

Enhancing Programs and Services for Older Adults in Elgin County

STRATEGIC REVIEW & RECOMMENDATIONS



Corporate
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Executive Summary

Background

In June 2021, Elgin County expressed interest to Fanshawe Corporate Training Solutions to engage in a parallel study to the City of St. Thomas senior services review to examine rural programming and services for seniors and better understand what exists and opportunities for improvements. In the spirit of collaboration, two Elgin County representative joined the Technical Working Committee (TWC) comprised of community stakeholders in the City of St. Thomas that had been convened to review the changing program and service needs of the older adult demographic in the City. The Elgin County review was initiated based on identified needs for seniors' recreation, health, wellness, and socialization programming outlined in the Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan. Changes due to COVID-19 as well as future population projections of older adults 55 plus further highlighted the need to better understand and adapt to the evolving recreation, leisure, and social needs of the community going forward.

This review identifies existing resources across the municipalities of Elgin County that can be leveraged and further supported to offer a mix of programming that aligns with age-friendly policy and the local needs of each community. New program ideas and strategies are also presented that highlight regional and national rural best practices that could be implemented in Elgin County.

Approach

The review was completed between June 16, 2021 to October 4, 2021. Key information was presented to the Elgin County Chief Administration Officer (CAO) (Julie Gonyou), the Director of Community and Cultural Services of Elgin County (Brian Masschaele) as well as the Chief Administration Officers of each municipality in the County at various points throughout the project. The following steps and deliverables were completed:

- Review of progress with a technical working committee made up of St. Thomas and Elgin County stakeholders as well as the Local Municipal CAOs to guide the review process
- Conduct an environmental scan of three regional and three national comparable rural counties
- Identify existing community resources and develop a detailed program inventory tool
- Conduct key informant interviews from each municipality
- Create a community profile using policy foundations, community demographics, market research psychographics, and 25-year population projections
- Administer a community stakeholder survey completed by nine organizations or groups
- Conduct an older adult survey completed by 429 residents in St. Thomas and Elgin County (including 100 responses from Elgin County)
- Map program locations and identify new program spaces in each municipality

- Analyze six program/leisure guides to identify best practices
- Develop outreach and marketing plans using the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) approach

The technical committee, community stakeholders, and residents were engaged during the review despite the fact that COVID-19 protocols limited the ability to conduct face-to-face interactions. Findings from the primary research were validated and compared to broader demographic and policy trends to ensure recommendations were tailored to the needs of communities across the County.

Key Findings

The review identified the following key findings:

Deliverable/Area of Focus	Key Findings
Defining Existing Community Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In other rural communities, programming is often organized by local health organizations and programs reviewed were similar, with fitness, crafts, and ancestry research programs, being the most popular 2. Five of the six counties had a dedicated seniors' centre located in a larger community and two had a program/leisure guide 3. Fitness, basic needs, and leisure programs are predominant; while, new social, respite, and arts and culture programs could be considered 4. Targeted age group (55+) programming could increase older adult engagement 5. Existing resources can be utilized or promoted in new ways to engage new participants
Foundational Information and Community Profile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Activity levels are lower in Elgin comparative to the province overall while rates of the 55+ demographic living alone are higher. 2. The 55+ population will stabilize and the 75+ population will grow in the next 25 years across Elgin. 3. There are a higher number of older adults living alone, particularly in Aylmer, Dutton/Dunwich, and West Elgin, indicating that social isolation among older adults is a factor.
Community Based Surveys	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many programs and services exist already within the County; however, some are full or waitlisted. 2. Community agencies are interested in offering more programming, but are restricted due to staffing, resources, space limitations and funding. 3. Many older adults are interested in participating 2-3 times per week, but are unaware of programs and services available. 4. The majority of older adults prefer higher intensity activities with 70% stating their favourite program was either fitness or sport.
Program Summary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A seasonal older adult's program guide designed for accessibility with City, County and Local Municipal Partner information is advised. 2. Facilitating new community partnerships can help increase cross-promotion of existing programs and draw in new registrants.

Future Considerations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Many rural counties utilize a local seniors' centre to diversify program options and increase access to grant funding. 2. Partnership and participation in St. Thomas Seniors' Centre committees could help promote information sharing and improve system navigation for all.
Facility Determination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Geographic location impacts access to programs and services. 2. Virtual and telephone programming should be promoted when geographic location could lead to isolation. 3. Opportunities to support community organizations in need of free space should be explored, including venues that did not appear in the program inventory.
Outreach Methodologies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New outreach and marketing strategies, both online and offline, are needed to raise awareness of programs and services, especially to socially isolated older adults across the County. 2. Outreach strategies should focus on a central message or theme that can be promoted across municipalities to help with system navigation. 3. A coordinated loyalty or rewards program could be considered to increase repeat registration and word-of-mouth marketing.

Recommendations

The final recommendations of the review are as follows:

1. Create diverse programming options, as outlined in the program roster, to meet the various needs and abilities of adults 75 plus due to increased population projections in Elgin County in the next 25 years.
2. Maintain promotion of fitness, sport, and leisure programs, and increase respite, social, and arts and culture programs.
3. Continue regular, daytime programming, but explore virtual programming (both online and via telephone) via partnership, such as with the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre.
4. Leverage the program inventory to develop new private and public partnerships and maintain the tool for referral and navigation purposes.
5. Strengthen Cross-County system navigation by convening an Older Adults Programs and Services Network made up of County stakeholders and older adults.
6. Identify resources that can be shared with community partners to enable new programs, such as indoor and outdoor spaces that can be made available for free.
7. Establish a partnership with the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre to cross-promote programming and develop new programs that align with older adult recreation interests and mutually benefit both parties.
8. Create a seasonal, activity guide for City of St. Thomas and Elgin County combined that focuses only on older adult 55+ programs and services, is available in larger font and accessible online and in print formats.

9. Develop an integrated marketing communications plan using a blend of traditional and digital strategies to increase awareness of older adult programs and services, focus on a central theme or messaging, and enhance participant engagement.
10. Consider a rural loyalty or rewards program that encourages St. Thomas and Elgin County older adult residents to try new activities located across the County.

Next Steps

Suggested next steps include:

1. Seek feedback and input from the Technical Working Committee and County and Local Municipal CAOs on the final report
2. Assess recommendations and determine top five priorities
3. Create an implementation plan and assign roles and responsibilities

The review indicates that there is clear demand for older adult programming in the County and a collaborative approach in which stakeholders work together and with the County is desired. Additionally, many of the community stakeholders who completed the survey indicated they would be interested in the findings of the review and how they can contribute to future collaboration. The list of community stakeholders (included as part of the program inventory) is provided to offer a starting point for these discussions. The County CAOs may wish to continue meeting to discuss how to prioritize the recommendations in the report or alternatively establish an advisory committee with additional space for community stakeholders and older adult residents to provide feedback and input. Once priorities are determined, roles, responsibilities, and timelines can be assigned.

Introduction

In Elgin County, the population of older adults 55 plus will stabilize by 2031; while the population of adult 75 plus will continue to grow over the next 25 years. This, combined with recent physical, emotional, and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable older populations, support the need to review and assess current and future programming and services for seniors. With this study, the aim is to review existing programs and services for older adults offered in Elgin County and assess how these offerings can be enhanced to further support and engage a rapidly growing aging population.

