

Older People in NSW



A Snapshot

A Statistical Summary

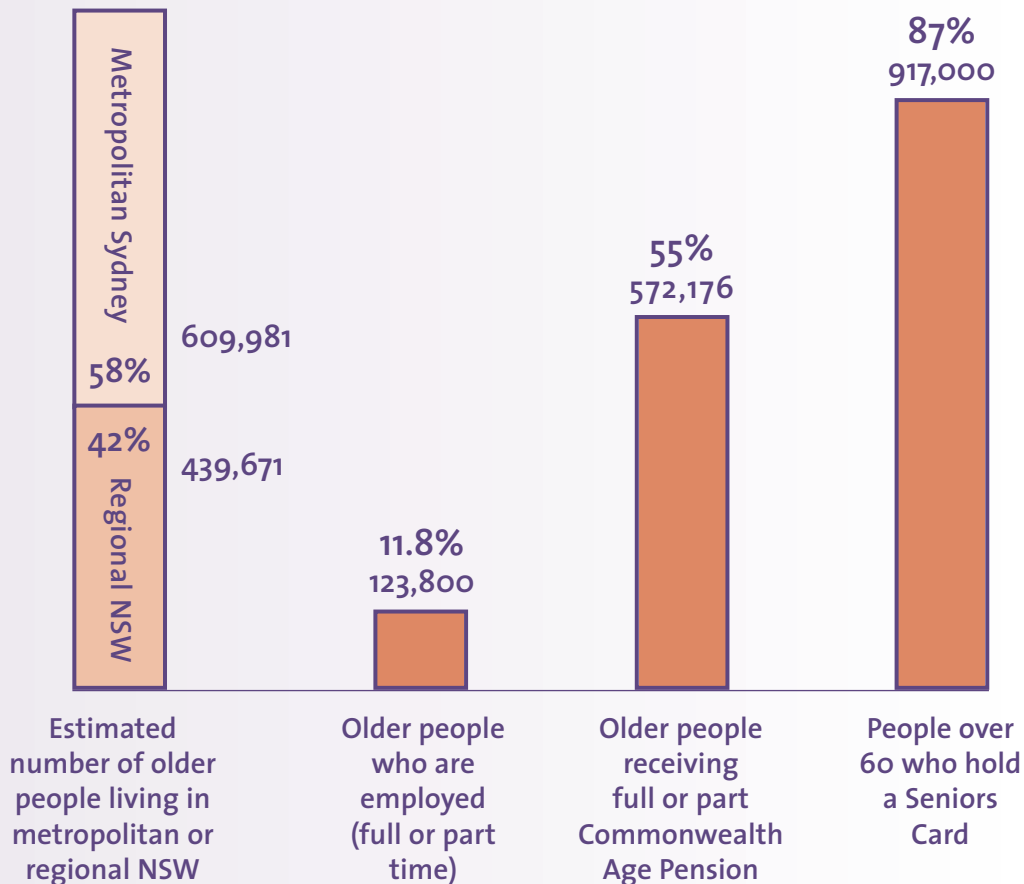
Total population of NSW

Younger (aged under 60)	Older (60 & over)
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16.8%

Estimated number of older people in NSW 1,049,652

People over 60 in NSW



Older People in NSW

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A Statistical Summary

An Ageing Population

The population of Australia is ageing. In the first few decades of the new millennium, the proportion and number of older people in NSW will rise substantially.

Nearly 17% of the population of NSW is currently aged 60 years or more. This represents nearly 1.05 million people. By 2021, older people are expected to represent over 24% of the population, and number more than 1.8 million. By 2041, that number will rise to 2.3 million, and represent nearly 30% of the population.

Where Older People Live

Over 80% of older people in NSW live in the Sydney metropolitan area and along the eastern seaboard. The regional areas of the State with the highest proportion of older people are the Hunter, Illawarra, Far West, Murray, South Eastern NSW, and Mid-North Coast regions.

Men and Women

Life expectancy has increased dramatically in the twentieth century. On average, men now live to 75 years of age, and women live for 81 years.

Because women live longer than men, there are 75 men for every 100 women aged 65 and over, and 40 men for every 100 women over the age of 85.

Cultural Background of Older People in NSW

The older population in NSW is becoming more diverse. 13% of people aged over 65 were born in a non-English speaking country.

