

CITY OF WATERLOO AGE-FRIENDLY ACTION PLAN 2025-2026

MAY 26, 2025



Territorial Acknowledgement

Waterloo is situated on the land traditionally cared for by the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe and Chonnoton Peoples, and the programs, services, initiatives and projects described in this report are carried out by people who work on these lands for the benefit of those who live here.

Many aspects of age-friendly planning build on the gifts and strengths of older adults that should be recognized as a living library and be understood as having value in our communities. However, it is important to acknowledge that age-friendly approaches have also grown out of a need to challenge ageism, in particular, negative stereotypes about aging and a societal failure to respond appropriately to the real needs of older adults.

It is important to remember that ageism is not built into all cultures and societies and was brought to this land with colonialism. Those of us who are settlers on this land have much to unlearn about what capitalism has taught us about who is productive and therefore has value or worth. We have much to learn from Indigenous Peoples about understanding and valuing the lived and living experiences of individuals over the course of their lives and how communities should respond with care, gratitude and respect for all contributions. In this way, it is our understanding that Reconciliation and age-friendly work are intertwined, and our hope that each informs the other.

With that in mind, those who have contributed to this report humbly acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge and philosophies of the Indigenous People with whom we share this land today. We commit to seeking out ways to deepen our own knowledge and put that knowledge into action.

Acknowledgements

Staff from across the City provided information about the many programs, services, projects and initiatives included in the Action Plan. Thank you to staff from the following teams:

- Active Transportation
- Capital Program and Project Management
- Communications
- Community and Neighbourhood Services
- Community Programming
- Community Planning
- Development Planning
- Legislative Services
- Office of the Chief Administrative Officer
- Parks, Forestry and Cemetery Services
- Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion
- Recreation Facility Programming
- Strategic Initiatives
- Volunteer Services

Volunteers and elected officials on the Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee provided valuable feedback on this Action Plan as part of the review and revision process.

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Overview

Age-friendly communities include systems and supports that promote healthy and active aging for their residents. While age-friendly initiatives typically focus on older adults, it is recognized that age-friendly communities benefit people of all age groups. The [Ontario Age-Friendly Communities Outreach Program](#) defines an age-friendly community (AFC) as:

“... a community where policies, services, and physical spaces are designed to enable people of all ages to live in secure and accessible physical and social environments. AFC’s contribute to good health and allow people to participate fully in society throughout their lifetime.”

What follows is an overview of age-friendly initiatives at the City of Waterloo. This includes an introduction to the worldwide network of age-friendly cities and communities, a network to which the City belongs. The report examines our own community by way of a summary of census data, and the vital role that age-friendly communities past and present have played in shaping the City’s work. The bulk of this report describes the work being done to meet the needs of older adults on our community. It describes how the City approaches age-friendly work and how various frameworks inform our planning. It goes on to provide an overview of past City initiatives and current work that staff are doing. The report concludes with an outline of the work planned for 2025 and 2026.

This document provides an interim Age-friendly Action Plan for the City of Waterloo. It will support continued progress during the period of corporate business plans and budgets that were already finalized for a three-year period from 2024 to 2026. It also fulfills one of the expectations of membership in the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities by showing the progress made and the plans to continue building on this progress.

This report lays the groundwork for a more fulsome Age-friendly Action Plan that will be developed alongside the City’s next Strategic Plan in 2027. A clear picture of where we have come from and what we are doing now will provide a starting point for discussions about what the City is doing well, where there are gaps, and recommendations to address those gaps. It is our hope that this report will be a useful tool for community members, elected officials and staff as we work together to develop a future Age-Friendly Action Plan.

The work outlined in this report has come to fruition thanks to the hard work and dedication of many people. This includes past and present Age-friendly Waterloo Committee members, elected officials and staff. Their continued commitment will ensure that Waterloo continues its work to build a community where older adults can live securely, enjoy good health and participate fully.

Introduction

This Age-friendly Action Plan for the City of Waterloo outlines what the City is doing to meet the needs of older adults. It describes what the City has done, what staff are doing now, and what is planned for the near future. While it is understood that age-friendly communities benefit people of all age groups, age-friendly initiatives at the City of Waterloo have typically focussed on older adults.

There is no single definition of older adults, nor is there one age at which a person becomes an older adult. As much as possible, individuals should be able to decide for themselves how they choose to identify. Organizations and service providers use different words and different ages to describe who is included and who can use their services.

At the City, we recognize that people in our community use the terms “seniors” and “older adults.” The City uses both of these terms to describe our programs and services. We do this to be sure that people can find the resources and information they need. Throughout this report, we use the word “senior” when referring to a program or service that uses that word in its title or description. In all other cases, we use “older adults” to be consistent with the World Health Organization.

