



Manitoba Forum on Aging and Disabilities Report

March 12, 2008

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**For: The Province of Manitoba's
Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat and
Disabilities Issues Office**



The report can also be obtained by e-mail at dio@gov.mb.ca or online at www.manitoba.ca/dio. This document is available in multiple formats.

March 30, 2009

Greetings,

We are very pleased to provide your organization with a report on The Manitoba Forum on Aging and Disability, 2008.

The forum was organized by Manitoba's Disabilities Issues Office and the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat to assist in creating a dialogue and on-going networking between organizations focusing primarily on people with disabilities and seniors. Organizers believe the two population groups have much to gain from exchanging experiences.

As you may be aware, the Manitoba Government has embarked on an age friendly journey as well as a strategy to support full citizenship of people with disabilities. These two initiatives have a mutual goal to respond to the needs of people of all ages and abilities so they can participate more fully in the community including, making our society healthy and vibrant.

The attached report has been prepared to provide stakeholders across Manitoba with a useful and interactive tool. It is intended to help community organizations build on the discussions that took place. We hope you find the report a valuable resource and that it stimulates discussion.

Kind regards,

Dave Martin
Executive Director

Patti Chiappetta
A/Executive Director

MANITOBA FORUM ON AGING AND DISABILITY REPORT, 2008

The Manitoba Aging and Disability Forum was organized by the Disabilities Issues Office and the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat of the Province of Manitoba. This report has two purposes:

1. Give an overview of the discussions that occurred.
2. Encourage continued dialogue that began at the forum.

We invite you to read and share this information with your organization or group. The questions following the description of each issue are designed to help your group think about how these issues affect them, and how to brainstorm for solutions.

Background: Aging and Disability across Canada

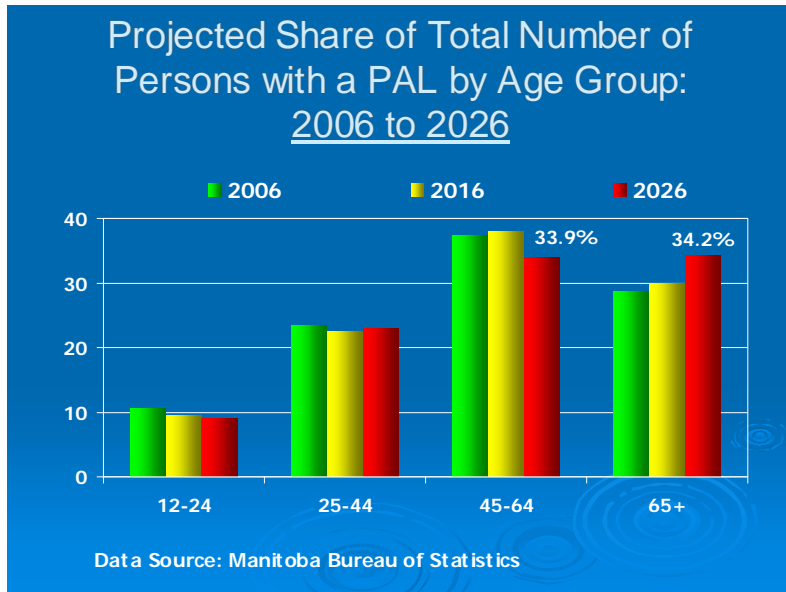
An increasing proportion of Canada's population is entering the seniors years, defined as 65 plus. Among this group, there are more individuals with long-term disabilities than ever before, and there are many people who are "aging into disability."

We know that there is an important link between age and disability, but generally the two groups remain separate. Young people with disabilities identify with people their age. Similarly, seniors think that the physical changes they are experiencing as they age are part of the aging process. **But what about people who are aging who develop disabilities? And, what about people with disabilities who are aging?**

"Seniors... have a higher chance of developing limitations, but even in their wise age there's reluctance to recognize they might now actually have a disability and be joining that other community. When I asked seniors...what they need they identified benches along walking paths, but they couldn't see it as a disability issue. We don't have to give it a name. It's about the need."