Demographic factors such as age, income, and housing are key components to consider when examining programs and services in an age-friendly community. The older adult population aged 55 and over in Elgin County (including St. Thomas) comprises 34% of the total population in the region and is projected to grow to 37% by 2046. In 25 years, the region will be home to more than 46,000 people over the age of 55 (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2021). Income levels are also lower in Elgin County on average than throughout Ontario. The average annual income for individuals in Elgin County is \$43,751 and the average household income is \$89,457 – which is 15% and 22% lower than the provincial averages (SimplyAnalytics, 2021). Furthermore, a considerable proportion of older adults in Elgin County live alone, have a desire to remain independent, and prefer to engage in community programs that provide them the opportunity to stay fit and be social. These factors demonstrate the basis for this senior services review as the older adult population is growing quickly and has diverse needs.

The Elgin St. Thomas Age Friendly Community Plan (AFCP) was a key reference document. The AFCP recognizes that recreation and leisure opportunities have multiple tangible benefits for the community including enhanced mental, physical and social well-being. This review takes a community-based approach in alignment with existing plans and data to strengthen inclusion, belonging and civic engagement.

This report provides insights about what programs and services have been successful in the past, an inventory of current offerings, and what aspects of programs and services can be improved to meet the evolving needs of the older adult community in Elgin County.

Background and Methodology

Summary of Methodology & Deliverables

In June 2021, Elgin County joined a Technical Working Committee (TWC) comprised of community stakeholders in the City of St. Thomas that had been convened to review the changing program and service needs of the older adult demographic in the city (see Appendix A for a list of members). A parallel review was initiated at the County level once a work plan was approved on June 14, 2021.

Project presentations and facilitated sessions with the TWC took place virtually on a bi-weekly basis in addition to interviews, focus groups and brainstorming exercises. The following nine key deliverables were identified with a completion date of October 7, 2021:

1. Defining Existing Community Resources
2. Foundational Information and Community Profile
3. Community-Based Surveys
4. Program Summary
5. Future Considerations
6. Facility Determination
7. Outreach Methodologies
8. Final Recommendations/Report

The Elgin County senior services review utilized multiple data sources, including primary and secondary research and grey literature (e.g. policy literature, working papers, government documents, white papers, urban plans, etc.) to better understand the demographic and social shifts in the County among the aging population and provide recommendations for recreation and leisure programming that aligns with the priorities outlined in the Elgin St. Thomas Age-Friendly Community Plan (AFCP). Disruptions to programming caused by COVID-19 were apparent throughout the project. Every attempt was made to understand the programming landscape before the pandemic and the anticipated program mix as facilities were able to re-open.

Several tools were developed from the various data sources and are included as supplemental resources to this report to assist in the planning and implementation of the recommendations. These resources include presentations, environmental scans, policy summaries, program inventory, program summary, community stakeholder and senior survey results, facility determination, and outreach plan.

Definition of the Target Audience

The initial tasks for the TWC were choosing the terminology used to refer to the target audience and the age range to focus on. The terms 'seniors' and 'older adults' are both used in the AFCP somewhat interchangeably; however, the actual age ranges implied by either term can be different. For example, the term 'seniors' often refers to the 65+ demographic, which aligns with the traditional age of retirement. In contrast, the term 'older adults' can refer to the 50+ or 55+ age group. Ontario's Age Friendly Communities strategy notes there is significant diversity within the older adult and senior population in terms of mobility and activity levels, health status, lifestyle, and leisure interests ("Creating a More Inclusive Ontario", 2021). Therefore, a clear, shared definition was needed to ensure the review focused on the correct target audience.

Summary

The TWC had already decided to use the “Older Adults 55+” terminology and age range when the County joined the project. Various factors related to lifestyle, age, mobility and accessibility were considered. The age groups known to be attending current programs and those whom they would like to target in the future were also discussed. The County did not express any concerns with the chosen terms and age range as the reasoning behind the committee’s decision also aligned with trends occurring in the county context.

1. Existing Community Resources

A thorough review of older adult programming and services in rural communities (provincially and nationally) was conducted through an environmental scan (e-scan) to determine a baseline and common themes. Secondly, an in-depth program inventory was created to identify existing community resources and gaps or opportunities for future programming and services.

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan (e-scan) is a detailed investigation of comparable communities to identify similarities, differences, and best practices. Scans were conducted at the regional and national level based on comparable population size to Elgin County, close proximity to a large urban centre (as Elgin County residents live in close proximity to London and/or St. Thomas), and when possible, prominence of coastline in the County geography, as the Lake Erie coastline impacts the recreation and leisure activities available in the County compared to landlocked communities. Table 1 shows the older adult (55+) population, facilities and services available in the reviewed communities. More detailed versions of the e-scans can be found in Appendix B.

Table 1: Facilities and Services Inventory of Comparable Communities in E-Scan

County and County Seat	Older Adult (55+) population	Seniors’ Centre in the County	# of Library Branches	Other Notable Facilities	Program/Leisure Guide
Elgin – St. Thomas, ON	28,960	St. Thomas Seniors’ Centre	10	Southwestern Public Health	Y – Low Cost Activity Guide
Grey - Owen Sound, ON	38,715	Active Lifestyles Centre Grey-Bruce	10	SPARC Seniors Programs and Respite Care – in-home therapeutic care	Y – For older adults
Huron - Goderich, ON	22,915	The MacKay Centre for Seniors	12	South West Community Care Access Centre	N

Dufferin - Orangeville, ON	17,105	Orangeville & District Senior Citizens Centre	4	Dufferin County Community Support Services – services for seniors/disabled adults to remain in familiar surroundings	N
Carleton, NB	9,225	N/A	3	Carleton Civic Centre	N
King - Sussex, NB & Hampton, NB	22,940	Sussex and Area Seniors Centre (Golden Jubilee Hall) Hampton Senior Resource Centre	3	The Kings Way Life Care Alliance Adult Day Centre - support for those isolated, depressed, or in early stages of dementia	Y – specific to town of Sussex
Colchester - Millbrook, NS	18,930	Millbrook Seniors Centre	5	First Nation Community Centre offering various activities and services	N

The e-scan identified several program and service trends in the rural communities reviewed including:

- Programming is often organized and funded by local health organizations, such as community care access centres, long term care centres or community health centres
- Programming found in the counties reviewed was similar, with fitness, crafts, and ancestry research programs being popular
- Notable unique programming was found in:
 - Huron County
 - Seniors Telecheck friendly volunteer phone call program to check in on isolated older adults
 - Colchester County

- Seniors' Games and Fundy Seniors' Games, county-wide social events with competitive and non-competitive activities for older adults of all skill and mobility levels
- Five of the six counties had a dedicated seniors' centre located in the city/municipality with the highest population
- Two of the six counties had a program/leisure guide

Six city and county program guides were reviewed to determine the following: geographic area, target audience, frequency, presentation format, and inclusion of advertising or third-party programs and services. Table 2 shows the key information collected about each guide.

Table 2: Comparison of Program Guides and Directories

Publication	City, County or Both	All Ages or Seniors Only	Frequency	Directory or Guide	Ads (Y/N)
Brantford Leisure Activities Guide	City	All Ages	Multi-season	Guide	Y
New Tecumseh Recreation and Culture Guide	City (includes communities of Alliston, Beeton & Tottenham)	All Ages	Multi-season	Guide	Y
North Simcoe Directory of Seniors Services	County	Seniors Only	Every 2 years	Directory	Y
Sarnia Community Activities Guide	City	All Ages	Annual	Guide	Y
St. Catharines Leisure Guide	City	All Ages	Multi-season	Guide	N
Tillsonburg Recreation Guide	City	All Ages	Multi-season	Guide	N

A review of the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of each guide was presented to the committee for feedback and discussion and the idea of developing a St. Thomas & Elgin County older adult program guide was discussed. The committee preferred a seasonal guide specifically for older adults that included program information for both the City and County. It was noted that the guide should be made available online and in hard copy with possible distribution through key community locations, such as grocery stores, banks, and health organizations. Other important considerations were to use a large, readable font, include a special events section, and keep program descriptions brief to prevent information overload.

