



Bruce County Age-Friendly Community Strategy **Engagement Summary Report**

July 2026

1. Introduction

Bruce County is developing an Age-Friendly Community Strategy (2027-2031) to support the health, well-being, and quality of life of older adults across the County. This work builds on earlier foundational efforts, including the 2025 Needs Assessment and Community Profile, and is intended to move the County from understanding community needs toward defining clear, coordinated, and actionable priorities for the future.

Community and stakeholder engagement has played a central role in this process. Building on the findings of the existing needs assessment and background review, the engagement activities were designed to deepen understanding of key issues, explore lived experiences of older adults and caregivers, and identify meaningful, locally relevant actions to support aging well in Bruce County. Consistent with the project's engagement plan, the process was intended to validate and refine existing insights rather than duplicate previous consultation, with a strong focus on practical implementation considerations and the County's evolving role in supporting age-friendly communities.

This report summarizes the engagement activities undertaken, highlights key themes and messages emerging across engagement streams, and identifies implications for strategy development and implementation.

2. Engagement Overview

Engagement for the Bruce County Age-Friendly Community Strategy was guided by a commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, collaboration, and action-oriented planning. Activities were designed to reach a range of perspectives across Bruce County, including older adults, caregivers, service providers, community organizations, municipal representatives, County staff, and members of the public.

Engagement activities completed between May and June 2026 included:

- **Focus groups with service providers and community organizations** (23 participants)
- **Interviews with County staff** (6 participants)
- **Engagement with local municipal staff**, including a targeted focus group and one-to-one interview, as well as input gathered through broader stakeholder sessions (7 municipal staff in total)
- **Municipal leadership worksheets** (5 responses)
- **Focus groups with seniors and caregivers** (19 participants)
- **Community outreach at Healthy Aging Day in Sauble Beach**, including community conversations and written feedback cards (approximately 50 participants and 34 written feedback cards)
- **Online public feedback form** hosted through the County website (15 responses)
- **Review and validation session with the Age-Friendly Community Committee**, focused on engagement findings, emerging priorities, and strategic direction

Overall, engagement reached a broad cross-section of individuals and organizations with direct knowledge of aging-related opportunities and challenges in Bruce County. Importantly, the process included both system-level perspectives (County staff, municipal staff, organizations) and lived experience perspectives (older adults, caregivers, residents).

3. What We Heard

3.1 Bruce County Has Important Strengths to Build On

Across all engagement activities, participants consistently emphasized that Bruce County is not starting from scratch. There is a strong foundation of community assets, partnerships, and existing programs that support older adults and contribute to quality of life.

Key strengths identified across engagement included:

- Strong community spirit, volunteerism, and informal neighbour-to-neighbour support
- Collaborative service providers and community organizations that already work together across sectors
- Existing transportation and community support services such as SMART Transit, Saugeen Mobility, and community support agencies
- Libraries, recreation programs, seniors clubs, community centres and Seniors Active Living Centres (SALC), and community hubs that provide opportunities for connection and participation
- Community paramedicine, Family Health Team partnerships, and other health and wellness initiatives
- Seniors themselves as active contributors to community life through volunteering, leadership, and participation in local organizations
- Local municipal recreation and social programming, including subsidized activities, educational sessions, wellness programs, and community-led events

Participants frequently spoke positively about Bruce County's culture of collaboration and the willingness of organizations and communities to work together. There was also recognition that many age-friendly elements are already present within existing County plans, municipal programs, and community initiatives. As a result, the engagement process consistently pointed toward a strategy that builds on and strengthens existing efforts, rather than creating entirely new systems.

3.2 Transportation is the Most Significant and Consistent Priority

Transportation emerged as the strongest and most consistent issue across every engagement stream. It was repeatedly described as a foundational challenge because of its impact on almost every other aspect of aging well, including health care access, social participation, volunteerism, shopping, recreation, and overall independence.

Participants identified a range of transportation-related concerns, including:

- Limited transportation options across a large rural and geographically dispersed County
- Difficulty getting to medical appointments, grocery stores, and community activities
- Transportation barriers for older adults who no longer drive
- Limited accessible transportation options for individuals with mobility challenges
- Long distances to specialized health services and urban centres
- Limited local transportation within communities, not just between communities
- High transportation costs and limited alternatives such as taxis
- Seasonal and weather-related challenges

A key message validated was that transportation needs to be considered at two levels:

1



Regional and inter-community connections between Bruce County communities and larger centres for health care, services, and specialized appointments; and

2



Local transportation within municipalities, so that older adults can get to recreation programs, libraries, shopping, medical appointments, social activities, and day-to-day amenities.

