

COLUMBIA VALLEY'S

Vital Conversation

Population Growth, Aging & Healthcare



COLUMBIA VALLEY
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

FOR GOOD. FOR COMMUNITY. FOR EVER.

MESSAGE *from the* FOUNDATION

This project was designed to better understand the healthcare needs of Columbia Valley residents at a time of rapid population growth, particularly among older age groups. As more people choose to live, work, and age in our community, the pressures on local healthcare services continue to grow and change.

Through this work, we explored where residents experience gaps in healthcare—and whether these reflect actual service shortages or a lack of awareness about resources that already exist. Readers are encouraged to refer to the Community Healthcare Resource Guide on page 14, which highlights some excellent resources and provides contact information for key services providers in the Columbia Valley. We also invite readers to look beyond advocacy for increased provincial funding and to consider practical, community-driven actions: expanding community recruitment efforts to include a wider range of care providers, increasing education around senior care, and supporting programs that reduce social isolation.

At its heart, this project is about working together to build a healthier, more resilient Columbia Valley—now and for generations to come. This work would not be possible without the generosity of our donors and partners. Your support helps turn ideas into action and strengthens our ability to create meaningful, lasting change. Thank you for being part of this journey.

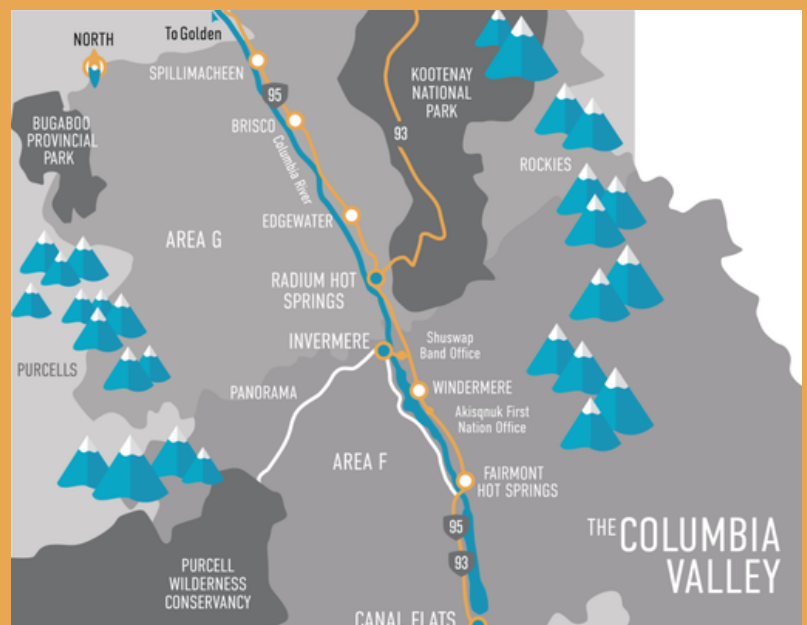
Yours in giving,

Wendy Booth
Board Chair

Thiloma Hofer
Executive Director



THE COLUMBIA VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION IS LOCATED ON THE UNCEDED SHARED TRADITIONAL TERRITORY OF THE KTUNAXA AND SECWÉPEMC PEOPLE, HOME TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF ʔAKISQ̓NUK FIRST NATION AND SHUSWAP BAND, AND THE CHOSEN HOME OF THE COLUMBIA VALLEY MÉTIS.



Between November 18 and December 18, 2025, the Columbia Valley Community Foundation invited hosts across the region to bring together friends, neighbours, and colleagues to discuss challenges faced by our rapidly growing and aging population. These discussions took place in living rooms, kitchens, and community halls, creating welcoming spaces for people to share their firsthand experiences.

On February 20, 2026 we brought together community leaders, service organizations, and residents to reflect on what we heard. This gathering offered an opportunity to learn from one another, highlight existing resources and explore practical and collaborative ways to ensure our senior population can thrive in the Columbia Valley—now and into the future.

8

Conversations held throughout the Columbia Valley

51

People participated

30

People attended the report discussion workshop

How To Use This Report

This report reflects the conversations held throughout the community. Although it is divided into seven sections, readers will notice overlap where many topics were naturally interconnected.