Summary

The findings from the e-scan indicated that many rural counties offered similar types of older adult programs, including fitness, leisure activities such as crafts, and heritage activities such as ancestry research. Programs were often run by, affiliated with, or funded by a health organization. A seniors' centre was located in a large population centre in most counties. Although the counties did not operate the seniors' centres themselves, they did provide partnership and cross-promotion opportunities depending on the level of collaboration between the venue and the county. It was also noted that some counties use a program/leisure guide to promote programs, although the format and geographic area of the guides varied. The committee supported the idea of a combined City and County program guide for older adults and upon further consideration of best practices agreed that a seasonal guide with program, service, and event information would be a mutually beneficial outreach strategy.

Committee Interviews and Group Discussion

One-on-one interviews were conducted with TWC members to better understand their observations and analysis related to older adult programming in the community and a group discussion was conducted with the Local Municipal CAOs across Elgin County. The information gathered highlighted that committee members and County representatives had similar goals, such as:

- Offering a diverse programming mix to meet changing needs, such as increased demand for fitness programs
- Implementing new outreach and marketing strategies to recruit and retain participants
- Building partnerships to share resources and best practices

They also faced many of the same challenges or barriers in their work, such as:

- Funding constraints
- Concern about duplication of services in the community
- Impact of COVID-19 protocols resulting in some individuals being placed on waitlists, such as in the Adult Day Program

The following table identifies the emerging themes and descriptions from the interviews and group discussion:

Table 3: Committee Interview Themes

Theme	Description
Anxieties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concerns about duplication of services• Stigma regarding age or the use of the “senior” title• Management of participant feedback processes
Seeking Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to improve existing programs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to better inform the community about the programs • Learn about best practices and methods for building additional capacity
Funding Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursuing outside rentals, room rentals and sponsorships from local businesses • Applying for grants
Active Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating higher intensity active or physical programs such as sport tournament opportunities, use of outdoor trails, both outdoor and indoor courts, exercise classes and pickleball
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique and collaborative ideas for recruiting new members • New outreach strategies and advertisement suggestions
“One Thing”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire for a “central system”, methods for standardizing programs options, a one stop shop catalog or contact person, or a “hub for the city”
“Filling the Gaps”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating a smoother transition into long term care • Providing better transportation options to get to programs • Improving digital literacy to access information about programs online
County Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement of the unique needs of each Local Municipal Partner both in programming and outreach • Desire to strengthen and grow community partnerships • Need to address barriers, such as transportation, distance to venues, isolation

Summary

An integrated, community-based approach was discussed in the context of St. Thomas, Elgin County and collaboration between the two. While the St. Thomas stakeholders specifically indicated a desire for a streamlined centralized system or hub model in St. Thomas, the unique needs of each Local Municipal Partner were discussed in relation to the County. One common goal for all parties was better outreach and promotion so that every older adult would understand the various recreation and social programs available. There was also a desire to strengthen and support community partnerships with agencies, healthcare organizations and community organizers that provide services to older adults and seniors.

A collaborative approach has numerous benefits and is becoming increasingly common as municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and community groups look to meet the growing demand for diverse programs and seamless program registration and delivery. From a financial standpoint, collaboration enables a more efficient use of resources by reducing duplication and cross-utilizing resources. Collaboration can also lead to a better customer experience because it simplifies system navigation and increases overall participation through cross-promotion.

Program Inventory

To gain a better understanding of the recreation and leisure activities currently available to older adults in Elgin County, a program inventory was created. A mixed methods approach was used to gather details on programs, services, and activities of interest to older adults in Elgin County which included an online search, a scan of local social media groups, and direct correspondence with Local Municipal CAOS and local organizations. Information was gathered for 100 programs from 38 different organizations. Due to the disruption to programming caused by COVID-19, some organizations were unable to provide updated information on program offerings.

The following information was collected in the program inventory:

- Program and membership fees or costs
- Ability levels (whether programs are more active or passive)
- Registration options, and whether the program is offered all year, occasionally or seasonally
- Program timing (day/evening), whether it would be adaptable for purposes of special needs or mobility
- Target skill levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced, or all levels)

The program inventory tool serves as a central repository or database to track and identify existing programs as well as opportunities for future program or service development and collaboration and is encouraged to be maintained.

Programs were organized into the 10 categories shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Inventory Program Types and Examples

Program Types	Program Examples
Arts	Painting, sculpting
Basic Needs	Healthcare, food bank, job or skill training
Culture	Theatre, heritage
Education	Digital literacy, language
Fitness	Zumba, yoga, aerobics
Leisure	Sewing, choir
Respite	Caregiver support

Social	Book club, discussion groups
Sport	Pickle ball, badminton
Volunteer	Registered Volunteer, Volunteer

In instances where a program fits in multiple categories, the most prominent aspect of the program was chosen. For example, a community theatre volunteer program was classified as a volunteer program rather than culture, whereas a drama class was categorized as culture rather than education. In the case of fitness and sports overlap, a program was categorized as sport if a competitive or team element was present.

Gap Analysis

A gap analysis of the program inventory was conducted to determine consistencies, inconsistencies, and opportunities. Key findings revealed that:

- The most prevalent program types were fitness (29%), basic needs (14%) and leisure (13%)
- The least prevalent programs found were volunteer (4%), respite (4%), and culture (3%)
- When combining fitness and sport programs, over one third (38%) of the inventory programs can be described as active
- No programs indicated they were targeted for different skill levels (advanced, intermediate or beginner) with 100% open to all levels
- The program fee was less than \$20 for more than 72% of programs in the inventory and 48% of programs were found to be free
- Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays were the most popular days for programs to run

Further information related to the program inventory gap analysis is provided in Appendix C.

Comparative Analysis

Programs in both inventories are colour coded based on the type of organization that hosts the services. The City of St. Thomas legend (Table 5) has 12 types of organizations while the Elgin County legend (Table 6) has two additional columns for a total of 14 types of organizations. The additional columns are as follows: Elgin County Libraries, Health and Wellness Centers/Organizations.

Table 5: City of St. Thomas Program Inventory Legend

Activity and Game Clubs/Organizations	
Arts and Culture Centres/Organizations	
City/Municipal Recreation Facilities & Parks	
Community and Service Clubs	
Educational Institutions	
Nonprofit Services and Charity Organizations	

Private Sport or Fitness Clubs/Businesses	
Religious Organizations (Churches, mosques, etc)	
Retirement and Long-term Care Homes	
St. Thomas Public Library	
St. Thomas Seniors Centre	
Other	

Table 6: Elgin County Program Inventory Legend

Activity and Game Clubs/Organizations	
Arts and Culture Centres/Organizations	
City/Municipal Recreation Facilities & Parks and Community Pools	
Community and Service Clubs	
Elgin County Libraries	
Educational Institutions	
Nonprofit Services and Charity Organizations	
Private Sport or Fitness Clubs/Businesses	
Religious Organizations (Churches, mosques, etc)	
Retirement and Long-term Care Homes	
St. Thomas Public Library	
St. Thomas Seniors Centre	
Health and Wellness Centers/Organizations	
Other	

The Elgin County inventory has a total of 100 programs, the majority of which are fitness programs (29%), basic needs services (14%) and leisure activities (13%). In contrast, the St. Thomas program inventory has a total of 196 programs, the majority of which are fitness programs (24%), leisure activities (16%) and social programs (13%). When combining fitness and sport, 34% of programs in the St. Thomas inventory can be considered active compared to 38% for the Elgin County inventory.

