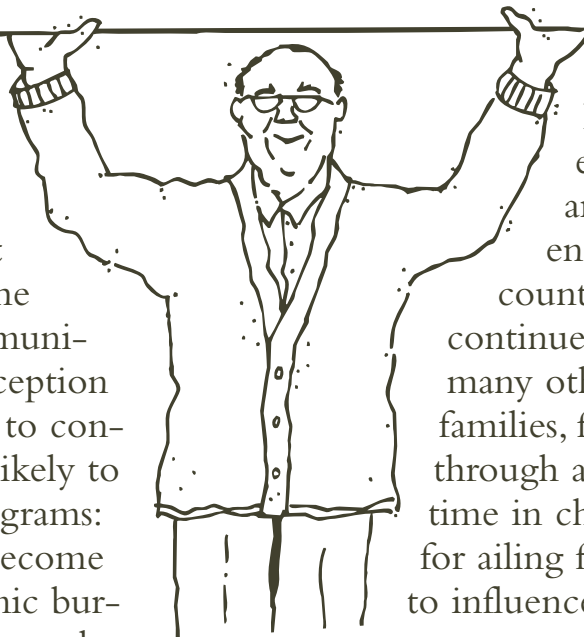




Expression

Bulletin of the National Advisory Council on Aging

Seniors contribute!



Canada's population is aging and as seniors' numbers swell, it's important that Canadians understand the value of seniors to our communities. There's too often a perception that this group is least likely to contribute to society and most likely to draw heavily from social programs: the fear is that seniors will become more of a social and economic burden than an asset. But the facts about the contributions of seniors to Canadian society tell a much different story. This issue of *Expression* helps to set the record straight about the value of seniors to our communities.

Seniors are an important part of the Canadian social fabric. They've earned their pensions by making economic contributions over their working lives and they continue to pay taxes throughout retirement – often paying for services that don't directly benefit them (such as education, daycare and employment insurance). Canadian

seniors now live longer, healthier, busier lives than ever before. In fact, they're among the most socially engaged citizens in the country. While some seniors continue to be gainfully employed, many others contribute to their families, friends and communities through activities such as spending time in children's classrooms, caring for ailing friends and actively working to influence public policies.

Seniors' social participation benefits Canadian society as a whole. It's important that governments and volunteer organizations avoid adopting ageist attitudes that discount seniors' diversity, interests and needs. Otherwise, Canada may overlook, at its own peril, one of its most precious natural resources.

Helen "Bubs" Coleman

**Helen "Bubs" Coleman,
NACA member**





NACA

The National Advisory Council on Aging consists of up to 18 members from all parts of Canada and all walks of life. The members bring to Council a variety of experience and expertise to advise the federal Minister of Health, his colleagues and the public on the situation of seniors and the measures needed to respond to the aging of the Canadian population. Current NACA members are:

Gilbert Barrette, QC

Lloyd Brunet, NWT

Bubs Coleman, SK

Robert Dobie, QC

Bhupinder Dhillon, BC

Reg MacDonald, NB

Verdon Mercer, NL

Roberta Morgan, YK

Mohindar Singh, MB

Mike Sommerville, ON

Expression is published four times a year by the National Advisory Council on Aging. The bulletin is available on the NACA Web site. Please send your comments or change of address notice to:

National Advisory Council on Aging

Postal Locator 1908A1
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1B4

Tel.: (613) 957-1968

Fax: (613) 957-9938

E-mail: info@naca-ccnta.ca

Web site: www.naca.ca

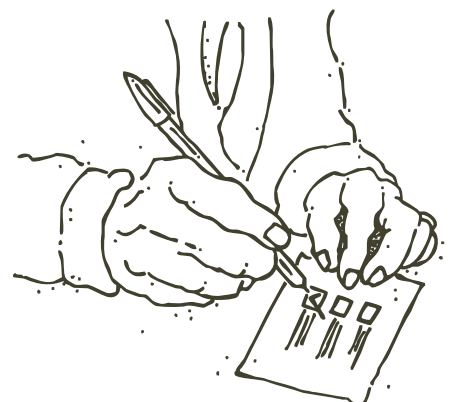
Agreement No. 40065299

ISSN: 0822-8213

Seniors: proud and present

Canadian seniors feel a strong sense of belonging to their country, and it shows. Today's seniors have actively participated in the political process for their entire adult lives. As a group, they continue to be among the most active Canadians. In the 2000 federal election, 80% of near seniors and young seniors (aged 58–67) voted, while 83% of those 68 and older cast their ballot. Compare these numbers to the national voting rate of 61%,¹ and it's clear that seniors are continuing to have an impact on their country. Seniors also have the most members in political parties compared to any other age group.²

Statistics also show that seniors (aged 65+) are very active community members, both economically and socially. For example, 77% of all seniors made direct contributions to charities in 2000, donating a total of \$854 million; 7.5% were employed in 2004; and 33.5% belonged to religious organizations.³



Older adults are more productive than ever. Those seniors and near seniors who volunteer are putting in more hours than in the past and more hours than volunteers in any other age group. Many retirees (16.1% of men and 14.7% of women) also regularly engage in caring for friends, relatives and neighbours, while the overwhelming majority (97% of women and 91.9% of men) participate in daily domestic work. Overall, three million retirees spend five billion hours of their time each year on productive activities – a contribution of about \$60 billion to Canada's economy,⁴ which is by no means a drop in the bucket.