The final page includes a summary of the key takeaways from the February 20 presentation.

Report Limitations

This report highlights the main themes of these conversations, and we acknowledge that no summary can fully capture the depth and richness of what was discussed.

We made a concerted effort to include voices from across the Columbia Valley and from a variety of backgrounds. Even so, we recognize that this report cannot represent every perspective within our community.



HOME SUPPORT*

Home support services provide assistance with:

- Daily living activities at home such as bathing, dressing and grooming
- Special exercises, medication administration and other care needs
- Support and relief for your primary caregiver

ASSISTED LIVING*

Assisted living offers support with personal care, medications, and hospitality services in a private apartment setting. You can maintain your independence and privacy while receiving help with meals, laundry, housekeeping, and social and recreational activities.

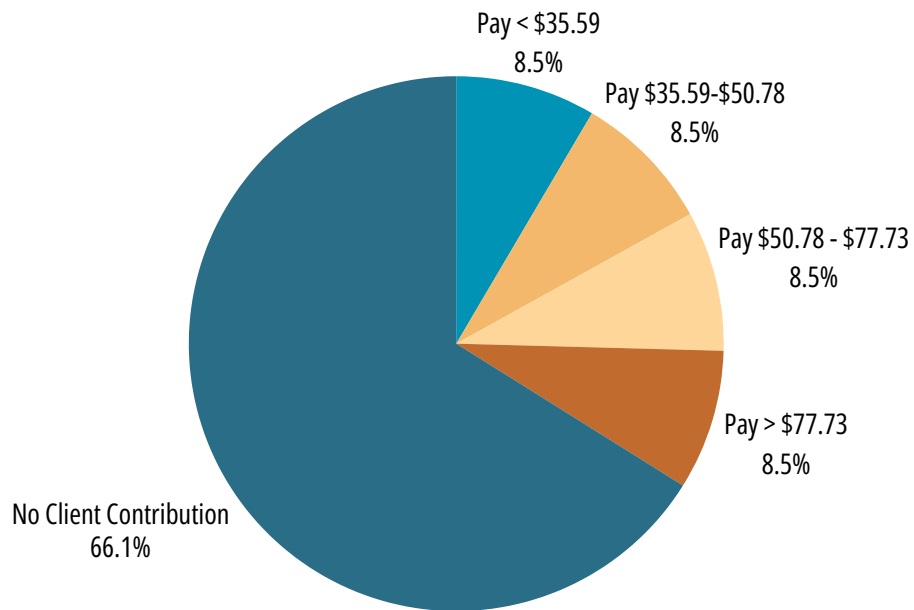
LONG TERM CARE (LTC)*

Long-term care is also known as extended care, nursing home care or geriatric facility care.

Average Wait Time (days) for LTC Admission 2024/2025**

From	Placement into	
	First Available Bed	Preferred Care Home
Community	134	155
Hospital	51	-
Interim Care Home	-	251

Assessed Client Contributions Per Day for Home Support, 2024/25**



Assisted Living and LTC Resources*

	Resource Type	Number of Publicly Funded Beds
<u>Columbia Garden Village</u>	Long -Term Care	34
	Independent and Assisted Living	8 (+ 55 privately funded beds)
<u>Columbia House</u>	Long-Term Care	35

Median Monthly Client Contribution for Long-Term Care

\$1,930**

For the Interior Health Authority in 2024/2025

Sources: *Interior Health (interiorhealth.ca)

