

2023 Update

Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan





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AGE-FRIENDLY KITCHENER ACTION PLAN Progress Report

Together with Older Adults Services staff, the Mayor’s Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors (MACKS) is pleased to provide a report on the implementation of the Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan (2017-2022).

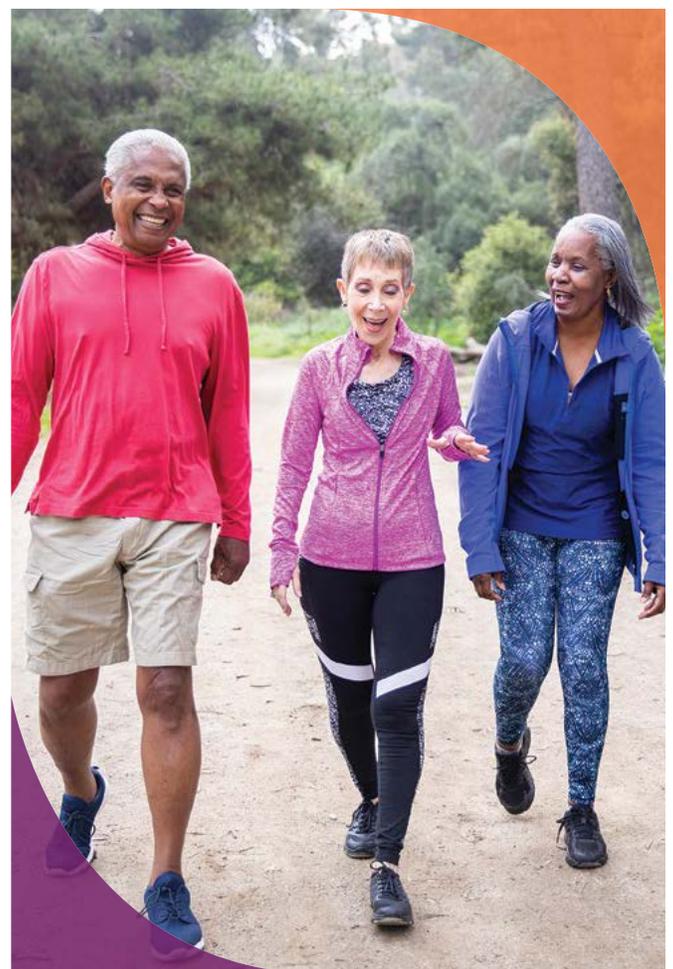
This serves as a status update for the Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan, highlighting outcomes achieved and of equal importance, next steps the City of Kitchener can take towards creating a community where Kitchener’s older adults can live well and age well.

What is an Age-friendly Community?

Age-friendly communities enable people to:

- **Age well in a place that is right for them**
- **Continue to develop personally**
- **Be Included**
- **Enjoy independence and good health**

In an Age-friendly community, programs, services, policies and the built environment are created in a meaningful way to support all residents to live active, socially engaged, and independent lives. Our vision is that all Kitchener residents can access the opportunities and programs that they desire to successfully “age in place”. The rich diversity of cultures, ages, abilities, and identities are equitably represented in civic engagement opportunities. Resident engagement is meaningfully planned and leverages the knowledge and experience of residents.