The following outlines the key findings of the comparative analysis:

1. Target Age

Organizations throughout St. Thomas frequently use the term older adults and the 55+ target age group for describing programs and activities for older clientele. The term "older adult" and "55+" was less common for programs occurring in neighboring municipalities. In fact, there was no data on programs that mentioned their target age range as being specifically "older adults" or for ages "55+" in the Elgin County programs inventory.

In the other municipalities throughout Elgin, roughly 15% of programs indicated that they target *Seniors 65+*. More than half of the programs found target *Adults 18+*, and nearly 30% target *All Ages*; whereas 40% of programs in the St. Thomas inventory were for *Older Adults 55+*, 27% were *All Ages* and 26% were for *Adults 18+*.

2. Mobility and Skill Level

100% of the Elgin County programs are geared toward all skill levels while 94% of the programs in the City of St. Thomas inventory indicate they are for all skills levels. In terms of mobility, 81% of St. Thomas programs and 81% of Elgin County programs indicated that they accommodate all mobility levels.

3. Program Fees

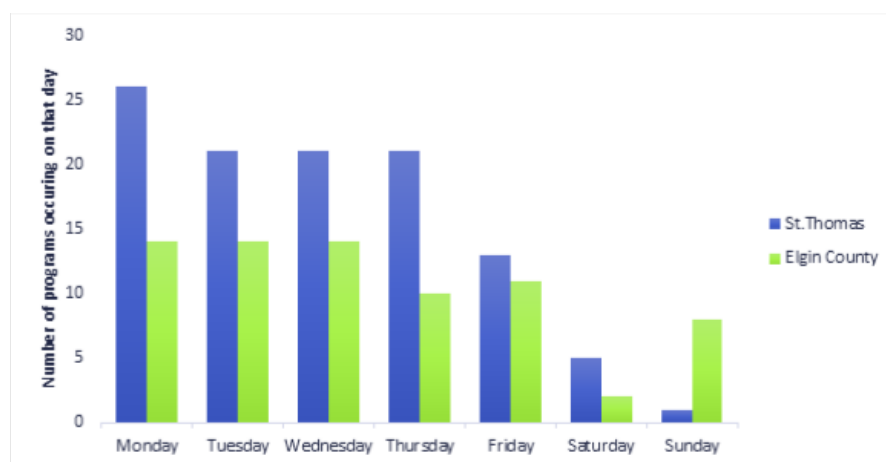
66% of Elgin County programs were offered for less than \$10 and 72% of programs were offered for less than \$20. In comparison, over 50% of St. Thomas programs were offered for less than \$20, while 43% were offered for free. This does not include membership-oriented offerings.

4. Program Frequency and Timing

79% of the programs in the Elgin County inventory run all year and 21% run seasonally; whereas 75% of the St. Thomas inventory programs run all year, with 18% running seasonally and 7% running occasionally.

When comparing program inventories, Mondays were found to be the most popular day for programs to run in Elgin County (Figure 1). Programs were more likely to occur on Sundays in Elgin County compared to St. Thomas. Some examples of the Sunday programs include: *Public Skate*, *Public Swim*, *Adult Swim* and *Water Walking*.

Figure 1: Program Timing (Day of the Week)



Summary

Based on the gap and comparative analysis of the program inventory, the following summarizes key points for consideration:

- Fitness, basic needs, and leisure programs are predominant; while, opportunities for new social, respite, and arts and culture programs could be considered
- Targeted age group (55+) programming could increase older adult engagement
- Lower individual program fees or free activities are common (aside from membership-based options)
- Virtual programming is being implemented in comparable communities and could help engage older adults living in smaller communities across the county
- Existing resources can be utilized or promoted in new ways to engage new participants

2. Foundational Information & Community Profile

Policy Foundations

A review of federal and provincial policy identified several trends impacting the program and grant funding landscape:

- Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility aims to help seniors stay independent, active, and socially connected
- The desire to help seniors stay independent and live in their own homes as long as possible
- A greater focus on accessibility and inclusion initiatives to ensure all individuals can access programs and services
- A greater use of technology to provide information and programs.

Demographics & Psychographics

Demographic and psychographic data were consulted to develop a community profile of the older adult population in the City of St. Thomas. Key findings from the demographic and psychographic data analysis are shown in Table 7. A detailed account of the data is provided in Appendix D.

Table 7: Elgin County Community Profile

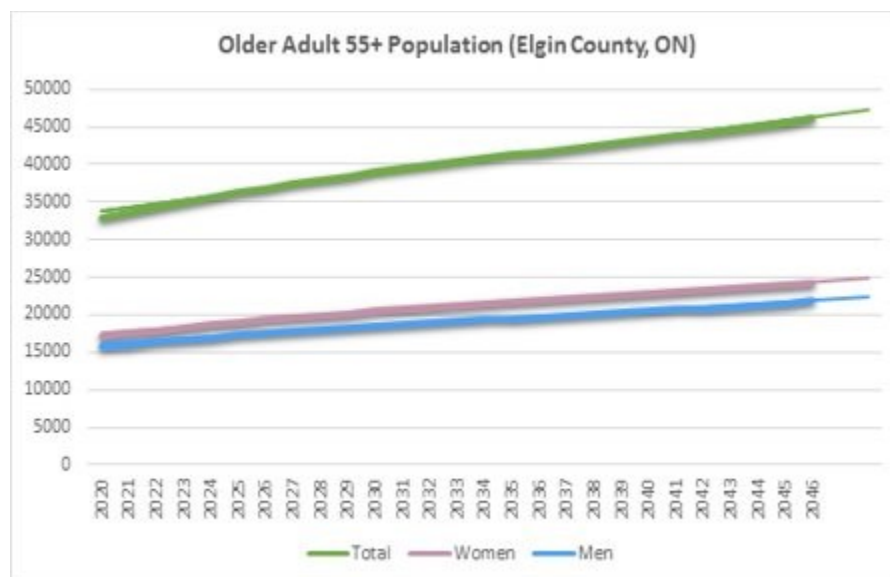
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elgin County (excluding St. Thomas) has 53,720 residents, of which 18,675 are 55+
Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The average income for individuals and households in Elgin County is lower than the provincial average (\$43,751 and \$89,457 compared to \$53,422 and \$116,877, respectively)

Health Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity levels are lower and sedentary lifestyle rates are higher in Elgin St. Thomas compared to Ontario as a whole Cardiovascular diseases, such as heart disease and stroke, are the leading cause of hospitalization in Elgin St. Thomas
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 52% of primary private households are maintained by older adults over the age of 55 suggesting a high number of older adults currently living in their own homes
Social Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25.2% of the 55+ population in Elgin County lives alone Aylmer has the highest % of their 55+ population living alone (31.2%), while Southwold has the lowest (15.6%)
Consumer Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High number of budget-conscious empty nesters and older singles Traditional pursuits, such as home and garden activities, nature activities, and local excursions popular Preference for traditional media (newspaper, radio, and TV)