**Monitoring Seniors Services 2025 Report, Published by the Office of the Seniors Advocate B.C.

COLUMBIA VALLEY LIFE EXPECTANCY

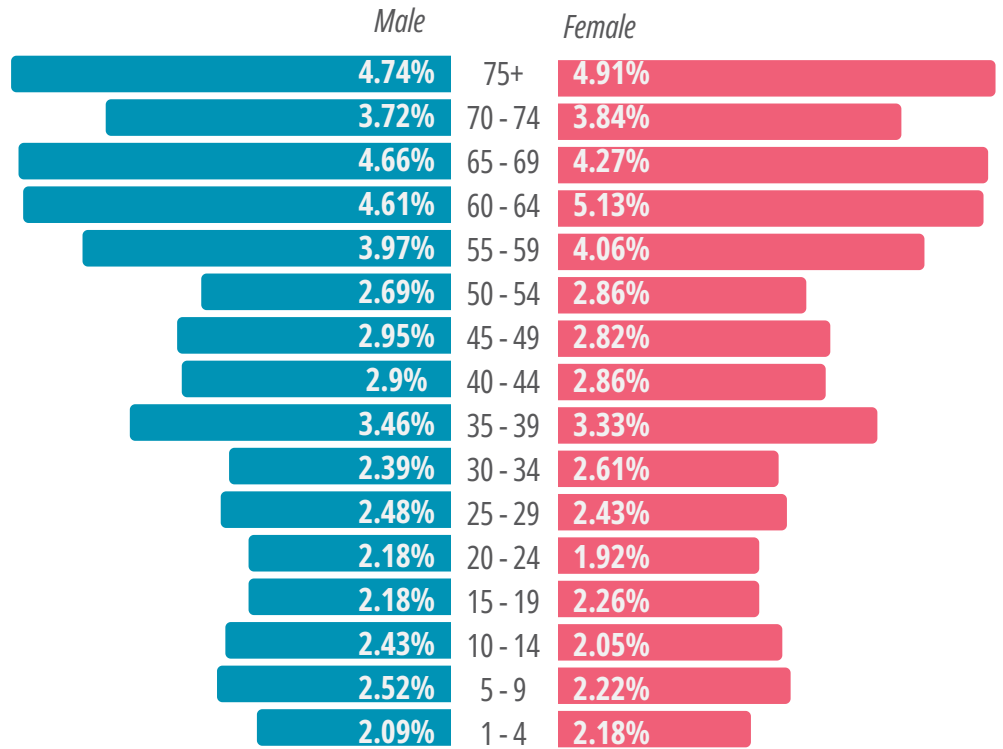
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86 WOMEN

79 MEN

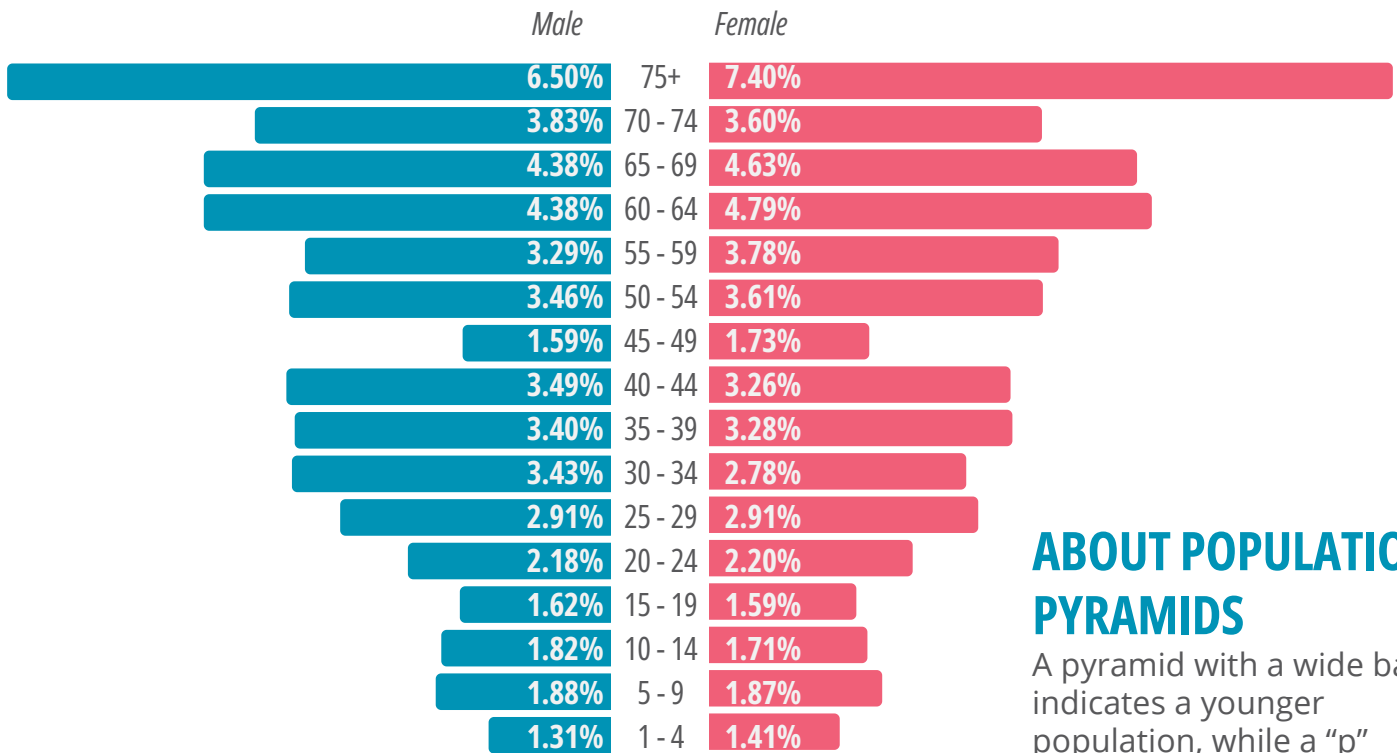
Source: Local Health Area Profile, Windermere 2020, Life Expectancy for BC 2015-2019, Statistics Canada

