CANADORE RESEARCH CENTRE

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

PUBLIC SUMMARY

Enhancing Access, Outreach, and Engagement for Older Adults

IN THE NIPISSING AND PARRY SOUND DISTRICTS

Needs, Strategies, and Communication Preferences

THE VILLAGE CANADORE

Canadore College, Research Centre

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Acknowledgements and Participant Overview

The research team at **Research Centre, Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology** gratefully acknowledges the valuable collaboration, contributions, and support of our project partners, particularly the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit and The Village at Canadore College.

We extend our sincere appreciation to VIP (Very Important Panthers) participants at **The Village at Canadore College** who generously shared their perspectives, experiences, and feedback during the community validation session. Their contributions were instrumental in assessing the relevance and practicality of the proposed outreach strategies and communication approaches for older adults in the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts.

Special thanks are also extended to the **North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit** for coordinating a stakeholder validation session and to the representatives from community organizations and service providers who contributed their professional insights and local knowledge. Their feedback helped refine the research findings and identify practical approaches to improving access to information, community services, and support for older adults across the region.

We sincerely appreciate the collective efforts of all participants and collaborating organizations whose contributions helped strengthen the relevance and community applicability of this research.

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1. Introduction

This executive summary report focuses on addressing the critical challenge of effectively reaching older adults within the districts of Nipissing and Parry Sound in Northern Ontario to improve their access to information about available health and community services. Older adults in these regions often face significant barriers related to geographic isolation, limited-service awareness, and varying levels of technology use (Skinner and McCrillis, 2019)[1].These barriers can prevent older adults from obtaining timely, relevant information when they need it most, which can negatively impact their health, wellbeing, and social connectedness.

The primary objective of this project is to build an evidence-based strategy tailored to the unique characteristics of Northern Ontario's rural and northern communities. The strategy will aim to enhance information dissemination to older adults, particularly those living independently in their own homes and who are not connected to a regular primary care provider or formal social support services, as these individuals often represent some of the most vulnerable populations in these districts.

This project was undertaken through a collaboration between Canadore College and the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. The Health Unit's ongoing work focuses on promoting health, well-being, and equitable access to services across the region, while Canadore College contributed research expertise, project coordination, and knowledge mobilization support. The Health Unit provided guidance on the local context, helped identify priorities related to older adult outreach and engagement. Through this partnership, the project seeks to support evidence-informed approaches that can enhance communication, increase awareness of available services, and strengthen community connections for older adults throughout the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts.

2. Research Questions

To guide this effort, the project addresses four key research questions:

1. What are the needs of older adults in Nipissing and Parry Sound districts?
2. What evidence or strategies have been documented in reaching older adults (i.e. providing or disseminating information about programming/services, etc.)?
3. What are the preferred methods that older adults would like to receive information?

[1] Skinner, M. W., & McCrillis, E. (2019). *Services for an Aging Rural Population & Northern Perspective*. Guelph, ON: Rural Ontario Institute.

4. Looking both nationally and internationally, are there strategies that would align to the geographic challenges and populations needs unique to Nipissing and Parry Sound districts?

3. Methodology

This research adopted an evidence-informed and community-validated approach to identify effective strategies for reaching older adults and communicating information about available health, community, and social services.

The first stage involved a review of case studies, promising practices, and documented outreach strategies from different countries and jurisdictions. The review focused on approaches used by organizations and communities to reach older adults and, where available, evidence regarding older adults' preferred methods for receiving information. Information was collected from multiple sources, including municipal and government websites, peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational publications, and reports describing promising or best practices.

The collected evidence was reviewed and organized according to the eight dimensions identified in the project: health-related needs; housing and environment-related needs; spiritual fulfilment; social and cultural activities; lifelong learning opportunities; transportation access; digital access and communication; and financial security. Based on this review, a preliminary set of outreach strategies and preferred communication methods was developed.

Recognizing that approaches identified in other jurisdictions may not always be directly applicable to the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts, two local validation sessions were held: one at The Village at Canadore College and a second organized by the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit.

