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# **THE SENIORS' POLICY HANDBOOK**



A guide for developing  
and evaluating policies  
and programs for seniors





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Prepared by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Committee of Officials for  
the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors

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In this document, the term “seniors” refers to people aged 65 and over.



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## About This Handbook

### What it is and Who it's for

This handbook is for people who analyze, develop or implement policies, programs, services or legislation that directly or indirectly affect seniors.

Its purpose is to help policy analysts and program planners consider the perspective of seniors, the diversity of the seniors' population, and the needs and issues facing seniors today and in the future.

### How it was Developed

*The Seniors' Policy Handbook* is an updated version of the 1998 publication called *Principles of the National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide*.

The **National Framework on Aging** was launched in 1994 by the Committee of Officials for the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors. It sets out the following vision:

**"Canada, a society for all ages, promotes the well-being and contributions of older people in all aspects of life."**

This vision is supported by five inter-related principles that reflect values articulated by Canadian seniors:

- dignity
- independence
- participation
- fairness
- security

**The National Framework on Aging was developed in consultation with policy analysts, seniors, seniors' organizations and government officials across the country. Its vision and principles have been endorsed by governments across Canada and by seniors themselves.**



## What You'll Find Inside

This handbook provides a practical step-by-step process and guidelines for analyzing programs and policies for seniors. The steps include a comprehensive **seniors' policy lens** through which policies and programs for seniors can be examined and evaluated.

The steps and guidelines in this handbook are founded on the vision and principles outlined in the National Framework on Aging. Their purpose is to help planners and policy-makers:

- analyze the impact and effectiveness of seniors' programs, services, policy and legislation
- develop new programs, policies and services that reflect seniors' needs
- critique proposed policies and programs for potential unintended negative effects
- consider programs and policies within a specific, seniors-centred framework as well as within a broad social context

**S**eniors wish to be full and active members of Canadian society—a society that accommodates equally the needs and aspirations of all age groups. Seniors would also like to be appreciated for life accomplishments and be respected for continuing roles and contributions to family, friends, communities and society.

— From *Principles of the National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide*, p. 4.





# Evaluating Seniors' Policies and Programs

## Why We Need Well-Developed Seniors' Policy

Canada's population is aging. The 2006 Census counted more than 4 million seniors. Over the next two decades, as the baby boom generation<sup>1</sup> starts turning 65, the number of seniors in Canada is projected to reach 8 million and their share of the population is expected to increase from 13% to 21%. By 2036, Canada's seniors are projected to number nearly 10 million and constitute nearly a quarter of the population (Turcotte & Schellenberg, 2007).

Given the anticipated increase in the seniors' population, there is a growing need for governments, communities, families and the non-profit and private sectors to consider how the needs of seniors can be met in an effective and sustainable way.

## Why We Need a Seniors' Policy Lens

Effective seniors' programs and policies take into account the increasing diversity of seniors as a group and consider the needs of seniors at different stages of their lives. They are responsive to the needs of seniors today and in the future. They also consider seniors' issues within the larger context of the public good and ensure that focusing on seniors is not to the detriment of the population as a whole.

Applying a seniors' policy lens can help to ensure that:

- the needs and values of seniors are respected
- the contributions of seniors in all aspects of life are acknowledged
- the diversity of the seniors' population is taken into consideration
- activities that affect seniors are approached in a holistic manner that considers linkages and interactions with other policies and programs
- the cumulative impact of change and the implications for seniors have been thoroughly considered
- the concerns and issues of today's seniors and of coming generations of seniors are considered

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<sup>1</sup>Baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1965.



## A Step-by-step Approach

### 1. Define the problem

A problem properly stated finds its own solution.

— Le Corbusier (1887–1965), the Swiss-born French architect whose work revolutionized the development of modern architecture

Begin with a **clear, precise statement** of the problem that needs to be solved or the issue that needs to be addressed. This will help you identify the information you need to analyze the situation and address the problem.

