

IN  
SUPPORT OF SHIFTING  
SANDS  
PHASE II  
FINAL REPORT

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Members of the Advisory Committee included Irene Rose, Health Canada; Marie Corinne Bourque, Peggy Norris Robinson and Mary Simpson from New Brunswick; Olive Bryanton and Pat Malone from Prince Edward Island; John Ryan, Valerie White and Jane McNiven from Nova Scotia; and from Newfoundland, Eva Blevins and Norah Browne.

The Executive Director of the Seniors Resource Centre, Rosemary Lester, was the Principal Director of the Project and Anne Marie Anonsen was the Project Coordinator. Reginald Gabriel assisted with writing the Report. An evaluation of the Project was conducted by the Institute for Human Resource Development, St. John's, Newfoundland.

The Board of the Seniors Resource Centre offers thanks to everyone who attended the meetings and provided valuable input to the Project.

The opinions expressed in this Report are those of the Participants who attended the provincial and regional meetings, and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Health Canada or the Seniors Resource Centre.

Ce document est également disponible en français et s'intitule: "En appui à Les sables vivants."

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In Support of Shifting Sands, 2001. Produced by Anne Marie Anonsen for the Seniors Resource Centre and the Population and Public Health Branch, Atlantic Regional Office, Health Canada.

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*“One of the things which policy makers forget is that what seniors are asking for today is for our children. The seniors’ farm team, the Baby Boomers, who are coming up behind us, should not forget that they will be old some day. Policy makers should remember that those things they take away from older adults today, they are taking from themselves forever.”*

- Charles S. Rennie, Delegate to *In Support of Shifting Sands* Project Seminars

The quotation shown above clearly reflects the mood of seniors who participated in both Project phases of *In support of Shifting Sands*. As their numbers increase and their needs remain unmet, it is anticipated that older adults will exercise increasing efforts to influence the development and shaping of social policies, public and private.

There should be a concern among those who influence policy development in the public and private sectors, as they reflect upon Atlantic Canada’s aging population. This is clearly supported in the *Shifting Sands Report*, (Lilley & Campbell, 1999), prepared for Health Canada. The Authors’ findings include the following. Policy development in the Region needs to be influenced so that emerging policies reflect sensitivity and awareness of the increase in the area’s aging population. They observed that policy development should be responsive to the changing needs of older adults. Therefore, initiatives need to be undertaken to cause policy makers and the leaders in various social and economic sectors in Atlantic Canada to take notice of the dramatic “aging” shift in the Region’s demographics.

In response to this reported demographic phenomenon and its implications, Health Canada funded *In Support of Shifting Sands*, a project designed and developed by the Seniors Resource Centre, St. John’s, Newfoundland, to be delivered in the four Atlantic Provinces. The Project was extremely successful. It generated significant interest among the Region’s “movers and shakers” who influence policy development in sectors including health, housing, education and the economy. To capitalize on this momentum, Health Canada funded a second phase of the Project, also sponsored by the Seniors Resource Centre.

Formal activities of Phase II concluded with the formulation of the three policy statements. Compiled by Project participants representing all Atlantic Provinces, the statements were distributed via press releases in late November, 2001. The intent is that they will serve as a focus for decision makers and others who influence and/or shape policy development; and a focus for those who will champion policy changes in support of older adults’ concerns, and the realities of an aging population.

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## **POLICY STATEMENT I - TAKING CARE OF THE SOUL, MIND AND SPIRIT**

As the world Assembly on Aging prepares to meet in April, 2002, Canadians must recognize and celebrate the successful aging that has occurred in our Country in the past 50 years. Population aging is one of humanity's greatest triumphs. Therefore, we call for policies that:

- Recognize that older Canadians are a resource: intellectual, social, economic, cultural, leadership.
- Support advancements for older citizens which will have an impact on our entire society and benefit future generations.
- Develop and support coalitions are an effective way of working together to better our world.

## **POLICY STATEMENT II - THE PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WILL CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT**

A physical infrastructure which will create a healthy environment for older Canadians will include housing and transportations options for all.

