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Building Age-Friendly Communities

Creating an Age-Friendly Business in Alberta



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Building Age-Friendly Communities: Creating an Age-Friendly Business in Alberta has been adapted from *Creating an Age-friendly Business in B.C. 2011*.



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BUILDING AN AGE-FRIENDLY ALBERTA

Alberta, along with most developed nations, has an aging population.

In the next 10 years, the number of seniors (i.e. those aged 65 and older) will increase by more than 50 per cent¹. This will have consequences across our entire society and for every generation. It will affect the way we build infrastructure, the way we get around, and even the way we shop for goods and services.

In anticipation of this, the Government of Alberta developed the *Aging Population Policy Framework*. It describes how the government will work with individuals and families, municipalities, the nonprofit and private sectors, and communities to ensure our province is ready to meet the changing needs of an aging population.

Encouraging and supporting the creation of age-friendly communities is a key direction of the Framework.

An age-friendly community is one where all individuals can be full and meaningful participants in their community. A community that's accessible and liveable for all citizens, regardless of their age, circumstances or backgrounds.



¹ Source: Statistics Canada, *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories 2010 – 2036*. (Alberta Medium-Growth Scenario 3)

BUSINESS — A VITAL PART OF COMMUNITY

When people consider the word “community”, they often think of governments, neighbourhood leagues and various community organizations, such as non-profit and voluntary groups. Certainly, all these things help make a community.

However, no Alberta community would be complete without the business sector. Albertans depend on local businesses for countless aspects of their day-to-day lives. Businesses play vital roles in meeting the needs and demands of citizens — everything from food and shelter, to personal care and home maintenance services.

Given its importance, the involvement of the business community is crucial in making a community more age-friendly.

Think about your own life. If you’re an adult who is in good health and has full mobility, then you may not have trouble accessing the many different parts of your community. You can probably get around and participate in community life fairly easily. Errands such as getting groceries, banking, and shopping likely aren’t a huge challenge for you.

However, there are likely a number of people in your community who are in different circumstances. Some residents may have disabilities. Some may have chronic health conditions. Some seniors may be living with reduced mobility, reduced vision or other conditions that come with older age.

For these residents, activities such as shopping and banking can be difficult tasks. Having age-friendly businesses in your community can enable more citizens to participate in community life, making for a stronger and more vibrant community overall.

AN AGE-FRIENDLY BUSINESS IS GOOD BUSINESS

Making your business more age-friendly is not only a socially responsible thing to do. It's also good for business.

Consider the following:

- People who have enjoyable experiences are more likely to become loyal customers. If your business is an age-friendly, accessible and welcoming place for people of all circumstances, **it can translate into repeat business.**
- The number of seniors in Alberta will steadily increase in the years ahead, as members of the baby boomer generation grow older. Between 2012 and 2022, the proportion of seniors will increase from 11 per cent to over 15 per cent of our total population². By 2031, when the last baby boomer reaches 65 years of age, it is projected that about one in five Albertans will be a senior. Making your business more age-friendly can help **ensure it caters to this large and growing part of the population.**
- Just as they have changed social trends throughout their lives, baby boomers will redefine what it means to grow older. In general, they are expected to be healthier, more educated and more affluent than previous generations of seniors. That represents **a lot of potential revenue if your business is more age-friendly.**
- Becoming more age-friendly opens your business up to a larger pool of potential customers. Age-friendliness makes your business accessible and welcoming to more than mainstream citizens. It also makes your business accessible and welcoming to persons with disabilities, pregnant women, people with reduced mobility, people with limited sight or hearing, young families, people from different cultures, those who speak languages other

² Source: Statistics Canada, *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories 2010 – 2036* (Alberta Medium-Growth Scenario 3)

than English, and many other members of the community. **A broader customer base means greater opportunity.**

- Businesses not only depend on having customers, but also their ability to recruit and retain workers. An age-friendly business is a **more attractive and more welcoming place for mature workers.**
- Making your business more age-friendly also serves as a powerful expression of social responsibility. If your community has set a goal of becoming an age-friendly community, your efforts to create an age-friendly business will demonstrate a clear commitment to making your community stronger. This will be noticed and appreciated by all citizens, **enhancing your business' reputation and goodwill.**



WHAT MAKES A BUSINESS AGE-FRIENDLY

An age-friendly community is one where all residents, regardless of their circumstances, can fully and meaningfully participate.