The City’s recreation and leisure programming for older adults generally targets people age 55+. This aligns with the age set by the Government of Ontario for the Senior Active Living Centre (SALC) program, which provides funding to the City. Staff responsible for age-friendly planning, and members of the Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee, also consider older adults to be 55+. This report will note where a different minimum age applies. The demographics section is a notable example. When reporting on older adults, Statistics Canada uses age 65+.

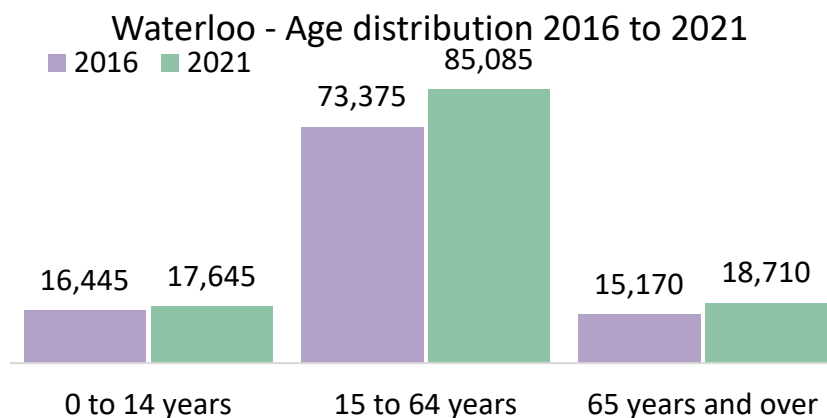
Demographics Summary

It is important to understand the older adult population in the City of Waterloo to provide them with the right services and supports. A demographic profile helps paint a picture of who is living in Waterloo – factors such as gender, income status, and education all play a role in shaping who they are. By understanding the unique identities and life experiences of older adults, we can continue to support their community engagement, aging in the right place and quality of life, while tailoring our work to address their needs. Although many City programs and services are tailored to older adults aged 55+, data used for this profile focuses on older adults ages 65+ and has been taken from the [KW4 Ontario Health Team’s 2021 Census Report](#) and the [City of Waterloo’s 2021 Census Bulletin](#), which reports on the [2021 Census](#).

Population

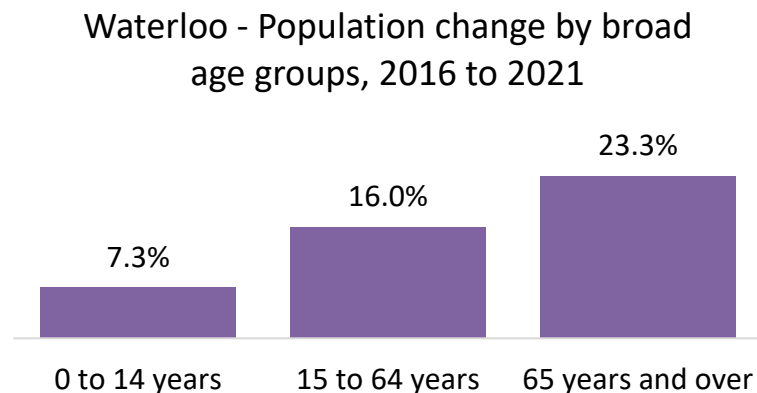
- The City of Waterloo has a population of 121,436 people, with an older adult population age 65+ totalling 18,710.
- Older adults aged 65+ make up 15.4% of the population.
- There are approximately 8,400 men and 10,315 women who are older adults. Statistics Canada says the non-binary population is small. Because of this, non-binary people are grouped with the other two gender categories to keep responses confidential.
- The degree that the older adult population is growing suggests that they will be the largest population group by 2030.
- Since 2016, the older adult population in the city has grown by 23.3%, compared to the 16% growth of the population aged 15-64 and 7.3% growth of the population aged 0-14.

Graph 1: Waterloo – Age distribution 2016 to 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Population.

Graph 2: Waterloo - Population change by broad age groups, 2016 to 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. 2021 Census of Population.

Below is a brief comparison of our older adult population to similar municipalities:

- As noted above, Waterloo has a population of 121,436, older adults account for 15.4% of the population.
- Kitchener has a population of 256,885, older adults account for only 14.7% of their population.
- Milton has a population of 132,979, older adults only account for 9.9% of the population.
- Kingston has a population of 132,485, and the highest comparative percentage of older adults at 21.1%.

Indicators of well-being

Three sets of data are examined below to look at well-being of older adults in Waterloo: Low-income cut off (LICO), education, and older adults living alone. LICO indicates how many people are spending more than average on things like food, shelter, and clothing. When someone spends most of their money on basic needs, it is hard to afford activities that improve well-being. Education statistics show how many older adults have finished high school or post-secondary education. This matters because higher education is linked to better financial stability and well-being. Finally, the number of older adults living alone is important because living alone can lead to isolation and loneliness, which may harm physical and mental health.