2021 Census Data



Source: 2021 Federal Census

Predictions for 2046



Source: P.E.O.P.L.E. Population Estimates and Projections, BC Stats. 2025

ABOUT POPULATION PYRAMIDS

A pyramid with a wide base indicates a younger population, while a “p” shape indicates an aging population with a longer life expectancy.

Aging in place is often framed as remaining in one's current home, but seniors' experiences show it is truly about staying in their community with the right level of support as needs change. This perspective varies by location. Rural residents, especially those with strong ties to their land and animals, expressed a deep desire to remain in their current homes.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- Different options and resources are needed for different people
- Some participants are able and willing to pay for services, while others will benefit from volunteer services
- Many people recognized the importance of planning ahead
- Current housing developments are designed for people with a higher income, are multi-level, or are in a location that require driving
- People that would like to downsize their home have limited options
- Retrofitting a home to age in place can be expensive and overwhelming
- To reside in a private home, maintenance, meal preparation, and transportation supports are needed.
- Home care through Interior Health is a vital service and the caregivers do the best they can
- Accessory dwelling units would be beneficial for caregivers or property caretakers on large rural properties
- Long term care can be expensive and people may need to leave their community depending where rooms become available.

80% of rural seniors live in a single-family home. This is significant because single-family homes present a number of design challenges; the presence of stairs and maintenance requirements are barriers that are much more prevalent in single-family homes.

-Seniors Advocate Report

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Lakeview Manor

Lakeview Manor is a seniors' housing residence in Invermere offering affordable, independent living in a supportive community setting. The building is owned and managed by the Lake Windermere Lion's Club. It provides safe accommodation for seniors who are able to live independently while staying connected to community services and amenities.



TRANSPORTATION

Transportation emerged as the most common tipping point affecting seniors' ability to age in place. While many seniors can manage changes in health or mobility, losing the ability to drive often leads to isolation, missed appointments, and reduced independence. When reliable and assisted transportation is available, seniors are able to remain in their homes and communities longer. When it is not, they are often forced into earlier moves or increased dependence on others.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- Transportation affects all aspects of life including grocery shopping, medical visits, social connection, and mental health
- Without transportation, medical services, social programs, and other important appointments can become difficult or even impossible to access
- Lack of transportation can make it impossible to age at home
- Many participants expressed anxiety about driving in poor conditions and at night
- Private transportation options are great but can be cost prohibitive
- Bus transit can be difficult due to scheduling and physical barriers
- Some participants access medical care in Golden but noted that the medical bus is centred around Cranbrook
- Ambulance services are being utilized as the only option for appointment transport in some situations
- Some travelers require physical assistance between the vehicle and their destination
- There is high appreciation for existing services such as taxis and the health bus
- Where scheduled door-to-door transportation is available, it is well used and appreciated
- Spouses, neighbours, and friends were spoken about with much gratitude and relief

“When you stop driving, life gets smaller”
- Participant

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Courtesy Shuttle

The Windermere District Branch 071 of the Royal Canadian Legion is pleased to announce the launch of a new community transportation service: The Legion Courtesy Van. Formerly known throughout Invermere and area as Katie's Van, this fully wheelchair-accessible vehicle has been refurbished and prepared for service through the dedicated efforts of Legion volunteers. The Legion Courtesy Van will be offered free of charge to Veterans as well as community members who require accessible transportation.