**Defining the problem is an iterative process. It's likely that you'll revisit your initial definition as you learn more about the issue and as new information and perspectives emerge.**

#### Here are some questions to consider:

- Why do you need to address the problem or issue?
- What do you expect to achieve as a result?
- How serious is the problem or issue?
- What are the symptoms of the problem or issue? What are the possible causes?
- What will happen if nothing is done?

### 2. Consider the context and assemble the evidence

Policy analysis and program development cannot be carried out in isolation. Rather, they must be considered within a broad context that examines personal, social and economic factors.

In this step, you'll examine the what, where, when and why of the problem or issue. You'll need to ask questions, review background material, look at the research, consider projections and new trends, explore motivations and investigate the circumstances. You'll need to analyze intersecting, interacting policies and assess their cumulative impact on your situation.

The information you gather will inform your problem-definition process. It will also provide the rationale and material you'll use to construct alternative courses of action and project outcomes.



**Policies and programs that affect seniors are often conceived, planned and delivered by a variety of governments, ministries, agencies and organizations. As a result, it's important to consider the holistic or cumulative impact of initiatives and changes, as well as the roles played by other governments or jurisdictions. For example, changes in the way health care services are delivered may have implications for seniors who rely on public transportation to get to medical appointments.**

**Here are some questions to consider:**

- How did the issue arise?
- What are the critical issues?
- What does the research show? What projections and new trends should you consider?
- How is the issue affected by other activities, policies, programs or issues? What are the linkages and interactions? What is the cumulative impact?
- How does the issue fit within the overall social and political context? What are the implications nationally? locally?
- What role do community agencies, other ministries or other orders of governments have?



### 3. Identify your stakeholders and involve them in the process

Involving stakeholders in the development and analysis of policies and programs makes it possible to tap into new ideas and expertise, draw on a broader range of knowledge and link into new networks. It keeps the development process open and transparent. It ensures that end products reflect a variety of realities and perspectives and increases the likelihood of successful implementation.

Different stakeholders may be involved at different points and for different purposes—for example, to provide important background information, to validate assumptions or to suggest alternatives. When and how stakeholders are involved and which stakeholders should participate depends on the nature of the issue.

#### **Here are some questions to consider:**

- What agencies and individuals have an interest or need to play a role in solving the problem or addressing the situation?
- In what areas do the interests of stakeholders diverge? converge?
- How will you consult with seniors and other stakeholders? How will you involve them in developing, implementing or evaluating programs or policies that are important to them?

### 4. Construct alternative courses of action

Once you've analyzed the where, when, why and for whom, you'll have the information you need to plan the "how" and define possible solutions to the problem or issue. Consider the resources you'll need and the outcomes you'll achieve. Also consider the impact of each approach on the problem at hand, and the repercussions on your organization and on stakeholders who are directly or indirectly affected.

#### **Here are some questions to consider:**

- How can you bridge the gap between where you are and where you want to be?
- What have others tried? What success have they had?
- What alternatives are reasonable? What options are indicated by your research?
- How will each alternative affect your various stakeholder groups? How will seniors be affected?
- What are the direct and indirect implications of each alternative? What unintended outcomes might ensue?
- Who would implement each of the proposed solutions? What resources will you need? (These may include cost, expertise, leadership and other components.)



## 5. Evaluate each alternative through a seniors' policy lens



### How to use this lens

- *The seniors' policy lens includes a number of checklists. Apply the checklists to each alternative you identified in Step 4 and check the appropriate box for each policy-related question. Keep notes as you go to remind yourself about areas where you need more information.*
- *NOTE: The primary purpose of the policy lens is to stimulate thinking, reflection and further inquiry and to ensure that a rigorous analytical process has been applied. The checklists can serve as helpful reminders of important tasks and choices. In some situations, it may be useful to compare the numbers of Yes versus No in each list, but this may not always be appropriate. Modify your approach to suit your specific needs and circumstances.*

### 5a. Does the proposed alternative support the five principles of the National Framework on Aging?

Seniors are a diverse group whose lifestyles, needs and aspirations vary dramatically. Nonetheless, in consultations across Canada, seniors themselves expressed certain shared values that are remarkably consistent. These values serve as the five core principles of the National Framework on Aging: **dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security**. Policy-makers can benefit from an awareness of these values when they develop policies and programs for seniors.