- LICO: Out of the total population, there are 12,240 people (10.2%) living at the low-income cutoff and 525 or 3.1% are older adults.
- Education: out of 16,940 older adults,
 - 2,765 (16.3%) had no certificate, diploma, or degree; and,
 - 9,820 (58.0%) had attained a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree.
 - Compared to Waterloo, 55.7% of Kingston's older adult population have attained a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree.¹
- Living alone: 3,794 (20.3%) of older adults 65+ live alone.

The City of Waterloo's aging population is an integral part of the community. It is important to keep these statistics in mind as we continue to support older adults through City programs and services. This way, we can tailor our efforts to address their unique needs and support their well-being and involvement in the community.

¹ Retrieved from Municipal Quality of Life Dashboard,
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2023025-eng.htm>, Feb 11, 2025

Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities

The [Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities](#) (GNAFCC or Network) was established in 2010 by the World Health Organization (WHO). It connects cities and communities around the world who are committed to promoting healthy and active aging. The City of Waterloo became a member of the Network in 2011.

Membership in the Network reflects a community's commitment to become age-friendly – it is not a designation or accreditation. Members commit to developing Action Plans as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.²

The Network uses a framework of eight physical and social domains to help communities set priorities. These eight domains are further defined in [section below](#):

1. Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Communication and Information
5. Community Support and Health Services
6. Civic Participation and Employment
7. Respect and Social Inclusion
8. Social Participation

Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee

In 2009, a group of dedicated community members from multiple sectors joined with elected officials and City staff to create the Mayor's Advisory Committee for Age-friendly Waterloo. This committee led engagement with community members to identify priorities for action. The group applied for membership in the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (Network) and the City became a member of the Network in 2011. This group was inspired by the words of geriatrician Bernard Isaacs, "Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young."

Since that time a central focus of the committee has been community engagement. This engagement helped create a vision of what an age-friendly community in Waterloo could be. It also brought the perspectives of older adults to City projects and initiatives. The Mayor's Forum, held annually from 2012 to 2019, was central to fostering these

² [The Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities: looking back over the last decade, looking forward to the next.](#) Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2018, (WHO/FWC/ALC18.4), p. 1-3)

connections with the community. The committee has also supported efforts to recognize the contributions of older adults in our community by actively participating in the City's Senior of the Year Award program. Other key committee milestones include:

- 2013 – Mayor's Advisory Committee for Age-friendly City: Report to the Mayor, was completed. This report included a summary of community feedback as well as recommendations for action.
- 2016 – The Mayor's Advisory Committee for Age-friendly Waterloo merged with the City's 55+ Advisory Committee to become the Age-friendly Waterloo Multi-Agency Committee.
- 2018 – Waterloo received the Ontario Age-friendly Community Recognition Award.
- 2018 – Age-friendly Waterloo Evaluation Report was completed. This document reports on a focus group held with community members and makes recommendations based on that feedback.
- 2024 – Age-friendly Waterloo Multi-Agency Committee becomes the Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee.

In its current role, the Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee advises City staff on healthy aging. This helps ensure the needs of older adults are represented in City policies, strategies, and significant projects and initiatives. Since 2023, the committee has provided valuable input on a variety of City initiatives including the following:

- 2023-2026 Strategic Plan
- Affordable Housing Strategy
- Development of a tool to assess accessibility of recreation and leisure programs
- Fire Master Plan
- Get READI (Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion) Plan
- Housing development at 2025 University Avenue
- Inclusionary Zoning
- Indoor Community Spaces Strategy
- Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCS)
- Training resources for the Welcome Ambassador volunteer roles
- Winter sidewalk clearing service delivery model

Age-friendly Waterloo Committee members have been strong advocates for service improvements to Grand River Transit (GRT) to address the needs of older adults. Committee members provided input on the most recent GRT Business Plan consultations. The Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee also has volunteer and staff representation on the Waterloo Region Age-friendly Network. This regional network brings together representatives from municipal older adult advisory committees and community-based

organizations that serve older adults from across Waterloo Region. The group provides opportunities for networking and hosts educational events for the community on topics related to health, housing and public transportation.

The committee is now entering a new phase as an advisory committee to staff, with support from the Community Programs and Outreach Services division. The City is grateful for all the foundational work done by past age-friendly committee members. City staff look forward to continued productive work alongside volunteers. Working together will help ensure that age-friendly principles are embedded into all that the City does.

Framework for Age-Friendly Planning

Age-friendly planning at the City of Waterloo is informed by the Network's eight domains listed above. The City's Strategic Plan also informs age-friendly planning. Numerous parts of the Strategic Plan align well with the Network's eight domains. This makes the City's membership in the Network an ongoing good fit. The City is also committed to using an equity lens in our age-friendly planning. This work aims to remove barriers and to ensure that older adults have access to the supports they need.