Over 80% of people aged 65 and over from a non-English speaking background originally came from either Italy, Greece, Germany or China.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a lower life expectancy than other Australians. There are only 4345 indigenous people aged 60 and over in NSW, representing 4% of the indigenous population, and only .4% of the total number of people aged 60 and over.

Older People in NSW

The Facts....



On Finance

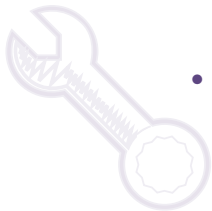
- Looking at the major sources of income for people over 65, 7 per cent receive most of their income from employment, while around 22 per cent gain most of their income from superannuation, property or investments. Pensions are the major source of income for approximately 70 per cent of older people.
- The group of older people who gain most of their income from superannuation is expected to grow in the future as compulsory superannuation begins to have an effect on people's savings. Nevertheless, experts believe that it will take many years for compulsory superannuation to dramatically reduce the take-up of pensions.
- The number of people who receive private income in addition to their pension is growing, and the major source of this income is savings and investments.
- Of all men aged 65 and over and women aged 61 and over, 67.5 per cent receive the Age Pension or a similar payment.
- A further 15.4 per cent of older Australians receive pension payments from the Department of Veteran's Affairs.
- Of all people receiving an Age Pension, only two thirds (67.9 per cent) receive the full rate, with the remainder on part pensions due to other income.
- Almost two-thirds of people receiving a pension are women, primarily because women tend to live longer and have less assets than men.
- At present, men are eligible for the pension from age 65, and women from age 61. The age for women is gradually being increased from 60 to 65 by the year 2013.
- Age pension payments are set at approximately 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings.
- Older people, as an age group, have the lowest incomes of all Australians, with an average of \$319 per week per person and only \$429 per couple. However, they are much more likely to own a home and other assets.
- Three quarters (76.8 per cent) of people aged 60 and over own their own homes. Those who do not own their own homes are more likely to be in poverty as their living costs are much higher.
- Older people who live alone have a higher chance of poverty as they do not have the opportunity to pool income and resources.
- The total value of superannuation assets rose from around \$40 billion in 1983 to around \$270 billion in 1996.

Older People in NSW



The Facts....

On Employment



- The workforce is ageing. By 2020, there will be as many people approaching retirement, as there will be people entering the labour market.
- The proportion of workers aged 45-59 in Australia is expected to rise to 29% by 2030, while the proportion of younger workers (that is, those aged 15-24) will decline as a percentage of the total labour force.
- There were 876,100 people (517,500 males and 358,600 females) aged 45+ who were employed, either full-time or part-time, in NSW in August 1998.
- At the same time, there were 49,800 people (31,300 men and 18,500 women) aged 45+ who were unemployed in NSW.
- There are 123,800 people in NSW who are working and who are aged over 60. The majority (60%) are working full-time, and over two-thirds are men.
- Mature-age people tend to be out of work for longer periods of time than other age groups. The average period of unemployment for a person aged 45-64 is 89 weeks, whereas a person aged 15-19 is unemployed for 25 weeks.
- Mature-age unemployment has long-term social and economic consequences. A person who is made redundant in their fifties could face 30 years of dependence.
- Regardless of background, ethnicity, or gender, the one characteristic that older unemployed people have in common is the long-term nature of their unemployment.
- 62% of unemployed people over 55 surveyed in July 1998, said their main difficulty in finding work was that that they were considered too old by employers.
- Research shows that older workers have fewer sick days, fewer accidents, and lower turnover rates than younger workers.
- Employment participation rates for individual age groups are highest for people aged between 20 and 44, and are lower for each subsequent age group.
- Older workers are less likely to than other age groups to have post-school qualifications. In 1995, approximately 45% of the 45-64 years age group had less than upper secondary qualifications.

Older People in NSW



The Facts....