- We are asking the Federal Government to take a leadership role in setting national standards for housing.
- We encourage three levels of government to form private, public and community partnerships that will lead to wider choices.
- The Federal Government must review the pension and tax system to reflect the changing demographics.

## **POLICY STATEMENT III - PHYSICAL HEALTH: MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE BODY**

- Older Canadians must have informed and appropriate choices at all levels of health care at every step of the way, as needs change. The Atlantic population is aging while the informal and formal support networks are diminishing.
- It is a fundamental right of older Canadians to have a comprehensive and appropriate

health care system including support for care givers, integrated home care, and palliative care.

- Older Canadians expect and will demand to be part of and to contribute to the health care decision making process. This will include defining what is appropriate, defining health care standards, and defining what is fiscally responsible.

*“planning for the far-reaching consequences of demographic change in Atlantic Canada has begun.”*

### PROCESS

In the Project’s Phase II, Leaders and decision makers were brought together from a variety of sectors in each of Atlantic Canada’s four capital cities. Those meeting were followed by a regional, Champions meeting in Halifax. Champions were those individuals from each province who stepped forward as leaders on specific issues. A major difference in delegates’ composition in this phase of the Project was, that those invited to attend had demonstrated a high degree of commitment toward positively influencing policy development in support of an aging Atlantic population.

To stimulate individual interest and to support anticipated, proactive approaches in each individual’s respective jurisdiction or sphere of influence, an emerging leadership technology was employed in the meetings. Sometimes referred to as “Open Space Technology,” this approach in achieving objectives is considered to be a powerful leadership process.

“It taps into the spirit of an organization like no other large or small group intervention can ... to enable organizations to learn and achieve beyond their expectations with a simple approach, based on clear values and principles. Open Space creates an environment for innovation, problem solving, creativity, team work, and rapid change. Open Space creates the conditions for an organization to utilize the potential of the workforce, inspire growth in organization performance, and to learn to use the chaos in the organisation to work for you rather than against you.”

In keeping with the “open space” approach, participants were aware that: “The process acknowledges the potential for leadership in every person. The agenda is created by the people in the room. Passion and responsibility are the two keys to a successful meeting. Without passion, enthusiasm for an idea will soon wane; and without responsibility, there is risk that the ideas will never move forward.” In other words, the objective of those meetings was to further stimulate highly motivated, interested individuals to accept responsibility for the implementation and progress of specific recommendations, as outlined in the Report, *In Support of Shifting Sands*.

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Following the four provincial meetings, the Champions' meeting took place in Halifax on October 24 - 25, 2001. The thirty-five participants included representatives from municipal, provincial and federal governments, from the private and public health sectors, housing, education, finance, and from a variety of seniors' organizations.

During the Halifax meeting, a process known as **World Cafe** was used to facilitate an individual being able to share information with every other individual present. The objective was to tell what was happening in their respective provinces in relation to efforts to influence policy making processes. Of equal importance, the posed question, "how do we move this work forward?" received considerable discussion.

As the Project's final, formal activity, the meeting had a threefold purpose. **First**, to follow-up on the action plans written during the Project's "Open Space" meetings, held earlier in the year. In other words, to learn how each group, headed by a champion, had progressed in moving forward a particular action plan. **Second**, to enable individuals to learn from each other about recent processes and progress in each Atlantic Province in planning for an aging population; and to determine what needs to happen to continue the work now that the Shifting Sands Project is finished. **Third**, to develop policy statements in three areas where seniors are particularly affected.

### THE VIEW FROM HERE: SENIORS' REFLECTIONS

It is impossible to capture and reflect the richness and depth of participants' discussions at the Halifax meeting. The level of insights and concerns reflected, however, are illustrated by the following quotations recorded during their round table and other discussions. One of the more salient points made was that policy makers need to be made aware of and understand that what older adults are asking for is not so much for themselves, but for those who come after them.