PRIMARY MEDICAL CARE

Participants consistently expressed deep appreciation for health-care workers in the Columbia Valley. Doctors, nurses, home-care workers, and hospital teams were described as kind, skilled, and genuinely committed to their patients. At the same time, participants emphasized that the system is under strain. Challenges were not framed as failures of individuals, but as limits on what even the most dedicated professionals can provide.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- An aging population is increasing pressure faster than services can expand
- Many diagnostic tests and other regular procedures require travel which can be stressful and expensive
- People living in Canal Flats or Brisco may access regular healthcare in Cranbrook or Golden
- Medical services that are not covered by health care can be too expensive to access, such as dental work or physiotherapy
- There are some supports to cover additional healthcare but often leaves a gap that seniors on a limited income cannot cover
- It can be difficult connecting with isolated individuals to monitor their needs
- Being discharged from the hospital may be abrupt with people feeling unsure of what supports are in place or who to contact
- Participants questioned the absence of supports seen in other communities such as travelling nurses and nurse practitioners
- Participants repeatedly said they felt cared for and respected by healthcare workers
- Experiences with the home care staff were extremely positive
- Extremely late or cancelled home care appointments were mentioned repeatedly
- Participants suggested that the system for coordinating home care visits does not adequately consider the distances being travelled by the caregivers, causing late arrivals



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Nav-CARE

Nav-CARE is a service provided by the Hospice Society of the Columbia Valley. Nav-CARE's specially-trained volunteers help improve the lives of people living with declining health by creating connections to community services and resources and providing caring, consistent emotional support.

SOCIAL CONNECTION

Community connection plays a fundamental role in healthy aging and should not be considered a luxury. Volunteering, group outings, clubs, and shared meals were all highlighted as important connection opportunities.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- The Columbia Valley is a friendly, close-knit place where people recognize one another and are willing to help
- Neighbours will check-in, friends offer rides, and you see familiar faces around town
- Community meals, seniors' lunches, bridge groups, coffee meetups, and local events help them stay connected and give structure to their days
- Volunteer-led programs provide social connection and a sense of purpose.
- Programs such as Better at Home (Family Dynamix) are valuable for social connection.
- There are many programs happening, but people are unsure where to find the information
- Most of the social programs available are geared towards women
- Many programs are dependent on volunteers which are becoming harder to find
- Losing the ability or confidence to drive can quickly lead to isolation
- Some seniors living at home described long stretches of time alone, especially in winter or after health or mobility changes
- Welcoming spaces, such as the Columbia House Healing Garden, were highlighted as places that make visits feel easier and more comfortable
- Long term care staff provide meaningful connection, especially for those with few visitors.
- As care needs increase, visits from family and friends often decrease
- Placement in long-term care outside a senior's home community can make it harder for family and friends to visit regularly

“Socially isolated seniors make more visits to their doctor and emergency rooms, use more medication, fall more often, and enter residential care sooner than those who are socially connected.”

— Social Isolation of Seniors Toolkit, Government of Canada



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Canal Flats' Men's Shed

The Canal Flats' Men's Shed is a community-based, non-profit organization whose purpose is to improve the health and wellness of men of all ages in Canal Flats by creating a suitable physical and social environment ("shed"), and by providing programs with purposeful activities to address the well-being challenges faced by men.