This distinction was reinforced during the Age-Friendly Community Committee discussion, where members emphasized the need for solutions that address both broader regional mobility and practical, local transportation needs within individual communities.

3.3 Supporting Aging in Place Must Be a Central Focus

A second major theme emerging across engagement was the strong desire to help older adults remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Participants consistently noted that most older adults want to age in place, but many face growing challenges in doing so safely and comfortably.

Participants described a need for a broader range of supports that help people remain at home, including:

- Home care and community-based services
- Assistance with daily living, meals, housekeeping, transportation, and home maintenance
- Home accessibility modifications and supports for mobility
- Caregiver supports and respite
- Better transitions between hospital, home care, and community services
- Practical supports that help people remain independent before they reach a crisis point

The online feedback form added particular emphasis to the need for practical in-home supports such as PSW services, nursing, occupational therapy, housekeeping, meals, and transportation, as well as more support for caregivers and people living with dementia. County staff and service providers similarly emphasized that many older adults remain independent until a sudden health event occurs, at which point gaps in support become much more visible.

Overall, participants were clear that aging in place requires more than housing alone. It depends on a broader system of home supports, community services, transportation, and caregiver assistance.

3.4 Housing Options Need to Better Reflect the Needs of an Aging Population

Housing emerged as another major priority throughout engagement. Participants across sectors described growing concern about the availability, affordability, and suitability of housing options for older adults in Bruce County.

Key housing issues raised included:

- Rising housing costs and affordability pressures
- A lack of smaller, lower-maintenance, and age-appropriate housing options
- Limited affordable seniors housing, supportive housing, and retirement living options
- Long waitlists for social housing and supportive housing
- A lack of options between independent living and long-term care
- Challenges “right-sizing” within local communities while remaining close to social networks, family, and services

Municipal representatives also highlighted geographic and local housing pressures, including the impact of seasonal and recreational property ownership in Northern Bruce Peninsula on affordability and availability for local residents. Community members and website respondents raised concerns about access to local long-term care and supportive housing, as well as the importance of allowing people to remain close to their home communities and family supports as their needs increase.

3.5 Social Connection, Participation, and Inclusion Matter

Participants consistently emphasized that healthy aging is not only about services and infrastructure; it is also about belonging, purpose, and connection. Across seniors’ sessions, municipal engagement, staff interviews, and community outreach, social isolation was identified as an important and ongoing concern, particularly for:

- Older adults living alone
- People who no longer drive
- Residents in rural or remote communities
- Seniors during winter months
- Individuals who are not connected to organized programs or social networks

At the same time, participants highlighted the importance of the many existing programs and spaces that already support social participation, including libraries, seniors clubs, community dinners, coffee groups, church-based programs, recreation activities, and community events.

Participants also identified opportunities to strengthen connection and participation through:

- Expanded recreation, social, and wellness programming
- More informal gathering opportunities and community hubs
- Friendly visiting and outreach to isolated seniors
- Intergenerational programming and opportunities to connect older adults with youth
- Volunteer initiatives that support social connection and practical assistance
- Accessible, year-round opportunities for exercise and walking, particularly in winter

The importance of intergenerational programming was reinforced through municipal input, service provider discussions, community feedback, and the Age-Friendly Community Committee conversation. There was a clear sense that age-friendly planning should not only respond to needs, but also create opportunities for older adults to continue contributing to community life and connecting across generations.

3.6 Access to Information and Services Needs to Be Easier

A recurring theme across all engagement streams was that services often exist, but people do not always know where to find them or how to access them. Participants described challenges navigating services, understanding eligibility, and identifying where to go for help, particularly before a crisis point is reached.

Common concerns included:

- Fragmented and decentralized information
- Uneven awareness of available services and supports
- Heavy reliance on word-of-mouth information
- Barriers created by digital communication for older adults who are not online
- A need for both digital and non-digital communication methods

Participants repeatedly suggested the need for clearer, more centralized, and more accessible information about programs and services. This included ideas such as centralized directories, improved resource mapping, better promotion of local services, and navigation supports that help older adults and caregivers connect to appropriate programs earlier.

