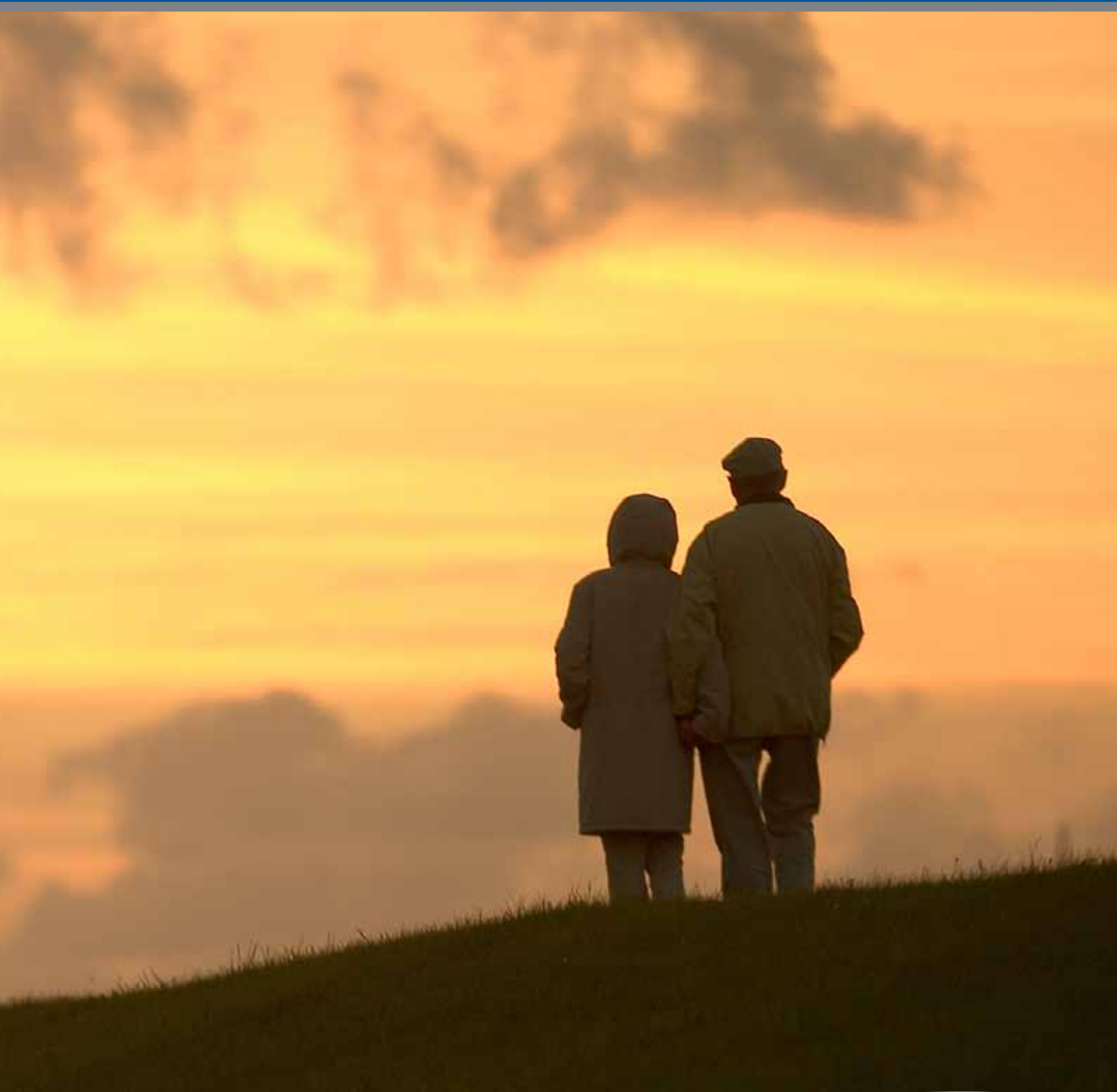


Let's talk about Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness

Northern Health 2013 Community Consultation



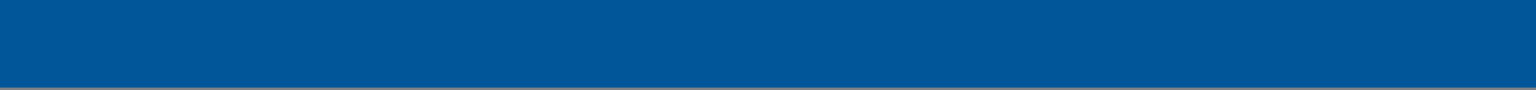
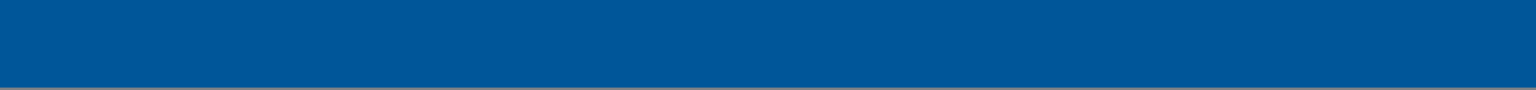


Table of contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Executive Summary | 5 |
| A note about the report | 5 |
| Key findings | 6 |
| Further observations..... | 8 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| Overview of the Consultation Process..... | 10 |
| Public Involvement..... | 10 |
| Discussion Framework | 11 |
| Themes and Outcomes..... | 12 |
| What Healthy Aging and Wellness Mean..... | 13 |
| Balance | 13 |
| Community involvement | 13 |
| Social connection | 14 |
| Choice..... | 14 |
| Themes specific to First Nations | 15 |
| What is Working..... | 16 |
| Personal choice | 16 |
| Community characteristics, services and programs | 16 |
| Health services | 17 |
| What Could be Improved..... | 19 |
| ‘Help me stay in my home’ | 19 |
| Housing alternatives | 19 |
| Supports in the home | 20 |
| Transportation | 20 |
| Education and information | 21 |
| Communication and integration of services..... | 22 |
| Creating a culture of dignity and respect | 23 |
| The challenge of the Northern winter | 23 |
| The financially disadvantaged..... | 24 |
| Further Observations..... | 25 |
| The value of conversation | 25 |
| Self-determination and community action | 26 |
| Strength of stakeholder relationships..... | 26 |
| Appendix A: Community Summaries | 27 |
| Appendix B: List of Communities Visited | 65 |





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Executive Summary

Population aging is one of the most significant trends of the 21st century. As Canada prepares for an expected growth in the number of seniors to over 25% of the population, and as people's life spans extend, we need to understand how best to support the physical, mental and social well-being of people as they age.

Northern Health's 2013 public consultation, *Let's Talk about Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness*, provided the opportunity to engage citizens in Northern BC in conversations about what it means to be well and how to stay healthy as one ages. The goals of the consultation sessions were to:

- Hear the perspectives of Northern BC citizens;
- Record and report on people's experiences with wellness and aging, as well as their ideas about improving wellness and the process of aging;
- Identify partnership opportunities;
- Provide people with information on healthy aging and seniors' wellness.

A note about the report

This report does not recommend specific courses of action. However, by describing the ideas and perspectives gained from the process, it does attempt to provide guidance to Northern Health's Board of Directors as it begins its planning and decision-making processes around actions related to health care services for seniors.

Health and wellness for seniors involves a complex interplay of numerous factors, including personal choices, life events, good health policy, supportive environments, strong community action and a health system that contributes to the pursuit of health.

It should be noted, therefore, that not all of the discussion in this report is directly related to the programs, services and systems under the control of Northern Health.

Rather, the report underlines the fact that in order to meet the needs of seniors in Northern BC, any actions taken will require an integrated approach that involves health care providers, local and provincial government, and community agencies and individuals working together.

Key Findings

The feedback from each consultation session is reflected in the community summaries included in Appendix A of this report. However, consistent themes recur from session to session and from community to community across Northern BC. These emerged within each of the three areas of inquiry:

- What do ‘healthy aging’ and ‘wellness’ mean to you?
- What is working in your community to help you stay healthy, get better, and live well with illness?
- What could be improved in your community to help you stay healthy, get better, and live well with illness?

What Healthy Aging and Wellness Mean

- **Balance:** Wellness is found in discovering a balance between the physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects of health in one’s own life.
- **Community involvement:** A sense of community, where one is able to continue to be involved in the activities of daily life, to be respected for who one is, and to contribute to the community, plays a significant role in health and well-being.
- **Social connection:** Maintaining a sense of connectedness with family and community is pivotal to health.
- **Choice:** Maintaining control and choice over one’s personal circumstances are critical if healthy aging and wellness are to take place.

What Is Working

- **Personal choice:** The level of control individuals feel they have over the choices they make about how they live is one of the most important determinants of their level of health and well-being.
- **Community characteristics, services and programs:** The depth, breadth and variety of the community programs and services available to seniors enables them to maintain social networks, stay active and have meaning and purpose in their lives.

- **Health services:** The level of access to family physicians, primary care professionals and non-medical professionals is generally good, although uneven from community to community. The more locally available services there are - or that can be accessed in nearby communities - the better for seniors' health and wellness.

What Could Be Improved

- **Housing:** Seniors across Northern BC were virtually unanimous in agreeing that supports to allow seniors to stay in their homes longer, and more options to help the transition from home into supported care, are key to wellness.
- **Supports in the home:** Timely service, more frequent visits, better consistency and continuity in home care staff, and integration of clinical services with community-based services are all seen as important in allowing seniors to age in place.
- **Transportation:** Transportation provides access to much-needed services and recreational and social activities. Seniors in Northern BC were clear: the ability to get where one needs to go in a timely fashion is integral to independence, and therefore to health and wellness
- **Education and information:** Information about community and health services needs to be simplified and made relevant to the community - and, most importantly, brought to seniors in a way that works for them.
- **Communication and integration of services:** To seniors and their families, the health care system appears fragmented. Better communication across systems of care as well as between various service providers is vital.
- **Creating a culture of dignity and respect:** Participants felt there is a need for care and services to be respectful of seniors, particularly First Nations elders and their specific cultural needs.
- **The challenge of the Northern winter:** Most communities identified the need to create or support access to more facilities that would help keep seniors active and in their communities during the winter months.
- **The financially disadvantaged:** It is not uncommon to see seniors living in poverty in Northern communities. Participants felt it is important to do whatever is needed to prevent anyone from “falling through the cracks.”

