



Age-Friendly Hamilton  
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy  
Recommendation Report  
July 2024

Indigenous seniors are...at higher risk of social isolation than other seniors due to their generally poorer physical, social and economic conditions. Among Indigenous seniors in cities, 23% were found to have low income compared with 13% of non-Indigenous seniors... [H]igher percentages of Indigenous seniors who lived alone were part of the low-income population compared with those who lived with a spouse or partner. A relatively high percentage of Indigenous senior women (38%) live alone, almost half (49%) of whom are part of the low-income population.

Social isolation of seniors also has consequences for the community, since Indigenous seniors play an important role in language and cultural preservation. Such cultural isolation can contribute to a loss of language and culture for Indigenous society as seniors begin to lose their role in cultural and language preservation.<sup>1</sup>

Government of Canada 2022

In 2019/2020, an estimated 1.1 million older Canadians (19.2%) experienced loneliness, with women having significantly higher likelihood of being lonely than men... Immigrants who migrated as adults (from ages 18 to 44) and long-term immigrants (20 years or more in Canada since immigration) were at higher risk of loneliness than the Canadian-born population. The likelihood of being lonely was higher among people living with multimorbidity or experiencing barriers to social participation.<sup>2</sup>

Statistics Canada 2023

Over the past 5 years, 54% of older [transgender] adults [in Canada] had experienced verbal harassment. [Twenty-one percent]...had experienced sexual harassment, and almost half of [trans and non-binary] older adults avoided 3 or more types of public spaces such as public transit and public washrooms for fear of harassment or outing.<sup>3</sup>

TransPULSE Canada 2023

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<sup>1</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada. (n.d.) Social isolation of seniors – Supplement to the social isolation and social innovation toolkit: A focus on Indigenous seniors in Canada. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/social-isolation-indigenous.html#h2.5-h3.11>

<sup>2</sup> Islam, MK. And Gilmour, H. for Statistics Canada. (n.d.) Immigrant status and loneliness among older Canadians. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2023007/article/00001-eng.htm#>

<sup>3</sup> TransPULSE Canada. (2023). Health and well-being amongst trans and non-binary older adults. Available at: [https://transpulsecanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Older-Adults-PPCT-report-vFINAL\\_EN-FINAL-ua-1.pdf](https://transpulsecanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Older-Adults-PPCT-report-vFINAL_EN-FINAL-ua-1.pdf)

## Introduction

In the fall of 2023, Hamilton's Age-Friendly Collaborative Committee (AFCC) took the first step towards implementing an equity, diversity and inclusion framework, as laid out in Hamilton's Plan for an Age-Friendly Community 2021-2026.<sup>4</sup>

The Committee engaged *Intersecting: Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression Consultant*, who conducted a survey in February of 2024, and learned about the many initiatives being undertaken by the AFCC to address equity, diversity and inclusion. Highlights include making EDI a priority in the Age-Friendly Plan, engaging outside consultants to assist in developing an inclusion strategy, increasing outreach to diverse communities, and fostering strong collaboration among agencies serving older adults.

To gather more input, AFCC hosted an EDI forum – Building Our Inclusive Age-Friendly Hamilton – in downtown Hamilton at the end of April 2024, where attendees responded to three questions related to diversifying AFCC and integrating EDI into its work.

The Committee must be commended for bringing this to the fore and for recognizing the need for an EDI framework.

We asked three questions:

1. What does diversity mean in practice?
2. How do we reach culturally diverse older adults in communities that already exist?
3. Who's missing from the conversation?

Responses were collated, sorted and put together in a report with recommendations for integrating EDI into AFCC's work.

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<sup>4</sup> Appendix A to Report HSC23034: Community Progress Report of Hamilton's Plan for an Age-Friendly Community 2021-2026. Available at: <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2023-06/age-friendly-progress-report-2022.pdf>

## Diversity in Practice

Diversity is 'the condition of having or being composed of different elements.'

- Merriam-Webster

Members of the Age-Friendly Collaborative Committee know that communities thrive on diversity and stagnate or become dysfunctional without it. We also know that acknowledging and advancing diversity facilitate democratic, collective decision-making and sharing of power, which are the cornerstones of equity and inclusion.