Population Projections

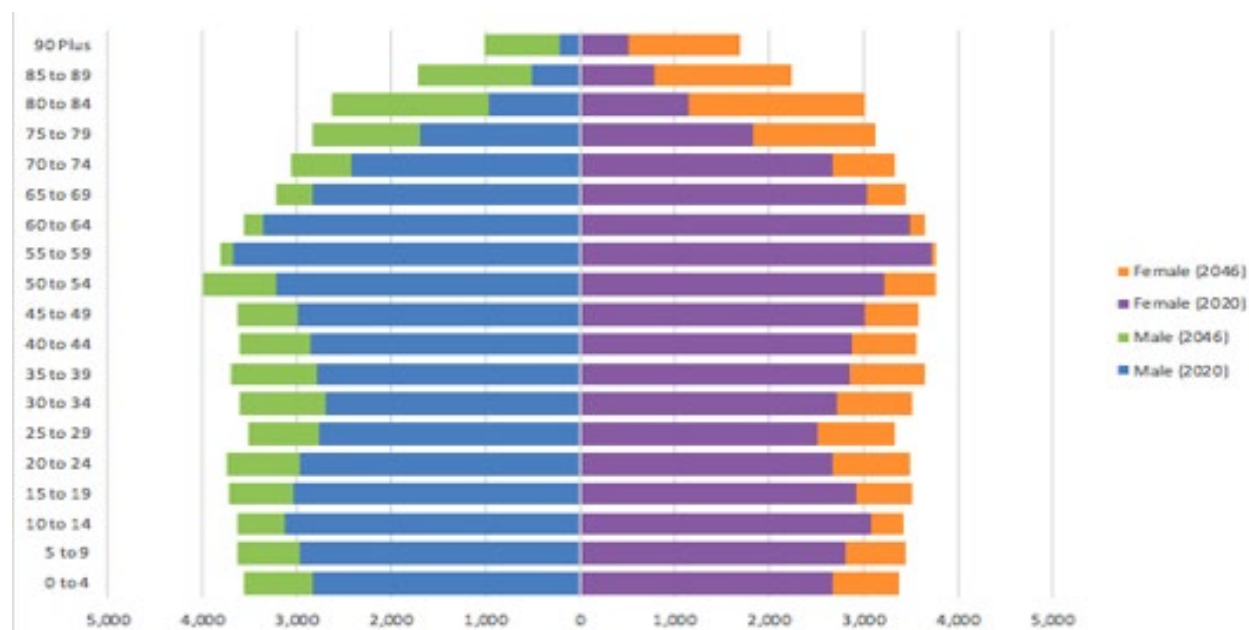
The older adult population 55+ in Elgin County was 33,633 in 2021 and is projected to increase by 12,447 to reach 46,080 in 2046 (Ontario Data Catalogue, 2021). This growth is equally distributed among men and women (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Projected Older Adult 55+ Population in Elgin County (2021-2046)



In 2021, older adults comprised 34% of the population of Elgin County (including St. Thomas). It is projected that the total number of older adults will grow until 2031 and after this time, the growth in both the number and percentage share of older adults will slow. Figure 4 shows that by 2046, there will be a significant increase of older adults 75 to 90 plus in comparison to 2020. The extending life expectancy for both men and women are an important population trend to consider for future programming and services for older adults.

Figure 3: Age Pyramid of Elgin's Population, 2020 and 2046 (projected)



Appendix D offers more detail on the population projections data.

Summary

Both current and projected population data indicates that Elgin County has an aging population that will continue to grow both in absolute numbers as well as overall share of the population. Local and policy trends suggest that older adults prefer to remain independent and in their own homes as long as possible before transitioning to higher levels of support, such as long-term care. However, the County has a higher number of older adults living alone, particularly in Aylmer, Dutton/Dunwich, and West Elgin, indicating that social isolation among older adults is a concern.

As the current 50–64-year-old population continues to age, the demand for services that meet the needs of this age range will plateau while programming for the 75+ demographic will increase. Program planning must therefore be flexible to meet these changing needs over the next 25 years.

3. Community-Based Surveys

Two surveys were created to gather local feedback from both community stakeholders and older adults.

Community Stakeholder Survey

In July 2021, a community stakeholder survey was sent out via email to organizations and community leaders known to facilitate programs, services, and activities for older adults in and around Elgin County. The survey served the following purposes:

- Learn about the diverse types of programs and services being offered in the community
- Understand the challenges or barriers these organizations and their clientele face
- Confirm the components of program and service delivery stakeholders feel can be improved upon.

The overall response rate of the survey was low (3/38 stakeholders responded). Two factors contributed to the low response rate:

- A community stakeholder survey had already been sent out for the St. Thomas older adult review before the County joined the project. As many organizations serve both St. Thomas and Elgin County, sending a second survey to many of the same stakeholder created duplication.
- Emails were received from three stakeholders that chose not to fill out the survey but wanted to provide more information. A common theme was that while the organizations offered programs for all ages, families, and/or adults 18+ that may be of interest to older adults, they did not offer programming specific to older adults due to funding, staffing, or other capacity constraints. The organizations were interested in the possibility of offering older adult programming in the future by applying for grants or establishing new partnerships.

A copy of the survey questions and a summary of the nine responses received from stakeholders serving Elgin County (that completed either the Elgin County or St. Thomas stakeholder survey) are provided in Appendix E.

The key findings from the community stakeholder survey include:

- The most popular program types offered were education (22%), basic needs (13%), and fitness, leisure, and social (9% each)
- No respondents offered sport programs and only 9% indicated offering fitness programs
- Membership was only required by 2 respondent organizations
- Over half of respondents indicated their typical client was 65-79 years old
- 89% of stakeholders indicated their typical clients preferred lower intensity programs over higher intensity programs
- An equal number of respondents stated their clients have “some mobility challenges” or “a high level of physical mobility” (44% each)

- 100% of respondents indicated that programs occur frequently during the day
- The top three funding sources were provincial funding (17%), donations (14%), and federal funding (12%)
- 89% of respondents reported to be providing some form of free programming
- 44% of respondents felt the community was not well-informed about the programs or services they offer
- 89% of respondents indicated they would be interested in advertising their programming in an activity or leisure guide
- Program waitlists range from 0 to 75
- 44% of respondents indicated that for their programs, registration rarely exceeds capacity
- Stakeholders indicated a need for accessing meeting spaces that are fully accessible
- The top types of spaces stakeholders are interested in having more access to include halls or larger common rooms (15%) and classrooms, church or chapels, and auditoriums (11% each)
- Other spaces being used for programming include churches, parks, long-term care and retirement homes, and common rooms of apartment buildings
- Staffing costs were the largest expenditure related to programming for 78% of respondents
- Stakeholders are interested in new partnership opportunities, accessible spaces, and greater collaboration with the older adult community

Older Adult Survey

An older adult survey gathered data from 429 residents of the City of St. Thomas and Elgin County in June and July of 2021. Due to the challenges of in-person data collection, the survey was primarily administered through online methods; however, TWC members also circulated the survey to their members via paper copies and online methods. Postal code data was used to remove responses from St. Thomas residents to focus only on the 100 responses received from older adults living in the County. In the survey, respondents answered questions pertaining to their experiences with programs in their community, accessibility to programs and services, what they believe could be improved to better the services offered, and how they would like to access information about future programs, services, and activities in their community. Appendix F show the total results of the survey and Appendix G provides a detailed analysis of the Elgin County survey results.