The first session presented the preliminary findings to Village VIPs to gather their perspectives on whether the proposed approaches were practical, relevant, and aligned with the circumstances of older adults in the region. A total of 12 participants attended and were invited to comment on the proposed communication approaches, identify strategies that might be less effective locally, and suggest additional or alternative approaches.

The second session, organized by the Health Unit, presented the findings to representatives from various organizations and sought their feedback on the proposed outreach strategies. This discussion provided service providers' perspectives on the practical

considerations involved in reaching older adults and communicating information about available programs and services.

Both sessions highlighted important considerations that are reflected in the results section of this report. Participants' feedback was reviewed and incorporated into the findings to refine the proposed outreach and communication strategies. The final report therefore combines evidence from national and international practices with local perspectives from older adults and service providers, offering an evidence-informed and community-validated framework responsive to the geographic, demographic, and service-delivery realities of the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts.

4. Results

Understanding the Needs and Communication Preferences of Older Adults in the Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts

This section of the report is based on eight dimensions that address the needs of older adults in the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts, including health-related needs; housing and environment-related needs; spiritual fulfilment; social and cultural activities; lifelong learning opportunities; transportation access; digital access and communication; and financial security. It also examines documented strategies for reaching older adults in these districts, as well as their preferred methods for receiving information.

A. Health-Related Needs

Outreach Strategies

- Distribute health information through multiple channels, including printed materials, telephone outreach, community newsletters, local radio stations, and digital platforms.
- Deliver health information sessions and presentations through existing community organizations, older adults' centres, libraries, healthcare facilities, and community events.
- Develop clear, accessible health information materials on topics such as chronic disease management, preventive care, nutrition, mental health, and available community services.
- Promote awareness of existing healthcare services, telehealth options, and community supports through coordinated communication campaigns.
- Provide simple guides and information sessions that help older adults access and use virtual healthcare and telehealth services when appropriate.

- Partner with local organizations, healthcare providers, municipalities, and community groups to ensure consistent and coordinated dissemination of health-related information.
- Provide primary care offices and partner agencies with concise, regularly updated referral information explaining which organizations provide particular services, whom they serve, and how to contact them. Share brief updates through existing partner networks to help staff direct older adults to appropriate services when a need is identified.
- Use telephone follow-up through established, trusted service relationships to clarify information about available services, answer questions, and explain how older adults can take the next step to access relevant supports.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed health guides, brochures, and tip sheets using large print and brief, concise wording, distributed through pharmacies, healthcare facilities, community organizations, and direct mail.
- In-person communication, workshops, and information sessions delivered through trusted local organizations, healthcare providers, and older adults' centres.
- Text messages and other simple digital reminders, particularly for appointments and time-sensitive information, for older adults who use digital technologies; these should complement rather than replace in-person and non-digital options.
- Information shared through home-care providers, PSWs, family members, and other trusted contacts to help reach older adults who are homebound or socially isolated.
- Posters and informational displays located where older adults live or regularly visit, including seniors' residences, pharmacies, libraries, community centres, and healthcare settings.
- Informal community networks, including phone chains, churches, social clubs, and seniors' centres, where information can be shared through trusted relationships.

B. Housing & Environment-Related Needs

Outreach Strategies

- Develop and distribute housing resource guides that provide information on rental housing, homeownership supports, assisted living options, home maintenance services, and emergency housing resources.
- Share home safety information through printed materials, community newsletters, local newspapers, and direct mail campaigns.

- Deliver information sessions and presentations on home safety, seasonal home maintenance, and available housing supports through community centres, libraries, and older adults' organizations.
- Promote available housing, home maintenance, utility assistance, and emergency support programs through local radio stations, community television, and public service announcements.
- Partner with municipalities, housing providers, community organizations, and service agencies to disseminate information about housing-related resources and supports.
- Develop centralized print and online directories that help older adults identify and access housing, home maintenance, and environmental support services.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Brief, large-print home safety checklists, housing resource guides, and informational brochures with clear headings and practical contact information that can be retained for reference.
- Direct verbal and in-person communication through trusted service providers, community organizations, housing support agencies, and workshops, particularly when an older adult has an immediate housing or home-support need.
- A single trusted telephone contact or centralized multi-agency information line that can direct older adults to current housing, home maintenance, mobility equipment, utility, and other community supports.
- Printed information delivered through regular, trusted mail channels, such as utility bills and community newsletters, rather than unsolicited door-to-door outreach.
- Centralized print or online information that is maintained by a trusted organization and kept current; digital information should be accompanied by clear verification because of concerns about scams and online trust.
- Information shared through trusted community events and organizations, including workshops and seniors' fairs, where older adults can ask questions and identify appropriate services.