1. Pammett, J. H. and L. LeDuc. "Confronting the problem of declining voter turnout among youth," *Electoral insights*. July 2003.

2. Jedwab, J. "Part 6: Belonging and participation in social and political life in Canada," *Association for Canadian Studies*, April 29, 2005. Online: www.acs-aec.ca/Polls/Part%205%20and%206.pdf

3. Statistics Canada. *Labour force characteristics by age and sex*. 2004.

4. University of Alberta. "Retired Canadians remain productive members of society," *Research on aging policies and practice*. June 2004.



■ New breed, new ways

Recently, the rate of older adults who volunteer has decreased. But upon closer look, this is simply a reflection of the changing volunteer landscape – where seniors are more active than ever.

For many, the words “older volunteer” conjure up images of middle- to upper-income, 70+ widows driven by altruism to contribute by folding flyers or leading social events. While older seniors still play an important role in community work, today’s mature volunteer is more in the 55 to 65 age group, as likely to be a man as a woman, and as likely to have immigrated to Canada during his or her lifetime as to have been born here. In general, he or she considers time to be a valuable commodity, has high standards and expectations, is seeking interesting and meaningful experiences, and isn’t likely to stop volunteering or to accept the status quo.

For organizations that count on the contributions of older volunteers, finding creative ways to remove barriers and facilitate participation is vitally important. Along with recognizing that today’s seniors are looking to make meaningful contributions with their time, there are other practical issues for organizations to consider. Inadequate transportation, low income and language barriers can all deter participation. A lack of familiarity with Canadian volunteerism can make getting involved a difficult task for seniors who are new to Canada. Working to remove some or all of the barriers to participation will help organizations, seniors and the community. For suggestions, see the section *Attracting today’s seniors* (page 6).

■ Seniors helping seniors

Every community across Canada is ripe with examples of seniors helping out and making a difference. Seniors are getting involved through federal and provincial programs, community and non-governmental organizations, and peer groups – all with the goal of making a difference for themselves and others. The following is a sampling of such programs.

FADOQ, the largest seniors association in Quebec, has members volunteering to improve the quality of life for other seniors who live in private residential homes. This organization and **FAFO**, a francophone seniors group in Ontario, which followed FADOQ’s lead, evaluate local homes and recognize those that provide residents with the highest quality services by awarding their “Roses d’or” and “Trilles d’or” to deserving residences in the Laval and Ottawa areas respectively. Both of these programs publish a list of their award recipients, which makes it possible for the homes to be assessed (using an evaluation grid) by current and future residents, concerned family members and staff.

The **Alberta Council on Aging** administers the Seniors Centres of Alberta Network (SCAN) project to improve the capacity of seniors centres to serve area seniors. One of its initiatives aims to mobilize the energetic and creative leadership qualities of seniors. Through the initiative, SCAN develops and promotes practical advice for seniors centres to follow in order to become more volunteer friendly.

Creative Retirement Manitoba sends scores of seniors back to school each week so that they can share their time, life experiences



and individual talents with students. The organization, which is staffed and operated entirely by volunteers, is very flexible to the needs of its members while scheduling activities such as reading to children, helping with homework, sharing a personal talent and taking part in special events.

Count seniors in

While it's true that less than a quarter of all people aged 55 and older volunteer *officially* (for example, through recognized volunteer networks, government programs or with non-governmental organizations), a large number are active in *informal* volunteer settings – spending a lot of time providing support to each other, to their extended families and to their communities. According to Statistics Canada, almost two-thirds of near seniors and seniors volunteered informally in 2003, and that number will likely rise in the future.

The **Canadian Association of Retired Persons** (CARP) works to voice the concerns of Canadians who are fifty-plus and to develop practical solutions to problems that people in this age group typically face. CARP has recently participated on various federal and provincial committees, held national forums and hosted fact-finding missions from Asia. Issues of interest are diverse and include combating scams and frauds directed at seniors, to the importance of informal caregivers, and preventing GST charges from being applied to dental, chiropractic and physiotherapy services.

Since their creation during the *International Year of Older Persons* (1999), the regional **Tables de concertation des aînés** have provided an effective vehicle for seniors in

Quebec to participate as equal partners with government, non-governmental organizations, and the private and voluntary sectors to influence decisions on issues of concern, such as safety, health and the environment.

The **Congress of National Seniors' Organizations** (CNSO) is made up of 12 national seniors organizations that defend the right of each Canadian to age with dignity. CNSO brings a "senior's lens" to federal programs and policies by appearing before parliamentary standing committees and commissions, and by participating in important conferences and meetings.

■ Seniors helping others

While many seniors organizations focus on the issues of seniors, a number have shifted their activist energies to address issues of concern to all age groups. The following examples demonstrate what is being accomplished by some of Canada's active and concerned seniors.

A Quebec-based group known as **Les Retraités Flyés** is set up to address the needs of retired people looking to socialize, learn and give back to the world around them. Their regular meetings focus on participants' interests and personal experiences. It's not at all uncommon for people to discuss projects that they're currently undertaking and to solicit help from others at the meetings. A recent tendency has been the increasing number of seniors travelling to developing countries to complete volunteer assignments where they can apply the skills and experiences amassed during their professional careers.



In early 2005, **Canadian Pensioners Concerned** (CPC) participated in pre-budget planning of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. The group stressed its top priorities: training and education, building socially integrated communities, and eliminating discrimination in Canada.

A number of women's groups are taking stands on global issues and making sure that their voices are heard. **Raging Grannies**, for example, and its francophone equivalent les **Mémés déchaînées**, have been striving to make the world more humane and just for their grandchildren, one publicity stunt at a time, since the late 1980s. The groups gladly play up their unthreatening "granny" images to gain public support for their causes. They often dress outrageously and sing comical songs of protest or perform street theatre in the name of the environment, native land claims or peace. The Grannies have chapters in cities all across Canada.

The **Older Women's Network** (Ontario), which has chapters in Hamilton, Peterborough, Ottawa and Toronto, is a group of over 400 members that helps women of all ages overcome injustices. The network attempts to influence public policies on issues relating to security, justice, housing and health through position papers, phone calls, letters and interviews.

■ Why contribute?

Because it's good for you! Everyone has heard doctors say that being *physically* active is the key to living a long, healthy life. And of

course, they're right. But a recent Harvard study has shown that *social* and productive activity (for example, volunteering, helping a friend or taking care of a grandchild) lowers the risk of all causes of death as much as exercise does!⁵

That's because the health benefits of doing good things for others (such as lowered heart rate and decreased blood pressure) are similar to those experienced by people who practice yoga or meditation. This physical feeling, known as "helper's high," has psychological benefits too. It reinforces the helper's sense of purpose and enhances self-esteem.

For seniors: Looking to get involved?

- Consult the internet – visit the sites of organizations linked to your interests. Read the mission statement of the organization to get a better understanding of the scope of work it does.
- Pay attention to media reports – keep one eye and one ear out for reports on television, in print and on the radio. You may find an opportunity or a great idea.
- Contact your local volunteer centre – the staff will be glad to help you find a position that suits your skills and criteria.
- Take a pre-retirement course – you will learn about the many possibilities available in your community. Check with employers, banks, and local schools or community centres to find out when the next courses are offered.

Volunteer Canada. *Volunteer connections: New strategies for involving older adults.* 2001.

5. Cromie, W. J. "Social activities found to prolong life," *The Harvard University Gazette*. September 16, 1999.



Social participation is also healthy for communities. In fact, it's a great way to fortify a neighbourhood. Working with one another on a shared goal encourages neighbours to interact, increases their levels of trust and helps build a sense of unity. Further, when people of different generations cooperate on projects, stereotypes break down and generations begin to better understand one another.

■ Attracting today's seniors

Gone are the days of seniors looking for ways to fill up their time. The older adults of today and tomorrow have so many things on their to-do lists that the problem is finding enough time to fit everything in. When it comes to volunteering, today's seniors are often looking for a bigger bang for their buck: for example, spending time with family members while supporting a cause that is important to them, or working on improving the community while continuing to learn new skills. The challenge for organizations is to capture the interest, and accommodate the needs, busy schedules and ambitions of this group.

It's vital that organizations keep in mind that volunteering is a two-way exchange. By understanding that seniors of the baby boom generation are used to being productive members of society and to experiences that provide intrinsic rewards (such as learning, sense of accomplishment and problem solving) and a few extrinsic rewards (for example, thanks and recognition, transportation subsidies or input into programming),

For organizations: Looking to attract senior volunteers?

- Clearly describe your cause, needs and expectations.
- Provide information on how volunteers will benefit.
- Offer a variety of ways for volunteers to contribute.
- Provide support and learning opportunities for volunteers.
- Offer both public and private recognition.
- Listen well so that volunteers' input benefits your organization, and their personal needs are met.⁶

organizations can not only successfully attract older volunteers, but also benefit from their different outlook.