## Dignity

Everyone has the right to be treated with respect, regardless of their age and situation. It's important that programs and policies for seniors be designed in a people-centred way that:

- respects individual seniors as they are
- allows seniors to maintain their dignity and self-esteem
- appreciates the life accomplishments of seniors and their continuing contributions to family, friends and community
- treats seniors as worthy human beings and respected members of society

Does the policy or program...	N/A	yes	no	not sure
treat seniors as respected members of society?				
respect the privacy of seniors? (for example, is seniors' personal information kept confidential?)				
respect the rights of seniors?				
support seniors' ability to make meaningful choices about how they live their lives?				
provide seniors with appropriate and accessible information so they can make informed choices?				



## Independence

Seniors value their independence. They value being in control of their lives, making their own decisions, and doing as much for themselves as circumstances permit. They value the freedom to make decisions about how and where they will live. They also value access to support systems that enable them to live as they choose.

Seniors' independence can be compromised by changes in their economic circumstances, their social support networks and their physical and cognitive functioning. Some seniors remain independent throughout their lives; others need support to maintain a good quality of life. Policies and programs for seniors should support individuals in ways that are appropriate for their circumstances. They should provide seniors with the information and options they need to make real choices.

Does the policy or program...	N/A	yes	no	not sure
support seniors' independence?				
provide seniors with a range of options? increase their awareness of the options available to them?				
give seniors the information they need to make informed choices? provide this information in appropriate ways? (for example, is support available to help seniors with impaired cognitive abilities make choices as independently as they are able?)				
give friends, family, caregivers and other members of seniors' support networks the information, support or training they need to be effective in their roles?				
foster an environment in which seniors can make the most of their abilities?				
help seniors overcome barriers that might restrict their ability to live as self-sufficiently as they wish? (Barriers might include physical accessibility, transportation, affordability, etc.)				
help seniors plan for and adjust to changes in their circumstances?				



## Participation

Seniors value getting involved, staying active and taking part in their community. They value being consulted and having their views considered. They value their ability to play a meaningful role in all facets of life—socially, economically and politically—and to enjoy what life has to offer.

Sometimes barriers prevent seniors from participating as fully as they might wish. These barriers can include language, literacy, cost, physical disabilities such as hearing loss, lack of access to transportation or information, or lack of support. Supporting inclusion in all aspects of life will have positive results both for individual seniors and for society as a whole.

Does the policy or program...	N/A	yes	no	not sure
support seniors in their efforts to participate in society and make decisions about their daily affairs?				
support the removal of barriers to seniors' social and civic participation?				
provide opportunities for seniors to take part in sports, politics, educational or cultural activities, community life or other activities that they value or enjoy?				
equip seniors with the tools, knowledge and resources they need to participate in whatever ways and to whatever extent is appropriate for their circumstances? (for example, does the policy or program make appropriate information accessible to seniors? is transportation available? are housing options in place?)				
give family caregivers and other individuals the tools, knowledge and resources they need to promote and support seniors' participation in society?				





## Fairness

All Canadians are entitled to fair and equal treatment and to equitable access to available services and resources. Discrimination on the basis of age is never acceptable. Seniors are entitled to have their needs and aspirations treated with the same regard as those of their fellow citizens. They are entitled to be included in all aspects of society.

At the same time, the needs of seniors should be considered within a broad socio-economic context. Many segments of society and many social issues require attention and resources. Policies and programs for seniors should take into account the needs and rights of other citizens—children, people with disabilities and other groups—so that resources are allocated as appropriately and fairly as possible.