On health

- Average life expectancy in Australia is amongst the highest in the world and has improved markedly over this century. Life expectancy is 75.2 years for men and 81.0 years for women. Furthermore, women who were 65 in 1996 can expect to live another 19.6 years, and men another 15.8 years.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to have lower life expectancies than other Australians. Only 4 percent of the Aboriginal population are aged 60 and over and less than 1 per cent are aged 75 and over.
- 64 per cent of people aged 65 and over who live in the community rate their health as either good, very good or excellent.
- Research suggests that in developed countries such as Australia, older people are living longer and at the same time enjoying more years without severe handicap.
- While most older Australians are healthy, the most common health problems amongst this group are arthritis, vision and hearing problems, high blood pressure, heart disease and varicose veins.
- In terms of chronic illnesses, older men are more likely to experience deafness and heart disease. Older women, on the other hand, are more likely to have arthritis, hypertension and varicose veins.
- Research suggests that there is a relationship between the socio-economic status of older people and their health. For example, those with higher incomes tend to report better health than those with lower incomes, as do those with more education.
- People born overseas tend to enjoy better health and have longer life expectancies than those born in Australia.
- Dementia affects around 6 per cent of people aged 65 and over, and of those, half are well enough to live in the community. However, the risk of dementia is estimated to double every five years after age 65, so that by age 85, one in four people are at risk of developing dementia.



Older People in NSW

The Facts....



- The likelihood that older people will need assistance with practical tasks increases with age. Amongst those aged 60 and over living in the community, 19.1 percent reported needing help with home maintenance, 13.1 per cent with home help, and 10.6 per cent with transport.
- Injuries from falls are a major reason for hospitalisation of older people, particularly those aged 85 and over. Hip fractures are the most common injuries caused by falls. The risk factors for falls in this age group include disability, medication, chronic disease and environmental hazards.
- Six per cent of people aged 65 and over living in the community experienced at least one of the most common mental disorders, that is, anxiety, mood or substance use disorders, some time during the 12 months prior to a 1997 survey on the mental health and well-being of Australian adults.
- Approximately one in ten of people aged 70 and over and living in the community may suffer from depression. It is likely that older people living in nursing homes or hostels, or who are admitted to a hospital, may experience even higher rates of depression.
- While the number of people aged 65 and over who die of suicide is low, the suicide rate is higher amongst older people, particularly older men, than amongst the population as a whole. The higher rates of suicide are likely to be linked with the greater probability of depression associated with isolation, physical illness and pain.
- A recent survey showed that many older people are sexually active and almost two-thirds see sexuality as very important, important or somewhat important to their well-being.
- Medication use is more common among people aged 65 and over than any age group. A recent survey of older people found that 71 per cent used at least one medication other than pain relieving and sleep or mood-altering medications on a regular basis. The most common medications are for heart problems and blood pressure.



Older People in NSW



Myth & Reality

Ageing is not commonly viewed in a positive light in our society. Many people find the image of age unpalatable – a time of inevitable mental and physical decline, dependence and inactivity.

However the reality is very different.

Myth: *Older people are a burden on society.*

Fact: Older people contribute to society in a positive way. Institute of Family Studies research has demonstrated that older people are more likely to provide financial and practical assistance to families than to receive it. This assistance includes childcare, financial help and help with cost of tertiary education.

Older people are also active in their communities. 24% of people aged 55 and over contribute their time as volunteers. Nearly 38% of people aged 55 and over care for children, or for frail or ill relatives and friends. 11.8% of people aged 60 and over continue in paid employment.

The impacts of predicted increases in health and aged care costs as the population ages can be minimised by reducing barriers for older people to continued employment and access to mainstream services.

Myth: *Older people are “all the same”.*

Fact: Older people are more diverse than any other age group. Each generation of older people brings its unique historical and cultural experiences with them as they age. As in the rest of society older people have different backgrounds and beliefs and like to be treated as individuals.

Myth: *Ageing means inevitable physical and mental decline.*

Fact: Physical ageing is a slow, gradual, life-long process. The rate of physical ageing among humans varies widely, dependent upon a complex interaction of genetic, physical, life style, social, and environmental factors. The greatest decline in the human body occurs between 30-40 years of age. Disabilities, sensory loss, and chronic diseases increase with age but are not inevitable ageing conditions.

Myth: *As you get older, you get wiser.*

Fact: Wisdom is not automatic with age. However, the accumulated experience of older people is a resource that should not be devalued or wasted.

Older People in NSW



Myth & Reality

Myth: *Older people need looking after.*

Fact: The majority of seniors live independently and require no assistance with daily tasks. Only 130,890 older people live in residential care facilities in Australia. This means that 95.7% of people aged 60+ are living in the community. Older people with a disability and living in the community are more likely to receive assistance from their spouse or partner than from formal community services.