City of Waterloo Strategic Plan

The City creates a new strategic plan every four years with each term of Council. It identifies the City's top priorities and how we work towards accomplishing the goals and objectives.

[The current Strategic Plan](#) was approved by Council in 2023 and guides the City in its work until 2026. Community members, business and organization leaders, elected officials and City staff provided input.

The approved plan includes six guiding principles, five strategic priorities and 17 objectives. As noted above, a number of these align very closely with the eight domains identified by the Network. The connections between the two are outlined below.

Alignment of the Network's Eight Domains with the City's Strategic Plan

The following section defines the eight domains of age-friendly cities and communities and shows connections with the City's Strategic Plan. The definitions of the eight domains are those provided by the [Ontario Age-Friendly Communities Outreach Program](#). More information about the City's Strategic Plan, priorities and objectives is available on the City's [website](#).

1. **Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings:** Neighbourhoods that are safe and accessible enable outdoor activities and community engagement.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic priority: Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, diversity and inclusion
- Invest in accessibility and inclusion to enhance belonging.

2. **Transportation:** Access to reliable, affordable public transit and infrastructure supports for personal mobility and active aging.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Priority: Infrastructure and transportation systems
- Provide residents with resilient public infrastructure and sustainable transportation solutions

3. **Housing:** Appropriate, affordable housing options are available with a choice of styles and locations that incorporate adaptive features.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Priority: Complete community
- Strategic density and diverse housing options

4. **Communication and Information:** Information about community events and services are readily accessible and in formats that are appropriate for older adults.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Guiding Principle: Operational excellence
- Provide exceptional service that meets the needs of residents

5. **Community Support and Health Services:** Availability of various services to help promote, protect and maintain independence and mental and physical health.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Priority: Complete community
- Achieve a high quality of life for all residents

6. **Civic Participation and Employment:** AFCs encourage older people to participate more in their city's social, civic, and economic life.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Priority: Complete community
- Achieve overall community vibrancy

7. **Respect and Social Inclusion:** AFCs encourage community attitudes of respect and recognition to the role older adults play in our society.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic priority: Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, diversity and inclusion
- A commitment to reconciliation, justice, equity and inclusion for all

8. **Social Participation:** Participation in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities help older adults stay engaged and informed.

Connection to City Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Priority of Complete community
- Provision of recreational and cultural amenities
-

What We Have Accomplished

The City of Waterloo has provided programs and services to older adults for many years. This section identifies significant initiatives that were completed since joining the Global Network in 2011 and prior to the current term of Council. While not a comprehensive list of all of the work that has taken place in that time, the initiatives highlighted here are an important foundation for the work currently underway.

Older Adult Recreation Strategy

The Older Adult Recreation Strategy was implemented from 2015 to 2022. It focused on programs and services now overseen by the Community Programming team. Staff completed this strategy to respond to changes in the older adult population and prepare for future needs. This strategy focused on five key areas: program delivery, volunteerism, affordability, recreation facilities, and the growth of programs funded by the Local Health Integration Network (now Ontario Health). A vision for the Community Pavilion was first identified in this Strategy. The Community Pavilion is now home to many of the City's programs and services for older adults.

Older Adult Housing Directory

The Older Adult Housing Directory was published annually from 2015-2023. It shared housing options and supports for aging in place. The need for a directory like this was identified by the Age-friendly Committee. Content related to housing has now been shifted to the more comprehensive Ageing Well Waterloo Directory.

Alternatives to Long-Term Care and Housing: Environmental Scan

This report was prepared by University of Waterloo Planning students for the Age-friendly Waterloo Committee in 2020. The findings of this report have been used to support ongoing City initiatives related to Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs).

Community Pavilion and Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex (WMRC) Expansion

The Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex (WMRC) expansion was completed in 2022. The new Community Pavilion was completed in the same year. These buildings were designed with the intention to create accessible spaces for people of all ages to connect. These spaces were designed to be universal and accessible and barrier free. A universal washroom is included in the changerooms, and tactile wayfinding supports personal navigation. Accessible drop-off locations were prioritized, with clear signage at each entrance. Indoor and outdoor benches and seating were integrated around the Community Pavilion to support gatherings and pick-up and drop-offs. Specifically, benches were installed along the laneway leading from Father David Bauer Drive.

What We Are Doing Now

The City is working to become more age-friendly in all that we do. This is important whether the programs, services or facilities are designed specifically for older adults or people of all ages. Age-friendly work must also consider the unique needs of people of all abilities, genders and races to ensure the needs of all older adults are met. This ongoing work helps make our community more accessible and age-friendly.