Further observations

While these three areas of inquiry guided the findings of the consultations, other observations arose that provide insights into how connection, commitment and action by health care professionals and community members can happen at the local level to support seniors as they age.

Three primary, interrelated meta-themes became evident during the consultations:

- **The value of having the conversation:** For many seniors, there was great value in being able to talk face to face with others about matters of importance to them, their families and their communities. Throughout this exchange of experience and expertise, important community relationships, partnerships and connections were formed.
- **The role of self-determination and community action:** In communities where seniors felt free to determine their own futures, the conversations were more likely to result in community action or partnerships of some kind. Conversely, communities that were waiting for others to take action on their behalf often became stuck in a different, less productive conversation.
- **Strength of relationships between the various stakeholders:** The most significant opportunities to achieve sustainable community change emerged from the consultation sessions in which community members, community agencies, local government and local health providers were equally represented and able to develop partnerships to address issues at the local level.



Introduction

In the fall of 2013, Northern Health held public consultations on the topic of *Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness*. These were the latest in a series that reflects Northern Health's commitment to hold regular consultations with the communities and people it serves.

Other consultations conducted over the past several years:

- *Let's Talk About Health (2004)*
- *Premier's Consultation for Improved Cancer Care in Northern BC (2005)*
- *Let's Talk About Mental Health and Addictions (2007)*
- *Northern Health Strategic Plan (2008)*
- *Let's Talk About Primary Health Care (2009)*
- *Let's Talk About Men's Health (2011)*

Population aging is one of the most significant trends of the 21st century, with important and far-reaching implications for most of society. It's estimated that by 2050, seniors will make up more than one quarter (27%) of the total population of Canada.

Such a statistic marks a tremendous achievement in human history, indicating as it does that people are living longer than ever before. However, with this achievement comes a need to understand how best to support the physical, mental and social well-being of people as they age.

In Northern BC, the increase in the proportion of seniors is much larger than in the rest of the province. There are two parallel reasons for this growth: movement of youth out of northern communities, and more seniors choosing to remain in their communities as they age.

Northern Health's 2013 public consultation, *Let's Talk about Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness*, provided the opportunity to engage citizens in Northern BC in conversations about what it means to be well and how to stay healthy as one ages. The lessons learned and perspectives gained from this process will help inform Northern Health's Board of Directors in their planning and decision-making.

Overview of the Consultation Process

The consultations were held in 15 Northern communities from September through November 2013, and included 11 public sessions, five community focus groups and four First Nations focus groups. A session was also held with representatives from the Northern Health board and northern regional hospital districts. Goals of the consultation sessions:

- Hear the perspectives of Northern BC citizens on healthy aging and seniors' wellness;
- Listen to, record and report on people's experiences with wellness and aging, as well as their ideas about improving wellness and the process of aging;
- Identify partnership opportunities;
- Give people information on healthy aging and seniors' wellness.

Public Involvement

Public Sessions

Public sessions were advertised and announced through local media outlets. Participants included seniors, family members and community members. Most were seniors currently living independently or semi-independently with support in the community. Many also shared experiences on behalf of friends or family members who were now living in residential care. Attendance at the public sessions ranged from 12 to 78 participants.

Focus Groups

Focus group participants were invited to the sessions by local Health Service Administrators. They were generally selected on the basis of their roles as leaders in their community on issues related to healthy aging and seniors' wellness. Typically, these groups included representation from local agencies or organizations and local government. However, each also provided input based on his or her own personal experience as a senior, or as a family member or friend involved in caring for seniors. The size of the focus groups, including Northern Health representatives, ranged from seven to 16.

First Nations Focus Groups

The First Nations focus groups were organized through Northern Health's Aboriginal Health Advisory Committees. Participants included elders, family members and community members who are active in supporting First Nations elders. Representatives from the BC First Nations Health Authority also participated. The First Nations focus groups ranged in size from four to 16.

Discussion Framework

Each consultation session began with a short overview of the importance of seniors' wellness and healthy aging and an opening question:

“What do ‘healthy aging’ and ‘wellness’ mean to you?”

The brief overview and the opening question set the stage for further conversation around two questions:

“What is working in your community to help you stay healthy, get better, and live well with illness?”

“What could be improved in your community to help you stay healthy, get better, and live well with illness?”

At the end of the session, participants were invited to reflect on the conversation and share their thoughts with the other participants and the facilitator.



Themes and Outcomes

As might be expected, each community came to the discussions with unique perspectives and ideas. The specific feedback received from each consultation session is reflected in the community summaries in Appendix A of this report.

However, common themes consistently recurred from session to session and from community to community across Northern BC. The following is an attempt to capture them.



What Healthy Aging and Wellness Mean

Balance

When asked what health and wellness meant to them, participants across Northern BC were consistent in one response: wellness is a balance between the physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects of health.

The factors that influence the health and social well-being of seniors within the community were expressed as a complex interplay among variables such as feeling in control of your life, having a caring family and circle of friends, and giving back to the community.

Eating properly, getting enough social and physical activity and maintaining good relationships with the people in your life were also frequent answers to this question. Participants agreed it's important for people to take ownership of wellness early in their lives in order to preserve optimal health. And, just as importantly, keeping a positive attitude contributes to positive health.

“ Wellness is not medical; wellness is about your whole life. ”

Community involvement

According to seniors across the North, the extent to which people are willing and able to be involved in the activities of daily life contributes significantly to their health and well-being. Examples of activities were dancing, skiing, walking, playing with grandchildren and making plans for the future. Elder-friendly environments with adequate recreational opportunities contribute to these goals.

Many participants also spoke about the importance of continuing to contribute to the communities in which they live. Being accorded dignity and respect as elders in the community contributes to preserving a sense of well-being, including the ability to share knowledge, having a purpose and feeling as though one is making a difference. This aspect of community is particularly

noticeable in First Nations communities, both in their interactions with the health care system, and between generations.

“ We’re elders but we shouldn’t be forgotten. We’re still alive and we’ve still got lots to give. ”

Social connection

Maintaining a sense of connection with family and community was also seen as pivotal to health. Having a strong social network that includes friends and family members brings health, happiness and contentment. Strong intergenerational relationships were also considered important to individual and community health and wellness.

Choice

As seniors age, personal needs change. For healthy aging and wellness to endure, participants said it is critical to be able to maintain control over personal circumstances, and to have a personal choice over how one adapts.

For example, aging in place - being able to stay at home and in the community as long as possible - is considered vital to healthy aging and wellness. Having adequate medical, community and financial resources in place will allow seniors to make their own choices about what support they need and when they need it. Control over these decisions will in turn help seniors achieve optimum health, wellness and a fulfilling life.



Themes specific to First Nations

While seniors of all cultural backgrounds described wellness and healthy aging in similar ways, First Nations elders expressed some culturally unique beliefs about how health and wellness are defined in their own lives.

Elders involved in the First Nations consultations spoke about health and wellness as an extension of their connection to their language and culture, to the land and to the traditional foods of their local environment. Good health for these seniors is also found in how people come together around food and families. Opportunities to hand down traditions, keep family close and enjoy good company and laughter are central to peacefulness and wellness.



What is Working

Personal choice

The level of control people feel they have over the choices they make about how they live is one of the most important determinants of their level of health and well-being.

They understand and describe ways in which increasing physical activity, eating healthily and staying socially connected help them create longer and healthier lives. These seniors are actively developing the habits and practices that ensure fulfillment and longevity.

“ If you make everything elder-friendly, you’re making it better for everyone. ”

Staying mentally active also helps people continue to enjoy life and preserve their quality of life. Participants spoke of seizing opportunities to continuously learn, to build strong networks of family and friends and to participate in the community through volunteering their gifts and abilities. In more remote and rural communities, it was frequently noted that the physical environment both necessitates and encourages a more active lifestyle.

Community characteristics, services and programs

A significant theme across the consultations was the extent to which the character of the community and the composition of community-based services and programs contribute to healthy aging and wellness.

It’s interesting that most participants identified the community as a strong contributor to health, yet the range of services and programs they identified as being beneficial in their communities was unique to each. (See the individual community summaries in Appendix A for examples.)

Geography, cultural history, local leadership and programs all varied across communities. What stood out was the quality of the relationships and the cohesion between community service providers and seniors themselves.

High on the list of contributors to wellness in Northern communities is the depth, breadth and variety of the community programs and services available

to seniors, particularly those that support and promote physical health.

Walking trails, indoor and outdoor tracks, swimming pools, and various programs such as water aerobics, yoga and t'ai chi were mentioned as examples of services that help seniors re-energize, maintain their independence and keep their minds and memories sharp. Strong community programs and services enable seniors to maintain social networks, stay active, and have meaning and purpose in their lives.

Community services and programs allow seniors to remain engaged in ways that provide opportunities for friendship and support. They encourage the development of social networks that combat social isolation, as well as enabling people to be involved in activities that optimize their physical health and independence while building meaningful relationships with others.

Health services

While it is human nature to think first about what can be improved in the health care system, participants in these consultations were also generous in their acknowledgement of the various health services they feel are working well.

There were numerous positive comments in some communities about good access to physicians and to specialists. Access to primary care professionals through local walk-in clinics is appreciated and family physicians are highly regarded. In some communities there is an understanding of how primary health care is helping to improve access to needed services and to demystify health care processes for patients. Family physicians and health professionals are generally considered good sources of information and education on healthy choices.

In the minds of the general public, health services are not limited to those traditionally provided by Northern Health. People are thankful to be able to incorporate the services of professionals such as physiotherapists, chiropractors and alternative health practitioners (where available) into their personal health care regimes.

Participants acknowledge that it is not viable to provide all services in all communities. But generally, the more locally available services there are - or that can be accessed in nearby communities - the better for seniors' health and wellness. Northern Health programs and services such as community care, local hospitals, preventive care, chronic disease management and the Cancer Centre for the North were all noted for their contributions. There is also a feeling that

wait times for services such as hip and knee replacements have been reasonable. The Northern Health Connections bus was also cited in some communities as a service that contributes to health and wellness for seniors because it eases the issue of transportation and makes out-of-town services accessible. The level of convenience of the service to some communities was questioned, however (see “Transportation” below).