Does the policy or program...	N/A	yes	no	not sure
treat seniors and subgroups of seniors fairly in comparison to other segments of the population?				
have a direct or indirect impact on other programs, population groups or jurisdictions?				
reduce disparities with regard to income, access to resources or other indicators?				
provide an appropriate and acceptable balance between the needs of seniors and the public good?				
have fair and reasonable procedures and criteria?				
take into account the needs and issues of other groups?				



## Security

Seniors value many types of security—the financial security that comes from having an income adequate for their daily needs; the physical security afforded by safe, pleasant living conditions in communities where crime is not a worry; the comfort and personal security that comes from access to family, friends and a network of support.

Policies and programs for seniors should consider seniors' sense of security as well as their actual safety and security. Respect for seniors' right to live "at risk," if they so choose, should be balanced with appropriate measures to protect seniors when warranted.

Does the policy or program...	N/A	yes	no	not sure
support seniors' physical safety?				
reduce the risk of crime, disease or injury?				
protect seniors from financial abuse? other forms of exploitation and abuse?				
increase seniors' sense of security and sense of belonging?				
support seniors in making reasonable choices about the risks they are willing to take and live with?				
provide seniors with the information they need to make informed decisions? include provisions that can help seniors inform their families about their wishes?				
facilitate timely, effective, and appropriate interventions to protect seniors when warranted?				
support seniors in planning their own future? (for example, does it help seniors plan where they wish to live and how they wish to be cared for at the end of their lives?)				



**5b. Does the policy or program take into consideration the diversity of Canada's seniors?**

Seniors are a diverse population. Their needs and aspirations vary as a result of their life circumstances and as a result of socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, income, geography, ethnicity, language, urbanization and living arrangements. Policies and programs for seniors should be considered from a variety of perspectives to ensure that they respect the diversity of the seniors' population and reflect the realities of different groups.

	N/A	yes	no	not sure
Does the policy or program consider the diverse needs, circumstances and aspirations of various groups within the seniors' population?				
<b>AGE</b>				
seniors aged 65 to 74				
seniors aged 75 to 84				
seniors aged 85 and over				
<b>RACE, LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY</b>				
aboriginal seniors				
immigrants and newcomers				
ethnic or linguistic minorities				
<b>GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>				
women				
men				
transgendered people				
gays, lesbians and bisexuals				



	N/A	yes	no	not sure
<b>HEALTH STATUS</b>				
people with physical disabilities				
people with mental illness				
people with developmental disabilities				
people who are cognitively impaired				
<b>GEOGRAPHY AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS</b>				
people who live in long-term care facilities, health care facilities or supportive care facilities				
people who live in cities				
people who live in rural areas				
people who have access to caregivers and support networks				
people who are socially isolated				
<b>SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS</b>				
people with low literacy levels				
people with low incomes				
<b>FAMILY STATUS</b>				
married, single, widowed, divorced				



**5c. Does the policy or program promote the health and well-being of seniors?**

Health Canada defines healthy aging as “a lifelong process of optimizing opportunities for improving and preserving health and physical, social and mental wellness, independence, quality of life and enhancing successful life-course transitions” (Healthy Aging, 2006, p. 4). This definition takes a comprehensive view of health that includes physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being.

The factors which contribute to good health interact with personal, environmental and societal factors such as gender, income and social status, social support networks, personal health practices, coping skills, and physical and social environments. The effects of these factors accumulate as individuals go through life. They need to be considered from a life course perspective which recognizes that seniors are not a homogeneous group.

	N/A	yes	no	not sure
Does the policy or program support seniors’ capacities to adopt the following healthy behaviours? Does it remove any barriers that might exist?				
physical activity				
healthy eating				
smoking cessation				
falls prevention				
social connectedness				
wellness and mental health				



**5d. Does the policy or program acknowledge the contributions of older people in all aspects of life?**

The assumptions and values that underlie policies and programs reflect and contribute to the way seniors are perceived by society. It is important that policies and programs for seniors support the portrayal of seniors as people who have a wide range of accomplishments and abilities and who are valued contributors to society.