This section describes key programs, services and initiatives that are underway for the remainder of the Council term. They were either started in 2023 or are longstanding programs that staff continue to provide. The initiatives are organized below using the Global Network's age-friendly domains. We recognize that one initiative could be connected to more than one domain. We have included each project or initiative under the domain we believe is most relevant.

Some services that are central to an age-friendly community are delivered by higher levels of government and non-profit organizations. City staff are committed to working with other service providers to help create a more age-friendly community.

Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings

Design of Public Spaces Standard

The City of Waterloo is committed to accessibility in the built environment. We recognize that accessible public spaces are age-friendly public spaces. The [Accessibility Standards Guide](#) applies standards for the built environment that meet or exceed the requirements of the Design of Public Spaces Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). These standards apply to developers, organizations and the City. Following these standards helps them to identify, remove and prevent barriers. Led by: Development Planning.

Universal Washrooms

Universal Washrooms include features such as automatic door openers, barrier-free toilets and sinks. They also include adult change tables. The City is standardizing ceiling track lifts as part of the configuration. The universal, autonomous washroom at 148 King Street South, enhances accessibility in the Uptown. This bathroom includes accessible and inclusive features, such as an adult-sized changing table, tactile map, grab bars and touchless soap and paper towel dispensers. As more opportunities arise, more accessible and inclusive washroom spaces will be added across the city. Led by: Capital Program and Project Management.

Warming, Cooling and Clean Air Spaces

The City's recreation facilities are available as warming and cooling centres during the hours they are open. These centres are needed because climate change continues to become more of a threat to our safety and well-being. They are an option to help support older adults and other vulnerable populations during extreme weather events. The City is committed to exploring the identification of additional warming and cooling and clean air spaces across the community. Led by: Strategic Initiatives.

Transportation

Assisted Snow Clearing Program

In 2023/2024, the City launched a new program offering free snow removal for eligible seniors and people with disabilities during the winter months. Snow removal services include sidewalks, driveway apron and windrows (snow remaining at the bottom of the driveway after a snowplow clears the street.) The program helps participants age-in-place by taking care of a task required of them as homeowners. It also ensures that essential services can access their homes and improves sidewalk accessibility for the public. Led by: Community Programming and Municipal Enforcement Services.

Grand River Transit (GRT) and Mobility Plus

Reliable and affordable public transit is a vital component of an age-friendly community. In our community, public transit is provided by the upper tier regional government. City staff are committed to working with GRT Transit Development as well as Mobility Plus staff to address the needs of older adults in the public transportation system. Multiple divisions maintain these connections.

Micromobility Program (Neuron e-bikes)

The City has collaborated with the Region of Waterloo to provide user-paid E-bikes, E-scooters, handcycles and adult tricycles. These devices provide an affordable and available mode of transportation. They help people get around Waterloo and the entire Region using active transportation. These devices are great for older adults because of their power assisted motor. Led by: Active Transportation.

Ride-a-Bus Workshops

The City works with GRT and the Waterloo Region Age-friendly Network to host annual Ride-a-Bus Workshops. These are free events that help older adults become comfortable with the transit service in Waterloo Region. GRT's travel training experts start with a training session. Participants then go on a bus ride where destinations of interest to older adults are noted. Led by: Community & Neighbourhood Services.

Road Safety Program

The City's Transportation Master Plan outlines the implementation of a road safety program. This program includes traffic calming to reduce traffic speeds and collisions. It also outlines road crossing improvements such as pedestrian crossovers. Led by: Transportation Services.

Housing

Additional Rental Units

The City is making it easier for people to build additional residential units (ARUs) as part of the Housing Accelerator Fund Action Plan. ARUs are smaller units within an existing house or an ancillary building (coach house). This would promote intergenerational living and provide support for older adults living alone. It would also create more affordable living options across the city. Led by: Development Planning and Community Planning.

Affordable Housing Strategy

The Affordable Housing Strategy was approved by Council in 2023. This strategy aims to help create a more affordable and accessible mix of housing over the next 10 years. Led by: Community Planning.

Affordable Rental Housing Grant Program

In 2024, the City awarded the first grants as part of the Affordable Rental Housing Grant Program. A grant of \$325,000 was awarded to Supportive Housing of Waterloo (SHOW) to help cover some of their costs. SHOW plans to add 31 affordable units to their existing building at 144 Erb Street East. These will be targeted toward low-income older adults. The existing building does not have an elevator. The addition will include an elevator to be shared with the existing building tenants, making the entire building more accessible. Led by: Community Planning.