Chetwynd Sunset by Maggie Gilbert Photo courtesy of Picture BC

What Could be Improved

‘Help me stay in my home’

If there was one virtually unanimous theme arising from these consultations, it was seniors’ desire to stay in their homes longer and to have more options to help the transition from home into supported care.

Areas in which improvements are necessary in order for this to become a reality include:

- A greater range of housing alternatives;
- More community-based services to provide supports such as home maintenance;
- Greater diversity and accessibility of transportation options;
- More comprehensive information on community and health services and how to access them.

Housing alternatives

Participants identified the need for a greater range of housing options. For example, as seniors age, they may have difficulties navigating stairways or managing the large homes and yards in which they’ve raised their families. But there are few options in many Northern BC communities to downsize, particularly to affordable, accessible, elder-friendly accommodations (such as townhomes, apartments, or single-story ranchers).

Suggestions included rent subsidies, co-op housing options, and the conversion of empty existing buildings (such as closed schools) to housing for seniors.

Participants also noted the growing need for a more comprehensive and cohesive range of housing options to take seniors through the years from

“My mom’s 80 and my dad’s a little younger. They own their house. It’s bought and paid for. It takes 86 steps to get up to their house. The house is falling down now. They’ve been asked to move, but they say, ‘No, this is our house, we want to stay here.’”

independence to greater levels of support, including assisted living and transitional and residential care. Greater levels of support for adult day care and palliative care were also recommended.

Participants also felt strongly that involving seniors in the design and development of any future housing would help create environments that are suited for seniors.

For example, adaptations to the home to help reduce the risk of falls and maintain independence are not always considerations in current home design.

Supports in the home

In every conversation, seniors and community members identified the need for help with basic activities in and around their homes: shoveling snow, maintaining yards and gardens, housecleaning, cooking, grocery shopping and minor home maintenance. In many communities, some of these supports are available; however, people don't know how to access them or are concerned about their cost.

People needing clinical home support services stressed the importance of timely service, more frequent visits, and better consistency and continuity in home care staff. Participants also expressed a real desire to find some way to integrate clinical home care services with some of the non-clinical home support services noted above.

“ I understand the need to centralize services. But it is vital to have transportation to those services. It's a medical need, not just a wish. ”

Transportation

Transportation for seniors living in rural and northern communities can be a significant barrier to staying in their own homes and their communities.

Transportation provides access to much-needed services and to recreational and social activities - all of which are important contributors to healthy aging and wellness.

In most (but not all) communities there is at least some level of public transit and/or the HandyDART bus service. In some communities, this is augmented by volunteer

and community-based services that provide transportation to appointments as well as delivery of prescriptions and groceries. The Northern Health Connections bus also helps make regional services more accessible.

While these services are valued where they are available, there are also perceived gaps that directly impact seniors. These are experienced in different ways across the North. In smaller communities, the local transit schedule often does not coordinate with scheduled appointment times. In many First Nations communities, there is little or no public transit. HandyDART services are often limited, and the hours of operation don't support access to community events in the evening, on weekends, or on holidays.

Winter conditions across the North further constrain people's mobility and increase social isolation, boredom and depression. Highway conditions deter people from using their own transportation and can also cause people to miss or defer appointments.

Across communities, the challenge of coordinating health appointments with the schedules of local transit (including trains) and the Northern Health Connections bus was seen as a particular issue that needs addressing. Scheduling multiple appointments is extremely difficult and often involves one or two overnight stays. This is both frustrating and expensive for seniors and their families.

Suggestions included an "appointment coordinator." This role would coordinate medical appointments with available transportation and associated schedules. Other suggestions were to seek more volunteer drivers, arrange better coordination between train and bus schedules, improve hours of operation, and provide help with acquiring sustainable funding for local transportation initiatives.

Education and information

One of the direct and immediate positive outcomes of the conversations held throughout these consultations was the way participants shared their knowledge of supports and services in the community with each another. Through this exchange of experience and expertise, important community relationships, partnerships and connections were formed and strengthened. Regardless of the size of the community, there always seemed to be information being shared about programs or services people might not have

heard about. People repeatedly mentioned the value of what they learned from others in the room. This inevitably led to the question: “How do we know where to get information on what services are available and how to access them?”

The mix of community and health services available across Northern BC communities is complex. It is clear from participants’ discussions that information about these services needs to be simplified and made relevant and readily accessible to the community.

Suggestions were made to improve both the availability of information and the content. Bringing information to seniors by proactively reaching out through existing networks and resource centres was one suggestion. Improving or creating a web-based information portal was also seen as helpful. Developing seniors’ advocates or information officers who are knowledgeable about each community and its health services could also help keep information current and accessible. In one community, there was even a discussion about holding ongoing seniors’ focus groups to create and maintain a continuously improving system of local support.

Specific suggestions for providing health education to help seniors (and others) make proactive choices that support wellness and healthy aging were also heard consistently across the consultations. Suggested topics included healthy lifestyle choices, early prevention of disease, healthy aging strategies, and services that are available to support seniors. People were also interested in learning more about specific conditions and issues such as dementia, end of life, and elder abuse.

Communication and integration of services

An integrated system of programs and services that is easily navigated by patients and families would seem to be the ideal way to ensure Northern BC residents get the care they need, when they need it, in a manner that is also efficient and affordable to government and Northern Health.

However, participants consistently expressed frustration with the fragmentation of different parts of the system and different aspects of care - not just medical services, but all the services and supports in place for seniors.

Better communication across systems of care (primary, acute, community and residential) as well as with transit systems, and community-based services

such as Meals on Wheels was seen as vital. Looking at services from seniors' perspectives may also help provide ideas for improvements that can make substantive differences to their health and wellness.

Creating a culture of dignity and respect

A disturbing theme heard throughout the consultations was the fact that seniors often feel disrespected by service providers. They felt that by virtue of their age they were judged to be no longer competent, and their experience and knowledge were not respected or acknowledged.

Participants felt there was a need for care and services to be respectful of seniors and elders, and to be patient-, family- and caregiver-centered. First Nations elders in particular spoke of wanting to be heard and respected in their interactions with the health care system, and also of the importance of access to their traditional healing practices in addition to mainstream health care.

“ We need to teach [staff] how to listen. Just stop and listen. And then they need to learn how to talk to seniors. They may not hear everything the same as when they're younger, and decisions can be made based on wrong information. ”

The challenge of the Northern winter

While not specifically a health care issue, Northern BC winters present unique challenges to healthy aging and seniors' wellness. Winter is a difficult time for seniors. Ice, snow, and extreme cold can make it challenging to participate in physical and social activities, so many seniors are less active during these months. Most communities identified the need to create or support access to more facilities that provide opportunities to let seniors stay active during the winter.

The financially disadvantaged

Participants from communities across Northern BC expressed deep concern for the number of seniors living in poverty. Seniors subsisting on very small regular incomes are not uncommon in northern communities. Their ability to obtain adequate shelter, to access healthy food and to afford prescriptions and some health and community services is significantly compromised. They are also at higher risk for social isolation, loneliness and depression.

Participants in these consultations felt it was important to be more aware of the unique challenges faced by this population and to do what is possible to prevent anyone from “falling through the cracks.”



Further Observations

Northern Health's 2013 public consultations and focus groups yielded a rich and varied perspective on the lives of seniors across the North. As with any series of public consultations, "meta-themes" emerged. These are not directly related to health care, but were nonetheless patterns of conversation important to the topic of healthy aging and seniors' wellness. They provide insights that may be useful in understanding how connection, commitment and action by health care professionals and community members can happen at the local level.

Three primary, interrelated meta-themes became evident during this series of consultations:

- The value of having the conversation;
- The role of self-determination and community action;
- The importance of the strength of relationships between the various stakeholders.

The value of conversation

For many seniors, there was great value in simply showing up and being able to talk with others about matters of importance to them, their families and their communities.

People described the consultation or focus group as a safe place to talk about issues, and many said they felt better simply knowing others were experiencing similar challenges.

Through this exchange of experience and expertise, important community relationships, partnerships and connections were formed. In many instances, people learned about local health and wellness programs and services for seniors of which they had previously been unaware, while others shared information that was pivotal to the forward movement of community initiatives.

Whenever people come together to listen to each other and share their perspectives, an alchemy of sorts occurs. The exchange of individual experiences, perceptions and observations becomes a shared experience that begins to form part of a new collective community narrative: friends, neighbours and strangers connect with each other. Through this exchange, they share knowledge and generate ideas and insights that may lead to new community-based actions and initiatives.

Self-determination and community action

During the consultations, it became apparent that there was a connection between the level of self-determination already present in a community - the general willingness to take collective action to influence outcomes rather than waiting for someone else to do it- and the participants' desire to take action on the issues under discussion during the sessions.

This is an important correlation, because in those communities where seniors felt the freedom to determine their own future, the conversations were more likely to result in community action or partnerships of some kind. Conversely, communities that were waiting for other agencies to take action on their behalf often became stuck in a different conversation, one that tended to focus more on dwindling resources and shifting priorities.

While the health care system obviously has a primary role to play in ensuring seniors have the opportunity to age well, healthy aging and seniors' wellness will only truly emerge from the collaborative efforts of citizens who care about where they live and want to make their communities the best they can be.

Strength of stakeholder relationships

The consultation sessions that seemed to hold the most promise as catalysts for transformation of communities into vibrant, elder-friendly places were those attended by a diverse mix of community members. There appeared to be great possibility for change in the consultations where seniors were well represented (especially those involved with seniors' agencies and initiatives) alongside representatives of local government and local health care professionals.

The most powerful dialogue seemed to develop when people from each of these groups came together in a grassroots conversation about what is possible. When this happened, there was a leveling of traditional power bases so that a conversation among equals could occur. The relationships that subsequently developed will determine the strength of the outcome. This coalition of community members, community agencies, local government and local health providers seems to hold the most promise for the emergence of sustainable community change.