C. Spiritual Fulfilment

Outreach Strategies

- Distribute information about faith-based services, spiritual care resources, community gatherings, and support programs through printed materials, newsletters, and community bulletins.

- Promote spiritual, cultural, and community events through places of worship, community organizations, local newspapers, and community calendars.
- Partner with faith-based organizations and community groups to disseminate information about available spiritual care, volunteer opportunities, and social supports.
- Use local radio programs and community media to share information about faith-based services, spiritual reflections, community events, and available supports.
- Provide information about spiritual and emotional support services through community centres, healthcare facilities, older adults' organizations, and social service agencies.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed worship schedules, newsletters, bulletins, and informational materials distributed directly through places of worship and community organizations.
- Direct invitations and in-person communication from trusted faith leaders, community members, and faith-based organizations.
- Announcements during worship services, faith-based gatherings, and community events.
- Websites, online worship services, and other digital options for older adults who are comfortable accessing spiritual information and services in these ways.
- Communication through established faith communities and their existing member networks, recognizing that trusted, direct channels may be more useful than unsolicited telephone outreach or broad radio messaging.

D. Social & Cultural Activities

Outreach Strategies

- Promote social, cultural, recreational, and volunteer opportunities through monthly community calendars distributed to homes, community centres, libraries, healthcare facilities, and older adults' organizations.
- Share information about local events through community newsletters, newspapers, bulletin boards, and direct mail.
- Use local radio stations, community television, and social media platforms to promote upcoming activities and community events.
- Partner with community organizations, municipalities, cultural groups, and older adults' organizations to disseminate information about available programs and activities.
- Develop centralized print and online event directories that provide up-to-date information on social, cultural, recreational, and volunteer opportunities.

- Conduct outreach through trusted community organizations and service providers to increase awareness of local activities and opportunities for social participation.

- Arrange brief, face-to-face introductions to social, cultural, and recreational programs during existing community meals, Golden Age club gatherings, and church lunches, particularly in smaller rural communities. Give older adults opportunities to meet a staff member, ask questions, and obtain contact information so that subsequent enquiries can be directed to someone familiar.

- When helping older adults identify social or cultural activities, consider their location, accessibility requirements, and transportation costs before recommending a program. Where possible, identify suitable opportunities closer to home and provide a direct contact for participation enquiries.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed event calendars, flyers, newsletters, and community guides distributed through homes, community centres, libraries, older adults' organizations, and other local hubs.
- Direct word-of-mouth and one-to-one communication from trusted community members, family members, friends, service providers, clubs, and local organizations.
- Telephone, text, email, social media, and community websites used together by trusted organizations to provide activity information and reminders, rather than relying on a single communication channel.
- Information about life-skills training and educational sessions led by psychologists or other qualified professionals, with brochures and printed materials made available through trusted community centres and local organizations. These materials can help older adults learn about available sessions, topics covered, and how to participate.
- Posters and informational displays in frequently visited local locations, including libraries, community centres, healthcare facilities, grocery stores, places of worship, and seniors' centres.
- Outreach through small-community networks and gathering places, such as local community centres, clubs, and seniors' groups, so that information reaches older adults outside North Bay and in more rural or remote communities.
- Local print and broadcast media may supplement outreach, but should not be relied upon as the primary method where newspaper circulation and locally focused radio coverage are limited.

E. Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Outreach Strategies

- Promote lifelong learning opportunities through printed course guides, community calendars, newsletters, and informational brochures distributed through libraries, community centres, municipal offices, healthcare facilities, and older adults' organizations.