Kitchener's 55+ Population

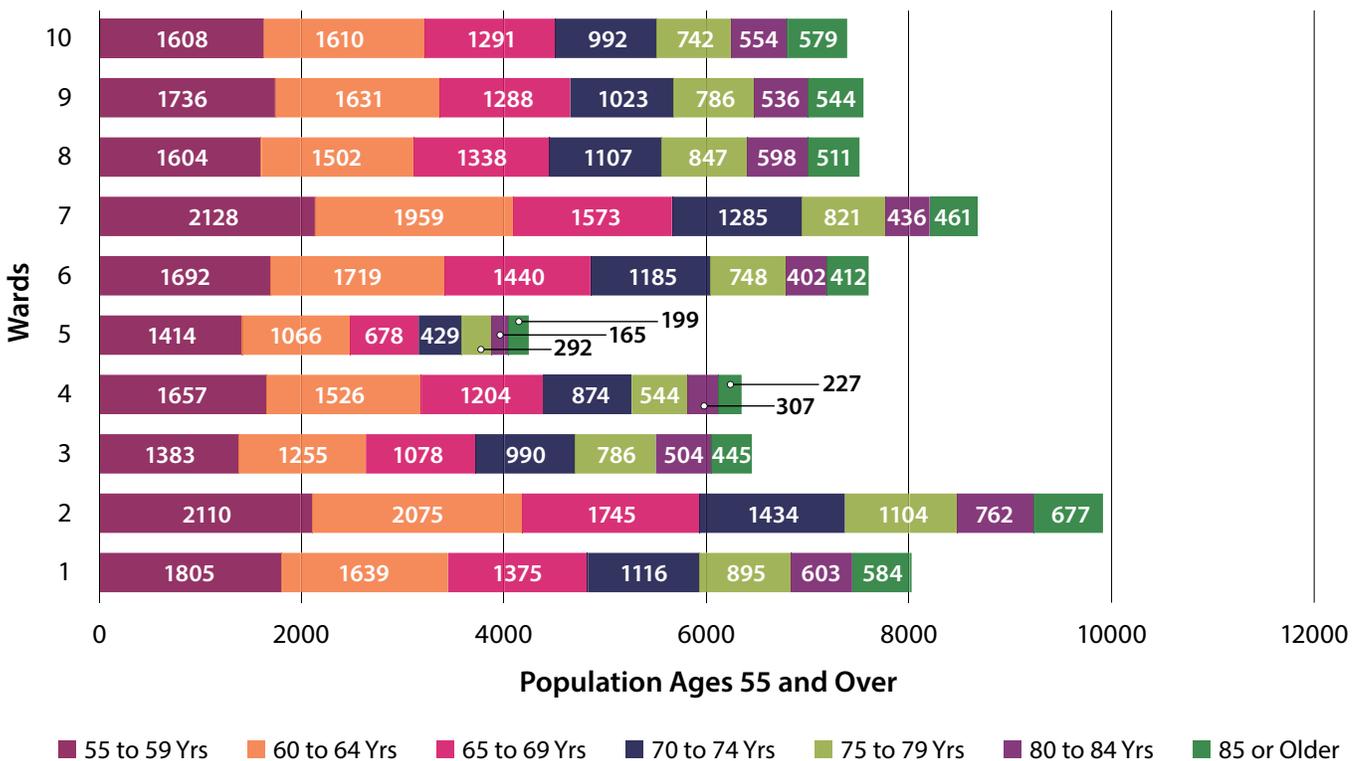
Kitchener is experiencing a demographic shift as an aging population. Between 2021 and 2036 projections indicate a 37% increase in the number of residents aged 55 plus with the most consistent annual growth for the demographic 90 and 100+.² As older adults are living healthier and longer lives than in the past, the City of Kitchener has a vital role in supporting an Age-friendly community through planning, program and service development, and meaningful engagement. These efforts will contribute to the well-being and independence of older adults and their ability to age in their neighbourhoods.

37% increase

in the number of residents aged 55... for the demographic 90 and 100+



Population Ages 55 and Over by Age Group and Ward 2022³



The Development of the Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan (2017-2022)

In 2015, the City of Kitchener was successful in obtaining a \$50,000 Age-friendly Communities grant from the Government of Ontario to develop an Age-friendly community action plan. A steering committee comprised of older adult volunteers, community partners, staff and City Council was formed to engage with older adults and establish priorities in preparing for and responding to a growing older adult population.

Based on community input, four Age-friendly priorities were established:

1. Accessible & Affordable Neighbourhoods
2. Access to Information
3. Belonging
4. Connectedness & Wellbeing



Community Engagement to Inform Action Plan

4 focus groups;
110 participants

5 Retirement
Homes
surveyed

7 Community
programs
surveyed

35 City of Kitchener
staff engaged

1200

people provided
feedback

Outcomes

An action plan including 19 initiatives under the 4 priority areas was developed and endorsed by City Council in April 2017. Implementation by City staff, in collaboration with MACKS and community partners have enhanced opportunities for Kitchener residents to age in place, including the following outcomes:

4
priority areas

19
initiatives

Accessible & Affordable Neighbourhoods

- **Program Access:** Expanded direct older adult programming to 8 additional Community Centres.
- **Virtual Programming:** Over 2,600 visits to newly developed virtual older adults' programs.
- **Public Transportation Awareness:** Partnered with the Waterloo Region Age-friendly Network and Grand River Transit to host Ride A Bus Public Transit Training workshop.
- **Free programs:** Launched 32 free introductory programs at 7 Community Centres in 2022. With additional funding for neighbourhood-based programs approved by Council in 2023 budget many more older adults will benefit by accessing additional programming in their neighbourhoods.
- **Leisure Access:** Council increase to Leisure Access (fee assistance) from \$300 - \$400 per person annually.
- **Sidewalk Accessibility:** Since 2019, there has been a 180% increase in the number of individuals supported through the Assisted Sidewalk and Windrow Clearing program, with 280 individuals registered in 2022. In 2021 City Council approved the addition of 4 staff for the proactive sidewalk enforcement program.
- **Housing Response:** Development of Kitchener's Housing for All Strategy in 2020, and Kitchener's Housing Pledge in 2023, Zoning by-law changes and continued collaboration with Provincial and Federal governments towards development of strategies to increase housing supply capacity.