~ Forum Participant

According to Statistics Canada, in 2001 there were 259,500 Manitobans who were seniors (age 65+) and 163,340 Manitobans with disabilities. The overlap group – Manitobans who were seniors and had disabilities – was 91,070. Among Manitobans with disabilities, 56% of them were seniors.¹ Statistics Canada reported in 2006 that almost 16% of Manitobans have disabilities. This number is expected to rise with an aging population. Furthermore, as the population ages, the size of the overlap group is predicted to increase by up to 50% – by 2026 more than 28% of Manitobans will have disabilities, and of those, two-thirds will be seniors.



Statistics Canada’s Participation and Activities Limitation (PALS) post census survey is the most comprehensive data we have regarding occurrence of disability. For the purpose of PALS, “persons with disabilities are those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical or mental condition or health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities that they could do.” Source: Canadian Community Health Survey, Statistics Canada.

¹ Aging and Disability in Manitoba:

In preparation for this change in population, the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) conducted a research project on *Aging with a Disability* focusing on Manitoba, British Columbia and Nova Scotia. The aim was to identify the needs and service gaps among people with long-term disabilities who are aging. The results were presented at an Inter-Provincial Forum on Aging and Disability in Winnipeg on March 10-11, 2008.

One key finding of the Inter-Provincial Forum was that while having a disability and getting older costs money, there are not enough programs to help with these costs. The study also showed that government health and social service programs often view people with disabilities and seniors as two different groups. This sometimes means that different programs and policies are developed, even when they are designed to meet the same or similar needs.

“The logistics in terms of the demands of the larger demographics bubble means there’s going to be a rush for greater resources in terms of more accessible housing and other options like power doors, better bus services and more benches.”

~ Forum Participant

The Inter-Provincial Forum also highlighted the gap in research about the support needs of people with disabilities when they grow older and still want to remain in the community. Participants agreed that people with disabilities and seniors have certain issues in common:

- Language, Identity and Attitude
- Home Supports and Care Giving
- Transportation
- Housing
- Income and Poverty

To understand the impact of these issues in Manitoba, the Disabilities Issues Office and the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat planned the *Manitoba Aging and Disability Forum*.

Manitoba Forum on Aging and Disability

The Disabilities Issues Office and the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat invited 21 seniors groups and 32 disability organizations and consumer agencies to a one day forum held in Winnipeg on March 12, 2008. Thirty eight (38) people participated in the event, along with sixteen (16) others including group leaders, speakers, a facilitator, and the forum organizers.

The program for the day was designed to be equally balanced between *providing* information presented by experts and *exchanging* ideas among participants. The planners of this event used a “double lens approach”² to look at issues and services. This is to say that when you look at programs and policies, you are thinking of both seniors (one lens) and people with disabilities (the second lens).

The morning began with information about new studies and projects for seniors, people with disabilities, and seniors with long-term disabilities. Olga Krassioukova-Enns and Ken Cassin presented the research by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies on disabilities and seniors. James Hunsberger provided a personal perspective called, “Policy Dreams and Practical Realities of Aging with Disability.” Three additional presentations described program models that respond to the concerns of both seniors and people with disabilities, including:

- Peer Support Program by Doug Lockhart of the Independent Living Resource Centre in Winnipeg;
- Functional Needs Approach used in emergency management by Yutta Fricke of the Disabilities Issues Office; and,
- Age-Friendly Communities by Dr. Verena Menec of the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba.

The afternoon was dedicated to hearing from the participants representing the communities of seniors and people with disabilities in Manitoba. These two groups talked about their mutual goals, needs and concerns. They also discussed whether existing programs met these needs, and which gaps were the most important to address. Finally, they explored the idea of seniors’ groups and disability organizations working together to help each other.

Participants were divided into five discussion groups, which each had the opportunity to work with the five issues identified by the Inter-Provincial Forum on Aging and Disability. The small groups rotated from issue to issue, building on the responses of the previous group. A set of progressive questions were used to go from a very broad vision to an increasingly specific view of each issue and possible solutions.

² A description of the double lens approach can be found in *What About Us? Aging with Disability and Dignity*, a report by the Independent Living Resource Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia in March 2008.

Website address: www.ilrc-halifax.ns.ca/news/aging.doc

The one day forum was a first step in inviting seniors and people with disabilities to discuss what they have in common and what they experience differently.