Myth: *All older people eventually become “senile”.*

Fact: The majority of older people do not experience significant memory loss. Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias affect less than 1% of people aged 60-64 and less than 3% of people aged 70-74. The incidence of these conditions only increases significantly in people over 85 years.

Myth: *You can’t teach an “old dog” new tricks.*

Fact: Learning is a life-long pursuit. Older people continue to learn from life and to pursue their interests. Older workers benefit from continuous training and retraining to the same extent as younger workers.

Myth: *Older people are not interested in sex.*

Fact: Sexuality is a characteristic of people at all ages. Older age does not mean the loss of capacity for or interest in sexual expression. However opportunities for sexual interaction may be reduced by the death or disability of a partner, or changes to accommodation that affect privacy.

Myth: *Older people are lonely and do not socialise much outside their homes.*

Fact: Most retired people are socially engaged and maintain active independent lives. A 1997 Seniors Card survey indicated that 75% of members sampled (60+) had travelled in that year. 61% ate at a club an average of 4.5 times during the year. 75% of respondents drove a motor vehicle.

The survey also indicated that seniors are more likely to participate in activities such as gardening, movie, theatre and concert going, visiting art galleries and museums than to join in activities with seniors clubs and centres or play bingo or card games.

Myth: *Older people are the biggest victims of crime*

Fact: Crime statistics for NSW show that older people are less likely to have crimes committed against them than any other age group. The biggest victims of crime are young men aged 18-25 years.

Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



International Year of Older Persons

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 1999 as The International Year of Older Persons (IYOP). The theme for the year is *Towards a Society for All Ages*, reflecting its goal of increasing public awareness about the important role that older people play in all walks of life.

Over the next few generations, the average lifespan will increase by almost 20 years. At the same time, the proportion of older persons in the world will increase from approximately 1 in 14 to 1 in 4.

In Australia we have one of the highest rates of life expectancy in the world – 75 years for men and 81 years for women. Twelve percent of the NSW population is aged 65 and over and this is expected to rise.

This is something to be proud of and IYOP will be important in recognising and celebrating the important contribution this group makes to our community.

Focus on ageing

The United Nations Principles For Older Adults identified five key issues important for ensuring older people's quality of life:

Independence: Older persons should have access to food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, work and other income-generating opportunities, education, training, and a life in safe environments.

Participation: Older persons should remain integrated into community life and participate actively in the formulation of policies affecting their well-being.

Care: Older persons should have access to social and legal services and to health care so that they can maintain an optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being. This should include full respect for dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy.

Self-fulfilment: Older persons should have access to educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources and be able to develop their full potential.

Dignity: Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security, be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse and be treated fairly regardless of age, gender and racial or ethnic background.



Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



Role of local government

Local government in New South Wales has an important role to play in the International Year of Older Persons (IYOP). The local government sector is in a unique position to help make NSW, and its own local community, a society for ALL ages.

Each local government area is responsible for developing its own plan for recognising the Year. During 1999, councils may choose to focus on improved services for seniors, as well as events to celebrate the year.

In our youth-oriented society, it's easy for older adults to fade into the background, isolated and invisible. But, as our population ages, it will become increasingly unrealistic to ignore the needs and aspirations of older people.

For every council in NSW, our rapidly ageing population presents a very real challenge – the challenge to serve seniors well and to create communities which allow all members to participate fully. IYOP is an opportunity to evaluate past policies and programs for older people, and consider new ones.

NSW now has a five-year policy framework for ageing – the *Healthy Ageing Framework, 1998-2003*. All councils have been sent copies of the Framework; more are available from the Ageing Issues Directorate of the Ageing and Disability Department (freecall 1800 804 135 or Sydney, 9273 6625).

All the Framework objectives, and a large number of the framework actions, have potential relevance to local communities. One example is Objective 4 – “Provision of accessible and supportive living environments which make it possible for older people to live as independently as possible”. This is relevant to councils' land use planning responsibilities, as well as their interest in community safety and provision of adequate transport services.