Caregivers, most often spouses, but also adult children, friends, and neighbours, described caregiving as one of the heaviest and least visible roles in the community. Several caregivers shared that they were “just doing what needed to be done,” even as their own health, sleep, and well-being declined.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- Caregiving often began gradually and intensified over time
- Caregivers manage complex medical needs, daily routines, transportation, appointments, medication and home care coordination
- There is high value in respite and adult day programs
- Respite overnight beds are a lifeline for when caregivers need to travel, have an evening out, or even just for a break
- In the absence of a family caregiver, a paid live-in caregiver would be an option if there was an extra room or an accessory dwelling unit for them to live in
- Friends, neighbours, and volunteers play a crucial role in supporting caregivers
- Last-minute cancellations or changes in home care schedules create additional stress for caregivers
- Caregiving can be extremely lonely, especially when caring for someone with dementia
- Many people have retired to the Columbia Valley leaving family and support systems

One in four adults aged 65 and older is a caregiver, and 27% of senior caregivers report that their overall health has suffered as a result of their caregiving responsibilities.

- Statistics Canada, 2018 General Social Survey – Caregiving and Care Receiving



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Caregiver Network

The Caregivers Network for East Kootenay Seniors recognizes that caring for seniors can be challenging and hard work. Recognizing this need, our not-for profit organization strives to provide support for caregivers of seniors who live in the East Kootenay. The Caregivers Network has been serving and supporting caregivers for over 20 years through our toll free telephone support line and our support groups for caregivers in six of the largest communities throughout the East Kootenay region.

LONG TERM CARE

Long-term care is often seen as something people hope to avoid, yet deeply value when needed. Seniors and families expressed strong gratitude for care aides, nurses, and support staff, describing them as compassionate, respectful, and committed to residents' well-being.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- Care aides, nurses, and support workers were consistently praised for their kindness and professionalism.
- Long-term care was seen as essential for people with complex medical or cognitive needs who cannot be safely supported at home.
- Families described waiting months or years, often during periods of declining health.
- Long waits place significant strain on family caregivers, who often carry complex care responsibilities without adequate support.
- Frequent moves within a hospital setting while waiting for a long-term placement can have an accelerated negative impact on health and mental well-being
- Families often felt relief once seniors were settled and receiving consistent daily care.
- While physical care was generally viewed as strong, seniors noted limited opportunities for meaningful social engagement.
- Participants noted social opportunities are limited to weekdays due to staff scheduling
- Staff are experiencing an increase in complex care, including undiagnosed or unmanaged mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia
- Care hours assigned to residents can be insufficient, especially with complex care needs
- Wage subsidies play a key role in attracting and retaining long-term care staff; without guaranteed funding, workforce stability is at risk.
- Care aides are leaving the profession due to workload and burnout



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Columbia House Enhancement Society

The Columbia House Enhancement Society (CHES) focuses on enhancing residents' quality of life beyond core care services. Supported by Columbia House staff and Interior Health, CHES leads projects that enrich residents' daily experiences. One of its flagship initiatives is the Healing Garden, inspired by a memorial bequest. The garden is professionally maintained and closely integrated into daily life at Columbia House, it is open to the public year round.

NUTRITION AND ACTIVE LIVING

Seniors view physical health and nutrition as the foundation for independence. When food, medication, and movement are consistent and supported, they feel stable and confident. Strong supports enable seniors to thrive.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

- Seniors want to stay physically well so they can live independently for as long as possible.
- Falls are a persistent concern, particularly if strength decreases or blood pressure fluctuates.
- Nutrition often declines quietly, especially for those living alone or lacking regular access to transportation for grocery shopping.
- Meal programs were described as eye-opening, with some seniors realizing they had not been eating balanced meals.
- The Dinner at Home Program administered by Interior Health is an affordable option for pre-made meals, though delivery needs to be arranged.
- Fitness classes are centred mostly in Invermere, making it difficult for some to attend from outlying communities.
- It is difficult to get fitness classes going in communities with smaller populations.
- Urban communities offer more opportunities for dedicated seniors' programs.
- More indoor winter activities are needed, with particular interest in an indoor pool.
- The indoor walking track at the Columbia Lake Recreation Centre can be both socially and physically beneficial.
- Pickleball is a great year-round activity that is growing in popularity throughout the Columbia Valley.
- Seniors hiking groups are well attended.