How can your group continue the discussion?

1) Language, Identity and Attitudes: Forum Discussion

“Ageism is rampant in society and the one thing, no matter where you are in the world, you come up against is the attitude or distorted view of beauty and youth. If in society you’re not perfect, young and attractive, you’re pushed to the outside.”

~ Forum Participant

Forum participants said that communication problems challenge seniors and people with disabilities. Some people learning English later in life need the cooperation of others in order to listen and speak. Some people experiencing hearing loss find it harder to understand important information and to visit with friends. Both of these problems discourage participation in the community. In the worst situations, people stay “shut in” their homes because they can’t hear or do not understand.

People at the forum said that the language used in official documents and government information is sometimes difficult to read or understand. If people do not understand these terms, they feel uninformed and isolated.

Opportunities for government to consider

- Make more translators available, including American Sign Language and Plain Language that uses simpler sentences to describe complicated ideas.
- Increase the flow of information with web-based communication and public education.
- Offer government materials in multiple languages, and train workers to be sensitive to cultural issues, especially to help the growing number of new Canadians.
- Include more representation and consultation of people with disabilities and seniors.

Participants thought that seniors and people with disabilities sometimes feel like they are not as valued as other members of society. They get the message that they are a “burden” or that they don’t have anything valuable to contribute. This lack of respect can happen in many places - when meeting with workers from health care or social services, among family members and neighbours, or in the media. Seniors and people with disabilities do not like to be seen as frail or feeble; they want to focus on their abilities instead of limitations.

Participants thought that society needs more role models of people with disabilities and seniors who are offering visible and important contributions. One idea to promote respect is intergenerational mentorship programs. It would also be good to see more people with disabilities and seniors represented in the media and advertising.

Opportunities for the community to consider

- Include more representation of seniors and people with disabilities in civic groups, in community organizations, and networks.
- Seniors organizations and disability groups should find opportunities to come together and discuss some of the false ideas they may have about each other.
- Seniors organizations and disability groups should create educational campaigns that teach the larger community about respect, change of attitude, and usage of proper language.

“What seniors don’t see is that not accommodating their own disability actually limits their activities – like they’d rather struggle walking in pain than get in a wheelchair because, ‘I don’t want people to think I’m that bad off’.”

~ Forum Participant

What Do You Think? Questions for your group to consider

- *What does the word “seniors” mean to your group? What does the term “people with disabilities” mean to your group? Does your group identify with either term?*
- *Have people in your group experienced discrimination based on age or disability? Why do you think that happens? (Don’t spend too much time discussing what happened; rather look for reasons why you think it occurred.)*

- *How have you reacted when you've experienced discrimination? Was your response effective? If it was, why? If it wasn't, what would you do differently next time?*
- *Sometimes when we experience discrimination, we feel very isolated. Go back and remember what happened, but this time imagine having the supports you need to make it a more positive experience. What supports would they be? Why would they make a difference?*
- *Think about joining with other seniors and/or disability organizations and find out about all the supports you could draw on together when you experience discrimination. What kinds of actions could you take to change language and attitude barriers? Who would you talk to? What would be your plan?*

2) Home Supports and Care Giving: Forum Discussion

Many people with disabilities and seniors need home supports and care giving to remain in the community. Participants said that the ability to get adequate care can be a huge challenge. Home care hours are limited and some families cannot provide the additional support. Many seniors and people with disabilities cannot afford to hire someone for extra help. Sometimes, the reason people have to leave the community and go into long term care facilities is not so much because they are sick, but because they cannot get the support they need to function in their homes.

Seniors and people with disabilities at the forum said that they are not always aware of the government services available or the resources in the community that could help them. Many are unaware of more flexible programs such as specialized medical care in the home or Self-Managed Care (a program that allows a person with a disability to take responsibility for hiring and managing the non-professional services needed to live independently in the community).

Home supports and care giving offer more than helping someone with their physical needs. People with intellectual disabilities, Alzheimer's or dementia may find their social networks growing smaller as they age or their disability progresses. Human interaction is very important.

Opportunities for government

- Ensure well-trained, consistent, person-centred home support for people to remain in the community.
- Increase Aboriginal and ethnic diversity among home care staff.
- Introduce educational opportunities for family care givers to learn and share information about different home support models.

