even or are there dark patches that hide tripping hazards? What do you see that could be a problem?

Walk around inside. Are the floors shiny or slippery? Do you see any obstacles? Is the lighting even? Is the signage readable – with good colour contrast – and instructive? Are the most-needed items easy to reach? Are the staff members friendly and respectful?

Take a look at your advertising and information materials, as well as your website. Computer and internet use by seniors is growing quickly; larger print and good contrast makes it easier for them to read about your business. Can a customer enlarge the font on your website? Are the sections and links easy to navigate?

To find out more about how you can make your business age-friendly, and how these changes will benefit your business, try the following approaches:

Ask your customers or clients

To receive input from older customers, conduct surveys or interviews, set up a focus group or create an advisory committee. Researchers may be of help in formulating questions that will provide you with valuable information.



Determine the numbers

To find out how many older people live in your market area, and what their disposable income is, visit the BC Stats site www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca for 2006 census data on each municipality and regional district in the province. Market research is also available from Small Business BC at www.smallbusinessbc.ca.

Additional resources

City or regional websites, local government staff, your local business association or Chamber of Commerce, will also provide access to good sources of information. The Social Planning and Research Council BC has resources to help you assess and improve accessibility in your business. The Measuring Up Built Environment Self-Assessment Guidelines (found at www.sparc.bc.ca/measuring-up) and other accessibility resources at www.sparc.bc.ca/accessibility-at-sparc-bc may be helpful to you.

Age-friendly details

The age-friendly business assessment in this guide provides details on features of an age-friendly business. See www.SeniorsBC.ca/agefriendly for other sources of information.

What have other businesses done?

Here are examples of what some businesses in B.C. have done to become more age-friendly.

A **grocery store** has:

- four-foot wide uncluttered aisles, automatic doors, places for people to sit;
- a washroom on the main floor with at least one high toilet;
- pricing and advertising information in legible print;
- a volunteer shopping and delivery program and a home-delivery website;
- easy access from the parking lot; and
- no in-store music.

A pharmacy has:

- automatic doors and slip-resistant floors;
- clear aisles and easy to read signage;
- a washroom that is easily accessible;
- magnifying glasses to help people read the fine print on product labels;
- prescription staff who are careful not to mention personal information at the counter, but know to move to a private area if discussion is required; and
- staff who are trained to recognize common customer concerns and needs, such as illness or mobility issues.

**A restaurant has:**

- a drop-off area at the door, parking for walkers or scooters and space to move easily between tables;
- tables that are located away from chilly air vents and chairs that are steady and easy to use;
- menus with low-fat, heart-smart, low-sodium choices and smaller portions offered at lower prices;
- staff that speak clearly, and at an appropriate speed, while looking directly at the person;
- china that contrasts with the table linens;
- menus (and bills) with easy-to-read print; and
- warm, welcoming staff.

**A bank has:**

- a visible customer service area and some counters at wheelchair or scooter height;
- Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) that can be used by someone in a wheelchair;
- screens with good contrast which are adjustable to reduce glare;
- staff trained to move to a private area to discuss people's business; and
- staff trained to identify signs of possible financial confusion or abuse, or of people needing additional care, and are aware of whom to notify if there are concerns.

More information about age-friendly communities

Many local governments in British Columbia are taking steps to make communities more age-friendly. There are resources available for local governments and seniors' organizations to help with age-friendly projects. See www.SeniorsBC.ca/agefriendly or email AgefriendlyBC@gov.bc.ca for more information.

Age-friendly business assessment



You can use this age-friendly business assessment to help you get started in making your business more safe, comfortable and attractive for older consumers, as well as for everyone else.

Many age-friendly features are the responsibility of local governments, other organizations or the property owner. You can help to make these organizations aware of what could be done to make the neighbourhood more age-friendly, and work with your municipality or landlord.

Rating Guide

Please use the following rating system for the questions below to assess your business.

Excellent = 4

Good = 3

Fair = 2

Needs work = 1

N/A = does not apply

1) Safety: Provide for people with reduced mobility, agility and balance.

Outside space: access to your business is free of hazards

- Sidewalk access from transit stop and parking areas is level and well-maintained, with curb cuts where needed.
- Entrances are kept clear of street furniture and other obstructions (such as tied-up dogs and piled snow).
- Pickup/drop-off areas are convenient, sheltered and clearly marked.
- Entrance doors open automatically or have access buttons; they stay open long enough to get through.
- Sidewalks and parking lot are well and evenly lit.
- Building has at least one level entrance, with threshold flush to the floor.
- Accessible and seniors' parking spaces are designated and enforced.
- Doors are wide enough for wheelchairs.
- Parking lot and sidewalks are promptly cleared of snow, wet leaves, puddles and other hazards (including paths from parking lot to sidewalk).
- There is clearance by the door for a person waiting with a wheelchair or walker.
- Parking ticket machines have clear instructions and large print.
- Wheelchair access routes are well marked.
- Pavement is smooth, without cracks or dips and bumps.