When people come together to work on common goals, they are more effective and the changes more sustained than they would when working independently. Representation matters in building equitable, inclusive communities. If people don't see themselves represented, they will not participate.

A truly healthy community enjoys diverse representation, employs mechanisms to ward off tokenism, and actively celebrates diversity, leading not only to trust and a sense of belonging, but also nurturing established and emerging leaders.

AFCC's Age-Friendly Plan should be considered a dynamic document that can be augmented and amended according to community conditions and global events.

## Representation Matters

AFCC recognizes an over-representation of white, straight, cisgender, female voices and perspectives at the table, and has committed to conducting outreach activities to attract older adults who may not have seen themselves reflected in Hamilton's Age-Friendly strategy before.

The Committee has been taking steps to integrate issues of equity, diversity and inclusion into its activities. Diverse representation on AFCC is increasing, EDI concerns and topics of discussion are now a recurring agenda item, and work is underway to address barriers facing seniors at risk. Moreover, the committee engaged outside facilitators – the authors of this report – and hosted a workshop on equity, diversity, and inclusion to build common understandings of systemic racism, the language of EDI, social location, privilege, unconscious bias, and allyship.

AFCC is increasingly reaching out for community input into planning and decisions, while building in monitoring and evaluation of progress. They are also more mindfully working to break down silos and foster meaningful collaboration by co-hosting meetings and forums, co-publishing a newsletter of interest to diverse, intersecting communities, and developing terms of reference for working sub-committees to take action on diversity, equity and inclusion.

## Acknowledging Culture at the Intersections

Intersectionality refers to all the separate aspects of our identity, like our race, gender, language, sexual orientation, country of origin, socioeconomic status, ability, etc. that intersect to give us our unique identity.

People are complex and experience privilege and oppression differently, according to their upbringing, life events, and cultural context. Some aspects of our identity afford us privilege, while others mean that we have faced or will face oppression.

It is not identity that causes privilege and oppression, it is people's attitudes and assumptions.

Transformation requires letting go of assumptions, being open to learning, and applying those learnings to our everyday interactions. Demonstrate cultural humility by being aware and mindful of cultural practices, holidays, food traditions, meeting times, provision of transportation assistance if needed, etc. to make meetings and events as accessible as possible.

## Who's Missing?

A key challenge in diversifying AFCC is identifying communities of older adults who have been missing from the conversation, understanding the barriers, and developing ways to attract these important perspectives and priorities.

While there may be people living with disabilities actively participating in AFCC activities, those living with stigmatized disabilities, such as mental illness, substance use disorders, or developmental disabilities are often not represented and consequently the needs of this population are also overlooked.

Also under-represented in the conversation are advocates, researchers, frontline workers, faith leaders, families, and younger seniors, all of whom have a powerful platform from which to advocate for equity and inclusion among older adults.

The following is a list of populations identified by survey participants who are missing from the conversation:

Neurodivergent people	Advocates
Seniors with disabilities	Researchers
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour)	Frontline workers who care for older adults
Socially isolated people	Faith leaders
Seniors struggling with substance use	Seniors 55-65
People experiencing homelessness	Older adults living in LTC

While we can't know all the reasons why socio-culturally diverse communities might not participate in an Age-Friendly Hamilton, we can be open to the idea that our society is organized in ways that privilege white, middle class, heterosexual men of Christian heritage, between the ages of 25 and 45 over everyone else. When all you know is that your experience is not relevant to the status quo, you stop expecting to be included and can become apathetic.

### Addressing Inequity

In the context of Hamilton, Canada, and rest of the world, it is unmistakable that there is work to do on the ongoing project of equity, diversity, and inclusion; however, it is also clear that there is much that can be accomplished in addressing contemporary and historical harms. Indeed, work is already underway.

Outreach and engagement activities connect older adults from across the community with services and programs that they might not have known existed before. Identifying demographic groups who are missing from the table and reaching out specifically to those groups is an excellent first step. For AFCC to be as accessible as possible, it must take cultural norms into consideration, such as religious holidays, meeting times, food choices, etc. when organizing meetings and events.