Homelessness

Homelessness is a challenge that affects everyone, regardless of age. As a two-tiered system, the Region of Waterloo and City of Waterloo work together to address homelessness. The Region handles planning and delivering homelessness services within the community. The City works with the Region to connect people to services and supports in the community. City staff also work to target communications and work related to homelessness. They also sit on region-wide teams like the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness (PECH) Co-Creator Roundtable. The response to homelessness requires a collaborative approach. City staff are committed to working with community partners and other levels of government to address this challenge. Led by: Strategic Initiatives.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) are regular buildings or neighbourhoods where more than 30% of the residents are older adults. In 2024 we launched a pilot project to support older adults in NORCs, using federal and provincial grants. This project aims to build relationships, offer support, and empower residents to create their own programs. By providing services within these communities, we help older adults to age in the right place. The 2020 report, written for the Age-friendly Waterloo Committee, titled, Alternatives to Long-Term Care and Housing: Environmental Scan, was used to help lay the foundation for this work. Led by: Community Programming.

Communication and Information

Age-friendly Tech Program

Our use of technology will continue to grow as it becomes more advanced. The City's Age-friendly Tech program teaches older adults how to use technology in many ways. Lessons cover things like how to pair their hearing aids to their iPad and computer. Participants can also take iPads out on loan to practice their skills at home. Led by: Community Programming.

Ageing Well Waterloo Directory

The City publishes an Ageing Well Waterloo Directory on a bi-annual basis. This is a direct response to a recommendation in the 2018 Age-friendly Waterloo Evaluation Report. The directory is provided in print and electronically. It shares information on housing, home support, health services, recreation and leisure, ethnic and cultural support and more. The directory is being translated into Mandarin, Spanish and Arabic and will be distributed across several Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in the City. Led by: Community Programming.

Alternatives to Digital Services

While the City is providing more services in digital formats, we understand that not everyone is comfortable using a computer. Our digital services strategy includes a commitment to become "digital but not digital-only". We want to make sure residents still have in-person, telephone or print options as needed. Led by: Communications.

Interpretation and Translation

The City provides on-demand interpretation in-person and with the use of a smart phone through a third-party service provider. We offer interpretation in more than 200 languages, including American Sign Language (ASL). The City's website is also translatable into more than 100 languages. Led by: Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion.

Wellness Calendars

The City collaborates with local service providers to create a printed wellness calendar for older adults. The calendar contains health promotion and prevention information and a directory of local services that promote active and healthy aging. The daily health check section is especially helpful for older adults who live alone. Led by: Community Programming.

Community Support and Health Services

Ontario Health Funded Programs

The City maintains an agreement with Ontario Health to deliver community support services for older adults. These include a senior day program and home support services. We also recently expanded our services to include a hospital-to-home discharge support program. These programs seek to support aging at home and promote independence. This includes preventing unnecessary hospital or emergency department visits and premature long-term care admissions. The City is also a strategic member of the KW4 Ontario Health Team, collaborating on various projects that affect older adults. Led by: Community Programming.

Social Prescribing

Social prescribing is a community-based intervention that aims to help older adults experiencing loneliness and isolation. The Community Programming team works with local health teams to provide referrals to the program. Through this, we support older adults by providing one-to-one support and assistance. We also help them get connected to programs at our facilities. Additionally, we have peer volunteers, known as Welcome Ambassadors, at the Community Pavilion. They are there to offer a more supportive and meaningful connection to services. Led by: Community Programming.

Seniors Health Fair and Health Clinics

Community Programming staff lead an annual Seniors Active Living Fair. This free event is done in collaboration with the KW4 Ontario Health Team. The event covers topics like health promotion, chronic disease prevention, and aging in place. There are a variety of vendors, service providers and community organizations that attend. Staff and volunteers from the Age-friendly Waterloo Advisory Committee also share information about the work of the City. Community Programming staff also offer health clinics. These take place at the Community Pavilion at Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex. Here, staff coordinate services such as foot care and hearing tests. These clinics promote ongoing health and well-being for older adults across the city. They are also provided at an affordable cost. Led by: Community Programming.

Civic Participation and Employment

Older Adult Volunteerism

There are many older adults in volunteer roles across the City. They are essential to keeping our programs and committees running. Some volunteer opportunities, like the Welcome Ambassadors, are specifically for older adults. There are also volunteer opportunities that are for people of all ages but have high numbers of older adults filling them. These include roles that support the City's older adult programs, Parks and the City of Waterloo Museum. There are also many older adults that sit on Advisory Committees. Led by: Volunteer Services; Legislative Services.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Accessibility Legislation and Advisory Committee

The City recognizes that accessible communities are also age-friendly communities. The City strives to remove barriers wherever we can. This includes making goods, services and facilities accessible for everyone. The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) guides this work. Members of the Grand River Accessibility Committee (GRAAC) also provide advice and feedback. Led by: Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion.