Similarly, an age-friendly business is one that all residents, regardless of their circumstances, can patronize and enjoy.

Consider the things that make a shopping or dining experience enjoyable for a customer. Or what elements of a service experience will leave a client feeling cared for and well-served.

Depending on the nature of your business, the specifics will probably be unique. However, there are some elements of age-friendliness that are common for almost all businesses:

- **Comfort.** A comfortable customer is a happy customer. People who are older or have reduced mobility often can not spend long periods of time standing. Accessible rest room facilities are also an important part of comfort. An age-friendly business has elements such as:
 - places to sit while waiting;
 - places to set down packages;
 - chairs that are sturdy, with arms that people can use to help themselves up and down; and
 - an easily accessible customer washroom.
- **Visibility.** An important part of any business is communicating with customers. You want customers to be able to see and hear the messages your business delivers. Peoples' vision and hearing can change with time. An age-friendly business makes use of strategies such as:
 - having customer service desks in clearly visible locations, so that people can ask for assistance easily;
 - keeping background music and ambient noise to a minimum, to help customers have and hear conversations with each other and with service staff;
 - using signage with good contrast, to make it easier to see;

- having plenty of glare-free lighting in your business so that customers can navigate well;
 - ensuring printed information is easy to follow;
 - providing telephone answering services that use real people rather than automated services;
 - minimizing the number of automated menus and button pushes that telephone callers must go through before speaking with a live person; and
 - training staff to effectively assist customers with hearing and vision challenges (e.g., speaking clearly at appropriate speed; looking directly at customers, etc.).
- **Safety.** The well-being and safety of customers is a key concern for any business. The design and layout of your business can have consequences for individuals with reduced mobility and other limitations. An age-friendly business helps ensure safety and security by having the following kinds of attributes:
- sturdy railings and banisters to help prevent falls;
 - a minimal number of stairs;
 - floor surfaces that are non-slip, especially when wet;
 - wider aisles to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs;
 - clear aisles and pathways, with no tripping hazards;
 - easily opened or automatic doors; and
 - area rugs that are low-piled and secured along edges to facilitate accessibility and ensure safety.
- **Respect.** At the core of customer service is generous and healthy respect for customers. An age-friendly business promotes respect by:
- treating customers with patience and understanding;
 - training staff to act in a professional manner;
 - training staff to have sensitivity for customers and not fall back on stereotypes or presumptions;
 - awarding staff for being respectful;

- providing options for staff to serve customers in ways that are most comfortable for the customer (e.g. a private place to sit down and talk);
- responding to errors and concerns promptly and courteously; and
- training staff to handle incidents (e.g. falls, outbursts) in ways that maintain professionalism and preserve the customer's dignity.

<p><i>If your business is a grocery store, consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ four-foot wide aisles; ■ price labels in large, legible print; ■ easy, stair-free access from the parking lot; ■ a carry-out service; ■ places for people to sit and rest; ■ a volunteer shopping/delivery program. 	<p><i>If your business is a restaurant, consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ a drop-off area at the door; ■ sufficient space between dining tables to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs; ■ sturdy chairs with arms; ■ menus and bills with large, easy to read print; ■ accessible washrooms.
<p><i>If your business is a pharmacy, consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ automatic doors; ■ clear, uncluttered aisles; ■ magnifying glasses for customers to use for reading print on product labels; ■ private areas for customers to sit and have discussions with the pharmacist. 	<p><i>If your business is a bank, consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ counters at wheelchair or scooter height; ■ automated teller machines that can be used by someone in a wheelchair; ■ private areas to meet with customers; ■ information using large print; ■ staff trained to spot financial abuse.