### Priority Recommendations

Following is a non-exhaustive list of insights and recommendations for the AFCC in moving forward with its equity, diversity and inclusion plan.

Priority	Activities
<p>Planning and Monitoring</p>	<p>The Committee is increasingly reaching out for community input into planning and decisions, and building in monitoring and evaluation of progress.</p> <p>It is also mindfully working to break down silos and foster meaningful collaboration by co-hosting meetings and forums, co-publishing a newsletter of interest to diverse, intersecting communities, and developing terms of reference for working sub-committees to take action on diversity, equity and inclusion.</p> <p>Success lies in sustainability, so use available tools to maintain momentum.</p>
<p>Meeting People Where They Are</p>	<p>Meeting people where they are – emotionally, psychologically, geographically – is the cornerstone of community outreach.</p>

	<p>That means accommodating people’s schedules, capacities, and any special needs that may arise.</p> <p>Recruit people with lived experience and expertise who are members of the groups you are trying to engage.</p>
<p>Providing Practical Supports</p>	<p>For equity, diversity, and inclusion to emerge from the confines of discourse and be applied to daily practices, people will need practical supports to participate, e.g. bus tickets, food and refreshments, accessible meeting times and places, printed meeting materials, accessible washrooms (preferably all-gender), etc.</p>
<p>Creating Opportunities for Learning</p>	<p>Seek out and support community learning opportunities, such as digital literacy, from Hamilton Public Library and Sackville to increase engagement and participation.</p>
<p>Contacting Community Leaders and Connecting with Community-Based Organizations*</p> <p>*List is not exhaustive</p>	<p>Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council</p> <p>Hamilton’s Afro Canadian Caribbean Association (ACCA)</p> <p>Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion</p> <p>St. Charles Adult Education Centre</p> <p>Muslim Association of Hamilton</p> <p>Hamilton Downtown Mosque</p> <p>St. Matthews House (seniors program)</p> <p>SAM Program (Good Shepherd)</p> <p>Canadian Mental Health Association Hamilton Branch</p> <p>Centre de Santé Communautaire Hamilton Niagara</p> <p>Hamilton Regional Indian Centre</p> <p>Temple Anshe Sholom</p> <p>Hamilton Literacy Council</p> <p>YWCA</p> <p>YMCA</p> <p>Womankind (women’s addiction services)</p> <p>Men’s Addiction Service Hamilton (MASH)</p> <p>Hamilton Pride</p> <p>Compass Community Health Centre</p> <p>Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre</p>

	<p>De dwa da dehs nye&gt;s Aboriginal Health Centre Hamilton Community Legal Clinic</p>
Being Visible	<p>Attend – and co-organize where relevant – forums, conferences, community meetings, and inter-cultural conversation circles.</p> <p>Remember to include groups whose constituents are less visible than others, such as Canadian Mental Health Association, Good Shepherd, Hamilton Literacy Council, YWCA, and YMCA, Womankind, Men’s Addiction Service Hamilton (MASH).</p>
Learning from Others	<p>Reach out to other municipalities to learn about their successes and challenges to strengthen AFCC’s members’ and partners’ policies and practices.</p>
Collaborating	<p>Collaborate with other groups to co-design age-friendly services and programs that are culturally relevant and responsive to community need.</p>
Collecting Data	<p>Conduct community audits applying an EDI lens to learn about gaps and opportunities.</p> <p>Ask older adults from across the city for regular feedback on services, activities, and priorities to ensure continuity.</p> <p>This inquiry may also include a question asking why a person might not be accessing AFCC programs and what needs to be done to attract them.</p>
Consulting Experts	<p>Use consultants where necessary for guidance, facilitation and recommendations.</p> <p>Engage consultants with lived experience and expertise. This may mean someone from the community.</p> <p>The community will buy in to, and drive, a strategy that they have had a hand in shaping.</p>
Advertising	<p>AFCC would benefit from sharing news about its work more widely.</p> <p>Seek out and advertise in neighbourhood newsletters, community newspapers, Facebook posts, online independent local news outlets.</p>