- Create provincial standards of care, and develop ways to “age in place” within one’s community.

What Do You Think? Questions for your group to consider

If you are from a seniors group, you might want to invite members of a disability group (or vice versa) for an informal coffee discussion to compare answers to the following questions:

- *Do you want to remain living in your community? Why is or isn’t that important to you?*
- *Are there any challenges that might make it difficult for you to live in your community? What are they?*
- *What do you need to stay in your community?*
- *Do you know if you can get what you need to stay in your community? How or where would you get what you need?*

3) Transportation: Forum Discussion

Both seniors and people with disabilities recognize that having accessible transportation is very important. A good transportation system helps people to avoid loneliness, feeling “shut in,” and losing important social contacts. Some seniors have difficulty making the switch from *being drivers* to *being driven*. People with disabilities active in the workforce find it frustrating if transportation is unreliable.

Participants said that services such as Handi Transit are offered on a priority bases. For example, social trips, including volunteer work, are given a low priority. For people with disabilities and seniors in rural areas, transportation services are even more limited. Furthermore, increasingly assisted living units are being located in outlying areas of cities and town in Manitoba, which means there will be a greater need for more urban accessible transportation.

“Seniors are seen as being enemies in competing for access to programs. We need to dialogue together to combine forces so we stop competing. They have to encourage younger people with disabilities to bring concerns together with seniors.”

~ Forum Participant

The current transportation policies are set up in such a manner that seniors and people with disabilities feel they need to compete for services. The participants discussed ways to improve the situation.

Opportunities for government

- Increase the number of Handi Transit buses in urban areas.
- Make more regular buses “accessible” (in other words, they are easy for people in wheelchairs and others to get on and off).
- Reduced taxi fares for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Increase the options for accessible long distance transportation, such as planes, trains and buses.
- Introduce reduced fare passes for people who are assisting people with disabilities take the bus.
- Locate more accessible transportation near assisted living facilities.
- City planners should consult with seniors and people with disabilities as they design neighbourhoods and commercial areas.

What Do You Think? Questions for your group to consider

If you are from a seniors group, you might want to invite members of a disability group (or vice versa) for an informal coffee discussion to compare answers to the following questions:

- *Do you use public transportation? If you do, how often do you use it? If you don't, why don't you?*
- *How important is it for people in your group (seniors or people with disabilities) to have public transportation?*
- *How important is it for people in your group to have fully accessible public transportation? Do they get what they need? If they don't, what are some solutions to that problem?*
- *What are the most important things that planners of public accessible transportation should think about? Why are these ideas so important?*

4) Housing: Forum Discussion

“There’s been all this talk about more visitable housing so we can continue to visit friends and family wherever they may live, not just adjustments to personal homes. Accessible housing for people who are looking to buy down, buy smaller, like move from that 2 storey house to a bungalow or condominium.”

~ Forum Participant

People at the forum said that the lack of affordable and accessible housing was a problem in their communities, particularly in safe areas. Participants said that finding accessible housing was very challenging in rural areas, and this made it difficult and unsafe for people who might already be isolated. Some people are forced to leave their home communities and move to larger urban centres in order to have accessible housing. Others may have to move into institutional settings. This does not necessarily occur because their health is worse, but because they can't get around in their own homes anymore.

An "accessible" house is one that a person with a disability could easily live in, with access to all interior rooms, doorways, cabinets, switches and flooring, as well as outdoor surrounding area and parking.

A "visitable" house has: 1. an accessible route to at least one entrance; 2. a no-step entry with generous landing area; 3. passable main floor doors and hallways; and, 4. a main floor bathroom that can be accessed by a person using a wheelchair.

Some people with physical limitations live in "accessible" housing, but visiting friends and family may pose a problem, as these homes may not be accessible. What is needed in their communities is "visitable" housing. Standards for "visitable" housing need to be publicized and promoted to commercial home developers.

