



ASSET MAPPING REPORT

INVENTORY OF I&R SERVICES FOR
SENIORS ACROSS BC

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411 SENIORS CENTRE SOCIETY; BACKBONE LEAD FOR THE NAVIGATION
& PEER SUPPORT PROJECT

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United Way
Healthy Aging



411
SENIORS
centre society
Informed and Connected

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INTRODUCTION

Information & referral services focus on the connections of resources, benefits, and information to service users. Seniors make up a significant and growing proportion of service users in British Columbia (BC). 1 in 4 of the population is predicted to be a senior by 2031¹ and responding to the needs of this diverse population remains a challenge for government agencies and organizations from all sectors. Increasingly information and access to benefits and applications are being delivered online; a shift that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Navigating online information can present significant challenges for some seniors. Language skills, declining health, predisposing conditions, unfamiliarity with technology, and lack of resources to own, maintain, and use technology pose significant barriers that prevent seniors from successfully shifting to the digital realm. In turn, seniors turn community-based senior services and organizations for assistance. An inventory was compiled in 2022/early 2023 to identify the organizations offering this type of service and activities. Organizations that engage with seniors were contacted and briefly surveyed on whether they provide information & referral services to seniors. From a preliminary list of nearly 800 entries, 595 agencies were reached. 120 of these agencies responded that they provide information & referral services. This inventory will serve as a reference as decisions and resources are made to enhance information and referral resources across the province.

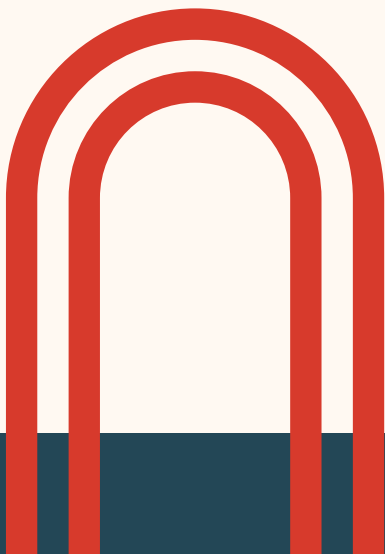
¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-520-x/2010001/aftertoc-aprestdm1-eng.htm>

METHODOLOGY

Defining Information & Referral

Organizations adapt and develop their information & referral service provision to best meet the needs of seniors in their communities within the context of the community and agency structure. While the actual practice and procedures ascribed to information & referral service delivery may look different at individual organizations, a working definition of the activity itself is needed to assess and categorize which organizations are providing this type of service.

Drawing upon previous work done by the United Way-supported Information & Referral Working Group, along with in-depth conversations with funded members of the Navigation & Peer Support demonstration project and aligning terminology with the accreditation body in the field of Information & Referral, AIRS (Alliance of Information and Referral Systems), a synthesized definition of community-based information & referral services was determined. The definition was presented to each eligible organization so that they could self-categorize if they did or did not provide this type of service for the purposes of building this inventory list. Please see below for the definition.



Definition of Information & Referral Services

Community-based senior service (CBSS) agencies provide older adults localized and contextual information and referral services to assist in the navigation of public systems and community-specific resources. CBSS agencies are particularly suited to assist older adults with higher/complex needs who are not easily assisted through existing information systems such as BC211. Information & Referral (I&R) involves an in-depth process and enhanced service that includes individualized access assistance and information provision, relying on a tailored assessment of an individual's problem and their capacity to resolve the problem to provide the most appropriate linkage to a service or resource. Administered by trained staff or volunteers, I&R provides descriptive information about a service including procedures for application to a service/resource. Where necessary, I&R will act in an advocacy role by assisting an individual with the completion or submission of an application or facilitating communication between an individual and a service. I&R supports the outcome of increasing an individual's capacity and confidence in securing resources and accessing services.

Creation of Main Reference Database

Potential organizations were compiled from several sources. Drawing upon existing databases, current knowledge of organizations that are providing these types of services, as well as prior work inventorying various senior-serving groups across BC, a total of **789** organizations were targeted for reach-out to determine if they provided information & referral services to seniors in their communities.

The main database was created by compiling entries derived from three directories including:

- BC211 (n=555) comprised of all entries under their main heading "Older Adults"
- Pathways (n=467) comprised of all entries under their main heading "Seniors Services"
- Applications made to United Way for the Navigation and Peer Support Project funding (n=95)
- BC Senior Centre Database (n=198), comprised of an exploratory inventory of all the senior centres in BC

Each of these databases described their entries using different category headings. I started by retaining all the categories for each entry. I then scanned the list for duplicates. When a duplicate was present; I kept the entry that had the most detail and the most category information, combining information from duplicate entries where possible. Next, standardized category names and formats were developed based on the AIRS Style Guide (https://www.airs.org/files/public/AIRS_Style_Guide_2021_FINAL_7_15_2021.pdf), reflecting the categories and format employed by the BC 211 Directory.