Does the policy or program...	N/A	yes	no	not sure
portray seniors in a positive light?				
base itself on the general presumption that seniors are capable and competent?				
honour and respect seniors' accomplishments and the contributions they have made to society?				
build on the strengths and capabilities of seniors?				
adapt to accommodate seniors' limitations or disabilities, if present, in a respectful way that allows people their dignity?				
support inclusiveness? view seniors as important members of society?				



## 6. Identify additional evaluation criteria, as appropriate

It's important to evaluate policies and programs from the perspective of seniors themselves. It's also important to apply a broader perspective that considers the following criteria:

- accepted societal values
- the perspectives of the various organizations and agencies that are sponsoring the program or policy
- costs, affordability and sustainability
- net benefits and economic benefits
- efficiency and effectiveness
- political acceptability

## 7. Project the outcomes

Outcomes identify the goals or objectives you wish to achieve when your program or policy is implemented. It's important to be clear about what you want to accomplish and to examine each possible course of action you identified in Step 4. For each alternative, project all the potential outcomes or impacts you can think of. Then apply the evaluation criteria you've selected. These will include criteria specific to seniors (Step 5) as well as the broad criteria you've identified as pertinent to your situation (Step 6).

**Your program or policy may have multiple outcomes. It may also anticipate different outcomes for different groups of seniors.**

### Here are some questions to consider:

- What outcomes is your policy or program intended to achieve? What do you want to accomplish?
- Who is responsible for achieving your intended outcomes? Who needs to contribute?
- What forces and factors could contribute to or detract from your expected outcomes?
- What barriers might stand in your way? How could these be mitigated?
- What undesirable side effects could arise? How could these be mitigated?



## 8. Consider the trade-offs

Once you've projected your outcomes, you'll need to analyze your alternatives to determine which are most likely to work. You'll need to weigh the pros and cons of each alternative and consider the trade-offs each will entail. You'll need to make judgments about the relative importance of the various evaluative criteria you've selected. It's a good idea to involve your stakeholders in this process.

### Here are some questions to consider:

- What outcomes are most important?
- How do the costs and benefits of each approach compare? (think about dollar costs, time, staff, physical resources, leadership, political costs and opportunity costs)
- How do your various options compare in terms of feasibility? Obstacles and constraints?

## 9. Make recommendations and implement

Decisions, choices and actions are the next steps in the process. Your recommendations should provide decision-makers with the level of detail they'll need to make an informed choice and to defend their chosen approach.

Once a decision is reached, the next step is to decide "who needs to do what by when" in order for the intended outcomes to be reached.

### Here are some questions to consider:

- What decisions or commitments does your proposal require? Who needs to act and be informed?
- What assumptions and implicit values underlie your recommendation?
- What documentation do you need to support your case?
- What are the next steps? What resources are required and where will they come from?
- How will you evaluate your policy or program?
- How will you communicate your recommendations and decisions?





## 10. Monitor and evaluate

Policy-making and program development are dynamic, ongoing, iterative processes. They require ongoing evaluation and review to ensure that they remain appropriate and effective. A continual feedback loop and repeated assessment are needed:

- to ensure that programs and policies are properly implemented
- to measure the impact and effectiveness of programs and policies and ensure that the intended outcomes are being achieved
- to assess strengths and weaknesses and provide information on which further decision-making can be based
- to determine if course changes are required
- to establish priorities for future work

Periodic adjustments and revisions will always be required, and the cycle will always begin anew.

### **Here are some questions to consider:**

- How will you know your program or policy is appropriate? Effective?
- How will you know if unintended negative consequences ensue? How will you assess the cumulative effect of your project with respect to other policies and programs?
- How and to whom will you be accountable?
- How will you communicate with your stakeholders?



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