MAKING YOUR BUSINESS MORE AGE-FRIENDLY

If you're committed to making your business more age-friendly, a helpful first step is to conduct an age-friendly assessment of your business.

An assessment will help you gain a better understanding of how your business currently appears to people of older age, reduced mobility and other life circumstances. It will help you determine how age-friendly your business is today.

Using that information, you can then chart a course for improving the age-friendliness of your business.

Conducting an Assessment

1. Start by reviewing the “Age-Friendly Business Checklist” provided in the Appendix of this guide. Familiarize yourself with the various categories and elements in the checklist. Some of these may be more applicable than others, depending on the nature of your business.
2. Place yourself in the shoes of someone else, such as an older person, a person with reduced mobility or a person with sight or hearing challenges. Try to examine your business from their perspective as you take a look around your business.
3. With the checklist in hand, systematically assess the various aspects of your business. Some of these will be tangible aspects, such as the physical structure and assets that make up your business. Others will be more intangible, but just as important — for example, the conduct of staff and the service that customers receive.
 - Look outside. Are there steps without railings? What kind of elevation is there between the parking lot and the front door? Examine the level of lighting when it's dark outside. In general, consider what a person will experience when approaching and entering your business — by car, by transit and on foot.
 - Now walk around inside. Is it easy to walk around? Are there objects or other clutter to navigate? Can you reach objects on the shelves? Examine sights such as price labels and signage. Are they clear and easy to read? Stop and listen to the surroundings. Do you have to raise your voice to have a conversation with someone?

- Examine your advertising and information materials, including your website if you have one. Could someone with reduced vision read these? Can a customer increase the font size on your website? Is the information easy to understand?
- 4. Get some additional opinions to further inform your assessment. You might consider asking an older friend or relative to help you with the assessment, to better gain an alternative perspective of your business. When it comes to assessing the service experience, you might want to ask someone to be a “secret shopper” with the goal of assessing the age-friendliness of the customer experience.
- 5. Customers, potential customers and staff can also provide insights. Gaining their firsthand opinions through a survey, focus group or other information-gathering strategy will further inform your age-friendly assessment.

Taking Action

Once you’ve completed your age-friendly assessment, consider what actions you can take to make your business more age-friendly.

- Have a look at the results on the age-friendly checklist. Are there certain areas where you rated your business as “Needs Work” or “Fair”? Is there a pattern to these ratings? These might be areas you want to consider as priorities for action.
- You might also find room for improvement in a number of areas that seem minor. Don’t discount these. Actions to become more age-friendly don’t necessarily need to be large and expensive. A number of limited actions can add up to a big impact.
- Find out if your municipality or local council has committed to becoming a more age-friendly community. If so, contact them and let them know about your efforts to make your business more age-friendly. They may be able to provide information, linkages and other resources to help you take action.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Background information on the Age-Friendly Movement, as well as tools, resources, and best practices, are available at www.health.alberta.ca

For statistical data on your community, which can help you better understand the demographics of customers in your market area, you can visit:

- Statistics Canada (www.statcan.gc.ca);
- Government of Alberta Office of Statistics and Information. This site includes an Alberta perspective on population, the labour force, educational levels, water quality, environment and much more. (osi.alberta.ca); and
- Profiles of Municipalities kept by the Government of Alberta (www.municipalaffairs.alberta.ca/mc_municipal_profiles.cfm).



APPENDIX: AGE-FRIENDLY BUSINESS CHECKLIST

Use the following checklist to undertake an age-friendly assessment of your business.