Councils have also been recently sent the February 1999 edition of *Ageing Interaction*, a special issue on progress already achieved by State, local and non-government agencies in using various strategies to achieve the goals and objectives of the Framework. The initiative of Sutherland Shire in its *Social Plan: Aged Services Target Plan*, was highlighted.

The goal, objectives, strategies and actions of the Framework can provide a guide to councils as they carry out their social planning responsibilities for older people. The NSW Government wishes to work collaboratively with local government in achieving the Framework goal and objectives.



Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



Local government and social planning for older persons

The opportunity for improved planning and outcomes for older persons that IYOP provides is shared with all local, state and national governments, in Australia and across the world. The National Healthy Ageing Strategy is in its final stages, and will be submitted to Community Services Ministers later this year. IYOP is now a chance for local communities and their councils to consider the NSW Healthy Ageing Framework's goal, objectives, strategies and actions, and their relevance to all local communities.

In fulfilling their responsibilities under the Local Government (General) Amendment (Community and Social Plans) Regulation 1998, councils may wish to adopt these or similar objectives. Councils are encouraged to develop strategies to help to achieve the Framework goal of 'a society in which all older people lead satisfying and productive lives with maximum independence and well-being.'

One rural council, developing its social plan in-house, has already started investigating the opportunities to improve older people's access and opportunities to participate in education and learning programs. Tallaganda Shire is looking at ways to make its library computers available to older people, who would be assisted – perhaps by the NSW Department of Education and Training, by Computer Pals and/or library staff – to feel more comfortable and competent in the use of the Internet and technology generally.

South Sydney City Council has drawn attention to the Framework in its consultant's report, *Planning Our Community's Future, Section 94 Research Study: Options Paper*. "Another critical component of this strategy is a commitment to fund and work in partnership with the non government sector and local government in working towards implementation of the objectives of the Framework." (p 20)

The Ageing and Disability Department at both regional and State levels is keen to work collaboratively with councils – individually or collectively – to achieve agreed healthy ageing goals and objectives. Officers of ADD have already participated in training programs for council social planning staff; are now able to provide service provision data on older people and people with disabilities; and have advised council officers and consultants on social planning initiatives for older people. The NSW Disability Policy Framework can also assist councils in realising a commitment to developing an accessible community.


Councils wishing to discuss their social planning initiatives for older people are welcome to contact:

- for service provision data – Jo Manion, Senior Project Officer, Planning Unit, on (02) 9364 6945;
- for healthy ageing planning – David Efraemson, Senior Policy Officer, Ageing Issues Directorate, on (02) 9273 6625
- the Regional Planner in your ADD Regional Office.

Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



Suggested activities for celebrating the IYOP in your community!



Local governments in New South Wales are encouraged to participate in IYOP – to think about how their communities can make positive changes that will benefit older people in the short and long term.

The activity suggestions reflect NSW's IYOP theme "A society for ALL ages".

They are designed to promote intergenerational understanding and greater awareness of seniors and ageing issues.

Some of these activities require financial support or local sponsorship; others can be organised inexpensively while still having a significant impact.

Whatever you decide to do, don't forget to let us know by using the activity registration form.

Remember to include the IYOP logo in announcements of the Year and in your promotion of events and activities!

Special events

Organise the Best Party for Ages to kick-off in your locality (See brochure included in this kit).

Create a community mural reflecting the theme "A Society for ALL Ages" and providing a lasting legacy of IYOP.

Hold a public forum for people of all ages on intergenerational issues. This "Generation Xchange" could include such issues as use of public space, access to services and recreational activities.

Organise a mall display for organisations working with seniors.

Hold a community information session (involving local health professionals and/or community service providers and seniors) to discuss the implications of Australia's aging society for community services, programs and community life in general.

Organize a special event to highlight seniors' diversity, talents, skills, resources, knowledge or contributions to the community.

Develop an activity that encourages seniors to learn more about healthy, active living.

Hold public meetings and workshops on specific topics such as the contributions older people make to the community, how ageing affects the community and how the community can meet the challenges of ageing.

Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



Conduct grandparent's days at your community daycare centres.

Plan senior days at parks, pools and sporting facilities.

Policy and program initiatives

Inform residents and ratepayers that 1999 is the International Year of Older Persons. Include information about IYOP and its aims on rate notices and other regular communications.

Support community based initiatives to develop activities to celebrate IYOP.