Improved Access to Information

- **Tech Connects Program and device lending library:** With the support of a \$25,000 grant in 2021 from the Government of Canada New Horizons for Seniors Program, and in partnership and Bits & Bytes Computer Club, 519 older adults participated in a 193 free technology training courses.
- **Older adult's webpage:** A dedicated older adults webpage was developed in 2020 on the City of Kitchener's website to create a one stop location for older adult program and service information.
- **Educational Workshops:** Over 130 workshops offered for older adults at community centres and virtually since 2018, including topics such as filing income tax, nutrition and fall prevention.
- **City-Wide Multi-language Interpretation Service:** Launched in 2019 to provide interpretation in over 200 languages for telephone and in-person inquiries, ensuring a more consistent and equitable customer experience for all.

Belonging

- **Responsive Neighbourhood Based Programs Survey:** Data received through over 500 digital survey responses and from in-person engagement with over 200 older adults through focus groups and in-person surveying, will inform the development of additional programs that respond to the specific needs and interests of older adults in their neighbourhoods.
- **Connected At-Home Program:** 1,477 Activity Kits delivered, over 21,800 social support calls placed. These programs have continued post-pandemic to serve those who remain socially isolated due to mobility or health challenges.
- **Golf Fore Life:** Created first dementia friendly golf program in North America in partnership with Kitchener Golf. Since launching in 2018, over 20 golfers have participated in more than 800 rounds of outdoor golf and 700 rounds of golf at an indoor facility.
- **Community Engagement:** Extended outreach in the community by initiating connections with older adults currently underrepresented in older adult programs and services, resulting in more diverse representation on MACKS, and an invitation for staff to co-create programs with ethno-cultural community groups.



Connectedness & Wellbeing

- **Social Prescribing:** In partnership with the Older Adult Centres of Ontario (OACAO), older adult services staff provide social prescribing services through the Links2Wellbeing program. This program receives referrals from health care professionals for older adults who are experiencing loneliness and isolation and connects them with city programs and services to support their needs.
- **Kitchener Senior of the Year Award:** Co-hosted annually by MACKS and the Mayor's office to celebrate outstanding contributions of older adults nominated from the community. Over 70 residents nominated since 2018.
- **Continuum of Supports** provided through specialized programming such as:
 - **Sharing Dance:** an adapted dance program offered in partnership with Canada's National Ballet School, offered at 8 Community Centres as well as virtually, with over 100 registrants to date.
 - **Adult Senior Day Program:** supports over 100 different residents experiencing health and age-related changes.
 - **Grief Support:** offered weekly at Rockway Centre providing peer support for those who have lost a partner.

Age-friendly Kitchener Collaborative Partnerships

- **Age-friendly Recognition Award:** Kitchener's Age-friendly Action Plan received the Age-friendly Recognition Award from the Government of Ontario in 2018.
- **Development of Age-friendly Decision-Making Lens:** Created by MACKS in 2019 to embed an age-friendly perspective into City-wide planning, policy development and daily work.
- **Engagement with MACKS:** On over 50 City of Kitchener initiatives and projects, as well as ongoing representation to 5 City of Kitchener Project Steering committees since 2017.
- **Staff and volunteer collaboration** with the Older Adult Centres Association of Ontario (OACAO), the Southern Ontario Age-friendly Network (SOAFN), KW4 Ontario Health Team (KW4CHT), Waterloo Region Older Adult Strategy Steering Committee and Community Member Network, and the Waterloo Region Age-friendly Network
- **Grant Applications:** Older Adult Services staff have applied for several provincial and federal grants and have received \$300,000 in funding to support a variety of initiatives

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic resulted in 8 months of in-person programming restrictions between 2020-2022. This presented both challenges and opportunities for the City's Older Adults Services team. Staff adapted quickly and found new ways to deliver programs and services to help reduce social isolation among older adults.

New virtual and at-home programs were developed to assist those experiencing isolation. To support these new programs, Older adult services staff were redeployed, resulting in some Age-friendly Kitchener actions items not being operationalized due to changing priorities related to the pandemic.

While the City of Kitchener was able to adapt and maintain most programming throughout the pandemic, some community partners were unable to do so, and have yet to return to pre-pandemic programming levels. As a result of fewer community options being available, demand has increased significantly for City-delivered programming, particularly inclusion supports for adults living with disabilities to attend daytime programming. To meet the growing demand, additional resources are required for staffing, education, and training for instructors and volunteers to successfully support participants with more complex needs.