In 2025, 197 seniors' fitness and yoga classes were held at the Columbia Valley Centre, each drawing 30-50 participants

-District of Invermere



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT - Nourish Columbia Valley

Nourish is a program created by Columbia Valley Food and Farm which utilizes both recovered and purchased ingredients to prepare healthy meals. These fresh meals are planned, prepared and delivered to 30 seniors in need throughout the Columbia Valley by a group of dedicated volunteers under the direction of Chef Lara McCormack.

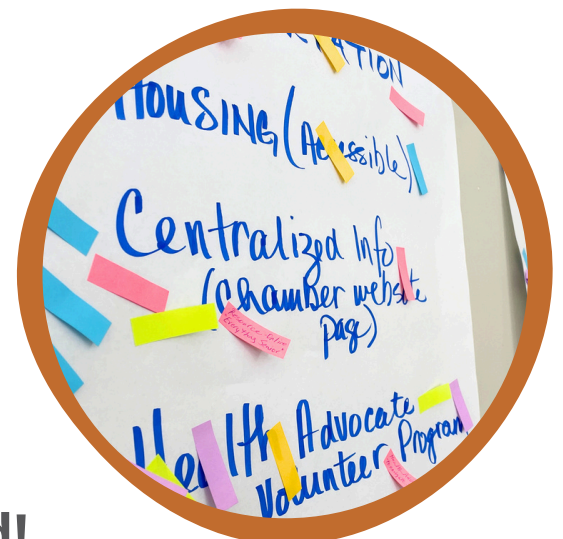
INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS TO SUPPORT HEALTHY AGING

On February 20, 2026 thirty people met to review the draft report, share knowledge, and discuss next steps. The discussions were meaningful, with participants exchanging insights and experiences that highlighted the need for improved communication and education to support an age-friendly community. The following pages outline actions that could be taken by individuals and community groups to support healthy aging.



“How do you know what you don’t know?”
-Participant

1. Research early using the many resources and guides available (see page 15).
2. Share experiences and found resources with others. In turn, don’t be afraid to ask for help or advice.
3. Consider long-term accessibility needs when building or planning a renovation.
4. Involve family members in planning; have conversations early.
5. Identify options in the event that preferred arrangements become infeasible.
6. Bring a support person to medical appointments, for emotional support, to help remember details, and ask questions on your behalf.
7. Attend local events such as the Seniors’ Health Fair (presented in the fall by Invermere Seniors Association).
8. Volunteer, attend events or find a way to be involved in the community.
9. Revisit your plans every 2-3 years. Needs, preferences and community resources will evolve over time.
10. Be a good friend and neighbour. Check in with others.



Plan ahead, plan ahead, plan ahead!

COMMUNITY ACTIONS TO SUPPORT HEALTHY AGING

Housing

- Housing, social connection, transportation, and homecare should be planned together
- Prioritize accessible housing with close proximity to essential services
- Support “one smart move” over multiple forced moves
- Encourage housing that combines independence with scalable support
- Improve early information sharing for retrofits and other supports so seniors can plan ahead
- Build housing geared towards full time residents looking to downsize

Transportation

- On demand, door to door accessible and affordable transportation options
- Plan social programming with consideration for the transit schedule
- Better promotion of transportation options such as BC Transit, Angel Flight, Wheels of Hope
- Investigate depth of need for transportation to Golden for medical appointments
- Promotion of volunteer driving services to recruit both drivers and users

Primary Medical Care

- Promotion of NavCare (Hospice Society of the Columbia Valley) program to help people through life changing transitions
- Recognition of the medical bus times when booking appointments in Cranbrook
- Communication around travelling nurses or nurse practitioners
- Find systems to cover the financial gap for services not entirely covered by government funding
- Consider in community training for care aids

Social Connection

- Update the Columbia Valley Seniors guide to connect seniors with the many valuable programs and resources available locally
- Expand social programs, particularly that are targeted for men
- Encourage all Columbia Valley organizations use ivolunteer.ca to advertise volunteer opportunities

Caregiving

- Increase the availability of short-term respite, including full-day and half-day adult programs
- Reduce number of late home care appointments and last-minute cancellations that force caregivers to abandon work or other commitments
- Promote networks available to support caregivers
- Improve services, both paid and volunteer, to support people at home
- Investigate feasibility of a course for caregivers to educate and foster community connections

Long Term Care

- Educate seniors and future caregivers on the long-term care system, including how and when to get on waitlists.