Many participants were excited to hear information presented by the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies about liveable communities. Liveable communities include:

"Access to public transportation, a walk-able community close to amenities, safety and security, access to health, recreation and cultural services, and a caring, supportive community with adequate, affordable, accessible housing. Visitable housing is one simple approach that can address homeowners' and community needs over time and contribute to a more liveable, healthy environment."³

Participants stressed the importance of making sure community plans for new subdivisions are liveable, and that there is a balanced mix of residential and commercial properties so that residents in those areas can easily go to places for healthcare, recreation, religious and cultural activities, and shopping.

³ This definition is taken from *Visitability - Moving Towards Livable, Sustainable Housing and Communities in Canada*. Canadian Centre on Disability Studies Bulletin Vol.11 No. 1 Spring 2007. This report can be found at <http://www.disabilitystudies.ca/Documents/Bulletins/2007/vol11no1.html>

Both seniors and people with disabilities agreed on the following recommendations for planning developments and housing:

Opportunities for government

- Locate housing near public transportation and other social services.
- Create housing communities where a person could stay throughout life.
- Create diverse neighbourhoods where people from different age groups, cultural background and abilities can all feel like they belong.
- Hold information sessions for the general public to promote the 2 advantages of both liveable communities and visitable housing. People need to be educated that accessible housing is better for everyone.
- Encourage private sector companies to develop low-income housing where profit margins might be marginal (in other words, these companies wouldn't make very much money) but the social benefit would be significant. Government services could encourage partnerships between public and private sectors through tax incentives.
- Encourage homebuilders to make more houses "visitable" for people with physical limitations.

What Do You Think? Questions for your group to consider

If you are from a seniors group, you might want to invite members of a disability group (or vice versa) for an informal coffee discussion to compare answers to the following questions:

- *Do you like where you live? What do you like about it? What would you change?*
- *Does everyone in your group know what the terms "visitable housing" and "liveable communities" mean? If they don't, do you think your group should have an information session to learn more?*
- *Do people in your broader community know about "visitable housing" and "liveable communities?" What could be some ways your group could create interest in supporting these ideas?*
- *Do you know if any housing developments are being planned in your neighbourhood? Does your local municipal council know about "visitable housing" and "liveable communities?" Could some members of the seniors and disability community approach them to talk about housing options?*

5) Income and Poverty: Forum Discussion

“It needs to be recognized that poverty is not a choice.”

~ Forum Participant

Forum participants were very concerned that people with disabilities and seniors faced serious poverty and income challenges. Limited income means it is very difficult to meet basic needs, and although some people receive income supplements, these are not enough to provide for a good quality of life. Low income means people are forced to cut back on participating in healthy choices like going to the YMCA or affording bus transportation to go to the library, church or cultural activities. This adds to the problem of loneliness and feeling isolated.

People with disabilities and seniors at the forum felt they were “stuck in survival mode.” Statistics show there is a much higher rate of unemployment among people with disabilities. The same is true for Aboriginal Manitobans, many of whom do not have pension plans.

Participants talked about how “the system” makes it difficult to get ahead. Applying for social assistance makes people feel like their dignity has been taken away. Some participants who were not working said they would become poorer if they went back to work because medical costs are covered by income assistance, but not for the working poor. People said it was very hard not to be trapped in a poverty cycle. The shame that comes from being poor is very discouraging.

People with disabilities and seniors talked about the connection between getting good care and not having enough money. Informal caregivers do not receive any compensation; so sometimes people lose income or become poor in order to look after a loved one. Some participants were worried about having increased care needs at home, but not having someone to look after them. People can’t afford private care services if their Home Care is over-cost. This could mean they have to leave their communities and live in an institution because they don’t have the money to pay for the additional care.

Participants also recognized that sometimes there was a feeling between seniors groups and disability groups that they were competing against each other for the “same piece of pie.” Both groups could work better together if they saw each other as stakeholders in the same issues.

“If I got into an accident and lost my leg, I could go get a prosthetic, but if I lose my hearing – also a medical condition – it costs me \$5,200 bucks to get hearing aids. Why is this so? I just start getting angry so in a certain sense in this society, being aged is a disability.”