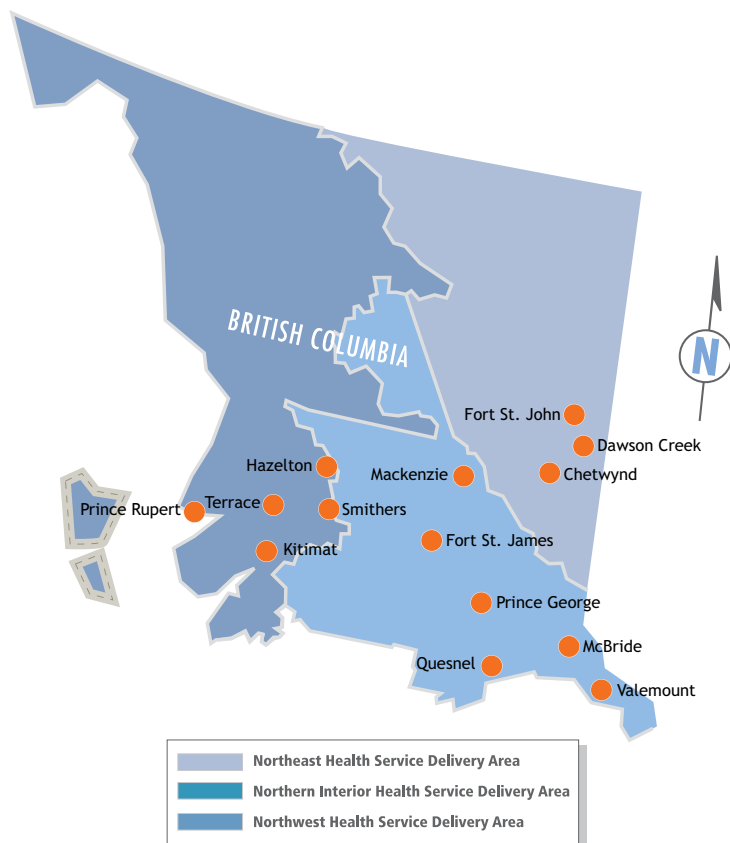
Appendix A: Community Summaries

The following pages summarize discussion notes from the public consultation sessions held between September and November 2013.

While every attempt has been made to include the full breadth of the comments received, these summaries will necessarily be an interpretation of the overall conversation.

The summaries below are abridged versions of the full summaries of each consultation session, which can be found at www.northernhealth.ca. How to find them:

1. Go to the Northern Health home page (www.northernhealth.ca),
2. Go to the “Your Health” tab.
3. Then go to the “Seniors’ Health” tab.
4. The report and summaries will be posted on that page.



Chetwynd

Date: October 2, 2013 • Participants: 8

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Participants described wellness as a process that ideally begins in the early years of life and leads to healthy aging through “developing a good, hard work ethic when young” and “taking ownership for wellness” throughout life. Wellness was described as the “balance of mind, body, spirit and physical activity.”

The group spoke about the value of staying physically and mentally active through “playing when not working” and staying “busy in retirement.” Many underlined the priority of being active in the community and that “community is an aspect crucial to healthy living.”

What is working?

Lifestyle and personal choice

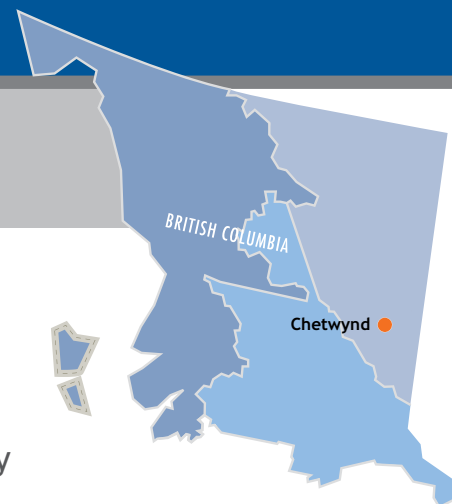
This group maintained that the legacy of “**farm-style living**” (an outdoor lifestyle with lots of physical work) was the single best contributor to seniors’ health and wellness, and that community services and programs in tandem with this heritage are what helps seniors stay physically and mentally fit.

Community services

Chetwynd seniors’ organizations provide lots of daily activity that encourages people to stay young and keeps social isolation at bay. The **Chetwynd Recreation Centre** was seen as a pivotal community space that provides many opportunities for seniors to stay well. As well, the District of Chetwynd has invested in the health of the community through ongoing **communication** with citizens on community health and through the development of **walking trails**.

Natural environment

Chetwynd, with its physical beauty and **natural amenities**, inspires seniors to stay well and active through hiking and skiing. The group emphasized the



integration of work and play for healthy aging and wellness and to stave off boredom and inaction. They felt strongly that the integration of these activities with “remembering a day of rest” and “being happy” are most important in maintaining wellness.

What could be improved?

Proactive programs

Participants emphasized the need for **preventive/upstream thinking** and action when dealing with what is not working to inspire health and wellness in Chetwynd. They spoke of the need to have more **public health support** in the community to make long-term health a viable and sustainable reality.

Housing

There is a clear need for **housing alternatives** in Chetwynd that enable seniors to transition as they age. Most significantly, there is a lack of affordable housing for seniors. At the same time as some seniors are experiencing homelessness, there are vacant housing units in Chetwynd but no **rental subsidies** available for those who have low incomes. It was felt that Chetwynd is in need of **more infrastructure** for aging in place.

Volunteer Support

An important theme in the conversation on supporting people to stay in their homes was concern for the dwindling resource of **community volunteers**. People highlighted changing attitudes with regard to giving service and building community as detrimental to finding and keeping volunteers. Volunteers were described as an essential resource.

Transportation

Transportation was seen as critical to helping seniors stay well mentally and physically and to battling social isolation, particularly during the winter months when weather conditions can create mobility challenges.

Chetwynd First Nations

Date: October 2, 2013 • Participants: 6

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

The elders agreed that information and education help them stay well and that being healthy is a personal choice. Reading labels helps with good food choices; taking vitamins is also important. The group underlined that while healthy choices and knowing the content of food are important, this is only one component of health.

Other elements of good health are how people come together around food and build families. Family connections, particularly with children, are critical to health and wellness for elders. As one elder said “I live and breathe for my kids.” Preparing traditional foods, like a dry rack for moose meat, is one way to bring a family together around food and wellness. It provides the opportunity to enjoy each other’s company, hand down traditions, and keep family close through the cooking of traditional foods.

What is working?

Community, family and culture

Participants feel **friendship and keeping company** with others is an important part of being well and helps to keep elders connected rather than isolated in their homes or in the hospital. **Exercise and walking**, particularly in the company of others, was also seen as important to staying physically well and mentally active. Again, **family** is integral to wellness.

Fun activities that engage the mind and encourage socializing, such as healthy food or bingo, bring people together and are seen as valuable. **Culture and tradition** are also very important to wellness. Knowing that traditional ways are valued is important to mind, body and spirit. As one elder clearly stated, “a healthy elder is someone who knows their culture is respected.”

What could be improved?

Patient-focused care

First among the Chetwynd elders' concerns is the **disrespect** they feel they encounter when using the health care system. Elders suggested that when they engage with the health system they want to be heard and respected for who they are and for the perspective they hold. They also want their families to be able to advocate for better care on their behalf when hospitalized or living in long-term care.

Health services

Opportunities to practice **traditional healing** inside the hospital are valued as a way of maintaining wellness in body, mind and spirit. Meetings between elders and physicians need to be less rushed, with more of a focus on diagnosis and treatment plans. **Timely access** to health care services was seen as critical to maintaining and preserving wellness.

Within the community, elders need to have programs and activities that engage the mind, body and spirit. Finding **transportation** to appointments and activities can be challenging and can be a detriment to long-term health, vitality and wellness.

Communication and information

Better communication was cited as critical for the development of healthy relationships for all aspects of care (hospital, residential, community).

In addition, more **education** from the health care system on the practices of healthy aging in the form of workshops would be useful. Programs with a particular emphasis on how to take charge of your own health and how to advocate for what you need within the health care system would be valuable.

Dawson Creek

Date: October 1, 2013 • Participants: 22

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Participants from Dawson Creek consider health and wellness to include as active a lifestyle as possible, eating well and having a close circle of friends. Many spoke of managing chronic conditions through good nutrition and exercise. Seniors' wellness, for this group, means staying in their own homes and their communities with the proper supports to optimize health and to enable a fulfilling life.



BRITISH COLUMBIA

Dawson Creek

What is working?

Community services

A significant contributor to wellness in Dawson Creek, according to participants, is the depth and breadth of the **community programs and services** available to seniors, particularly those that support and promote physical health. These include recreational facilities and programs, as well as the Dawson Creek Seniors Hall, South Peace Seniors Access Services and the Better at Home program.

Relationship and culture

Participants cited what they consider the **elder-friendly culture** of Dawson Creek. They talked about a culture of organizations, businesses and corporations that support seniors' initiatives.

Health services

Participants felt that they had **good access to physicians and specialists** in the community, in addition to good nurses, physiotherapists, chiropractors and massage therapists.

As well, short or nonexistent wait times for hip and knee replacements were perceived as enabling seniors to stay active and productive. The walk-in clinic was cited several times as being patient-centered.

What could be improved?

Housing

Supporting people to **maintain their independence** and stay in their own homes as long as possible was identified as being critically important for seniors' health and wellness, with many asking, "How can we care for more people at home, and how do we get help when we need it?"

Housing alternatives were clearly identified as significant for health and wellness. More assisted living and long-term care was perceived as critical. Affordable housing was also seen as important, particularly given the upward pressure on housing costs as a result of the booming oil and gas sector.

Community services

Many seniors need help with simple **day-to-day tasks** so that they can continue to live independently in their own homes and stay connected to their communities and support systems.

Participants also wanted more frequent and consistent visits from Northern Health **home support** as well as access to medical equipment to allow people to recover from illness and chronic disease in their own homes.

An important sub-theme in the discussion about supporting people to stay in their homes was deep concern for the diminishing pool of **volunteers**.

Transportation

Transportation was identified as an issue, both within town and for out-of-town medical appointments. Many people noted that it is more efficient for people from Dawson Creek to go to Edmonton than Vancouver or Prince George. Participants suggested the Northern Health Connections bus service should be re-examined to ensure it meets people's needs in a timely way.