Engagement participants highlighted 211 as a potential resource that could be more actively promoted within the strategy and implementation planning.

3.7 Health, Wellness, Accessibility, and Community Supports Remain Important

Participants identified a number of additional needs related to health, wellness, and accessibility that cut across the broader priorities above.

Health and community supports:



Participants highlighted limited access to Health and community supports: Participants highlighted limited access to primary care, specialists, and home and community care services, along with concerns about health human resources and increasing pressure on the system. Transportation was frequently linked to health-care access, particularly for specialist appointments and out-of-county services.

Preventative health and wellness:



There was interest in more preventative and wellness-oriented supports, including exercise programs, indoor walking opportunities, falls prevention education, fitness and nutrition programming, and supports that help older adults maintain health and independence over time.

Accessibility:



Accessibility was raised in both physical and systemic terms. Seniors and caregivers provided numerous examples of day-to-day barriers, including heavy doors, inaccessible entrances, unsafe crossings, insufficient seating, and winter sidewalk conditions. County staff and the Age-Friendly Community Committee similarly emphasized the need for continued accessibility improvements in community facilities, public spaces, and buildings.

4. What We Heard About Implementation

One of the core messages emerging from engagement was that community members, organizations, municipal representatives, and County staff want a strategy that leads to visible action. Participants consistently expressed appreciation for the work undertaken to date, but also a strong desire to move beyond studies and consultation toward a practical, focused, and accountable implementation plan.

Across engagement activities, participants emphasized that the strategy should include:

- A small number of clear and achievable priorities
- Concrete actions that can be implemented over time
- Defined roles and responsibilities for Bruce County, local municipalities, and community partners
- Timelines and phasing of actions
- Clear accountability and public reporting
- Metrics to track progress and demonstrate impact
- Ongoing leadership, coordination, and partnership-building
- Continued engagement with older adults, caregivers, and community organizations during implementation
- Attention to funding and resourcing needed to move priorities forward

These messages were strongly reinforced during the Age-Friendly Community Committee discussion. Committee members affirmed the overall strategic priorities emerging from engagement and highlighted the need for an implementation plan that includes timelines, resource needs, roles and responsibilities, and performance measures. Committee discussion also pointed to the need for practical guidance and support for local municipalities, recognizing that communities across Bruce County vary significantly in geography, capacity, service levels, and local priorities.

The Committee's validation session further reinforced several implementation considerations that should be reflected in the Strategy and implementation framework, including:

- The importance of transportation solutions at both regional and local levels;
- Continued accessibility enhancements in public spaces and facilities;
- Support for intergenerational programming and community connection;
- The opportunity to improve information navigation; and
- The importance of funding and resourcing to support implementation.



5. Implications for Strategy Development

Taken together, the engagement findings provide a strong foundation for the next phase of strategy development. While a broad range of issues were discussed, the findings consistently point toward a relatively focused set of strategic directions for the Bruce County Age-Friendly Community Strategy.

Based on engagement, the strategy should give particular attention to the following interconnected priority areas:

- **Transportation and Mobility** - including both local and regional transportation, accessible mobility, and connections to services, recreation, and community life
- **Housing and Aging in Place** - including housing choice, home supports, caregiver supports, and the broader continuum of supports needed to remain in community
- **Connection, Participation, and Well-Being** - including social participation, volunteerism, recreation, intergenerational opportunities, and efforts to reduce isolation
- **Navigation and Access to Services** - including communication, centralized information, service coordination, and practical navigation supports
- **Leadership, Collaboration, and Implementation** - including roles, partnerships, accountability, funding, and the supports needed to move from strategy to action

Just as importantly, the engagement process suggests that the final strategy should be accompanied by a practical implementation framework that translates these directions into achievable actions, with identified leads, timelines, resource considerations, and measures of progress.

6. Conclusion

The Bruce County Age-Friendly Community Strategy engagement process confirmed that there is a strong foundation to build on and a high degree of consistency in what communities, organizations, staff, and residents are saying. Transportation, aging in place, housing, social connection, information and navigation, accessibility, and coordinated community supports all emerged as important priorities. The findings of this engagement process provide direction for the next phase of the project: the development of a focused Age-Friendly Community Strategy and accompanying implementation framework that can help Bruce County move from planning to action and support older adults to age well in their communities.