~ Forum Participant

Opportunities for government

- *Introduce more options for people to get confidential, no-cost financial counselling.*
- *Publicly funded accessible opportunities for education and recreation.*
- *Guarantee annual income for seniors.*
- *Guarantee annual income that is adequate to meet disability supports, special needs.*
- *Introduce tax benefits for informal caregivers so they don't have to be poor in order to look after a loved one. This is one way services can recognize and value their contributions.*

What Do You Think? Questions for your group to consider

If you are from a seniors group, you might want to invite members of a disability group (or vice versa) for an informal coffee discussion to compare answers to the following questions:

- *What are the effects of not having enough money on people in your community?*
- *What is already working in your community to support seniors and people with disabilities living in poverty?*
- *What do you think are some of the best ways of reducing poverty?*
- *Do people in your community face attitudes that make them feel ashamed, because they don't have enough income? If so, do you think these attitudes are there because people have the wrong ideas about what it is to be in “survival mode?” What if the members of your groups worked together to raise awareness of what living in poverty is all about? People could write articles in local newspapers or even stage an information event (you could give it a name like “The Faces of Poverty”) that could help change attitudes about poverty in your larger community and help people realize that living with low income is a complicated and serious issue.*

6) Unexpected Outcomes: The “Parking Lot” Issues

“The most common interest of both is improved physical environment in terms of being... safe. It’s more than mobility – it’s about signage, lighting, safety issues...”

~ Forum Participant

Participants had many thoughts and important things to say about each of the five areas developed for discussion. Throughout the day, participants also raised issues that weren’t a part of the official agenda. We called these “parking lot” issues. Two important issues are highlighted below.

Safety

Both seniors and people with disabilities said that they needed to know more about being safe and staying safe in the community. The topic of safety had been raised at several points throughout the day, but participants suggested that a future event be developed for seniors and people with disabilities that was dedicated to issues of safety.

Sexuality

Participants raised some concerns connected with sexuality. They said that society doesn’t ever expect seniors or people with disabilities to be sexually active; and, some social attitudes are unfair and hurtful. One result of these social attitudes is that people with disabilities and seniors are not always given information about safe sexual practices. Another problem is that people with disabilities and seniors start believing these social attitudes, and this can prevent them from having meaningful intimate relationships.

Conclusion

“There were times when I was surprised that some of the issues were the same for either group.”

~ Forum Participant

The Manitoba Forum on Aging and Disability was a unique opportunity for seniors, people with disabilities and seniors with long-term disabilities to meet together and discuss the issues they face and the services they use to assist them in their daily living. Participants at the forum realized that, although they may see themselves as coming from different social groups, their needs and challenges are often the same or similar.

“We need to be exploring the divide – what are the things that separate the two areas of characteristic and concern? Why is there such difficulty in determining what we have in common –the myth of separate worlds – reaching across the two solitudes? If we can’t bridge that one, we just don’t have the right people at the table.”

~ Forum Participant

List of Participating Organizations:

Age-Friendly Communities: Dr. Verena Menec
Manitoba Society of Seniors: Harry Paine
Canadian Paraplegic Association: Derek Legge and Jack MacDonald
Continuity Care: Suzanne Swanton
Council of Canadians with Disabilities: Colleen Watters
Canadian Centre on Disability Studies: Dr. Olga Krassioukova-Enns,
Laurie Ringear, Abigail Larbi, Harriet Baffoe and Nancy Nervall
People First of Winnipeg: Valerie Wolbert
Society for Manitobans with Disabilities: Natalie Mulaire
Independent Living Resource Centre: Doug Lockhart, Joanne LeGault,
Elgeline Merquita and Brenda Currant
Manitoba Deaf Centre: Joey Reeves
Federation des Ages Francophones du Manitoba: Gerard Cure
Winnserv, Inc.: Leslie Udell
Manitoba Council of Aging: Norma Drosdowech
Ten Ten Sinclair: Ken Cassin
Cosco of BC: Ian Buck
Council of Canadians with Disabilities: April D'Aubin
Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation: Wendy Rath
Winnipeg Seniors' Recreation Council: Judy Asker
Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg: Gina Sylvestre
Alzheimer's Society: Sylvia Rothway
Public Health Agency of Canada: Pat Lachance
Manitoba Council on Aging: Norma Drosdowech
Disability Links Association Network: Jack Styan

List of Resource Persons:

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For further information, please contact the following:

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For a complete seniors' list, please visit the Seniors Access Resource Manual
Website: www.winnserv.ca