Fort St. James

Date: October 29, 2013 • Participants: 16

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

For some participants in Fort St. James, health and wellness was found in having dignity and being respected as an individual, as well as being content with one's current situation and being able to adapt as things change.

Health was also seen as holistic, encompassing the mind, body and spirit, and involving taking care of one's self. For others, a sense of belonging, of being active and involved, of having choice, and sharing one's knowledge meant being healthy and well.

A third viewpoint was that health and wellness means being able to age in place, in your own home and community, and knowing that the services you need will be there.

What is working?

Community collaboration

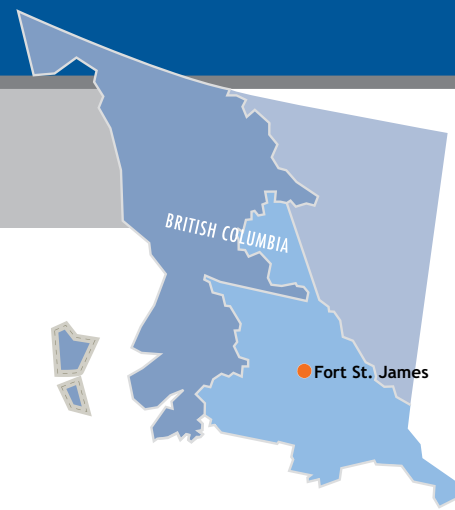
Fort St. James community members **work collaboratively to create and sustain services** that support seniors to stay independent and in their homes and in the community. Many of the participants expressed a desire to be able to **grow old in their community** and are prepared to put in the effort to make it happen.

Personal choice

There are opportunities in the community for people to become involved in things that support them in their choices to **stay active and healthy**. There is concern, however, that people who do need help are not **asking for the help** they need and that nobody is advocating for them.

Community services

The community has a number of services that were created to support seniors to be able to stay in their own homes and in the community as a



result of **community planning processes**. Services include a delivery and transportation program for seniors living in their own homes.

Health services

A part-time **long-term care assessor** in the community is also available for people who want to learn about home health services.

What could be improved?

Information and advocacy

Having a **resource centre** for people who are unlikely to use the Internet or HealthLink BC was suggested. There are also tools of communication within the community, such as the **seniors' centre** and the **college's newsletter**. Participants suggested both could be used to provide relevant information for seniors.

There is a sense that **advocates** are needed for seniors and for patients who can't advocate from themselves. There is also interest in bringing in speakers to offer **seminars on health-related topics**.

Coordination of community services

As people listened to each another speak, there was an awareness of the continued need for better **coordination among organizations** in the community. Other ideas for improvements included involving seniors in **decision-making** and policy-making, and creating opportunities for seniors to mentor each another about healthy living.

Transportation

While there has been a lot of work done in Fort St. James to support the transportation needs of seniors, participants said there is a need for **sustainable funding** and eventually for a **dedicated bus**. The **Northern Health Connections** bus is appreciated; however, it is not well timed for appointments.

Health services

There were a lot of questions in the room about **who to contact** for different health service needs, and also a desire for better integration of services. Participants suggested a **"wraparound" approach to the health needs of seniors**. Typically, they have a number of needs, but when a health professional looks at the issues in isolation, problems can arise.

Fort St. John

Date: September 30, 2013 • Participants: 44

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Fort St. John participants demonstrated a high level of knowledge about eating properly, getting enough physical and social activity and living an independent life. The life they described suggests that a positive attitude, financial security, community support and independence are linked to create environments where seniors flourish.

Some participants proposed that a critical part of wellness is accepting illness and learning to live well within its constraints. For them, this means staying active despite reduced mobility, and helping others in their community to stay involved and engaged with life.

What is working?

Personal choice

The importance of **living with purpose** was woven throughout the session in the conversations on staying active, mixing with peers, maintaining family connections, spiritual support and looking after one another.

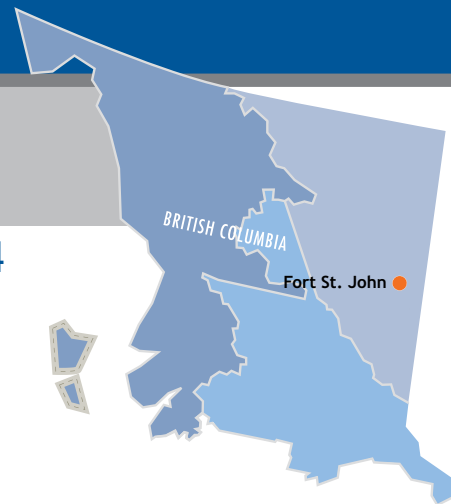
Community services

A variety of programs, services and facilities in the community help seniors stay **fit and socially active**. The community is seen as actively supporting the health and vitality of seniors through **facilities and programs that support social and physical well-being and community connectedness**.

Health services

Another clear positive noted by participants was the number of **Northern Health programs and services** available. Fort St. John participants were grateful for good family physicians and good health care supports and services in the community.

They also noted the positive impacts of the **cancer centre**. The **Northern Health Connections** bus was also seen as a great benefit to those who need to travel to receive specialized care.



In addition, Northern Health's focus on **primary health care** was perceived as beneficial both in demystifying medical processes and in creating timely access to services.

What could be improved?

Community services

More consistent **home care support** to help seniors who are still in their homes was deemed a priority. This included help with **non-medical day-to-day tasks** such as housework and yard work. Participants felt that better wages and incentives for home support workers were needed.

Participants underlined the need to **increase social activities** to combat isolation and improve opportunities for health and wellness, including increasing opportunities for **intergenerational** social activities for the benefit of the community.

Housing

There was a consistent theme that more **affordable housing alternatives are needed**. The conversation suggested that there is a need in Fort St. John for **housing for various stages** of life such as residential care and assisted living, as well as more alternatives for independent seniors.

Communication and information

Participants expressed a desire for more **information and education** and better information-sharing about existing community resources, services and the linkages between them. This would help maximize the resources available to them in their communities.

Transportation

Transportation plays a pivotal role in keeping seniors connected to the community, rather than isolated in their homes. Participants said public transportation needs to serve the local hospital, and recommended that it should be regular and timely for seniors. In addition, participants suggested that HandyDART hours could be extended and used to transport seniors to services and programs.

Hazelton

Date: September 26, 2013 • Participants: 12

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Participants agreed that the most important factors in health and wellness are good relationships with the people in their lives, a sense of independence, being engaged in activities that support mental and physical health, and a positive outlook on life.

The natural environment of the area, having the opportunity to age in place and stay in your own home, and a sense of control over the direction of your care are also considered important.

What is working?

Personal relationships and community

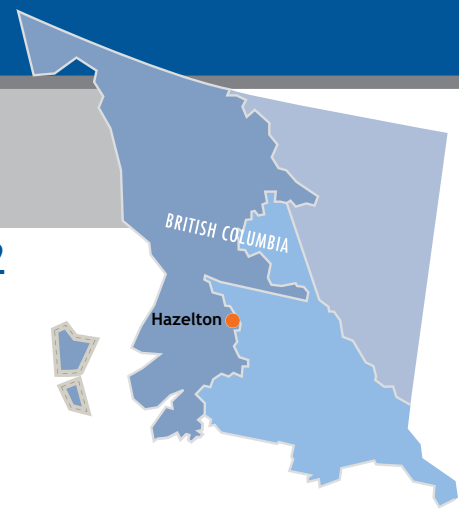
Community collaboration is seen in the many opportunities that are available to gather together. **Community services** also play a role in helping people to be healthy as they age. As well, Hazelton is a community where networks of people look out for each another.

Transportation and communication

There was appreciation for the **transportations and communication systems** that are currently in place. **Technology** is viewed as an important tool that can help to break the sense of isolation for both the community and for individuals within the community.

Health services

Health services in the community play a role in seniors' wellness and health aging, with specific mention made of the local pharmacy, dentist, physicians, hospital, emergency room, assisted living, residential care and adult day services, and visiting specialist and screening services.



Housing

The local seniors' housing (Roche View Lodge) provides support for seniors both at the lodge and in other facilities. There is also a co-housing group that is beginning to explore alternative housing options for seniors in the community.

What could be improved?

Personal choice

Participants suggested a number of ways to not only promote **healthy choices and activity** among the residents of Hazelton, but also ways the community could support those choices, including the opportunity to volunteer or find the services of volunteers.

Transportation

While **transportation services** were identified as a strength of the community, there were a few suggestions for improvements, including changing the classification of Highway 16 and providing expanded transportation options within the community.

Communication and information

Participants had a number of ideas to connect elders with **information on services and supports** that are available as they age, and to provide them with help navigating the system. There was also discussion about setting up seniors' focus groups and a seniors' council.

Health Services

Participants identified the need for greater interaction between home health workers and other services.

While participants acknowledge the isolated nature of the community, they would still like to see some way to get more specialists to provide periodic specialty clinics in the community. They would also like better response from Smithers-based home and community care staff.

Kitamaat Village

Date: September 24, 2013 • Participants: 16

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

The elders of Kitamaat Village consider gathering with their relations and sharing good company and laughter as central to peacefulness and wellness. Doing things they love is also seen as important to healthy aging.

Most importantly, being healthy and well is an extension of their connection to their language and culture, and to the land and traditional foods of their local environment that have nourished them for centuries. Gathering traditional foods provides a sense of physical well-being, as well the peace and intrinsic sense of purpose that come from contributing to the community.

That being said, the elders noted that the natural environment has been impacted by industrialization over the past half century. This has changed, and in some cases depleted, the availability of traditional food sources such as cockles, crabs and oolichan.

What is working?

Community connections

The elders spoke about the sense of **community and companionship** they receive from one another. The **Elders' Centre** offers a place to gather and to engage in the activities that allow them to maintain a connection with the traditional ways. They are also able to share resources and information.

Cultural traditions

Connecting across the generations is important for everyone. Connecting youth with elders fosters learning about the traditions and culture and builds respect. Family ties are also very important to staying healthy and well.

The elders spoke about the fact that many of them have conquered alcoholism and other addictions, which has given them wisdom and experience to pass on about how to meet challenges to living well and in good health.