My next step was to remove entries that were assessed to be irrelevant based on the definition criteria of information & referral services. This process eliminated all the Service Canada office entries as these government agencies were the provider of benefits and entitlements and did not bestow information or individual context-based referral to other types of services and supports. Other entries that were deemed ineligible included entries for health-specific conditions (e.g., the BC Cancer Agency) or provided task-specific services (e.g., pro-bono lawyers, low-cost denture clinics) as these sites were assessed to be unlikely to provide service linkage or assistance to individuals outside of the limits of their practice domain.

A search of all First Nation Friendship Centres was done, and these entries were added to the list to as these centres respond to a variety of needs and provided an array of services to Indigenous populations, including seniors. After reviewing for any missed duplications, a final list of 789 entries was compiled.

Survey Development

An online survey was developed with questions created to assess an organization's inclusion eligibility as well as collect information to populate or update categorical information. A preamble detailed the general background of the Navigation & Peer Support Project funded through United Way explaining the purpose of the survey and its goals. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 1 of this document. Questions included:

1) Eligibility inclusion: providing a definition of community-based information & referral services and asking an organizational representative to identify if they offered these types of services or not.

If eligible, agencies were asked the following questions:

2) If their information & referral service was assigned a program name or specific staff member and, if so, the name of the program and/or staff role.

3) If the organization was able to consistently offer information & referral services in a language other than English and, if so, what other languages.

4) If the organization targeted their information & referral services to specific populations (e.g., only new immigrants) and, if so, which populations.

5) What community did the organization serve and if they limited their services to a particular catchment area.

6) The dates and times that they offered information & referral services.

7) How individuals connected to the organization for information & referral services (i.e., self-refer or needed a referral to the organization through an intermediary such as a physician or social worker).

8) Delivery modality of information & referral services (i.e., in-person at their offices; over the phone).

9) Contact information including physical address, mailing address, website, and email addresses.

10) Other types of services the organization may offer that reflect the main categories available on the BC211 website including:

- Advocacy & Helplines
- Day Programs
- Dementia
- Elder Abuse
- Financial Assistance
- Health Conditions
- Home Support
- Housing
- Meals
- Social & Recreational Activities
- Transportation

Contacting Organizations

Drawing upon the available email addresses contained in the compiled database of agencies, a survey link was distributed on August 24, 2022, by the United Way through a Healthy Aging email address. Over the 3 months a total of 88 responses were collected using this survey link.

In January 2023 the remaining organizations that had not responded to the initial survey were contacted by phone, and if a phone number was not available or discoverable through an Internet search, then a follow-up email was sent. When contact was made, an organizational representative was administered the survey over the phone and the results recorded in an online data collection tool. This process identified 42 agencies that were either duplicates or were organizations that were irrelevant. Responses were recorded for **747** organizations from across BC. Responses are categorized as one of the following:

- 1) "Yes" the organization provides information & referral services to seniors.
- 2) "No" the organization does not provide information & referral services to seniors.
- 3) "Unsure" as a response was not received despite email and telephone contact attempts being made.

A total of 5 organizations refused to answer questions over the phone and did not respond to an email follow-up.

Survey highlights are discussed in the next section followed by discussion of observations and limitations.

KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDINGS #1

120 organizations self-identified as providing information & referral services to seniors in their community.



KEY FINDINGS #2

33 agencies were able to consistently offer services in a language other than English



KEY FINDINGS #3

All services were available on a self-refer basis although many identified working in partnership and receiving referrals from physicians or other allied-health professionals.

VISUAL DATA

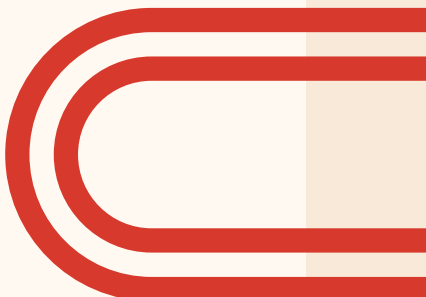


Figure 1: Organizations offering information & referral services location distribution.