- Prioritize stable information in printed learning materials, including the types of opportunities available and a reliable telephone contact, and explain how to confirm current course dates, availability, and registration details. Supplement these materials with shorter updates when schedules change, and communicate cancellations through participants' preferred contact methods.

- Share information about educational programs, workshops, and skill-building opportunities through local radio stations, community newspapers, and community bulletin boards.
- Partner with libraries, colleges, school boards, and community organizations to disseminate information about available learning opportunities.
- Provide information sessions and presentations that raise awareness of educational programs and lifelong learning resources available within the community.
- Use telephone outreach and information lines to help older adults learn about available courses, workshops, and educational supports.
- Promote learning opportunities through community websites, email newsletters, and social media platforms for older adults who are comfortable using digital technologies.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed course brochures, community calendars, newsletters, and posters that older adults can take home and refer back to when needed.
- In-person information sessions and presentations delivered through libraries, community centres, older adults' organizations, and other trusted community locations.
- Telephone information services that allow older adults to ask questions about registration, location, eligibility, and program details.
- Email newsletters, community websites, and social media for older adults who are comfortable using digital technologies.
- A multi-channel approach that combines print, in-person, telephone, and digital communication, recognizing that older adults span a wide range of ages, abilities, and communication preferences and that no single method will work for everyone.

F. Transportation Access

Outreach Strategies

- Develop and distribute easy-to-read transportation guides that provide clear information on available services, fares, schedules, eligibility requirements, and booking procedures.
- Promote transportation services through community newsletters, local newspapers, radio stations, community bulletin boards, and direct mail.
- Provide transportation information through telephone information lines and community service organizations that assist older adults in identifying and accessing available transportation options.
- Deliver information sessions and presentations through community centres, libraries, healthcare facilities, and older adults' organizations to raise awareness of transportation resources.
- Create centralized print and online directories that provide up-to-date information on public transit, accessible transportation services, volunteer driver programs, and community transportation resources.

- Build on the transportation inventory already shared by local municipalities by making it available through municipal service counters and partner agencies as well as municipal websites. Provide frontline staff with the information needed to direct older adults to the relevant transportation provider and booking contact for their location.

- Partner with municipalities, transportation providers, healthcare organizations, and community groups to ensure consistent dissemination of transportation-related information.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed transportation schedules, route maps, and easy-to-read service guides that explain fares, eligibility, booking procedures, and available transportation options and can be referred to more than once.
- Telephone information and assistance for older adults who need clarification about eligibility, schedules, booking, costs, or available alternatives.
- Information provided through trusted healthcare providers, community organizations, municipal services, and other service agencies, with materials available in as many relevant locations as possible and kept up to date.
- Digital tools, including real-time bus information and service updates, for older adults who use smartphones, while maintaining non-digital alternatives for those who do not.

- One-to-one orientation or accompaniment, including support from trained volunteers or students where feasible, to help older adults learn bus routes and become comfortable using transportation services.
- Local communication about route changes, service interruptions, weather-related disruptions, and transportation alternatives, using channels appropriate to the community.

G. Digital Access & Communication

Outreach Strategies

- Develop and distribute printed step-by-step guides that help older adults access online services, including telehealth, government services, online banking, and community resources.
- Promote digital literacy programs, technology support services, and available digital resources through community organizations, libraries, healthcare facilities, and older adults' groups.
- Provide information about digital services and supports through community newsletters, local newspapers, radio stations, and direct mail.
- Deliver information sessions and demonstrations that introduce older adults to available digital tools, online resources, and technology support services.

- Ask older adults whether they regularly check email or use digital platforms before selecting these as their main communication channels, and record their preferred contact method where appropriate. For those who check digital messages infrequently, provide time-sensitive information through an agreed telephone or other non-digital option.

- Partner with libraries, municipalities, community organizations, and service providers to disseminate information about affordable internet programs, technology supports, and digital learning opportunities.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed visual guides, step-by-step instructions, and take-home reference binders that older adults can follow at their own pace.
- In-person group demonstrations and digital literacy sessions where older adults can see each step, ask questions, and practice using devices or online services.
- One-to-one technology support for older adults who need individualized assistance, including help that reflects differences between devices and operating systems.