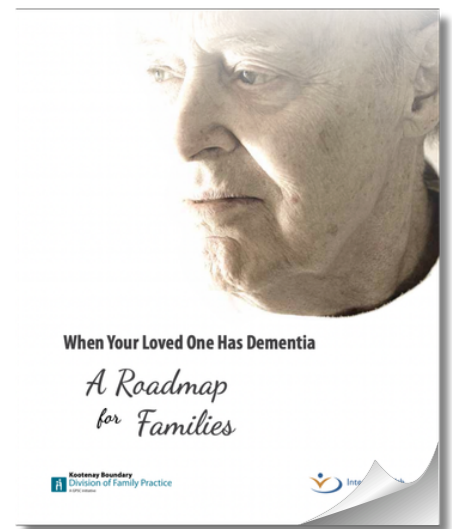
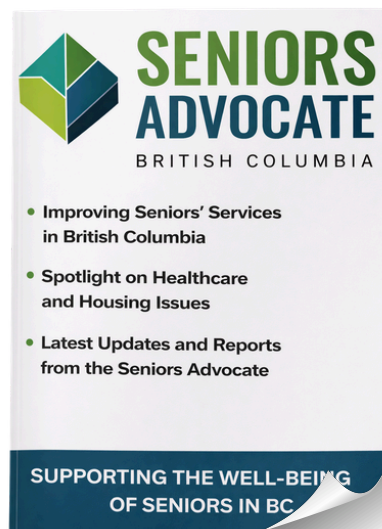
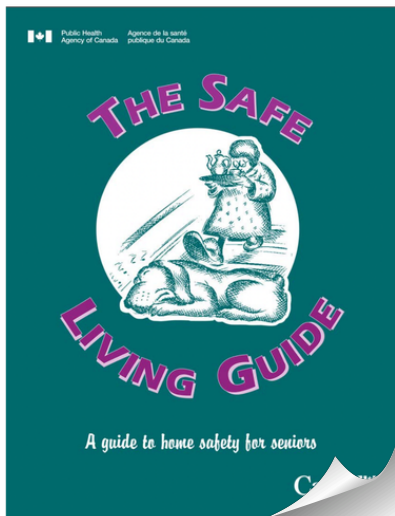
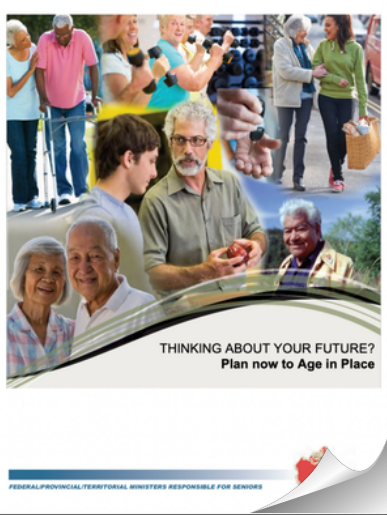
Nutrition and Active Living

- Support the continuation of the Nourish program through Columbia Valley Food and Farm
- Continue to build a variety of active living programs for people of all abilities

GUIDES AND RESOURCES

There are many free resources available to support aging well. Based on what we heard through community conversations, we've highlighted a selection we believe will be especially helpful and relevant. We encourage you to explore these resources and find what works best for you or the people you support.

 Click on the guides below to view them online 



We have many local organizations to connect you with available resources:

Family Dynamix - familydynamix.ca - 250-342-5566

Hospice Society of the Columbia Valley - hospicesocietycv.ca - 778-526-5143

Invermere Health Centre - 850 10th Ave Invermere - 250-342-2360

Invermere Seniors Association - 1309 14th St Invermere

THANK YOU

We are grateful for our exceptional volunteers and staff. These amazing people have dedicated their time, shared openly their expertise, and bring a passion for the enrichment of our community. If you are interested in joining our Board of Directors, or supporting us in another volunteer capacity, please reach out!

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