"Having sewn the seeds of awareness, and realizing the fertility of their placement, it is imperative that additional effort be taken to further the initiatives taken as outlined in the Report, *In Support of Shifting Sands*. To do otherwise will result in a failure to seize an opportunity in redirecting the thinking and policy development that can lead to a much stronger and more viable social environment for the Atlantic Region."

"... when looking at health care policies, for example, emphasis should not be placed on cost. We must get governments to look at the broad issues: how will their policies impact the health and well-being of the individual over the long-term, in terms of improved quality and quantity of life; ... and the effect on loved ones caring for that individual. Cost is only one factor!"

"Encourage provincial governments to have a health strategy designed with the future in mind to meet seniors' needs as the population ages. There should be a holistic approach to health and

well-being, starting at a younger age.” Another excellent example is the recommendation indicating the requirement for “national, standardized, regulated home care and home support programs.”

“Our system penalizes people who wish to continue working/earning beyond formal retirement - this is silly in an era when people live longer; the knowledge economy needs the input of experienced workers, and we are openly advocating that people need to plan wisely for retirement by saving and building RRSPs; yet, we are still living with a tax and social security system developed in the 1950s and 60s.”

“We are used to aging as being a period of retirement from **active** life, that is, after age 65. But people are living much longer today. The period of life after retirement may be as long as their working life was. There is a need to think about and prepare for a **culture of long life.**”

“What is influencing decision makers right now? Policies depend on choices of policy makers who make decision for a variety of personal and political reasons. Policy makers have personal reasons why they make policies and it is difficult to find out what those factors are. It is difficult to influence policy makers who may not be using strong evidence upon which to base policy decisions. We need to learn more about these policy dynamics and what is influencing the choices of tomorrow and today.”

“Older adults have the right to give direct input into policy making and management of resources. Seniors have the knowledge, but it is going to be a difficult process to break through the barriers separating policy makers from the people”

### MAKING A START

“This process, (In Support of Shifting Sands Project), is helpful; but we need to build more networks and coalitions. We must not get discouraged. We are planting seeds. Who are the policy makers and who has the power? Is it the politician working in four-year stints? Is it the bureaucrat who can work in longer stints? Both must be reached by credible voices who can put a face upon and bring prominence to the implications of aging-related issues.”

Those comments reflect the mood and enthusiasm of older adults who have been involved in the Shifting Sands Projects. In other words, “We have to take what we have learned here and do projects in our communities to make people aware of these gaps and problems.”

Their comments also reflect appreciation for issues raised and highlighted by Project participants in the Atlantic Provinces. This is underpinned by referring to the many recommendations which

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resulted from the activities in Phase I of the Project. The need for policy development, taking into consideration the increase in the Region's older population, was demonstrated by the nearly 100 recommendations for review, change and/or development in sectors including health care, housing, transportation, financial concerns and life long learning.

## SMALL STEPS - SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS

So far, what gains have been made as a result of the Shifting Sands Projects? In truth, this cannot be fully known for some time to come, if ever. The reason is that the effects and fallout, including informal, Project-related contacts, may have impacted decision makers and policy makers in ways that cannot be readily traced, even through formal, evaluation processes. The following will serve as an example.

Referencing his awareness of the Project, the President of Memorial University of Newfoundland recently met with representatives of the Seniors Resource Centre in St. John's to discuss the emerging issues affecting older adults; and to observe, that with the cooperation of the Centre and the community, initiatives may be taken to develop a Centre on Aging at that University.

There are a number of significant achievements, however, which can be directly attributed to the impact and awareness raising initiated by *In Support of Shifting Sands*. Following are examples of those, on a per province basis.

### New Brunswick



Seniors groups in New Brunswick decided that, working together their issues can be promoted by developing “bridges” between younger adults and seniors. Their goal is to bridge the gap between the two generations.

As part of this effort, they have aligned themselves with a national project operating out of Montreal called, Project Intergenerational Rapports des Generations. In its first year, the Project is providing resources to look at religious faith groups, the work place and policy work. This effort is receiving enthusiastic support from the New Brunswick Go-Ahead Seniors Organization.