Examine different aspects of your business, as listed in the following categories. Assess each aspect and give it a rating according to the following system:

Excellent = 4
Good = 3
Fair = 2
Needs Work = 1
Does Not Apply = N/A

Outside

- Sidewalk access is level and well-maintained.
- Curbs are cut and ramps are in place to allow for walkers, wheelchairs, strollers and easier access.
- Pick-up and drop-off areas are convenient, sheltered and clearly marked.
- Sidewalks and parking lots have sufficient lighting.
- Accessible and seniors' parking spaces are designated and enforced.
- Parking lots and sidewalks are promptly cleared of snow, ice and other hazards.
- Parking signage, including parking meters, have large and clear print, and use clear instructions.
- Pavement in the parking lot is smooth, without major cracks and bumps.
- Entrances to the business are kept clear of obstructions.
- Entrance doors open automatically or have access buttons.
- At least one entrance is at grade level.
- Doors are sufficiently wide for wheelchairs, and for people walking beside a wheelchair.
- Wheelchair access routes are well marked.

Inside — Safety of Customers

- Stairways have sturdy handrails.
- Stair edges are clearly marked.
- Flooring is non-slip and non-shiny.
- Mats are placed where necessary and are well secured.
- Elevators are available.
- Ramps are in place for changes in elevation.
- Obstacles (e.g. steps up and down, wet floor, etc.) are clearly marked.
- Aisles are wide enough for two walkers or two wheelchairs (approximately four feet).
- Aisles are not cluttered by displays or objects.
- Location of elevators, washrooms and other amenities are clearly posted.
- A store map is located near the entrance, with large print.
- Popular items are shelved at medium height.
- Staff are trained to assist elderly and disabled persons in the event of an emergency, including evacuation.

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Inside — Mobility and Accessibility

- Sturdy, regular-height seating is available in waiting areas and line-up areas.
- At least one customer service area is accessible for persons in wheelchairs.
- Service counters have a place to hook a cane so that it does not fall.
- There is space near the entrance for customers to park scooters.
- An on-line or phone-in ordering (and delivery) service is available.
- Carry-out service is available to assist customers with their purchases.
- Telephones have large print buttons and amplification abilities.
- Customer washrooms are available on all service floors.
- Washrooms contain at least one accessible toilet cubicle and hand washing area.

Inside — Comfort, Visibility and Hearing

- Has good lighting that offers sufficient and even illumination is present.
- Signage uses large, easy-to-read lettering and good contrast (e.g. black letters on white background).
- Printed materials (e.g. packages, price labels, etc.) have good contrast and use readable sizes of lettering.
- Sound or speaker systems for public announcements are clear and not over-used.
- Background music in the business is absent, or is low enough in volume so that customers can hear conversations clearly.
- Temperature is at comfortable levels with no chilly air currents.
- Quiet space is provided for discussing private business such as medications, financial or sensitive concerns.
- Website is easy to navigate.

Inside — Customer Service and Respect

- Staff members are trained to assist customers who have vision or hearing challenges.
- Staff members speak clearly, and at an appropriate speed, while looking at the customer.
- Staff members are trained to move to private areas to discuss private matters with customers.
- Staff members are trained to be sensitive to customers with varying circumstances and avoid stereotyping or condescending behaviours. (For example, speaking too loudly, showing impatience or speaking too familiarly.)
- Staff members are friendly and patient with customers.
- Errors and customer concerns are addressed promptly and courteously.
- Staff members are trained to manage situations, such as falls or outbursts, in ways that preserve a person's dignity.
- Staff members are trained to identify if a person is experiencing a medical emergency and can notify appropriate authorities.
- Promotional materials include depictions of elderly and/or disabled persons.

Age-friendly Alberta is supported by the Ministry of Seniors. Encouraging and supporting the creation of age-friendly communities is a key direction of the *Aging Population Policy Framework*. For more information about Age-friendly Communities, visit www.health.alberta.ca

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Contact Information

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www.health.alberta.ca

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