Although the pandemic paused some AFK actions, it was a catalyst for developing new programming to engage with those who might have previously experienced barriers to participation by serving them in new and creative ways.

Innovative programs and services launched by the Older Adult Services team in response to the pandemic included:

135 older adults enrolled in Connected@Home Program

1,477 activity kits delivered to isolated older adults

193 Tech Connects classes with 1,410 participants and launch of device lending library

21,800 social support calls to over 390 older adults

7,400 older adults attended virtual fitness, music and social programs



Action Plan Learnings

1 Changing Community Priorities

Priorities identified at the beginning of the 5-year action plan shifted as a result of changing demographics and emerging community needs. New priorities arose such as affordability and improving access to programs and services. As a result, some AFK action items were paused so staff could respond to these developments.

2 Grant Funding Limitations

While grants have enabled staff to deliver innovative and needs-based programs (such as Golf Fore Life and Kitchener Tech Connects), additional consideration should be given to sustainability through partnerships and community collaboration so programming can extend beyond the life cycle of grants.

3 New Ways of Connecting Socially

As participants adapted to home-based and virtual programming during the pandemic, requests to keep these programs running are ongoing due to changes in health, ease of access, and flexibility to participate anywhere. While many have returned to in-person programming, statistics continue to demonstrate a need for home-based programming such as virtual fitness, education workshops, reading groups, and home-delivered activity kits.

4 Evaluation

Dedicating resources to formal evaluation in advance of strategy development would allow for a more systematic approach to both ongoing and final review.

5 Impacts of Pandemic

As a result of the pandemic, older adults were required to change the way they participate, communicate, and engage with others and their communities. The pandemic also highlighted the digital divide experienced by many older adults, along with inequities in accessing services experienced by those living with disabilities, those living with lower income, and those who are part of marginalized and vulnerable populations. Continued planning is required to prioritize these needs.

6 Ongoing Commitment

Age-friendly planning is not limited to a 5-year plan. An ongoing commitment of resources is needed to ensure an age-friendly approach is incorporated into all planning, policies, and daily work across the corporation. With additional funding that was approved by council in the 2023 budget, older adult programs will continue to expand to additional Community Centres. This will support needed social connections and programs that are intentionally designed to respond to the varied needs and interests that exist within particular neighbourhoods.

While many outcomes have been achieved both within the Corporation and within our community to improve our Age-friendliness, continued focused efforts are still required as our programs and services will continue to be impacted by an aging population due to increased demand, the changing and varied needs of this population and many older adult newcomers joining our community.

Where do we go from here?

As the Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan was developed through a one-time \$50,000 Age-friendly Community Grant from the Government of Ontario, next steps will be achieved through existing resources, any additional grant opportunities, and community partnerships to:

- **Develop culturally inclusive programs:** Based on recent engagement with a variety of cultural groups, a need was identified for culturally inclusive programs and services. To support the successful development of these programs staff will need to work closely with various groups to co-design these programs to ensure they are delivered in a manner that is culturally safe and inclusive.
- **Continue to expand programs:** Community engagement results from the 2023 Neighbourhood-based Older Adult Program Survey will be used to inform and develop programs and services at the Neighbourhood Level, responding to the unique needs of those communities.
- **Development of a resource plan** that will support the expansion of older adult programs within neighbourhoods including associated budget, staff resources, partners and stakeholders. Increased staff resources are required to continue expanding neighbourhood-based older adult programming. Also, with a return to in-person programming, staff are often performing double-duty to maintain virtual programming, in addition to coordinating in person
- **Expand program evaluation processes** including demographic data, to understand if participation is representative of the community, and to help identify barriers and opportunities to make programs more inclusive and welcoming for all. Evaluate new pandemic programming in conjunction with the return of pre-pandemic programming to help align staff resources to support various needs.
- **Continue to partner with staff** across the corporation to promote a positive image of aging and to ensure that an Age-friendly perspective is incorporated in policies, processes, and daily work.
- **Continue staff and volunteer participation** with the Waterloo Region Age-friendly Network to collaborate and respond to issues impacting older adults which fall within Regional responsibilities (e.g. Transportation and Housing).



Acknowledgements

The City of Kitchener thanks those who participated in the project's community engagement and on the project steering committee. We also extend our appreciation to the Province of Ontario, whose funding provided support for the development of the Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan. Last, a very special thank you to the members of the Age-friendly Kitchener steering committee and to the volunteers of the Mayor's Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors for your collaboration, and continued commitment to championing the vision of a community where we can all live well and age well.



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