Inside space: customers can navigate without obstructions and distraction

- Stairways have sturdy handrails on both sides.
- Stair edges are clearly marked.
- Flooring is non-slip and non-shiny.
- Necessary mats are securely fastened.
- Elevators are available for other floors and there are ramps for changes of level.
- Obstacles or hazards are clearly marked (e.g., Step Up, Step Down, Automatic Door, Wet Floor).
- Aisles are wide enough for two walkers or wheelchairs (approx. 4 ft), and uncluttered by displays.
- Location of elevators, washrooms, customer service and other amenities and services is clearly posted; a store layout map is visible near the entrance.
- Most-popular items are shelved at medium height.
- Emergency training of staff addresses warning and evacuation of the elderly and disabled.

Excellent = 4

Good = 3

Fair = 2

Needs work = 1

N/A = does not apply

Your total: _____ ÷ Number of items that applied to your business: _____
= _____ **Your total score on outside and inside safety**

2) **Comfort: Consider customers with reduced mobility, agility and balance.**

Provide for people with limited strength and stamina

- Sturdy, regular-height seating is placed in waiting or line-up areas.
- At least one service or checkout counter is accessible for customers in wheelchairs.
- Service counters have a place on which to hook a cane so it doesn't fall.
- There is a space by the entrance for customers to park scooters.
- In areas where customers sit for some time (e.g., restaurant tables), temperature is held at comfortable levels, with no chilly air currents.
- An on-line or phone-in ordering/delivery service is available.
- Telephone has large print buttons and amplification capabilities for the hearing impaired.
- Customer washrooms are found on all service floors.
- Washrooms contain at least one accessible toilet cubicle and hand washing area.
- Customers are offered assistance when taking items to their cars.



Provide for people with poor sight or hearing

- Premises are well and evenly lit.
- Signage has legible fonts and good contrast (e.g., black on white).
- Printed or written materials (e.g., package labels, cash receipts and restaurant cheques) have good contrast and readable font sizes.
- Staff speak clearly, and at an appropriate speed, while looking directly at the person.
- Some staff are trained to assist customers who have vision or hearing challenges (e.g., reading labels and locating items).
- Sound systems for public announcements are loud enough, distortion-free, and not over-used.
- A quiet space is provided for discussing private business such as medications or finances; staff are trained to move to those areas when necessary.
- The font sizes on your website can be increased.
- The website is easy to navigate.
- Background music is absent or low in volume.

Excellent = 4

Good = 3

Fair = 2

Needs work = 1

N/A = does not apply

Your total: _____ ÷ Number of items that applied to your business: _____

= _____ Your total score on comfort for persons with strength/stamina concerns and sight and hearing concerns

3) Respect: Ensure all customers are treated with respect.

- Staff are trained to be friendly and patient with all customers, and try to meet their needs.
- Errors and customer complaints are addressed promptly and courteously.
- Staff are sensitized to avoid condescending behaviours (e.g., speaking too loudly, speaking too familiarly – as in calling someone “dear,” or showing visible impatience).
- Staff are trained in how to manage situations, such as a fall or an outburst, while preserving a person’s dignity.
- Staff are encouraged to move to an area where they can more comfortably serve someone who may have trouble seeing, hearing, understanding or making their requests known.
- Staff can identify if a person is experiencing a medical emergency and can notify the appropriate service, or authority.

Excellent = 4

Good = 3

Fair = 2

Needs work = 1

N/A = does not apply

Your total: _____ ÷ Number of items that applied to your business: _____
 = _____ **Your total score on respect for older customers**

4) A few extras that will increase the attractiveness of your business for older customers:

Promotional material includes depictions of older people.

Products and services are designed for smaller households, smaller incomes, and smaller appetites.

Consumer research includes older people.

Your total: _____ ÷ Number of items that applied to your business: _____
 = _____ **Your total score on extras**

Total score

Enter your totals for each section:

Safety - outside space, p.8 _____

Safety - inside space, p.9 _____

Comfort - limited strength and stamina, p.10 _____

Comfort - poor sight or hearing, p.11 _____

Respect - p.12 _____

Extras - p.13 _____

Total - Your age-friendly business score _____

Scoring guide:

Outstanding = 20-24

Good = 15-19

Fair = 10-14

Needs work = 0-10

How did you score?

Now that you have completed the assessment, you can look at the examples (page 5) of what other businesses have done to help you develop a plan. Look at the assessment for areas where you would like to improve, and create your plan for a more age-friendly business. If you have any questions, contact AgeFriendlyBC@gov.bc.ca.

If you are already doing an outstanding job, or if you make some changes, we would like to hear about it – we are always looking to promote great examples of ways communities and businesses are becoming more age-friendly.



Age-friendly British Columbia is supported by the Ministry of Health. Creating age-friendly communities is a key focus for supporting seniors' healthy living and healthy families in B.C. See www.gov.bc.ca/agefriendly. For information about other programs and services for seniors, visit www.SeniorsBC.ca.