Key findings from the older adult survey include:

- Fitness programs were identified as the favourite program type among over half of the respondents (55%) with an additional 15% indicating sport programs were their favourite
- Leisure, arts, and respite programs ranked third, fourth, and fifth, respectively

- Respondents stated their favourite programs offered the chance to socialize and focus on their health, wellness, and mental well-being
- 62% of respondents stated a preference for high-intensity programs rather than low intensity programs
- 92% of respondents use their own vehicle, 7% rely on family, friends, or a caregiver for transportation, and 1% rely on third-party options, such as a shuttle
- When asked monthly spending on recreational activities, the value that appeared most often was \$0
- 58% of respondents indicated they wanted to attend a program or service 2-3 times per week
- 95% were interested in a program/activity guide with 44% preferring to access the guide online and 36% preferring a paper booklet-style guide

Respondents were asked to provide suggestions about how to improve program experiences. The responses were analyzed and divided into the seven categories shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Senior Survey Suggested Program Improvements

Category	Description	Examples
Skill Accessible	Programs with varying skill levels	<i>Less intense, more intense</i>
Increased Frequency	Programs and services offered more frequently	<i>Daytime, evening, weekend</i>
Additional Services	More space and locations for already existing programs + new types of programs	<i>Indoor/outdoor, class sizes, older adult & senior options, local offerings</i>
Accessible Features	Improved facilities and services that are accessible for everyone	<i>Wheelchair accessible, new equipment, wifi, virtual offerings, facility repair, more staff transportation access</i>
Social Improvement	Options that encourage socialization, diverse groups and participation	<i>Gender integration, organized teams, increased participation</i>
Satisfaction	Satisfaction with services and no further comments or suggestions	<i>"My experience has been great", "Great as it is"</i>
COVID-19	Issues affected by the pandemic and out of county control	<i>Government-mandated lockdowns, facility closures</i>

Summary

Survey results were compared to the program inventory findings and revealed that:

- Many programs and services exist already within the County; however, some are full or waitlisted

- Community agencies are interested in offering more programming, but are restricted due to space limitations and funding
- Older adults are interested in programming and services that cater to their needs; however, many are unaware of what is available
- Top programming types are consistent including fitness, sport, and leisure
- Traditional daytime programming is preferred
- The majority of older adults prefer higher intensity activities; however, stakeholders state their clients prefer lower intensity activities
- Accessibility factors are important for seniors to ensure inclusion
- An activity guide with a list of programming and services for older adults that is accessible online and in print format appeals to the majority of seniors surveyed

4. Program Summary

Through the e-scan, several program summaries were examined and compared to the existing program inventory for Elgin County. A data analysis was then conducted to determine gaps in the current program mix in Elgin County, which are indicated in Table 9.

Table 9: Programming Gap Analysis and Proposed Programming and/or Partnerships

Gap	Proposed Programming and/or Partnerships
Not enough fitness and sport programming tailored to the needs of active older adults	Work with partner organizations to apply for grants or sponsorships to increase fitness programs and resources, such as benches. Determine if free space can be provided to community partners in new locations for popular programs. Explore virtual programming and promotion.
Lack of unstructured programs to increase social time and connections	Cross-promote existing free offerings across the county and in St. Thomas. Encourage peer-led initiatives and projects.
Need for new outreach strategies to engage socially isolated older adults	Work with community partners support outreach in areas of high need. Contribute to a program/leisure guide in collaboration with City of St. Thomas.
Need for more respite programs for caregivers and adults with complex needs	Work with partner organizations to identify resources needed to expand offerings.

Based on the program summary gap analysis, Table 10 shows a new program roster that includes suggested activities, potential locations, and partnerships in alignment with the deliverables of this study, as well as the possible duration.

Table 10: Suggested Program Roster

Suggested Program	Location	Partner/Provider	Duration

Book Club in a Bag	Elgin County Libraries	Elgin County Libraries and local service clubs	1x per month
Intergenerational programming	Throughout County	St. Thomas-Elgin EarlyON	1x per month
Virtual respite support group	Online/phone	Adult Day Program, health organizations	Monthly; on-going
Seniors' Centre Without Walls (trivia, bingo, talks)	By Phone	Coordinated with St. Thomas Seniors' Centre	Daily; On-going
SMART Exercise and Falls Prevention	Underserved locations	VON	Weekly; On-going
Trail walking group	Outdoors (Joe Thornton Centre in St. Thomas when raining)	Coordinated with St. Thomas Seniors Centre and local walking groups	Weekly; Seasonal
Older Adult 55+ Swimming	Aylmer Family Pool; West Elgin Community Pool	YWCA	Day time, Weekly; Seasonal

Summary

Based on the cumulative key findings, a seasonal program guide specifically for older adults 55+ that includes programs in St. Thomas and Elgin County is an ideal approach, with sections for each municipality. A large font and pictures should be used to make the guide visually accessible for the target audience. The guide should also be made available in both digital and paper-based formats with distribution through the City and County websites as well as locations frequented by older adults (St. Thomas Seniors' Centre, libraries, community organizations, etc.). Advertisements can be included to highlight relevant businesses and offset the cost of the publication. A sample program guide is provided in Appendix H.

5. Future Considerations

Future considerations for the County include how to maximize awareness and participation in programs while better utilizing existing resources. Almost all rural counties reviewed in the e-scan had at least one seniors' centre located in a population centre in the county. Understanding how seniors' centres impact the regional programming mix is important because many (including the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre) receive stable annual funding to address policy priorities among the older adult population not just in the city/town itself, but also in the surrounding area. Furthermore, the older adult survey indicated that some County residents are already members at the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre. Table 11 identifies the number of older

adult survey respondents who indicated they were a member of the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre.

Table 11: Survey Respondents Who Are Members of the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre by Municipality

Municipality	Number of Members
Bayham	0
Central Elgin	18
Dutton/Dunwich	0
Malahide (including Aylmer)	2
Southwold	1
West Elgin	2

Expansion of seniors' centre offerings to rural residents or through rural-based programming is also supported in research by the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OACAO). Key findings include:

- 58% of older adult centres in Ontario are already serving rural dwelling seniors
- Virtual programming is becoming increasingly popular through the Seniors Centre Without Walls program offered by many seniors' centres across the province
- Seniors' centres identified rural older adults as a key target audience to grow membership
- Most centres offer fully accessible spaces (including the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre), which can be difficult to find in rural communities with older facilities

Table 12 highlights key attributes of the seniors' centres identified in the e-scan.

Table 12: Attributes of Seniors' Centres in Rural Counties

County (Location of Seniors' Centre)	Seniors' Centre in the County	Governance Model	Partnerships
Elgin County (St. Thomas)	St. Thomas Seniors' Centre	Independent, nonprofit	Private rentals (see St. Thomas report for hub model recommendations)
Grey County (Owen Sound)	Active Lifestyles Centre Grey-Bruce	Independent, nonprofit	Runs <i>Seniors Ask</i> phone service to connect seniors with resources across the county
Huron County (Goderich)	The MacKay Centre for Seniors	Independent, nonprofit	Runs <i>Seniors Centre Without Walls</i>
Dufferin County (Orangeville)	Orangeville & District Senior Citizens Centre	Independent, nonprofit	Private rentals

King County, NB	Sussex and Area Seniors Centre -- Hampton Senior Resource Centre	Independent, nonprofit -- Independent, nonprofit	None -- Partners with Rotary Club of Hampton for events
Colchester County, NS	Millbrook Seniors Centre	Independent, nonprofit	Hub model – Operated by Millbrook First Nations and used by other community organizations

The table shows that all seniors' centres reviewed operate as independent, non-profit entities, which aligns with OACAO findings that the majority (70%) of centres across the province have a non-profit governance structure with a board of directors, rather than as municipal entities overseen by the lower-tier governments (see OACAO, 2020). In the parallel older adult review conducted in St. Thomas, a new 'hub model' approach was recommended for the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre to increase community partnerships and cross-promotion of programs. A facility name change was also recommended to be more inclusive of the diverse population the centre serves.

Rather than simply encouraging County residents to access programs in St. Thomas, a partnership that utilizes County strengths would be more beneficial for all. For example, the proposed roster of programming suggests an outdoor walking group that is organized in partnership with the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre could draw members out to green spaces throughout the County. This aligns with the new hiking group initiative in West Elgin. Additionally, many seniors' centres offer bus trips paid for by members to cultural events, festivals, shopping destinations, or other excursions. Organizing trips to locations in the County could benefit local businesses and raise awareness of other County assets.