What could be improved?

Health services

The issue of addiction is very real, and the elders spoke of the journey to wellness and the choices they have made. **Additional supports** for others in the community facing the same challenges would be welcome.

Community services

The elders also want to continue to be **independent** and stay in their own homes. Often their homes present challenges to independence, especially when there are mobility issues: many of the homes are located on slopes and have stairs.

Home support services have also been reduced, and the elders expressed the importance of having housework support to be able to stay in their own homes.

Cultural traditions

The elders talked about what seems to be a growing reliance on public services rather than looking to the nation's **cultural traditions** and seeking out the wisdom and experience of elders. They consider the loss of language, traditions and heritage as key to changes in individual and community health.

Transportation

One of the greatest challenges in the isolated location of Kitamaat Village is **transportation to access services** and supports that are located in neighbouring Kitimat or Terrace.

Kitimat

Date: September 24, 2013 • Participants: 58

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Kitimat residents felt that healthy aging and wellness means keeping a positive attitude and being able to remain independent, but also having the supports necessary to maintain mobility and independence.



What is working?

Personal choice

Participants agreed that **taking responsibility for one's own health** was important in healthy aging, and that this includes paying attention to good nutrition, healthy body weight and daily exercise. A good attitude and strong social connections were also seen as important contributors to health.

Community services

Kitimat is seen as an age-friendly community with a low crime rate, a good system of walkways, a good bus system, and a strong system of community services. The seniors' centre, the Red Cross and Meals on Wheels were noted as particularly strong examples of community-based **services and programs**.

Health services

Participants highlighted the accessibility of family physicians, free flu shots, and the "living well with diabetes" program as examples of **health services** that are working well. Participants were also relatively happy with short wait times, decent mental health services and a very good home care activation program.

What could be improved?

Housing

There was much discussion about the need for more **affordable and appropriate** housing options for seniors. Incorporating **senior-friendly design** into new construction was also cited as a need.

Many participants felt they could remain **independent in their own homes** much longer if only they could find more support (volunteer or subsidized) with managing things such as yard maintenance, snow clearing and general household chores.

Transportation

Improving transportation options for seniors who may not want to or be able to drive would allow them to remain independent longer.

Information sharing

Participants agreed **information sharing about community and health services** could be improved. This could be done via the Internet, by better local information outreach, and even through an “information officer” who could provide information on services in the community.

Health services

Ideas for improvements to **existing health care services** included a drop-in clinic, counselling services, and better coordination between local doctors and outside medical specialists.

There is a perception that there are long waiting lists to access long-term care and assisted living spaces, and that there are therefore more spaces needed.

Additional staff training in respectful and patient-centered care was recommended, as were improvements to in-home and post-operative care.

Kitsumkalum & Kitselas

Date: September 25, 2013 • Participants: 9

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Elders at this focus group meeting agreed that health and wellness is linked with both independence and being able to do things for other people. This brings interdependency rather than dependency to their relationships. This is particularly true of intergenerational interactions, which promote individual and community wellness. Physical, mental and spiritual aspects of health are all important to the sense of health and well-being.

What is working?

Relationships, community and culture

The elders spoke of working with young people and how **intergenerational relationships** contribute to a sense of well-being. The **peer support** they receive from friends and family is also vital to their ability to participate in daily activities of life and community. The reintegration of the **feast system** in to the culture has also brought back an important foundation for cultural and individual wellness.

Personal choice

Staying active and participating in social activities also contributes to staying well. And making proactive choices to **move away from unhealthy behaviours and into healing** was seen as important to health and wellness.

Community and health services

The band has helped when people needed to **travel** to Vancouver for treatment. The elders said this assistance has made the difference in “surviving” the experience. Northern Health has supported **Volunteer Terrace**, which provides help with household jobs that have become difficult, such as laundry.

The **Health Centre** in Kitsumkalum provides food baskets that are free to people with diabetes and available to others at a cost. These baskets help ensure people are getting balanced diets.

Mills Memorial Hospital in Terrace has been very accommodating to First Nations cultural traditions (for example, lots of family participating in care).

What could be improved?

Affordable food

Low income prevents some elders from being able to buy healthy foods. The Tsimshian people have a deep traditional connection to the land , so maintaining a **community garden** contributes to cultural and physical health and also provides healthy food for those in need; however, the community garden in Kitselas is not being maintained.

Transportation

Problems with mobility and access to services can also make it difficult for people to access health care. Elders who live on reserve often do not have **transportation support** to get to the health services they need in Terrace, Prince George or Vancouver.

Health services

While clinical home health services are available to elders, there is a need for more **non-medical supports** that would contribute towards people being able to stay in their homes.

There is a perception that **waitlists for specialists are too long** and that the shortage of doctors impedes their ability to get and stay healthy.

Doctors also need to work on their listening skills. The elders note that it often feels as though they are not paying attention to what you are saying, or they do not understand it properly.

Mackenzie

Date: November 7, 2013 • Participants: 20

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Participants in the Mackenzie consultation session see wellness as integrating the three components of physical, mental and social health. They spoke about the importance of being able to continue to do the things that give life depth and richness, such as dancing, skiing, playing with grandchildren and making plans for the future.

Accessible health services and transportation are considered vital to healthy aging and wellness as well as being able to ask for help when you need it. According to these seniors, staying active, connected and mentally sharp was equated with health, happiness and contentment.

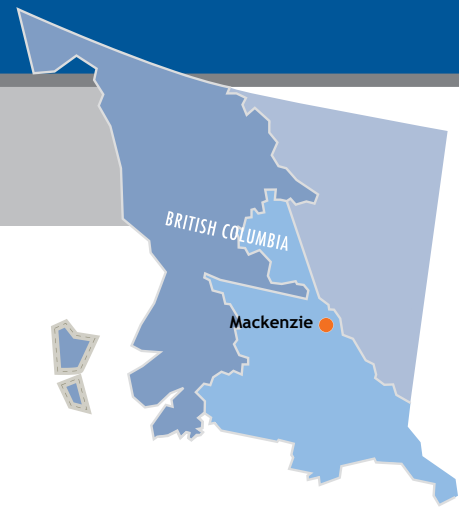
What is working?

Social networks

Participants referred to the significant role that **family and friends** play in maintaining health and in aging well. They also referred to individuals in the community who run **programs that are elder-friendly** and who offer special classes or services or are simply open to feedback from seniors on what works best for them.

Community services

The **size of the community** allows for spontaneous socializing, and physical spaces such as the Mackenzie Recreation Centre, the library and various service clubs make physical, mental and social health for seniors a possibility. With regard to Mackenzie itself, participants spoke of how the community is working toward being a place that actively involves, values and supports older adults. Clean water and air, as well as **opportunities to be active** in the outdoors and indoors, were mentioned as important to physical, social and mental well-being.



Health services

Many participants mentioned the advantages to seniors of having **medical services conveniently situated**, with physicians' offices, the hospital and other services all located in the same place. The group also specifically mentioned how much they value their nurse practitioner.

What could be improved?

Housing

As with many communities in the North, a significant focus for the Mackenzie consultation was how to help seniors maintain their **independence through staying in their own homes**. Many seniors just need help with simple **day-to-day tasks** so that they can continue to live independently. Respite for caregivers was also considered important.

There is a clear need for **affordable housing alternatives** in Mackenzie that enable seniors to transition as they age from independence to assisted living, residential and long term care. Participants want seniors to be involved in the planning of such facilities to ensure accessibility and elder-friendliness.

Accessibility

Mackenzie was built for a younger population, with many buildings having one or more flights of stairs. A community-wide focus on making Mackenzie more **elder-friendly** would include making businesses wheelchair-accessible.

Transportation

Many people spoke of the need for more **transportation options** and for an improvement in the hours of operation for services that already exist. The group spoke of the wait for both taxis and buses as interminable. The Northern Health Connections bus was appreciated, but is not often scheduled in a way that allows for seniors to be able to attend specialist appointments.

Health services

There is limited access to **secondary care** in Mackenzie. There are no eye doctors, physiotherapists or chiropractors, underlining the need for transportation to other centres or for innovative solutions for care.

McBride

Date: November 18, 2013 • Participants: 8

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

When invited to speak about what wellness means to them, focus group members highlighted the need to stay fit physically, mentally and socially.

Many felt the factors that influence the mental health and social well-being of seniors within the community are a complex interplay among variables such as feeling in control of your life, having a caring family and circle of friends, and giving back to the community. Involvement in the community was emphasized as critical to health and social well-being.

What is working?

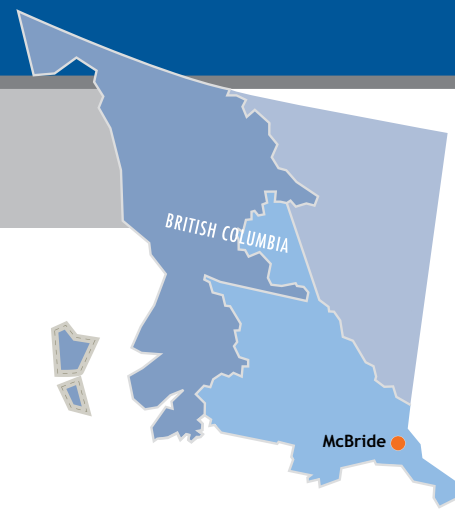
Community services and programs

The focus group members suggested that what fits best in the community are programs and services that work well within the unique culture and community of McBride. These include **community programs and services** that encourage physical fitness year-round.

Other community events oriented toward keeping seniors active, involved and healthy are the **seniors' luncheons** that happen monthly. These are well attended, and seniors with mobility challenges are picked up by other seniors. The **McBride community garden** was cited as providing many seniors with fresh produce, an opportunity to garden and intergenerational connections that promote mental, physical and social well-being.

Health service and programs

Northern Health programs and services were cited as helping seniors stay healthy. Examples are the **Northern Health Connections bus**, the **cancer centre** in Prince George in tandem with the NH Connections bus, and **community health workers** serving both McBride and Valemount. The latter were particularly complimented for “going the extra mile” in helping seniors to be supported in their own homes.



What could be improved?