Social Participation

Assistance Programs

The City offers assistance to those who cannot afford to pay fees for affiliated recreation, leisure, arts and culture programs. This is through our fee assistance leisure program. Successful applicants receive a \$400 credit per person per year. We also offer personal assistant for leisure activities cards (PAL) to residents with disabilities. This program allows residents with a PAL card to bring a helper to a program without paying extra. Led by: Community and Neighbourhood Services.

Community-based recreation groups

The City supports established groups in the community through our affiliation program and policy. Many affiliated recreational groups have a large number of older adults as members. Like all affiliates, these volunteer-led groups offer affordable activities. They also commit to being open and inclusive to all residents. Led by: Community and Neighbourhood Services.

Multi-Generational Programming

The City provides a variety of opportunities for multi-generational connection across our facilities. One example is our Exploring World Art Forms program. This is a multi-generational ethnocultural art program where people of all ages come together to learn. Our Senior Active Living Centres are also great places for connection. The many programs here aim to bring people of all ages together in an inclusive and welcoming space. Led by: Community Programming.

Seniors Active Living Centre

The City receives funding from the Ontario Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) for our older adult programs. This funding is through the Seniors Active Living Centres (SALC) Program. It helps us run programs at the Community Pavilion and Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex (WMRC). Because of the funding, we are able to connect with seniors in various communities. We are also able to make our programs and services more inclusive and accessible for all seniors. Led by: Community Programming.

Older Adult Leisure Programming

The City offers many affordable leisure programs for older adults at the Community Pavilion, Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex. Community members can take part in games like crokinole and euchre, participate in workshops, special interest art classes, and more. They can also attend educational presentations like Friday Flicks Travelogue and the Empowered Learners lecture series. Attendees can build social connections and community at these events and activities. Led by: Community Programming.

Older Adult Aquatic, Recreation and Sport Programming

The City offers a range of programs at the City, for all adults (18+) and specific programs for adults 55+. Older adults are encouraged to participate in any program that aligns with their fitness level. In fact, most participants in our weekday, daytime 18+ fitness classes are older adults. Our daytime 18+ shinny program also includes many older adult participants. Our older adult-specific programs include:

- **Aquatics:** Up to 40 drop-in water fitness classes per week schedules throughout the day as well as 55+ land swims and adult swim lessons.
- **Fitness Classes:** Twelve of the over 90 fitness classes offered at the City are for participants 55+, including yoga, Zumba, weight training and specialized fitness classes. Three weekly fitness classes offered online for those who cannot attend in person. Exercise workshops offered by a registered kinesiologist on healthy hips and balance include learning and movement portions.
- **Sports:** Slo-pitch program for adults 55+

These programs promote healthy aging and improve health outcomes for older adults. Led by: Recreation Facility Programming.

WOW Waterloo

WOW is a Seniors' Centre Without Walls telephone program for older adults. Participants can enjoy guest speakers, learn new skills and connect with others in the community. WOW Waterloo also offers programs to those who may be less comfortable using a computer and are not able to attend in person. Over 100 people participate in this program. Led by: Community Programming.

Our Plan for the Next Two Years

Over the next two years, the City will continue our work to make Waterloo a more age-friendly community. That includes continuing the work described above as well as introducing some new initiatives. This final section provides further details on new or

expanded City-led initiatives planned for 2025 and 2026, including further details about our next Age-friendly Action Plan.

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Facility Accessibility Design Standards

The City is working to develop a set of standards to ensure accessibility for renovations and future developments meets or exceeds the Ontario building code and the design of public spaces accessibility standard. This includes incorporating assistive listening technology into meeting rooms, tactile wayfinding strips in buildings, providing seating for rest, and much more. Led by: Capital Program and Project Management.

Improvements to multi-use pathways

The City is working on improving accessibility and safety of multi-use pathways at various locations, such as Davenport Road, Around Laurel Creek, and the WaterLoop Trail. This includes replacing sidewalks with a wider asphalt pathway, smoothing sidewalks, filling in holes and cracks, and upgrading road crossings. Led by: Active Transportation.

Inclusive and accessible spaces

The City's Get READI (Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion) Plan identifies the need for low-cost, accessible, inclusive, and age-friendly public spaces in Waterloo, which is why we are working to develop, promote, and identify opportunities for creating these spaces for Indigenous peoples and community members from equity-denied groups. Led by: READI.

Transportation

Accessible Connections

The ION is an essential form of public transit across the Region, which is why it is important to ensure that stations are accessible for everyone. The City will be reviewing accessibility improvements around stations to provide better access to the ION across Waterloo. Led by: Transportation Services.

Housing

Municipal Lands for Housing

Housing is a complex issue that requires several solutions, especially as the need grows across the community. The City is committed to developing new housing opportunities that are affordable and accessible. The City is negotiating with a proponent to develop over 1000 affordable and attainable housing units on a City-owned property at 2025 University Avenue. The City continues to explore additional opportunities to use municipal lands for affordable housing. Led by: Office of the Chief Administrative Officer.