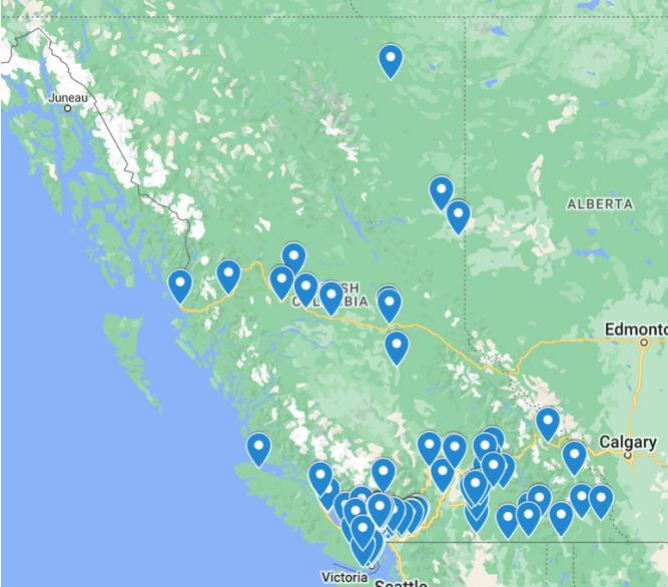
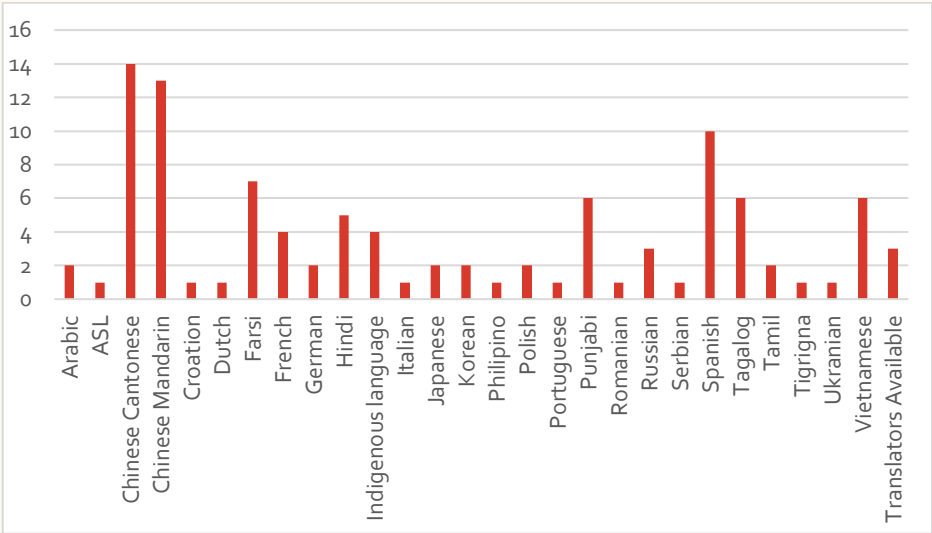


Figure 2: Number of organizations offering information & referral services in languages other than English.



CONCLUSION



Information & referral services are a critical component that forms the backbone of much of the work organizations serving seniors provides. These services may be delivered in a variety of ways and may be a stand-alone program or embedded within other programming such as Better at Homes. Services requested include healthcare-related items (e.g., access to free or low-cost medical devices), transportation (e.g., Bus Pass Program), financial (e.g., tax filing, applying for pensions), housing, home support, and more. Responding to the needs of an individual senior may be a one-time task completed in a short appointment or a longer, multi-step process involving several people relying on partnerships with other agencies. At the core of information & referral service provision is the individualized approach that responds to the context and specific needs of the senior and cannot be completed or accessed by the seniors themselves.

TAKEAWAY #1 VERY LIKELY AN UNDER-ESTIMATION OF SERVICES

Over 150 organizations were not able to be reached through our reach-out by email and telephone follow-up timeframe. It is very likely that the actual number of agencies providing information & referral services is higher than the 120 organizations we were able to make direct contact with. It is difficult to generalize and predict what types of senior-serving organizations provide information & referral services. While some community-based senior centres did identify that they regularly offered this type of activity, many of the senior centres contacted stated that they were entirely volunteer-run and based programming around social and recreational activities. While some individuals expressed interest and the need for information & referral services for seniors in their communities, lack of financial and staffing resources as well as use of a dedicated space was given as barriers.



TAKEAWAY #2 INFORMATION & REFERRAL SERVICES ARE EMBEDDED IN MUCH OF THE WORK AND PROGRAMMING OFFERED AT COMMUNITY-BASED SENIOR-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Many organizations identified that they had specific programming or staff roles dedicated to information & referral services. However, not all these programs were identified by the activity specifically. Information & referral services was embedded as part of the overall aims and activities that make up other United Way supported programming such as Better at Home and Therapeutic Activation Program for Seniors which see organizations acting as connectors assisting seniors to remain in community, to age in their homes, and to engage and access community resources.

TAKEAWAY #3 LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IS NOT WIDELY AVAILABLE OUTSIDE OF A FEW KEY AREAS

Few organizations reported being able to consistently offer services in languages other than English. These organizations are clustered in large urban areas, mainly Vancouver, Richmond, Surrey, and Victoria. The lack of consistently available non-English service delivery is partly due to the demographics of communities. However, non-English speakers, especially those new to Canada or who are not familiar with their community are often the most isolated and therefore their language needs may be obscured by their lack of service-seeking. Community-based senior-serving agencies operate on limited budgets and have limited resources to provide staff or hire translators. Many service access points such as housing applications and benefits are shifting online, creating barriers for seniors who primarily communicate in languages other than English.