Housing and home support

An identified need in the Robson Valley is support to **keep seniors in their own homes** and in their communities. The group felt that more education is necessary to help caregivers and families understand the need for **autonomy** on the part of seniors, and the natural desire to stay in their own homes. Many people in the Robson Valley come from a rural background that lends itself to the desire to live independently, and the perception that “living well is also living in your own environment for as long as possible.”

Community support

A dominant theme that emerged from this focus group was the threat to seniors’ health and well-being from a diminishing pool of **volunteers**. Participants felt that volunteers are the backbone of a community in terms of filling the gap in services for the elderly. There was a perception that “burnout is a reality for many who volunteer on seniors’ issues.”

McBride is experiencing a demographic gap wherein educated young people leave the community for employment in bigger centres, leaving a growing burden on **seniors’ advocates and activists** as they try to meet the needs of an aging population. They also identified the cultural trend toward “keeping busy” and toward wanting to pay for services rather than volunteering as having a huge impact on what is possible to achieve for seniors.

Prince George

Date: October 28, 2013 • Participants: 67

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Participants in the Prince George consultations spoke about health and wellness as being happy and content, maintaining an active lifestyle and having a purpose in life. They agreed that while people may face mobility or other health issues as they age, they can still be content in spite of this.

People spoke about how health and wellness also incorporates more than just physical health. It includes mental and spiritual well-being, and being involved with the people in your family and community. Being able to stay in your own home while having access to services to remain independent and in control of your own affairs is also important.

What is working?

Personal choice

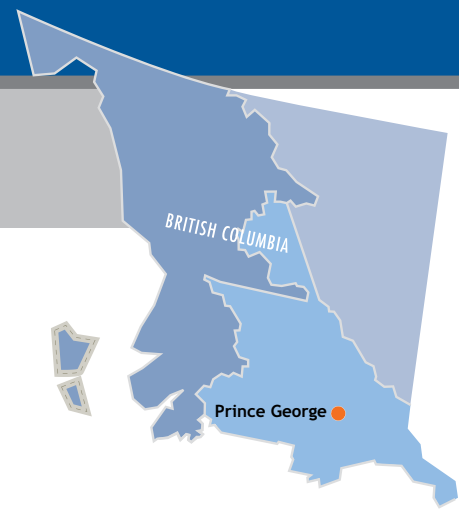
Prince George participants believe **personal circumstances and personal choice** contribute to an overall sense of health and well-being. Participants also spoke of the need to have a **sense of purpose and meaning**.

Community-based services programs

Local **seniors' centres** are very helpful, and there are also a number of other **organizations that also support recreation, socializing and volunteering**. The **seniors' help line** is also valuable. Having accessible **transportation** that helps seniors get to activities is a significant support available within the community.

Housing and support services

The ability to **stay in your own home** and, when this is no longer possible, to have access to **affordable housing alternatives** is very important to supporting the health and wellness of seniors, according to Prince George participants.



Community support

There is a strong awareness in Prince George of the implications of an aging population, and a history of research and dialogue on the needs of seniors living in the north and in rural communities.

Health services

Access to **medical care** and the quality of the care received was valued, including **both primary care and specialized services**. There was appreciation for the improvements in the integration of care, especially for seniors. **Home-based** care was acknowledged.

What could be improved?

Supportive communities

Building a community that **understands and supports people as they age**, including providing **dignity and respect**, was considered vital by Prince George participants.

Financial support

There was concern expressed that many elders face **financial challenges**, and support to help address these challenges as seniors age was seen as important.

Social Connection

Opportunities for **recreation and socializing** are especially important for seniors who are socially isolated. Creating opportunities for **intergenerational activities** can address a number of needs and foster a sense of connectedness.

Information

Prince George participants felt **more information, and more accessible information**, about services available to seniors is important, as is help navigating the system.

Transportation

Flexible, accessible, and affordable transportation is a primary need of seniors.

Housing and home support

Participants suggested they would like to see more **affordable supports** that would allow them to live independently for longer. There is also demand for a **more diverse range of housing options**.

Home care

Improvements to **home care** were identified, including consistency and continuity of home care staff, cluster care staffing models, support for patients after they leave hospital, and better communication between health providers regarding a client's care plan and needs.

Health services

Access to specialists and tests is thought to take too long. **Better integration** between services and departments, more consistency and continuity in care staff, and **better communication** throughout the system were other areas participants pointed to as needing improvement.

Prince George First Nations

Date: October 28, 2013 • Participants: 4

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

The elders agreed that being healthy and well means enjoying a fulfilling life, including being able to appreciate family without expectations, share knowledge, have a purpose, make a difference and be able to handle the stresses that come with life.

Being healthy and well also includes a sense of inclusion and belonging, being part of a community and having a sense of social wellness, regardless of age. Health and wellness incorporates mental, emotional, spiritual wholeness and wellness.

What is working?

Information and communication

The **information sharing** that takes place within the community is a big help in keeping healthy, according to the elders. Often people are suffering and don't know what they can do to change their circumstances. In the First Nation and Métis communities "the word goes out" and people will try to help.

Healthy eating and staying active

Elders perceived eating well and staying active as very important to health and wellness. Individual participants shared the decisions they have made in their own lives to eat well; they believe it is important to share this knowledge with young people so they grow up with **healthy eating habits**. In Prince George there is a farmers' market, and the Prince George Native Friendship Centre makes coupons for the market available.

Health services

The elders pointed out that family physicians are fairly good about sharing information on making healthy choices. As well, there has been work at the drop-in centre on connecting people with good information on healthy eating. Having access to good medical care for early diagnosis and assessment is also important.

What could be improved?

Community services

The elders indicated they would like to see more **support programs and services** to help seniors be healthier and more independent and resilient. They felt it was important to break an often multi-generational dependence on social assistance in order to improve health and vitality, and that the system may be able to help break this cycle.

Financial challenges often arise as people age and often live on low incomes; the elders felt there is a need to help address those challenges.

Information sharing

The elders pointed out that people often do not know **where to go to get information** when they need it. They would like to see more help provided to seniors and their families to navigate the system, and information on how to do things such as live healthily on a limited income. One significant challenge is reaching elders who are not literate.

Health services

Participants also noted the need for improvements to **respite and outreach**. Family caregivers need support, and some seniors without family supports need help staying connected and building support networks.

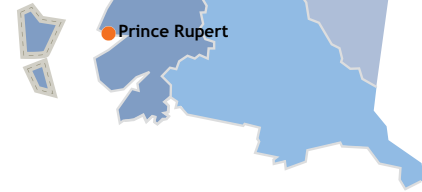
Participants also felt there is a need to educate doctors about issues related to aging and how to appropriately care for and interact with seniors.

Prince Rupert

Date: September 23, 2013 • Participants: 17

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

For residents of Prince Rupert, a key determinant of healthy aging and wellness was the ability to continue to live independently on their own terms, but with the necessary supports. They also talked about the importance of maintaining a strong social network, staying active and having meaning in their lives.



What is working?

Personal choice

Many participants said **staying physically active** was a choice that contributed to their sense of health and wellness. A wide range of indoor and outdoor activities was identified.

Community services

The community itself was viewed as a contributor to the sense of health and well-being. The size of the community, good **transportation infrastructure**, **community services** and **public facilities** make social and physical activity possible. There was high praise for the Seniors' Centre and its range and availability of activities and meals that support independence, wellness and health.

Health services

While the discussion in Prince Rupert focused mainly on matters of personal choice and community-based services and programs, participants also mentioned specific health services that are contributing to wellness, such as decent availability of family **physicians** and access to available **walk-in clinics**. There are also good **support groups** and some community-based clinical services, such as the diabetes nurse.

What could be improved?

Community integration of seniors

Actively **helping the community to stay connected to seniors** (and vice versa) was identified as being important for healthy aging and wellness. Suggestions included encouraging the community to come into facilities to visit with residents, supporting the gathering of seniors within the community, and creating spaces for seniors to gather, as well as including seniors in decision-making on issues that impact them.

Information sharing

Participants wanted to see more **accessible information** on services that are available, as well as on strategies for maintaining health and well-being.

Community services

Supportive services geared to the small things that help maintain independence, such as housework and yard work, were important to people.

Housing

Participants clearly identified what they saw as a need for more **accessible, affordable housing alternatives**.

Health services

Participants' suggestions for improvements to health services in Prince Rupert primarily focused on enhancements to **physician services, hospital facilities, home care and residential care**.

Quesnel

Date: November 20, 2013 • Participants: 43

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Quesnel participants consider wellness and healthy aging to mean enjoying a balanced lifestyle that incorporates the physical, social, emotional and psychological aspects of health. They saw independence and staying healthy in their own homes and within their own communities as critical to wellness, including having the necessary supports and services.

Wellness, for this group of seniors, means autonomy as well as having a community that offers programs and services that meet their ongoing needs as they age in place. According to the seniors of Quesnel, healthy communities support wellness through partnering with others to offer an integrated and diverse array of programs and services for seniors.

What is working?

Community programs and services

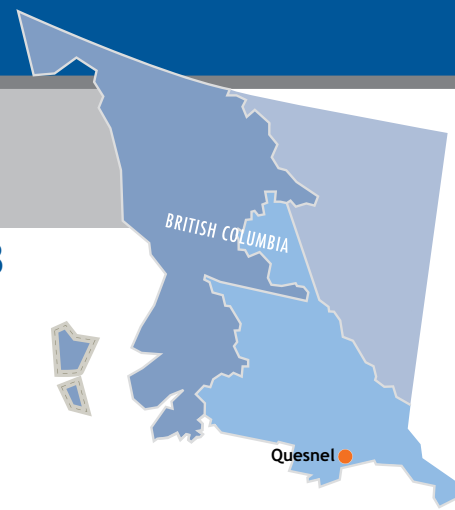
When asked what is working in the community to support and maintain healthy lifestyles, the Quesnel groups responded with multiple examples of **community programs and services** that support wellness for seniors, including the Quesnel Recreation Centre, the Seniors' Centre, the Better at Home program and the Quesnel Farmer's Market.

Natural environment

Quesnel seniors have multiple opportunities to stay physically **fit and socially connected** by taking advantage of the natural beauty and terrain of the area. People spoke of the walking trails, the River Walk and Ten Mile Lake, as well as initiatives through the **Healthier Communities Committee**.