Community Support and Health Services

Extreme Weather Events Resources

The City is working on information and resources for older adults to help them cope during extreme weather events. Community outreach and education for older adults on being prepared for emergencies of all types will provide valuable information that can be applied to extreme weather. Other resources are also being developed that include health messaging and the importance of seeking support and protecting oneself during these events. This is important because older adults may have more health challenges and smaller support networks, making them more vulnerable during extreme weather events. Led by: Strategic Initiatives; Fire Prevention.

New Acute Care Hospital

A new acute care hospital is being planned in the City of Waterloo. The City is currently supporting efforts to plan for the new hospital, primarily by ensuring appropriate infrastructure is available. Located west of Bearinger Road and Hagey Boulevard in the University of Waterloo Research & Technology Park, the acute care hospital is anticipated to open in 2034. The current proposal includes an urgent care centre and ambulatory care including an outpatient surgical centre at the current WRHN (Waterloo Region Health Network) mid-town location and expanded rehab and mental health services at WRHN Chicopee. Supported by the CAO's office, with input from multiple divisions across the organization.

Civic Participation and Employment

Voting Accessibility

As in the past, the 2026 municipal election will include accessible voting supports including magnifiers and accessible voting machines to help remove barriers to voting for people with disabilities and older adults. To meet legislated requirements, the City provides voting locations in retirement homes in which 50 or more beds are occupied. Led by: Legislative Services, Information Security and Privacy.

Engagement Opportunities

There are numerous projects planned over the next few years that will include resident feedback. The City wants to make sure we incorporate the ideas and opinions of older adults and include them in co-design opportunities as well. From assessing future housing developments, to consulting on strategies such as the Waterloo Park Strategy and the Sports, Recreation, and Leisure Strategy and the City website refresh, we are committed to engaging with older adults throughout the process. Participants in recreation and leisure programs will be able to provide feedback on our programs every year as part of a new responsibility of the SALC program. The City also offers opportunities through our Engage platform and we are developing honoraria and compensation practices to help remove barriers to participation. Multiple divisions.

Respect and Social Inclusion

Community Engagement Framework

The perspectives of older adults are vital in helping build an inclusive community. The City recognizes that there are many older adult perspectives. We are creating a framework for consulting with equity-denied individuals and communities of all ages. Led by: READI.

Respectful Behaviour Policy

The City's Respectful Behaviour Policy supports respectful interactions within City programs. It also supports respectful environments within City facilities. This policy is currently under review. A goal of the review is to provide more supports for effectively responding to hate. This includes ageism and ableism. Led by: Community & Neighbourhood Services.

Social Participation

Accessibility and Inclusion in Recreation and Leisure

Everyone should feel included and welcome to take part in City programs. To improve our programs, we are developing a tool to assess the accessibility of our programs and activities. Staff will also develop a plan to communicate this information. The goal is to help community members find programs and services that meet their specific needs. Led by: Community Programming.

Inclusion Support Services

The City will begin delivering one-to-one support for participants in our programs with its own team of inclusion staff starting in the fall of 2025. We have a long history of providing support to residents with disabilities through a purchase of service agreement with the City of Kitchener. Supporting participants in Waterloo programs with Waterloo staff allows us to provide excellent and expanded inclusion services to residents of both cities. We will offer accommodations that include program adaptations and one-to-one support provided by a trained staff person or volunteer. Led by: Community Programming.

Development of a New Age-friendly Action Plan

As noted in the introduction, this document is the City of Waterloo's interim Age-friendly Action Plan. It will support continued progress during the period of the current corporate business plans and budget finalized for a three-year period from 2024 to 2026. The City's next Age-friendly Action Plan will cover the years 2027-2030. This will align with the City's next Strategic Plan, business plans and budget cycles.

The next Age-friendly Action Plan will be developed with community input. Involving older adults in decision-making processes that affect them is a best practice identified by the

Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities. It also aligns with the City's commitment to effective public participation. Staff will develop an engagement plan to guide the work of connecting with older adults. We hope to learn more about what the City is doing well, where the gaps and challenges are, and ideas for possible solutions.

We will seek out opportunities to connect with older adults in a variety of ways. Opportunities will be both in-person and virtual. There will be informal conversations and more in-depth options like focus groups. We will collaborate with other staff teams who are already doing engagement on specific initiatives. We will explore ways to connect with older adults from equity-denied communities. As we move to action, we will explore opportunities for older adults to co-design initiatives with staff.

Over the next two years, the City looks forward to continued work on the initiatives and core programs and services described in this report. Staff also look forward to learning more from older adults about their experiences, with the goal of supporting an age-friendly city where people want to continue to grow and age in the right place.