- Human support through trusted locations and people, such as libraries, community organizations, family members, and technology service providers, recognizing that telephone-only guidance can be difficult when users need to see what to click or navigate.
- Practical information about commonly used apps and digital services so older adults can understand their options and make informed choices about which technologies they want to use.

H. Financial Security

Outreach Strategies

- Promote fraud prevention, financial literacy resources, and available supports through community presentations, information sessions, local radio programs, and public service announcements.
- Distribute benefits checklists, financial resource guides, and information on available government and community support programs through direct mail, community organizations, healthcare facilities, libraries, and older adults' groups.
- Partner with financial institutions, community organizations, and government agencies to disseminate information about financial resources, benefits, fraud prevention, and financial assistance programs.
- Share financial information through community newsletters, local newspapers, community bulletin boards, and trusted community organizations.
- Provide telephone information services and referral resources to help older adults access information about benefits, financial supports, and available programs.

Preferred methods for receiving information by older adults

- Printed financial guides, benefits information sheets, fraud-prevention resources, and direct mail communications that can be reviewed and retained for future reference.
- In-person information sessions and presentations through trusted community organizations, including sessions with financial advisors, lawyers, and other knowledgeable professionals.
- Opportunities for confidential one-to-one follow-up after group sessions, recognizing that individual financial circumstances may require personalized discussion.
- Information and referral through trusted government representatives and offices, including Members of Parliament for questions related to federal pensions and benefits.
- Telephone access to a trusted person or service that can help older adults navigate benefits, financial supports, deadlines, and referrals without being repeatedly transferred.

- Digital communications for older adults who are comfortable using technology, complemented by trusted non-digital options and clear fraud-prevention messaging.

Implementation Considerations Across All Eight Dimensions

- The discussion highlighted the importance of clarifying the roles of lead and supporting organizations and adapting outreach approaches to different local settings, including larger centres and smaller rural communities. Participants also emphasized maintaining connections among service providers and municipalities so that organizations know what others offer and can direct older adults to relevant services.
- Participants identified limited budgets and staff capacity as practical constraints on outreach. Existing organizational invoices, municipal tax mailings, and community or faith-based newsletters were discussed as opportunities for distributing information. The discussion also highlighted the importance of including stable information in printed materials, given printing lead times and the possibility of changes to program schedules.
- Participants discussed the potential to strengthen the local use of 211 as a shared information and referral resource, supported by comprehensive listings of programs and services across the eight dimensions. Navigation and follow-up through 211 were described as part of an approach being explored locally.

5. Concluding Remarks

This report highlights the multifaceted needs of older adults across eight key dimensions, including health, housing and environment, social and cultural activities, spiritual fulfilment, lifelong learning, transportation access, digital access and communication, and financial security. The findings emphasize the importance of ensuring that older adults have access to clear, reliable, and timely information related to these areas. Across all dimensions, participants and the literature consistently identified the need for communication approaches that are accessible, easy to understand, and responsive to the diverse circumstances of older adults.

The findings also underscore the importance of using multiple communication channels to effectively reach older adults. Printed materials, telephone communication, in-person interactions, local radio, community newspapers, and information shared through trusted community organizations emerged as particularly important sources of information. While digital communication methods can play a valuable role, they are most effective when complemented by non-digital alternatives and appropriate support for older adults with varying levels of digital literacy and internet access.

In the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts, geographic dispersion, rurality, transportation challenges, and varying levels of service availability further reinforce the need for flexible and locally relevant communication approaches. Community centres, libraries, healthcare facilities, municipal offices, older adults' organizations, faith-based organizations, and other trusted local institutions can play an important role in disseminating information and connecting older adults with available services, programs, and resources.

Moving forward, efforts should focus on strengthening coordination among organizations that communicate with older adults, improving the accessibility and consistency of information, and adopting communication approaches that reflect the preferences and needs of older adults in the region. By leveraging trusted communication channels and community-based networks, organizations can enhance awareness of available resources, improve access to information, and support the well-being, social inclusion, and quality of life of older adults throughout the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts.