

Supporting Seniors:
Advocacy and Capacity Building for Manitoba Seniors Facing Systemic Barriers

Engagement Event Report
July 2024

By:
Community Education Development Association
Public Interest Law Centre



Executive Summary

Over the winter and spring of 2023 and 2024, the Public Interest Law Centre (“PILC”), alongside the Community Education Development Association (“CEDA”), undertook to better understand the challenges that seniors face in Manitoba. Particular focus was on newcomer/refugees, Indigenous and racialized seniors, 2SLGBTQ+ seniors, low-income and unsheltered seniors.

Four engagement sessions were held across the province. The goal of the engagement sessions was to bring together seniors from different communities to better understand the challenges they face in accessing supports and services in Manitoba. These sessions were facilitated using open-ended questions about the strengths, gaps and opportunities that seniors and Elders in Manitoba experience from a policy and legal standpoint.

Along with the lived experience voices, representatives from various senior support organizations, or organizations that serve seniors, were present at the events and shared their insights and experiences relating to the legal and policy gaps surrounding seniors’ services.

Across all four engagement sessions, there were 111 participants representing seniors from across the province with varying identities and life experiences.

Key issues identified by these diverse, overlapping groups were:

- financial insecurity due to the rising cost of living;
- a noticeable lack of governmental representation for seniors who live rurally/in the north;
- isolation and lack of community supports;
- feelings of loneliness;
- inaccessible or inadequate housing; and
- a lack of coordinated services to help navigate the dispersed resources that exist in the province for seniors.

The response from the engagement sessions was overwhelmingly positive. The participants appreciated having a chance to come together to share ideas, as well as feel that their stories were being received, documented and valued.

Ultimately, the engagement sessions emphasized the importance of ensuring seniors have a voice with the power to make material changes in their own lives.

The recommendations arising from the participants and the coordination committee include the creation of a senior’s advocate office with significant investigative powers, a non-profit organization to represent seniors’ interests, and increased funding for senior’s services.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	0
Recommendations	3
Recommendation 1: Enact legislation for the Office of the Seniors Advocate	3
Recommendation 2: Create a Seniors Advisory Committee	3
Recommendation 3: Increased funding for seniors programming and supports.....	4
Introduction	5
Community Engagement Event – Winnipeg	6
Key Issues: Assisted Living and Affordable Housing.....	7
Key Issues: Personal Care Homes	7
Key Issues: Racialized and Newcomer Seniors	8
Key Issues: Indigenous Seniors	8
Key Issues: Poverty and Homelessness.....	9
Key Issues: 2SLGBTQ+ and Unhoused Seniors.....	9
Limitations to Winnipeg Community Engagement Event	10
Community Engagement Event: WestMan – Brandon	11
Community Engagement Event: Rainbow Resource Centre.....	12
Community Engagement Event: NorMan – Thompson.....	13
Conclusion.....	15

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Enact legislation for the Office of the Seniors Advocate

- Address the concerns raised by our engagement event participants. Such a specialized office can share information and resources with seniors across the province. To do so, the advocate must have the resources to engage with seniors across the province, with an equity lens to address issues of systemic racism and discrimination. The advocate should have an additional office located in central/northern Manitoba to ensure that voices of seniors outside of Winnipeg are heard.
- Advocate for higher income support, covered prescription drugs, medical supplies, equipment and dental benefits. Advocating for subsidized housing with seniors in mind would allow seniors to age in places that are tailored to their needs.
- Act as a watchdog for senior's issues. Seniors' advocates are given investigative and reporting powers within the government. Investigative powers allow the advocate to conduct in-depth inquiries into situations like mistreatment in Personal Care Homes, systemic housing challenges or financial abuse. These investigative powers would be similar to the authorities proposed for the new Protection of Persons in Care office and would address issues of abuse within institutions and the community, as well as both individual and organizational forms of abuse. Such investigations can ensure transparency and regulation of essential services for seniors.

Recommendation 2: Create a Seniors Advisory Committee

- Ensure the committee is reflective of the regional, economic and cultural diversity of Manitoba and is knowledgeable surrounding senior's lived realities. The committee must display the diversity of lived experiences of Manitoba seniors.
- Enable the group to be the voice in government that some seniors feel they lack. Direct involvement with government would ensure politicians remain cognizant of senior's issues, and that programs are implemented with seniors in mind. The committee could act to promote the voice of seniors either in tandem with a legislated seniors advocate, or in the absence of one. While legislation was introduced, it has not yet passed and many seniors issues need to be addressed as soon as possible.

- Create a centralized support hub for seniors with a repository of information on seniors supports. This would help ease the stress of finding information and allow seniors to be aware of the resources available to them. Particularly for seniors from marginalized groups, their communities may be spread out throughout the city, so ensuring these seniors can connect with others in similar situations can help build community, decrease isolation, and encourage support.

Recommendation 3: Increased funding for seniors programming and supports

- Increase financial support for all seniors. Seniors may not be able to rely on family supports to meet their needs, and with increasing costs and limited government funding, increased funding for seniors programming would help many seniors live with less stress and better overall wellbeing.
- Improve training and retention of doctors who specialize in geriatrics to ensure seniors access appropriate care that accommodates their needs. This should include a northern Manitoba foot care program.
- Increase training to combat agism among service delivery and care providers.
- Establish supports to assist seniors in dealing with issues such as financial abuse, loneliness, taking care of grandchildren and other stressors. These topics are difficult and often taboo to talk about, especially when it involves family.
- Facilitate and foster opportunities for seniors to age in place. Aging in place requires assisted living options for seniors on low and fixed incomes. Seniors require safe, clean and affordable housing that is accessible for those with mobility aids across the province. This housing must not be based on the medical model, and must reflect the importance of community, inter-generational families, and healthcare supports.

Introduction

In Manitoba, there is no dedicated senior's advocate or overarching group that advocates on behalf of seniors with an equity lens. While discrete groups provide resources and support to certain populations, these groups lack coordination and may not exist in communities outside of Winnipeg.

Because of this lack of coordination, some seniors are not connected to any established group or have limited to no knowledge about the programs and services available to them. While a range of groups may at times advocate for Manitoba seniors, they do not specifically focus on marginalized or equity-seeking groups throughout the province.

Seniors do not possess a direct voice in government, making it difficult to bring these issues to the forefront and have decision makers take them seriously. Without a strong senior's advocate or organization, either as a part of government or within the community, the voice of seniors across Manitoba is not heard.

In December 2022, PILC and CEDA received funding for this project from The Manitoba Law Foundation. The grant supports four community events intended to build capacity among seniors and existing service-based organizations, as well as identify and research key legal issues impacting Manitoba seniors. An ad hoc coordinating committee of activists and community members was formed to guide the project.

Specifically, the project's goal was to include the following activities, all of which were successful:

- The preparation and development of four legal workshops facilitated by PILC, pro bono counsel, law students and CEDA to identify key legal issues and general concerns facing seniors, with workshops held in Winnipeg, southern and northern Manitoba.
- The legal workshops will include both issue identification and capacity building.
- Legal research in preparation and following the workshops to better understand and assist in the identification of legal issues facing seniors.
- Establish a non-profit organization to assist in legal and policy reform for seniors that continues beyond the end of the project.

Many seniors' groups and community supports exist in Winnipeg. It can be easy for the voices of seniors living in other parts of the province to be forgotten. Hosting a rural and northern event helped the coordinating committee to understand the experiences of further marginalized seniors and avoid a Winnipeg-centric bias in the issues identified and recommendations.

Four events were held across Manitoba. Based on the event, between 12 and 75 participants attended. Many of the individuals had lived experience as seniors from marginalized groups, worked for community organizations, or both. Some of the marginalized groups that were identified and invited to attend the meetings included:

- Seniors facing housing insecurity and poverty
- Seniors in assisted living or affordable/non-profit housing
- Seniors living with disabilities
- Immigrant and refugee seniors
- Seniors living in personal care homes (PCHs)
- 2SLGBTQ+ seniors
- Indigenous seniors

Discussions were supported by a facilitator and notetaking. The participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- On a scale from 1-10, how would you rate your quality of life or the quality of life for seniors on your group?
- What, if any, supports do you have right now that you consider helpful and positive?
- What, if any, barriers exist that prevent your quality of life or the quality of life for seniors in the group?
- What changes need to be made to improve the quality of life?

Community Engagement Event – Winnipeg

On the afternoon of June 7, 2023, an engagement event was held at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg. Approximately 90 people RSVP'd, with 75 attending the event. Participants represented a wide range of individuals with lived experience and staff from community organizations that provide services to seniors.

Some community groups involved in the event were:

- End Homelessness Winnipeg
- Siloam Mission
- Salvation Army
- Transportation Options for Seniors
- Victoria Lifeline
- Harvest Manitoba
- Lion's Manor
- Canadian Association of Retired Persons
- Indigenous Senior Resource Centre (ISRC)
- Manitoba Non-Profit Housing Association
- Kekinan Tenant Resources

- Rainbow Resource Centre
- 2Spirit People of Manitoba
- Senior Indigenous Research Committee
- Thunderbird House
- University of Manitoba Centre on Aging
- Manitoba Association of Residential and Community Care Homes
- Anrock Leadership Inc
- Manitoba Association of Senior Communities
- Inclusion Winnipeg
- Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities

Due to the size of the event, each table had 8-12 participants who generally shared some characteristic or identity, such as requiring assisted living or being Indigenous.

Key Issues: Assisted Living and Affordable Housing

Seniors in this group recognized that many assisted living facilities do not have any options for family members to stay over, especially for extended periods of time, which increases their isolation. Certain cultures also rely heavily on extended familial supports. With inflation and increasing costs for food and services, this family support is even more critical. To not allow these family members to stay over seriously hinders their access to family support and socialization.

Seniors in this group felt further isolation due to a lack of Personal Care Homes (“PCH”)s in areas where their community lives, such as in the North End. Seniors identified not always having a choice of where they live. While there could be homes that include more members from their community or are tailored to their diet, the current model does not support this level of choice.

For First Nations seniors, there may not be any options for them to live on their reserve because there is not enough medical support, and long travel to cities is challenging. Having to relocate to an urban centre away from their community, land and language risks significant isolation and harm.

Key Issues: Personal Care Homes

Several attendees described alarming potential human rights abuses in their experiences as residents of PCHs. Some include:

- being denied water,
- lack of freedom of movement to schedule appointments or see family members,
- physical and chemical restraints,
- removal of residents from their communities,
- staff controlling of visitors and families,

- verbal abuse,
- being treated as incompetent, and
- a general lack of oversight, transparency and regulation.

The medical model of care was another major issue within PCHs as seniors living in these facilities are treated inhumanely. Participants spoke about how elder care is treated too much like a healthcare issue and not a social issue, which requires a different lens to identify issues and provide supports.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with how PCHs are funded and the general lack of transparency and oversight. Underfunding of PCHs leads to much of the day-to-day operations of the PCH being contracted out, resulting in essential services like cleaning improperly executed. A lack of transparency is particularly problematic when individuals rely fully on the system as they have no other means of support and are left increasingly vulnerable.

Key Issues: Racialized and Newcomer Seniors

Racialized and newcomer seniors comprised two tables. This was the best represented group at the event. A major theme that arose in conversations with this group involved how language acts as a barrier to communication. This may be in communicating with other seniors, community organizations, PCHs and healthcare professionals.

Along with the lack of culturally appropriate services, this group identified instances of racism leading to discrimination when racialized seniors tried to access resources.

While there are barriers to accessing care, there is also a lack of information about what services are even available, or what government funded programs may help seniors. General knowledge about pensions, fraud and retirement was also lacking for this group. Technical know-how makes finding this information challenging; even if those services exist, seniors may not be able to find ways to get information about it.

Racialized and newcomer seniors also identified many of the same issues other groups did, like the need for specific senior urgent care, community care that allows for recreation and mental well-being, medical assistance at home, and affordable and reliable transportation and nutrition. Lack of financial resources, or uncertainty around those financial resources available to seniors, leads to stress and does not allow seniors to retire and age well.

Key Issues: Indigenous Seniors

The cultural importance of intergenerational housing is not recognized in assisted or subsidized housing for 55+ residents. For some Indigenous seniors, they were living in spaces that would not allow grandchildren to come and stay overnight.

Cost of living is another barrier this group identified. Old Age Security and the Canada Pension Plan are insufficient to meet the rising cost of groceries, utilities, or medical equipment like walkers and bath safety equipment.

Navigating and accessing support is quite challenging, as well as being able to advocate for themselves in these complex situations. Doctors who specialize in geriatric care are seriously lacking. Many individuals recognized the need for these specialized doctors to go to reserves, as travelling to Winnipeg is challenging for some seniors. Indigenous doctors would be useful, so there is more culturally appropriate care, especially if the doctors are then willing to work on reserve.

Complex mental health needs and intergenerational trauma were also major issues identified in this group. These challenges may impact seniors trying to access services and healthcare, especially if it is not culturally relevant or tailored to these needs.

Key Issues: Poverty and Homelessness

The main issue facing seniors living in poverty is that social assistance, disability, CPP and OAS are all insufficient to cover basic living. Some individuals were not even aware of all the benefits they could access. With a rising cost of living, many seniors have trouble finding housing. This is exacerbated when they reach 65. Many see their benefits decrease, leaving them facing potential eviction from their homes if they can no longer afford rent.

Affordable medication was another major issue identified by the group. They would like to see pharmacare expanded to cover all prescription drugs, medical supplies, and equipment. Dental health is also not covered by government benefits, and seniors are in serious need of affordable dental services.¹

Finally, the group identified the hard time seniors have finding information about programs and resources. More money and effort should be spent in finding efficient and accessible ways to communicate different programs so seniors know what programs are available in one, convenient place.

Key Issues: 2SLGBTQ+ and Unhoused Seniors

A recurrent theme in this group was a lack of community, and the importance of the informal exchange of support. They identified a need for more supports with smaller things like grocery shopping, taking out the garbage, and other small tasks. While this can help

¹ Beginning May 1, 2024, the Federal government began the Dental program for seniors. The scope, availability and accessibility of the program remains unknown. While it is available for seniors aged 65 and over, some seniors, especially if unhoused, may be unaware of the program or have challenges applying for it online.

build community, there are also instances where people may feel they are burdened, or burdening other people. Interpersonal conflicts may also come up if someone is fully relying on informal supports. This increases senior's precarity and puts them at risk of being taken advantage of.

Transportation was a major issue, with many people relying on friends and family to drive them to shopping and appointments.

Income inequality and poverty were also overarching barriers. Because some seniors live in assisted or subsidized housing, they have a lack of autonomy from not having their own kitchen. Theft and conflict may come from a lack of housing options.

Specifically for 2SLGBTQ+ seniors, some expressed feeling uncomfortable in heteronormative spaces, while others are able to fit in. Because there is this disparity, it is not as easy to find supports and community that is appropriate for those who may feel out of place in cisgender, heteronormative spaces. PCHs may not be welcoming of 2SLGBTQ+ residents, especially in rural areas.

Isolation was a common theme for 2SLGBTQ+ seniors as they may not have as large of a community or be unaware of others that live in their complex or neighborhood. For low-income seniors, the need for free activities to bring people together was identified as important.

Limitations to Winnipeg Community Engagement Event

Some barriers, which we had contemplated before the event, remained an issue. This included siloing individuals who had overlapping identities, such as racialized, low-income seniors who were unsure which group to participate in.

The point of this project is to engage with groups that are underrepresented. While we contacted various community groups to ensure we heard from diverse voices, and senior communities who are often left out of mainstream conversations about senior issues, those voices are still hard to access. We hope to continue with our community advocacy to recognize individuals who are silenced in the conversations surrounding senior's advocacy and ensure we hear their perspectives, concerns, and ideas for ways forward.

Because the event was held at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, and because of the controversy surrounding the museum's development, some seniors may have felt uncomfortable attending the event. Some seniors who did attend mentioned how there was inadequate signage, and the room was challenging to move around in as the tables took up a lot of space.

Community Engagement Event: WestMan – Brandon

The Brandon event, held on December 5, 2023, had twelve participants in attendance. All the participants had lived experience as seniors, and some were affiliated with various organizations within Brandon. These included Westman Housing Cooperative, Manitoba Possible, Metis Seniors Group, Brandon Friendship Centre Seniors Circle, Westman Immigrant Services and Seniors for Seniors.

The coordinating committee determined Brandon would be an appropriate place to hold a western Manitoba engagement event. Brandon acts as a regional hub, which allows for viewpoints from seniors who live in the city, seniors who live in neighboring communities, or seniors who moved to Brandon recently access supports.

The event was held at an accessible meeting room at a hotel. The group considered hosting an event at the library downtown, but due to perceived safety concerns some residents may have, we determined the hotel was a more welcoming place for seniors to meet at.

First Nation, Inuit, Metis, newcomer, low-income seniors and persons with disabilities were all represented at this engagement session. Participants also had lived in Brandon for varied amounts of times. Some had lived in Brandon for much of their lives, while others moved from smaller towns in the surrounding area.

The group reflected on how they feel there are gaps in coordinated seniors supports. The meeting acted as an opportunity for many seniors to learn about the different services and programs available in Brandon, such as bingo nights and recreational classes. Services and programs may be advertised online, but if seniors are not using the computer, they are needlessly left out. Some seniors do not feel comfortable with technology, or do not feel it should be mandatory to use it just to learn what is going on in their community.

While Brandon has a municipal transit service, getting to the stops is a challenge due to inaccessible sidewalks. This compounds the isolation some seniors face, and may prevent them from attending recreational or social activities even if they are aware they are occurring.

No rural bus service exists between Brandon and Winnipeg or other municipalities in the area. For seniors who cannot drive or do not have access to a vehicle, their ability to connect or visit family in friends, especially if they have recently moved to the city, is seriously curtailed.

Even though Brandon is a regional healthcare hub, there is a lack of extended healthcare supports to ensure seniors are understood and believed in healthcare settings. Seniors feel they are rushed at the doctor, and while some of their needs are met, there is a lack of geriatric support that takes holistic healing and overall mental and physical health into

account. This lack of support leads to a lot of stress and anxiety, which may be compounded by the changing health needs of many seniors as they age.

A significant gap identified during the event was the lack of rural wheelchair repair services. While there was one rural repair person, they have since retired. For any wheelchair repairs, the wheelchair must be sent to Winnipeg, resulting in week- or month-long delays.

The participants did impress upon the coordinating committee that Brandon has a strong sense of community. Seniors are invested in taking care of each other, and they regularly call each other, especially if they know someone has a hard time leaving their home. The Metis Seniors Group holds many events throughout the week to keep seniors engaged and foster a sense of community, which was acknowledged by many participants as being a major source of support and socialization.

Some participants live in the newly-built seniors housing complex by Westman Housing Cooperative, which provides affordable housing for seniors. This helped generate a sense of community as seniors can get to know their neighbors while accessing safe, affordable and accessible housing in their community.

A unique recommendation on what would improve the lives of seniors in Brandon was a radio station dedicated to seniors. This could play familiar music and keep seniors in the area informed on the news and events happening in the community. A radio station would address the lack of coordinated services and isolation concerns many seniors identified during the engagement.