Establish senior advisory groups to advise the council on community affairs, especially those concerning ageing.

Assist older residents to remain in their local community by promoting aged services policies that generate adequate support services and housing options.

Integrate the needs of older persons in urban and community planning, including for housing, transport, health and social services, bearing in mind the diversity of older persons including, among others, indigenous elders, migrants and refugees (See information on NSW Healthy Ageing Framework and social planning).

Involve seniors in special outreach activities within the community.

Identify and recognise senior-friendly services, products, programs or companies in your community.

Publish a directory of paid and unpaid opportunities for seniors in community and social capital development.

Introduce programs such as surrogate grandparent schemes that benefit both older people and families with young children who are isolated.

Dedicate a community garden in honour of the IYOP. Involve people of all ages in developing the project.

Reach out to the world

Establish joint projects and cultural exchanges with sister cities and towns.

Link with seniors and local government organisations around the world using e-mail and Internet technology.

Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



Speaking notes for event organisers

I want to welcome you to this special celebration to mark the International Year of Older Persons.

The United Nations has declared 1999 the International Year of Older Persons in recognition of the world's rapidly ageing population. The purpose of the Year is to foster international awareness of the importance of seniors' role in society and the need for intergenerational respect and support.

The theme for our celebration of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons is "New South Wales, a society for all ages". The theme highlights the need for community members of all ages to come together in 1999 to show seniors how much we care for them and how much we value their contributions to our lives.

Today, I want to talk about two important objectives for the International Year of Older Persons and how we can make them a reality right here in our own community in 1999.

The first of these objectives is to enhance understanding, harmony and mutual support across the generations. This objective calls on all of us to communicate openly and honestly across generations.

A good starting point is for us to confront misconceptions about seniors and ageing ... particularly those stereotypes that portray seniors as frail, dependent and inactive.

The truth is that most local seniors are vibrant and active community members whose contributions are sometimes taken for granted or simply overlooked.

The group that can contribute most to increased understanding and appreciation of seniors across the generations is seniors themselves. I call upon the seniors among us today to take a proactive role in dispelling myths and stereotypes.

By reaching out to other generations, by staying actively involved in the community, by sharing your knowledge, your skills and vision, you can demonstrate how much seniors care for younger generations ... and how much you have to offer the community.

Our many active seniors can also act as advocates for those seniors in our community who are experiencing poor health or living conditions, or who are living in isolation.

As a community, we must work with seniors and seniors' organisations to see that the needs of vulnerable seniors are addressed.



Let's make NSW a society for ALL ages



Another group that can have a great impact in supporting seniors and in reinforcing positive images of ageing is parents. Parents are the strongest link between our oldest and youngest generations. By facilitating intergenerational contact – and by showing respect, caring and appreciation for seniors – parents help shape a community – and ultimately a society – that is responsive to seniors and supportive of their needs.

A second key objective of the Year is to increase recognition of seniors' contributions to their families, their communities and the country.

This recognition can take the form of a large event, like today's celebration. It can also take the form of small gestures in our homes and in our neighbourhoods.

These gestures can be very simple but meaningful acts – things that can be done almost on a daily basis to acknowledge and celebrate seniors. It can be a local business offering a special service or support to older customers – it can be a younger person helping out a senior neighbour with lawn mowing– it can be an invitation to an elderly relative for a meal and conversation.

The size of the gesture is not important. What is important is showing that we care.

Another important aspect of recognising seniors is acknowledging and celebrating the many contributions they make to our lives and to the overall well-being of the community.

Seniors contribute to our community in a thousand ways: they act as caregivers; work as volunteers; they provide support and assistance to family, friends and neighbours; they share their knowledge and insight from a lifetime of experience; and invest their time, talents and energies in local projects. Whatever we do this year to celebrate seniors, let's make sure that seniors are aware of the immense respect and appreciation we have for all they contribute to our lives.

Clearly, today's event demonstrates the depth of appreciation felt for seniors in our community. I want to thank the dedicated volunteers and sponsors who worked so hard to bring this event about. Your collaborative efforts have made this celebration a real success.

Let's build on this collaborative spirit in 1999 to make the International Year of Older Persons a truly meaningful year for seniors – and for all generations across our community.

Thank you.

(Adapted from material developed for IYOP by Division of Aging and Seniors, Health Canada)