Summary

A partnership between Elgin County and the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre under the proposed hub model could be mutually beneficial given the access the seniors' centre has to the target demographic and to maximize resources across the regional programming and funding landscape. Potential areas for synergy include:

- Cross-promotion of programs and events to increase County program registration
- Participation in St. Thomas Seniors' Centre committees to promote information sharing and improved system navigation
- Use of technology and virtual programming to reach isolated older adults in the County
- Coordination of bus trips to locations or events in the County
- Collaboration on grants available to seniors' centres that target rural older adults

6. Facility Determination

The location and density of program facilities were analyzed using the program inventory and the survey responses to better understand how geographic context impact program choices and access. The geographic context of Elgin County is an additional factor to consider in program planning for the following reasons:

- Lack of transportation is a barrier to accessing programs in the County
- The linear shape of the County results in long distances between communities on the west and east ends
- The number and percentage share of the older adult population varies in each Local Municipality
- New recreation investment typically targets children and families (such as playground equipment, skate parks, and splash pads)
- Elgin County residents may travel to access programs or facilities in nearby urban centres, such as St. Thomas, London and Tillsonburg
- Conversely, urban dwellers across southwestern Ontario may travel to Elgin County for specific types of recreation and leisure activities, such as hiking, agricultural education, and water activities
- Urban sprawl in St. Thomas has resulted in greater fluidity of county residents utilizing St. Thomas programs and vice versa, especially for Southwold and Central Elgin residents

Number of Programs and Program Location Maps

The number of programs in the program inventory per Local Municipal Partner in comparison to the number of older adults 55+ are shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Programs from the Elgin County Inventory and Older Adult Population by Municipality

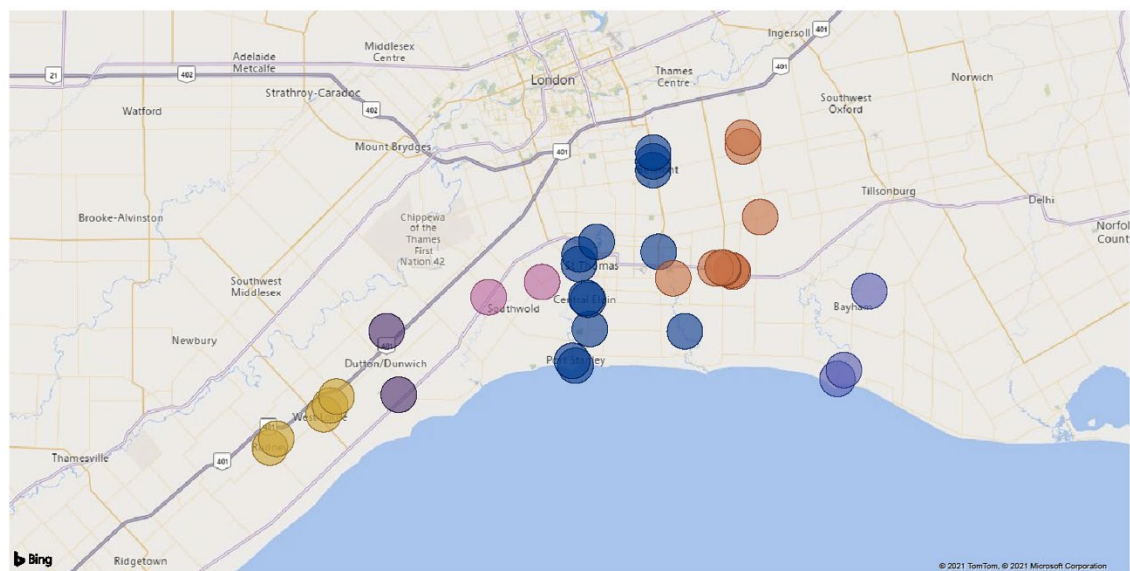
Municipality	Programs	Older Adult Population
Aylmer	21	2770
Bayham	5	2268
Central Elgin	18	5519
Dutton/Dunwich	13	1530
Malahide	3	2676
Southwold	6	1685
West Elgin	33	2241

The location of programs in the county according to the program inventory were mapped as show in Figure 4 and Figure 5.

Figure 4: Heat Map of Program Locations in Elgin County & St. Thomas



Figure 5: Map of Program Locations by Local Municipal Partner in Elgin County



The key geographic findings include:

- The highest number of programs occurred or were run out of West Elgin (33), Aylmer (21) and Central Elgin (18), respectively
- The fewest programs were found in Malahide (3), Bayham (5) and Southwold (6)

- In the west end of the County, programs are concentrated in Rodney and West Lorne
- In the east end of the County, programs were concentrated in Aylmer
- The largest number of older adults per Local Municipal Partner are located in Central Elgin and these individuals have access to programs in many communities, including St. Thomas, Port Stanley and Union (transportation barriers notwithstanding)
- Aside from public libraries, communities in Bayham lack access to programming

Program and facilities listings for other age groups (such as EarlyON early years programming) were reviewed to identify additional spaces across the County that could be used to offer programs or offered to community partners to expand offerings, as shown below in Table 14.

Table 14: Additional Program Locations and Facilities in Elgin County

Bayham	Central Elgin	Dutton/ Dunwich	Malahide & Aylmer	Southwold	West Elgin
Corinth Community Park (Brownsville) *green space	Lawton Park (Union) *vine maze, arboretum	Buttermilk Bog (Dutton) *trails	Steen Park (Aylmer) *arboretum	Fingal Heritage Park *accessible walking trail	West Elgin Nature Reserve (WestLorne) *organized nature walks
Vienna Community Centre *hall with kitchen	Turvey Park (Lynhurst) *pickleball	Sons of Scotland Park Trail (Dutton) *trails	Aylmer Wildlife Management Area *hiking trails	Fingal Wildlife Management Area *interpretive trails	Joe's Bush (Rodney) *hiking trails
Straffordville Park & Community Centre *hall, green space	Little Creek Park (Port Stanley) *outdoor fitness equipment	South Dunwich Hall (Wallacetown) *hall with kitchen, horseshoes	South Dorchester Community Hall Green Space (Springfield) *walking path	Southwold Earthworks Natural Historical Site *free, open to the public	Miller Park (West Lorne) *lawn bowling
Wind Energy Outdoor Kiosk (Port Burwell) *interpretive trail	Lake Erie Salmon & Trout Club (Port Stanley) *8 acres open to the public		Wonnacot Park (Port Bruce) *pavilion		Port Glasgow Trailer Park *municipally-owned recreation hall

Summary

Through analyzing the facility data with the results from the older adult survey and secondary research, the key recommendations of the facility determination are:

- Virtual and telephone programming should be explored

- Opportunities to support community organizations in need of free space should be explored, including venues that did not appear in the program inventory

7. Outreach Methodologies

Survey results indicated that increased outreach should be a key area of focus, including cross-promotion of activities among Local Municipalities and St. Thomas. The development of the program guide is one best practice to achieve this goal as 95% of survey respondents were interested in this resource. Additional outreach methodologies were examined to discover how organizations can best use resources to share information about program offerings, how older adults seek out program information, and how to reach socially isolated older adults who do not actively seek out program information.

Outreach Strategy

The customer decision funnel (used as a best practice in marketing management) helps illustrate the five key stages of outreach best practices (awareness, consideration, conversion, loyalty, and advocacy) as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Customer Decision Funnel



Table 15 shows the key findings related to each of the above stages of the funnel.

Table 15: Key Findings of Each Stage of the Customer Decision Funnel

Stage	Key Findings in Elgin County
Awareness	System navigation between municipalities and a general lack of partnerships is resulting in a disjointed programming landscape that is hard for older adults to understand.
Consideration	Health and wellness benefits are important motivations to the older adults across Elgin County who are already active in programs. Some survey respondents indicated they are traveling to St. Thomas or London to access programs but they would support a comparable local option.