Innovative solutions

Organizations are adapting to the changing volunteer landscape by finding innovative ways to tap into the wide-range of skills and experiences of their older volunteers. Creating a variety of roles and responsibilities (for example, some leadership, support, and direct service positions), offering cross-cultural and language training, and maintaining an informal and flexible atmosphere are some of the most successful strategies for taking full advantage of volunteer skills.

Enabling their participation is also crucial. Some seniors' volunteer opportunities can be limited by poor access to transportation, especially in rural areas. By addressing transportation needs, organizations can avoid missing out on valuable volunteer resources.

6. Buckspan, B. "Working with older volunteers: Maximizing the potential," Institute of social gerontology of Quebec, October 2003. Online: www.geronto.org/Vitalaging/October2003/potential.htm



They may consider offering taxi vouchers, reimbursing volunteers for transportation costs or discussing options with their Municipality to develop solutions tailor-made to their situation.

■ Leading the way

Many organizations have begun tailoring their programs towards attracting older volunteers. Some examples of their approaches are highlighted below.

Connecting Seniors of Canada (CSC) educates and trains senior volunteers to develop and implement community-based wellness programs for other seniors. The program brings groups of older adults together to participate in such activities as communication skills training and self-awareness drills aimed at helping participants address some of the challenges of aging.

The **Quebec government** (Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine) has dedicated \$900,000 for 2005-2006 to help fund programs that promote

participation and social action by seniors. Projects aimed at ensuring that seniors are valued in the community are eligible for funding. Last year's budget was allocated to over 80 projects across the province, and the intention is to increase that number this year.

Part of **Social Development Canada's** (SDC) mandate is to meet the needs of the seniors community. In 2004, SDC re-introduced the *New Horizons for Seniors* program, which provides funding to projects that encourage seniors to contribute their skills, experience and wisdom to improving the social well-being of their communities. And the department continues to solicit recommendations. In a recently completed online consultation process, all Canadian seniors were invited to share a personal anecdote and to complete a survey. The information will contribute to the development of other federal policies that ensure all seniors live with dignity and a high quality of life.

■ Everyone benefits

Contributing to social life benefits seniors and the whole community. Activities that create friendships, help family members, build self-esteem, lower the heart rate and instill new skills are more than enough reasons for seniors to get involved. And tapping into the vast resources and competencies of active seniors for the benefit of society is well worth the adjustments that volunteer organizations need to make in order to attract and retain the active seniors of today and tomorrow. The message is clear: when seniors get involved, everybody wins!





Resources and sources

The programs and opportunities for both seniors looking to volunteer, and organizations wanting to expand their volunteer programs are numerous and diverse. Below are some excellent starting points.

Alberta Council on Aging

www.acaging.ca

This site offers guidelines: *Volunteer development guidelines for seniors*.

Canadian Association of Retired Persons –

www.carp.ca

Canadian Pensioners Concerned

www.canpension.ca

Connecting Seniors of Canada

www.utoronto.ca/lifecourse/about/csc.htm

Creative Retirement Manitoba

www.crm.mb.ca

FADOQ – Mouvement des aînés du Québec –

www.fadoq.ca

Fédération des aînés et retraités francophones de l'Ontario (FAFO)

www.fafon.on.ca

Government of Quebec – Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition féminine –

www.mfacf.gouv.qc.ca

Les Retraités flyés –

www.communautic.uqam.ca/webriac/lesretraitesflyes

Older women's Network (Ontario)

www.olderwomensnetwork.org

Raging Grannies

www.geocities.com/raginggrannies

Senior Citizens' Secretariat

(Nova Scotia) – www.gov.ns.ca/scs/

Social Development Canada

www.sdc-dsc.gc.ca

Volunteer Canada –

www.volunteer.ca

This site offers a number of publications: *Volunteer connections: New strategies for involving older adults* and *Volunteering among ethnocultural seniors who are new to Canada*.



"Bubs" Coleman, a

resident of Saskatoon and

a graduate of Queen's

University, has worked as a writer, editor and communications coordinator until her retirement from Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery in 1994. She has since served on the Provincial Advisory Committee of Older Persons, has been a Trustee of the National Arts Centre and a member of the boards of the Saskatoon Symphony Society and Persephone Theatre. Her community and volunteer activities include assisting the Saskatoon Council on Aging and working with Wanuskewin Heritage Park.

Ms. Coleman was appointed to NACA in 1999 and has been reappointed twice. She currently serves as the Council's interim chairperson.

Ms. Coleman was appointed to NACA in 1999 and has been reappointed twice. She currently serves as the Council's interim chairperson.