	<p>Set up tables at local cultural festivals, including 2SLGBTQ+ Pride, Fest Italia, Soaring Spirit Pow Wow, and It's Your Festival, for example.</p>
<p>Removing Barriers</p>	<p>Part of the work of EDI is acknowledging and removing barriers to full inclusion facing racialized and other marginalized communities.</p> <p>There will be challenges, and it will be hard. Struggle is necessary for change to happen. But there will also be joy, friendship and learning.</p> <p>We learn by listening, sharing community resources, letting go of what we think we know, understanding privilege, unlearning, doing our homework, making mistakes and apologizing for them.</p>
<p>Leveraging Privilege</p>	<p>Strong allies bring a particular focus and commitment to challenging the status quo.</p> <p>By leveraging their relative privilege to speak up and take action on social justice, and by using their privilege to advocate for equity and inclusion for all, they can influence people in positions of power and effect lasting systemic change.</p>
<p>Being Flexible and Adaptable</p>	<p>In engaging more older adults to participate in an Age-Friendly Hamilton, adopting a variety of approaches will be key.</p> <p>For AFCC to successfully diversify and reach seniors from, e.g. racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, and differently abled communities, there must be a willingness to be flexible and adapt to changing conditions in the community by responding creatively and collaboratively.</p>

## What Does Success Look Like?

Members of AFCC and forum attendees outlined indicators of success in the work of creating equitable, diverse, and inclusive communities of older adults.

Indicator	Notes
Cross-Sectoral Collaboration	EDI groups are engaged in Age-Friendly work, and vice versa.
Community Buy-in	The whole community buys in to EDI and the AFCC becomes more diverse.
Resources Provided	Older adults who want to participate have all the resources they need to be able to attend meetings and complete AFCC-related tasks.
People from Diverse Backgrounds Participate	Older adults from diverse communities according to ethnocultural background, gender identity, ability, sexuality, religion, etc. are accessing AFCC.
Collaboration	Diverse communities of older adults come together to work on a common goal or to solve a problem.
Guest Speakers	Consultants and guest speakers with lived and learned expertise are a regular feature of AFCC meetings and gatherings.
Seamless Integration	EDI becomes fully integrated into everything AFCC does, and members recognize that learning is lifelong.
Policies and Norms	Strong policies against harassment and for equity and inclusion that are enforced and regularly reviewed and updated.
Annual Review of Priorities	Annual review of workplan, achievements, milestones, challenges and future action.
Succession Planning	Annual review to monitor the composition of AFCC, and succession planning using an EDI lens.
Cultural Humility <sup>5</sup>	The AFCC embraces uncertainty and demonstrates cultural humility.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines cultural humility as “a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique whereby the individual not only learns about another’s culture, but one starts with an examination of her/his (*sic*) own beliefs and cultural identities.” Yeager, K.A. and Bauer-Wu, S. (2013). Cultural humility: Essential foundation for clinical researchers. *Applied Nursing Research*, 26(4), 251-256. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3834043/>

## Conclusion

By undertaking this process with care and openness, Hamilton's Age-Friendly Collaborative Committee is demonstrating its ability to adapt its work to respond to changing priorities as Hamilton's population ages.

Although we all aspire to 'make Hamilton the best place to raise a child and age successfully'<sup>6</sup>, there are still identity-based groups of people who are excluded, or at least not actively included, such as older trans women, and aging, single immigrants, for example.

It makes sense, then, that the AFCC and its partners' programming and services are developed and updated with the input of those most affected by systemic oppression and lack of inclusion. Thoughtful outreach and engagement will not only benefit AFCC as an organization, but also the hundreds of older adults living in Hamilton who have so much to offer but were never asked.

The recommendations listed above are not exhaustive and we encourage AFCC to augment and adapt them to suit the committee's needs with respect to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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<sup>6</sup> City of Hamilton. (2016). 2016-2025 Strategic Plan. Available at: <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-council/plans-strategies/strategies/2016-2025-strategic-plan#:~:text=The%20City's%20vision%20%20To%20be,a%20better%20place%20for%20everyone.>