Conversion	Streamlined registration instructions are needed that offer mix of in person, telephone, and online registration and payment options.
Loyalty	Elgin County older adults have a high degree of loyalty to local small businesses, organizations and venues. They would like to participate in more activities and unique experiences.
Advocacy	Word of mouth is the most popular strategy. No formal, community-based advocacy rewards systems exist.

Table 16 identifies the key information and activities relevant to each stage with supplementary suggestions for socially isolated older adults.

Table 16: Stages of the Customer Decision Funnel Applied to Programming

Stage	Key Information	Key Activities	Key Activities for Socially Isolated Older Adults
Awareness	Who – Target audience What – Topic of program Where - Venue When – Day, time, frequency	Distribute program guide; provide info on website, social media, flyer; promote referrals, word of mouth	<i>Distribute information where individuals already go (home, doctor's office, grocery store, basic needs services); set up volunteer-led community champion program or phone service</i>
Consideration	Why - Benefits to the individual for attending How – How to register/participate	Follow up on referrals; online retargeting/ads; mentor or buddy program	<i>Use inclusive messaging; use clear signage in hard-to-find locations; establish buddy system; help address barriers (transportation, finances, anxiety/nerves); Ask preferred registration method</i>
Conversion	Confirmation - Event ticket, payment confirmation, proof of RSVP	Clear verbal, written or digital confirmation	<i>Provide clear registration and payment options, confirmation and reminders</i>
Loyalty	Gather feedback – On the program, instruction, new ideas Personalization – Send registration reminder, info on similar programs Loyalty incentive – discount	Feedback forms after program; Send emails or make phone calls directly; online retargeting; offer promotions	<i>Personalized follow up; ask for feedback; provide snacks; offer loyalty card with benefits/discounts to local businesses; offer popular programs regularly to build habit</i>
Advocacy	Reward incentive – Refer a friend Give review/testimonial	Provide incentive program information in program guide, online, at venue	<i>Ask to participate on advisory committee or offer informal ongoing feedback; ask to be a mentor/buddy; ask how to make it more appealing and accessible</i>

Summary

The structure of recreation programming is fragmented in the County due to the nature of the lower-tier municipality system; therefore, clear communication and system navigation processes between the Local Municipalities and St. Thomas should be developed to help increase registration and participation. Specific strategies are needed to engage socially isolated adults and new registrants who may face barriers to participation but could benefit the most.

The idea of a loyalty or rewards programs that encourages older adults to visit new locations throughout the County could be explored as research indicated County residents are keen to support local businesses and organizations. Examples of rural loyalty or rewards programs that could be adapted to recreation and leisure include:

- Renfrew County, ON – Six townships partnering to offer a “Rural Rewards” card. 10 purchases made local businesses entitles the individual to a monthly gift card draw.
- “Island Comeback” (rural BC) - Gift card program sponsored by local economic development organizations to encourage patronage of local businesses impacted by COVID-19

The loyalty program could also be created in partnership with the St. Thomas Seniors’ Centre to encourage participation from urban dwellers. Examples of seniors’ or community centre loyalty programs include:

- Qualicum Beach, BC - Membership at Qualicum Beach Seniors’ Activity Centre entitles the member to discounts at local businesses and a ballot in the monthly draw for a Quality Foods gift card
- West Vancouver, BC – The Silk Purse Art Centre membership card offers discounts on concert tickets, passes, and discounts at community partner organizations
- Woodstock, ON – South Gate Centre membership card provides members with discounts at various local businesses

Marketing Plan

Results from the older adult survey indicate that older adults in Elgin County want to access program information using a combination of online and traditional marketing methods.

Therefore, the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) approach, in which all communications consistently support a central message, is recommended. Using an integrated approach will also help with system navigation across municipalities. The central message could relate to one or more of the themes raised in the review, including:

- Elgin County is age-friendly
- Elgin County offers unique venues and outdoor programming that can’t be found in the city
- Programs are inclusive and available for all levels and interests

Table 17 shows how each marketing channel of the traditional IMC mix can be used to support the dissemination of program information, including local examples.

Table 17: Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) Mix for Programming

Channel	Key Activities	Local Examples
Digital Communication	Use of websites, social media, digital ads via Google and Facebook	County, municipality and township websites and social media, partner websites and social media accounts
Traditional Advertising	Use of ads in local newspapers, radio	Villager publications, myFM, de Brigj radio, Elgin County Market, Elgin Life, etc
Public Relations	Promotion of new programs and facilities through earned media	Pitch story to local publications and radio
Sales Promotion	Offering promotions to encourage registration or attendance	Offer early bird registration rates or priority access for prior attendees or e-newsletter recipients
Personal Selling	Sharing program information on a one-on-one basis at venues and through partners	Visitors to public library venues, partner organizations, hub model in St. Thomas, etc.
Experiential Marketing	Promotion of programs at community festivals, information fairs, or through trials or 'pop up' events	Information and 15-min taster sessions at community events or on a 'pop-up' basis
Direct Response	Mailing information directly to residents	Sending information with other city publications or mail, such as bills or seasonal items

Summary

Older adults in Elgin County prefer to access program information through both online and offline channels. While online methods became increasingly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, access to internet is inconsistent throughout the county; therefore, a diversified approach is needed. This is supported by research from Statistics Canada that indicates internet use among the 65+ population doubled between 2007 and 2016 from 32% to 68% and is particularly important for reaching older adults between 65-69 (Davidson & Schimmele, 2019). Marketing communications should focus on a central theme or message that can be shared across platforms and by different stakeholders. This will reduce fragmentation and promote a more inclusive approach to programming. In addition to specific program information, marketing content should promote the hub model including where older adults in Elgin County can go (online and offline) to learn more about the broader programming landscape.

8. Final Recommendations

After reviewing all key findings and summaries from each deliverable within this study, the final recommendations are as follows:

1. Create diverse programming options, as outlined in the program roster, to meet the various needs and abilities of adults 75 plus due to increased population projections in Elgin County in the next 25 years.
2. Maintain promotion of fitness, sport, and leisure programs, and increase respite, social, and arts and culture programs.
3. Continue regular, daytime programming, but explore virtual programming (both online and via telephone) via partnership, such as with the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre.
4. Leverage the program inventory to develop new private and public partnerships and maintain the tool for referral and navigation purposes.
5. Strengthen Cross-County system navigation by convening an Older Adults Programs and Services Network made up of County stakeholders and older adults.
6. Identify resources that can be shared with community partners to enable new programs, such as indoor and outdoor spaces that can be made available for free.
7. Establish a partnership with the St. Thomas Seniors' Centre to cross-promote programming and develop new programs that align with older adult recreation interests and mutually benefit both parties.
8. Create a seasonal, activity guide for City of St. Thomas and Elgin County combined that focuses only on older adult 55+ programs and services, is available in larger font and accessible online and in print formats.
9. Develop an integrated marketing communications plan using a blend of traditional and digital strategies to increase awareness of older adult programs and services, focus on a centralize theme or messaging, and enhance participant engagement.
10. Consider a rural loyalty or rewards program that encourages St. Thomas and Elgin County older adult residents to try new activities located across the County.

Next Steps

Suggested steps for moving forward are the following:

1. Seek feedback and input from the Technical Working Committee and County and Municipal CAOs on the final report
2. Assess recommendations and determine top five priorities
3. Create an implementation plan and assign roles and responsibilities

FANSHAWE CORPORATE TRAINING SOLUTIONS

October 4, 2021

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