Another achievement is the commitment and cooperation of fully bilingual teams of older adults, working together to develop increased interest in issues related to providing and accessing opportunities for life long learning opportunities to include older adults.

### Newfoundland



Delegates from that Province reported bringing issues of home care services to the attention of relevant health care boards, and to the doors of Government's Department of Health and Community Services' officials. This has resulted in that issue being placed higher on the agendas of those in positions to positively effect outcomes, that is, improved home care access and delivery.

The Department of Works, Services and Transportation has committed to work with the Seniors Resource Centre toward promoting implementation of recommendations in the Report, "Future Mobility Needs Of Seniors: Should There Be A Policy?"

The President of Memorial University has committed to working with the Seniors Resource Centre to further develop research into the Newfoundland and Labrador aging population, with a view to establishing a centre on aging which would include learning opportunities for older adults.

Resulting from their representatives' participation in the Project, the Department of Health and Community Services is holding regular seniors fora to bring together Government, the private sector and seniors organizations to share information and explore ideas respecting older adult issues.

The Seniors Resource Centre has been holding meetings with Government officials to pursue developing new legislation for the protection of older adults.

The Champion focusing on financial issues organized a forum where approximately 100 persons, including many seniors had an opportunity to raise and discuss concerns and issues regarding retirement planning, pensions, investments, taxation, personal financial practices and related matters. Results will be shared with decision makers in the financial sector.

The Seniors Resource Centre has committed to reconvening, in several months time, the delegates who participated in the Newfoundland segments of the Project. The objective is to further promote on-going activities initiated or stimulated by *In Support of Shifting Sands*.

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## Nova Scotia



Seniors who participated in the Project decided to create greater interest in policy issues affecting older adults by building coalitions of seniors groups to work together around those issues.

Toward that end, they have attracted the attention of the Gerontology Association of Nova Scotia, (GANS). In support of the Seniors' initiative, GANS has received funding from Health Canada to build coalitions among the Province's many seniors organizations.

## Prince Edward Island

Delegates from that Province reported being involved in and stimulating others to action toward improving home care services, with respect to access and delivery.

A "cross-sectoral" conference on housing took place recently. It was organized by the Province's Seniors Federation in collaboration with the Provincial Government.

Holland College is developing a marketing strategy aimed at the baby boomer generation. The goal is to stimulate interest in and access to life long learning.



## CONCLUSION

There were expectations that Project outcomes would include one or more examples of its impact, resulting in changes in policy development. Policy changes occur slowly, often achieved in small, incremental steps. This is particularly true with respect to working toward changes in government policies, regardless of whether they are in health, housing or any other sector. An example of the Project's impact is the influence it had upon the Newfoundland Government's Department of Health and Community Services to establish permanent seniors' fora to help Government learn more about seniors' view regarding policies affecting older adults.

Is it possible to capture every indication of policy change in all relevant sectors of Atlantic Canada which may have been influenced by the work of the Project? The obvious answer is no.

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There is enough evidence nevertheless, well beyond the speculative stage, to indicate that the Project was successful in achieving its stated goal, that is: “To raise awareness among the Atlantic Region’s policy and decision makers regarding the rapid aging of the population; and the necessity of taking into consideration positive policy changes in response to this demographic phenomenon.”

As noted in the concluding remarks of the Phase I Report, *In support of Shifting Sands*, having sewn the seeds of awareness, and realizing the fertility of their placement, it is imperative that additional effort be taken to further the initiatives taken as a result of this Project. To do otherwise will result in failure to seize an opportunity to redirect thinking and policy development which could lead to a much stronger and more viable social environment for the Atlantic Region.”

***“I have seen the future, and the future is us.”***

Given the far-reaching known and unknown effects of this Project, the following recommendation is offered for consideration. That Health Canada sponsor an evaluation of the Project’s outcomes, after a period of approximately one year has elapsed. This will provide some empirical measure as to the Project’s impact upon policy change and/or development. It will also serve to indicate if this kind of process should be considered as an approach for future efforts to create awareness and influence policy changes in response to Atlantic Canada’s aging population.