TAKEAWAY #4 SOME SITES SUCH AS CARE HOMES OR FACILITIES OFFER THESE SERVICES; BUT THEY ARE ONLY AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THOSE FACILITIES.

Facility-based organizations such as long-term care homes or organizations that provided assisted-living or other types of supportive housing are mostly absent from this list. While some of these organizations identified providing information & referral services to their tenants/residents/patients in a consistent manner, many did not consider the activity to be part of the type of supports they offered their residents. When organizations did identify providing information & referral support, the activity was limited to the residents of that facility.

Appendix 1

Survey of Information & Referral Services by Community Groups

WHY ARE WE CONDUCTING THIS SURVEY?

You are invited to participate in a survey developed through the Navigation and Peer Support (NPS) Program to identify where seniors access community information & referral services across BC.

United Way British Columbia has worked collaboratively with the 411 Seniors Centre Society to develop the NPS program in order to support organizations who are providing information and referral (I&R) services for low-income, higher needs seniors who require one-to-one support to access needed services and government benefits. The NPS group has undertaken trainings, hosted speakers, and, through monthly community of practice sessions, cooperatively supported diverse community groups across the province to build capacity supporting seniors across the province. The NPS Program is the result of many years of community consultation that aimed to highlight the diversity and complexity of information & referral service delivery across BC.

The goals of this survey are to:

1. Identify where community information & referral programs and resources are offered in different communities and regions across BC.
2. Ensure we have up-to-date information on organizations that are offering information & referral services for future reach-out and communications (i.e., for potential funding applications or training opportunities).

We will be reaching out to organizations across the province over the next few months and we encourage you to forward this survey on to any organizations in your network that you think we may have missed in our initial reach out efforts.

We thank you in advance for taking the time in your busy day to accommodate this request. We continue to champion the critical work done by community-based seniors' services.

WHAT IS INFORMATION & REFERRAL?

Connecting seniors to local resources happens in a lot of different ways. For the purpose of this survey, we are using this community-defined definition of community information and referral (I&R) services. Please review this description to assess if your organization provides this type of service:

Definition of Information & Referral Services

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1. Does your organization offer information and referral services? * YES/NO
2. What is the name of your agency or organization? * FREE TEXT
3. Does your organization have a specific program name or dedicated staff who offer this type of service? * YES/NO
4. What is the name of the program and/or job title of the staff? * FREE TEXT
5. Are you able to consistently offer information and referral services in a language other than English? * YES/NO
6. What languages can your organization consistently offer services in? Select all that apply (in alphabetical order) *

Arabic
Chinese-Cantonese
Chinese-Mandarin
Farsi
German
Greek
Hindi
Italian
Japanese

Korean
Polish
Portuguese
Punjabi
Romanian
Russian
Spanish
Tagalog
Tamil
Tigrigna
Vietnamese

Please enter all other languages services are provided in:

7. Do you focus your services on specific groups or populations? * YES/NO

8. [If yes] What groups? Select all that apply *

Seniors/Older Adults
Youth
Women
Im/migrants and newcomers
Indigenous
Physical/Programmatic Access for People with Disabilities
LGBTQ+

9. What community do you serve? * FREE TEXT

10. Are your information and referral services restricted to a catchment area? (A catchment area means your organization limits service provision to individuals who live within a certain geographical boundary) * YES/NO

11. [If yes] What is the catchment area? * FREE TEXT

12. When do you offer information and referral services? (Days of the week/Hours) * FREE TEXT

13. How do people access your information and referral services? *

Self-refer
Need a referral from a health professional (i.e., physician, social worker)
Need a referral from another agency (specify referral source):

14. How do you deliver information and referral services (select all that apply): *

In-person at our offices
In-person on outreach
Email
Phone
Videoconferencing/Zoom

15. Do you charge for your information and referral services? * YES/NO

16. What is your agency's physical address? * FREE TEXT

17. What is your agency's mailing address? * FREE TEXT

Same as physical address
Other

18. [If other] Agency's mailing address * FREE TEXT

19. What is your agency's contact telephone number? * FREE TEXT

20. What is your agency's website * FREE TEXT

21. What is your agency's contact email for information & referral services? * FREE TEXT

22. Does your agency offer any other type of services (select all that apply) *

Advocacy & helplines
Day Programs
Dementia
Elder Abuse
Financial Assistance
Health Conditions
Home Support
Housing
Meals
Social & Recreational Activities
Transportation