Community Engagement Event: Rainbow Resource Centre

Through coordination with Rainbow Resource Centre, an engagement event was held on December 6, 2023. Twelve participants attended to allow the coordinating committee to better understand the issues and concerns faced by 2SLGBTQ+ seniors.

The group identified that there are general feelings of loneliness, marginalization, and ostracization within this demographic. Many felt they wanted to be accepted by society and not live in fear, but do not feel like they can around other people their age.

Increasing financial support for seniors, through subsidized housing, medication, and generally increasing old age pension and government supports would greatly benefit seniors. This increase in financial resources would significantly reduce stress and allow seniors to age with dignity.

Challenges in accessing housing was another recurring theme. Increased rental costs and limited options for quality units was a serious challenge for members of this group, especially for those that live alone.

Participants with families felt more supported, and felt they had stability, support and security. Those without family and community support found it more challenging to access services or take care of their daily needs, such as going shopping.

Discrimination and a lack of understanding in healthcare systems was another major challenge. Participants feel there is a serious lack of holistic support within hospitals, and that the way their needs are treated is disjointed and does not focus on being well. This current lack of support and past trauma relating to how 2SLGBTQ+ persons were persecuted via the medical system makes accessing supports challenging.

While discrimination still exists, many seniors expressed hope that society is changing, and are focused on ways to ensure the next generation does not face the same type of discrimination they did.

One recommendation that came out of the group discussion was around inclusive housing. Having a dedicated space for 2SLGBTQ+ seniors in assisted living homes, such as Deer Lodge, could be one way that seniors are not continually asked to “go back in the closet” when trying to access community supports.

Other recommendations included increased information that is not online, giving seniors the ability to be non-digital. Increased housing opportunities and more affordable transportation were identified as other ways to help seniors with their fears around increasing prices and isolation.

Community Engagement Event: NorMan – Thompson

Twelve participants attended an engagement event on May 13th, 2024 at Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre in Thompson, Manitoba. Some participants had lived experience as seniors and Elders, while others were service providers through the Manitoba Metis Federation, Thompson Seniors Community Resource Council, Manitoba Harm Reduction Network, and Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre.

One overarching theme was the lack of meaningful representation from both the regional health authority and the provincial government. Participants felt that they have trouble raising their concerns, and even more so in having these concerns recognized by the government.

An example of this is the province’s decision to cancel the foot care program in Thompson in 2019. Provincial politicians advocated to reinstate the program, but after the most recent election these politicians no longer seem responsive to requests from Thompson residents to resume the foot care program. Many seniors relied on foot care, especially due to the higher incidence of diabetes from food insecurity in the north.

Participants feel that the regional health authority, because they are headquartered in Flin Flon, makes decisions that do not accurately account for the realities of living in Thompson. Trying to coordinate healthcare travel and specialist visits is particularly challenging without being able to visit the office in person. Folks are put on hold for long periods, resulting in significant stress and occasionally failed travel plans.

Similarly, homecare workers have expressed stress relating to having their services coordinated through Flin Flon. The coordinators at the regional health office will schedule workers to travel across the city multiple times, resulting in burnout and a lack of effective care.

Another overarching theme was the lack of perceived safety in Thompson. Many participants feel that in recent years, the increase in violence and unhoused populations has negatively impacted senior's and Elder's ability to go shopping or walk around Thompson. Many participants feel particularly vulnerable due to limited mobility and are not always able to rely on family and friends to assist them in shopping, which may lead them to stay home more often.

The participants attributed this lack of safety with the changing nature of Thompson. Many seniors and Elders have moved away to be closer to family and supports in larger cities, leading to less older adults. A lack of addictions support and accessible housing means more people are forced to live rough.

Relatedly, Elders and seniors may take on the responsibility of caring for grandchildren if their children are unable to care for their own family due to addictions. This places a burden on grandparents, and a lack of supports, both financially, physically, and mentally, leaves Elders and seniors with undue stress. Senior's abuse may also be present in these situations, with few services for seniors and Elders to seek support or recourse.

