



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

Editorial

BABY BOOMERS AND THEIR ALLIES LEAD THE CHARGE IN EXPANDING THE AGING IN PLACE MOVEMENT ACROSS ONTARIO

May 23, 2024

Baby Boomers are sick of waiting for government to act. It is time to take action ourselves if we want to continue to age gracefully in our own homes and communities. This generation of elders is answering the call all across the province to promote aging in place initiatives.

"Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world"
(Tommy Douglas, the first social Democratic Premier of Saskatchewan)

Demographic Power Equals Political and Economic Power

By anyone's estimate, Baby Boomers are still a very big generation. Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1965 remain the second largest age (18.9%) cohort in Canada, surpassed only by Millennials born between 1981 and 1996 - but not by much. The Millennial population got a boost in 2022-23 due to the arrival of permanent and temporary immigrants – 457,354 in that one year alone (StatsCan, 2024b).

The average age in Canada is now 41.6. Gen X is getting there.

In 2024 Canada's population reached 40,769,890 (StatsCan, 2024a) with almost a fifth of it being over the age of 65. That gives Baby Boomers considerable demographic and economic power and they are starting to use it.

With 3 million+ Baby Boomers living in Ontario, and an expected 4.6 million between 80 and 90 by 2046 (Near North Palliative Care Network, 2024) the pressure is on to support an aging in place movement that is starting to take shape.

There is a growing cry of "hell no we won't go into long-term care institutions" all across Ontario, and this elder generation has the demographic, economic, and organizing clout to back that call up.

Not Waiting for Government

This generation of elders, with decades of wisdom and experience, is not waiting for this or any other government to get its act together. Baby Boomers have started doing it for themselves.

From Ottawa, to Toronto, to Peterborough, to Kingston, to Burlington to Grey-Bruce and right across the province Baby Boomers and their allies are organizing intergenerational networks to support aging in place.

Kingston started it all with the formation, over ten years ago, of Oasis – a social and personal support network started by the Frontenac Kingston Council on Aging and Christine McMillan – a force of nature in her own right.

In Ottawa, the Ambleside Movement has taken hold, creating supports and services of their own in a naturally occurring retirement community (NORC).

In Burlington, Councilor Paul Sharman, himself a Baby Boomer, brought PACE (Program of All Inclusive Care of the Elderly) to his city. It is now expanding to other rent-geared-to-income and private buildings in that city.

In Peterborough elders and their allies are forming a community group to start PACE there.

In High Park and North York in Toronto other groups of elders have formed intergenerational naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) to support each other as they age in place.

Also in Toronto the University Health Network, led by Dr. Abrams, also a Baby Boomer, is using the Innovation Hub to support aging in place in naturally occurring retirement communities.

In Ajax, members of the SSAO Board involved the local Town Council to pass a resolution calling for PACE expansion there. Discussions are now to take place between Town Councilors, a local non-profit seniors serving agency, the Ontario Health Team, and the Region to create a partnership to bring additional supports to the town's elders, and possibly across the Region. It is one of the first potential partnerships of Seniors for Social Action Ontario executive members, a municipality, a non-profit seniors serving agency, an Ontario Health Team, and a Region.

In Grey-Bruce a new Seniors for Social Action Ontario chapter has formed to begin tackling the need for aging in place initiatives there.

The Goals are Clear

Two goals unite elders – the goal of remaining in their own homes and communities and the goal of refusing institutionalization.

Christina Doyle, 83, a resident of Stanley Knowles co-op, another NORC working with University Health Network on aging in place initiatives echoes the feelings of a whole generation of elders when she says “the government’s big idea is to take us out of our environments instead of keeping us in our homes...it isn’t the way any of us want to go” (Bradbury, 2024)

Provincial Elder and Disability Advocacy Organizations Join Forces to Speak With One Voice - The Ontario Advocacy Consortium's Brief to Cabinet

This past week elders and their allies in the Ontario Advocacy Consortium have joined forces for the first time in four decades to call for a halt to the institutionalization of disabled people of all ages in a joint brief to Cabinet and the senior civil service in key Ministries.

The message to the Cabinet and senior civil service is clear. Stop institutionalizing people and start investing in keeping them in their own homes and communities. The brief to Cabinet outlines the range of alternatives available to the Ford government that it could fund to end the pressure on hospitals and greatly reduce long-term care waiting lists.

Ontario Advocacy Consortium Brief to Cabinet found here:

https://www.seniorsactionontario.com/files/ugd/50033d_e809487548d1451f88662ca552889b87.pdf

Premier Ford and his Cabinet had better start paying attention. If he listens carefully he will hear the sound of a demographic army and its allies approaching, armed with votes for the party that best reflects its interests in the next provincial election.

Dr. Patricia Spindel is Chair of Seniors for Social Action (Ontario)

REFERENCES

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