Transportation

Transportation was mentioned as an important aspect of being able to engage in community activities, as well as to attend doctor's appointments and to help maintain a sense of independence and autonomy. The **local transit system**, the **Northern Health Connections bus**, and the **HandyDART** service were



all mentioned as invaluable supports for the health and well-being of Quesnel seniors.

What could be improved?

Home and community support

A significant focus for Quesnel participants was how to support seniors to stay in their own homes. Many seniors just need help with simple **day-to-day tasks** so they can continue to live independently. Participants saw a need for more **community health workers** to provide support for independent seniors.

Housing

Seniors in Quesnel talked about the need for **housing alternatives** to support healthy aging. Suggestions ranged from **low-cost housing** for seniors on a fixed income to housing that would affordably allow seniors to downsize while maintaining their independence. There was also a perception that the community needs more **assisted living** facilities.

Poverty

More and more Quesnel seniors are struggling to **afford housing, food and transportation** on fixed incomes. In addition, many seniors experiencing poverty also experience **social isolation, reduced physical activity and depression**.

Transportation

Transportation for Quesnel seniors was a theme in both what's working and what could be improved. While the participants appreciate the transit system, they also recognize that the bus system (including Northern Health Connections) is not very accessible to seniors and their schedules, and that neither taxis nor buses run on holidays, which exacerbates **social isolation and depression**.

Communication and information

Participants wanted to see more **information, education and communication** on a variety of topics. Better communication was seen as a priority, with a growing awareness that there is a need for people who are “connectors,” moving between groups to share resources and information.

Smithers

Date: September 26, 2013 • Participants: 78

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Turnout to the Smithers consultation was the largest of all the sessions held throughout Northern BC. People sat in small groups and talked with each another about what helps them live well and stay healthy. What is striking is the holistic approach that most Smithers participants take to maintain their health and wellness as they age.



What is working?

Social networks and relationships

Participants agreed that **staying connected and maintaining a sense of belonging** with family and friends is important and tends to occur naturally for many in Smithers. Examples included holding potlucks, volunteering, being part of a faith community, and living in a seniors' housing complex.

Personal choice

Choosing to stay physically active is an important choice people in Smithers make. The rural environment necessitates and encourages a more active lifestyle. Activities that are affordable and accessible were felt to be important for keeping active. **Continuing to learn** was also seen to be important, and access to **healthy and wholesome food** was mentioned several times.

Community services

Participants placed importance on the need to create **community infrastructure**, such as bus and transit services (particularly transportation support tailored for the elderly), accessible walkways and bike paths, and places to gather such as the seniors' centre.

Health services

There was a sense that their physicians give people in the Bulkley Valley **good service**, are accessible and available when needed, that the hospital also provides good care, and that there are many other programs and services meeting the needs of residents.

Those with extended health benefits noted the positive impact of access to other health care professionals such as chiropractors, physiotherapists and dieticians, and that the mix of government-funded and private health services is important and effective.

What could be improved?

Accessibility and affordability

Access to affordable facilities and programs to stay active in the winter was mentioned several times by participants.

Transportation

In a large, sparsely populated region such as the Bulkley Valley, **better and more coordinated transportation** is seen as crucial for accessing the services and activities that seniors believe support their ability to stay healthy and well. Participants also supported greater use of telehealth as an alternative to travel.

Community services

Participants felt the good range of available activities could be better **tailored to the needs of seniors**. For example, the time of day activities are offered could be adjusted, and the physical abilities and challenges of those involved could be taken into account.

Many people commented on the importance of services that help them maintain their independence, such as grocery delivery, light housecleaning, meal preparation, and in-house respite.

Communication

Increasing people's **awareness of information and services** available to help them stay healthy and well was also suggested as an area for improvement.

Health services

Participants felt **home support services** could be improved. A need for more **housing options** was mentioned, especially options that are affordable, accessible, and support the transition between living independently and residential care.

Training for physicians and staff in working with seniors was recommended so that the specific health care needs of seniors can be better addressed.

Terrace

Date: September 25, 2013 • Participants: 23

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

Participants agreed that healthy aging and wellness is largely about attitude: being positive and happy and “looking down at the grass,” in the words of one participant. Having good relationships with the people in one’s life, being able to carry on with current activities and not needing medical attention were other ways participants expressed the essence of what it means to be well and healthy.



What is working?

Personal choice

Personal choices that contribute to healthy aging and wellness include keeping an active social life and maintaining social networks.

Community services

Participants reported a robust range of **community services** in Terrace, including those designed to support seniors in their homes and others that provide places to gather and socialize. Public services provide specific programs and supports for seniors. Terrace is also endowed with both **indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities**.

Health services

Health services such as the flu immunization program, home support services, the Northern Health Connections bus service, and the number and quality of staff and specialists available in town were all cited as positives.

What could be improved?

Personal choice

Several participants suggested that more **accessible and relevant information** - including bringing information to seniors where they gather - would support seniors and reduce the complexity of the system. The need for a seniors' advocate or seniors' ombudsman was also suggested.

Community services

There were a number of suggestions for improvements to **infrastructure**, such as better sidewalks, improved recreational facilities and other ways to provide opportunities for seniors to stay active. There were also suggestions for improvements to **community services**, such as housekeeping and seasonal work, to help them stay in their homes longer.

There is a strong desire to see growth in the range and number of **housing options** for seniors, particularly closer to the downtown area.

Health services

Better **integration of health services** was recommended to help seniors with multiple health issues manage chronic conditions as well as supporting prevention. Other suggestions included **increasing home support services** for seniors and their families, and improving the capacity of and process for accessing long-term care.

Increased flexibility and access to **physician services** was also cited by participants.

Valemount

Date: November 18, 2013 • Participants: 17

What does healthy aging and wellness mean to you?

When Valemount citizens talk about wellness, they focus on staying active and independent in their own community. Staying in your own home and being a vital part of the community with the proper supports in place to optimize health and to lead a whole and fulfilling life was considered critical.

Participants also defined wellness as the absence of illness while remaining mentally active, continuing to enjoy life, and preserving quality of life. And finally, seniors in this community want to share their knowledge and experience with the younger generations, and in doing so stay current, involved and relevant.

What is working?

Health programs and services

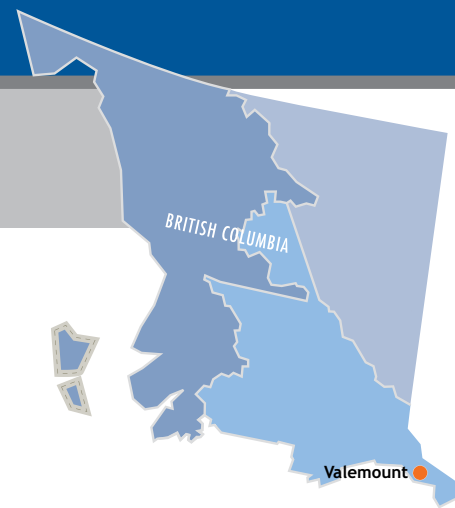
Valemount focus group participants are appreciative of many of the Northern Health **programs and services** in their area, most particularly the **health care professionals**.

The **walk-in clinic** is seen as far more than a place to go to when unwell. It is considered a vibrant centre of learning and connection. The services provided are perceived as collaborative, with the group focus on the delivery of health care having many benefits to individual and community wellness. The contract physicians provide **continuity and stability** in the community. The group-based care model practiced by the Valemount health care professionals has greatly increased information, awareness and access.

In addition, the **Northern Health Connections** bus is seen as a major contributor to accessing care for this community.

Community programs and services

Community programs and services in Valemount contribute to the physical, mental and social aspects of wellness. A number of services and facilities



help nourish a sense of community while promoting **physical activity and intergenerational contact**.

What could be improved?

Housing and home support

Several members of the focus group are concerned about what they see as a **reduction in programs and services**. Currently, **home support services** provide help with medications and bathing but not with the day-to-day tasks that would enable seniors to continue to live independently. Seniors in more rural areas are particularly challenged to access the services that enable them to stay at home.

There is a need for **housing alternatives** in Valemount that enable seniors to transition as they age. More assisted living, residential and long-term care facilities would enable seniors to stay in the Robson Valley when not acutely ill.

Social isolation

Participants also saw social isolation as a growing challenge in Valemount and surrounding areas. Seniors have fewer and fewer people such as life skills workers coming in to the home, providing **connection with the larger community** and anticipating emerging mental, physical and social issues.

Community services and programs

Access to **healthy meals** can be problematic for seniors with energy and mobility issues.

An important theme in the conversation on supporting people to stay in their homes was the need for volunteers. Changing attitudes with regard to giving service and building community have created a gap in this essential resource for community life.

Appendix B: Communities Visited

The following table shows the communities visited during the *Let's Talk About Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness* consultations, the dates, the type of consultation session, and the number of attendees at each session.

| Community | Date | Session Type | Attendees |
|----------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Kitimat | September 24 | Aboriginal Focus Group | 16 |
| Terrace | September 25 | Aboriginal Focus Group | 6 |
| Chetwynd | October 2 | Aboriginal Focus Group | 6 |
| Prince George | October 28 | Aboriginal Focus Group | 4 |
| Chetwynd | October 2 | Focus Group | 8 |
| Prince George | October 28 | Focus Group | 12 |
| Fort St. James | October 29 | Focus Group | 16 |
| McBride | November 18 | Focus Group | 8 |
| Quesnel | November 20 | Focus Group | 7 |
| Prince Rupert | September 23 | Public Session | 17 |
| Kitimat | September 24 | Public Session | 58 |
| Terrace | September 25 | Public Session | 23 |
| Hazelton | September 26 | Public Session | 12 |
| Smithers | September 26 | Public Session | 78 |
| Fort St. John | September 30 | Public Session | 44 |
| Dawson Creek | October 1 | Public Session | 22 |
| Prince George | October 28 | Public Session | 55 |
| Mackenzie | November 7 | Public Session | 16 |
| Valemount | November 18 | Public Session | 17 |
| Quesnel | November 20 | Public Session | 36 |
| Prince George | October 21 | Reg'l Hospital District Session | 33 |