Isolation was a serious concern for the participants, especially as it relates to other issues such as food insecurity, poor mental health, and increased health risks.

Housing concerns were another major concern for participants. Many elders and seniors live in apartments, however many apartments in Thompson are expensive, are only accessible by stairs, and are not otherwise equipped with assistive devices. Thompson does not have any supported or assisted housing, or a non-profit housing corporation. Wait times may be as long as five years for the personal care home. The personal care home has limited beds, and for those who do not require 24-hour care, it is not an appropriate housing option or an efficient use of resources.

While Thomspson is a regional hub for healthcare, there is still a general lack of healthcare and respite supports. Dialysis machines may be available, but a lack of staff and doctors means these facilities go unused. Even for the healthcare that is available, some participants felt that within the system their concerns are discounted or they are unable to

advocate for themselves. For those who live outside of Thompson and must rely on nursing stations, participants raised that there are serious barriers to effective care, and many individuals who rely on nursing stations end up being sent to larger centres.

Thompson has its benefits as being a smaller regional hub with a deep sense of community and pride. There are strong supports through the senior and Elder group in Thompson that provides social participation and inclusion, and assists in delivering food hampers to those who need. While there are strengths, serious concerns were raised that can be contributed to a lack of awareness and support for the particular realities of aging in a town that is a long distance from Winnipeg.

The two major recommendations that arose during the discussion included an office of the seniors advocate being located in Thompson. An office in the north would address the feelings of being ignored and abandoned by the provincial government. Reinstating the foot care program would be a small yet impactful and life-saving change. Finally, an accessible and supported living accommodation would allow more seniors to stay in Thompson instead of having to move south.

Conclusion

Seniors issues are routinely overlooked, especially for those with compounding identities of being low income/unhoused, Indigenous, racialized, a newcomer, a person living with disabilities, or part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

The engagement sessions offered much needed insight into the challenges seniors from all walks of life face. In every engagement session we heard about a lack of government support and participants feeling like their concerns as seniors were not properly addressed, especially relating to financial, housing and healthcare needs.

A legislated seniors advocate office must be given the power to address, investigate and advocate for seniors, especially relating to the feelings of neglect when accessing government supports and institutional abuse. This power must extend to looking at not just seniors who live in institutional personal care homes settings, but those who are able to age in place in the community, either in privately owned homes or assisted living facilities.

By way of example, the Protection for Persons in Care Office and Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth have expansive and legally enforceable investigative powers. This includes conducting examinations under oath, obtaining subpoenas, making applications to the court for assistance, and carrying out investigations on their own initiative.² Examining individual and organizational abuse must be a part of the seniors advocate

² For concrete examples, see *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, C.C.S.M. c. A6.7 ss 15, 17, 25, 26.1, 26.2, 37

office's legislated mandate paired with appropriate investigatory powers to ensure the office is meaningful and effective.

A seniors advocate can also act as a connection hub for seniors supports. As evidenced by the engagement sessions informing participants about the different supports available to them, an advocate could help direct these questions, while also undertaking work in investigating and advocating for seniors. To do so, the seniors advocate will have to be properly staffed and resourced, with multiple offices throughout the province to ensure no voice goes unheard.

For seniors in Thompson and Brandon, the lack of healthcare supports and accessible housing was of particular concern. Housing options that allow for seniors to age in place with a sense of community and varying levels of daily support would be a great benefit, especially in rural areas.

Manitoba's seniors advocate office, which should be established during the next sitting of the Legislature, will have a long road ahead of them to ensure that their mandate is broad enough to address organizational, institutional and systemic abuse that face seniors.

The coordinating committee would like to thank the Manitoba Law Foundation for its support in making this project a success. The provided funding has allowed seniors across the province to have their voices heard and guide the development of both a legislated seniors advocate and non-profit seniors organization.