

Canadian Guidelines on Library and Information Services for Older Adults

Approved by Executive Council ~ November 24, 2002

Introduction

Older adults are not a homogenous population that can be easily categorized. Like any identifiable group within our society, such as people with disabilities or members of ethnic communities, the information needs and interests of older people range widely and mirror the adult community as a whole. Also, within the broad category of "older adults" lie several generations with different life experiences and different sets of expectations. The first principle, then, of serving an older population is to recognize this great diversity and to be ever conscious of the dangers of stereotyping in planning collections, programs and services.

At the same time, as the existence of the study of gerontology clearly indicates, there are special circumstances that most older people share, and that service providers must take into account. These include the experience of retirement which brings both increased leisure and the need to re-structure one's daily life. While the great majority of older persons in Canada enjoy good health, the onset of physical problems increases with age and may dictate a change of lifestyle and activity. There are new circumstances that often have an impact on the information older people need, and how they are able to or wish to access it.

With the aging of our society we can expect that one out of every four or five Canadians will be 65 years or older within the next 30 years. At this time people in this age category are underrepresented among library users. If this situation continues we can expect a serious impact on our libraries, and how the public views the importance of the library.

This set of guidelines, proposed by the [Canadian Library Association's Interest Group on Services for Older People](#), is intended to provide a checklist for libraries to use in planning services that are inclusive of older adults, and that will encourage a greater use of libraries by this growing population.

A Definition of "Older Adults"

For the purposes of these guidelines, older people generally means persons aged 60 or older. This is the approximate age when one either chooses retirement, or begins to plan for mandatory retirement at age 65.

Guidelines

1. **Acquire current data about the older population and incorporate it into planning and budgeting.**

1.1 Conduct focus groups and user studies among the community's older population on a regular basis in order to gauge how services, collections and programs might be made more appropriate and relevant to this age group. Communities are dynamic, and each generation of senior citizens brings with it a different set of experiences, interests, and expectations.

1.2 Collect data on the special information needs of older people from minority cultures.

1.3 Ensure that any services that target the older population are an integral and ongoing part of the library's operations and budget. This might include, for instance, a seniors' information centre, a regular series of programs that target older adults, or the operation of a vehicle to serve seniors' residences.

1.4 Involve older adults in the community in the library's planning process, either by establishing a seniors' advisory committee, or through regular liaison with seniors' organizations and seniors' centres. Older adults who are library volunteers, members of the library's Friends organization, or are library board members might also be consulted.

1.5 Research appropriate grant opportunities and sponsorships that can support the development of new programs and services for older adults eg. purchases of special equipment.

2. **Ensure that the special needs and interests of older people in your community are reflected in the library's collections, programs, and services.**

2.1 Appoint a librarian, perhaps as part of the Adult Services team, to act as coordinator of seniors' services, or as seniors' liaison, ensuring that there is at

least one designated staff member monitoring and developing the library's collections and services with older adults in mind.

2.2 Since older adults are generally underrepresented among library users, consider how the library can be made more visible, more welcoming, and more relevant for this potential user group.

2.3 Advertise the library's services in local seniors' newspapers, magazines, radio or television programs, in seniors' centres, and seniors' residential housing.

2.4 Offer to speak to seniors' organizations about the library's services on a regular basis.

2.5 Establish an ongoing liaison with seniors' centres, seniors' organizations, and agencies serving older adults, to explore cooperative programming, to recruit volunteers or friends of the library, and to seek suggestions for programs or services that would encourage library use.

2.6 Where appropriate, be an advocate for the needs of older adults in the wider community.

3. Make the library's physical facilities safe, comfortable and inviting for older people.

All public buildings must follow prescribed building codes, but these alone do not ensure a level of safety and comfort that older adults may need. Most of the basic requirements for access by people with disabilities are included in these codes, in human rights legislation and local by-laws and regulations. Older adults comprise a sizeable percentage of Canadians with disabilities, therefore the Canadian Guidelines on Library and Information Services for People with Disabilities (CLA 1997) should be consulted and used in conjunction with these guidelines for serving older people.

3.1 In addition to consulting the Guidelines for People With Disabilities, evaluate your library's physical access by making use of the checklists, The Accessible Canadian Library II, and the Canadian Standards Association's Barrier-Free Design.

3.2 Provide at least one wheelchair in the library for public use.

3.3 Place chairs or stools near stack areas, by information desks, check-out areas, and computer terminals.

3.4 Avoid placing materials on shelves that will be difficult to reach with comfort. This is especially important in areas of the collection that older adults may frequent more.

3.5 Place paperback racks, clearly labeled and well spaced, in areas of the library that are especially well lit, accommodating the many older patrons who prefer paperbacks over heavier and more cumbersome hardback books.

3.6 Ensure that signage is clear, in larger type, and readily visible. Library brochures should also be in at least 12-point font type.

3.7 Provide at least one computer terminal with large font size or voice recognition system in all service outlets, and label visibly.

3.8 Make services and collections easily accessible for patrons with hearing disabilities, by providing TTY access, closed-captioned videotapes, and equipment to facilitate access such as TV decoders. Ensure that programs in the library are also accessible for deaf adults.

4. Make the library a focal point for seniors' information.

4.1 The library can provide an invaluable service to older adults in its community by organizing and consolidating information that they need about government and community programs and services for seniors. In communities where such an information centre is managed by a community agency, the library should work in cooperation with the agency by advertising this service and making the information more readily accessible.

4.2 Develop a library Web site for seniors, that selectively provides links to the sites of seniors' organizations, government departments and agencies serving older people, full-text seniors' newspapers, and other Web sites whose focus is older adults.

4.3 Ensure that the library's collection includes materials that are pertinent for caregivers of older people, for their children or other family members, and for

professional caregivers in the community. Collect and display pamphlet and other community information, and consider developing a library Web site for this audience.

5. Target the older population in library programming.

5.1 Include in program planning each year programs that specifically target older adults. Advertising at least some programs in this way can heighten the library's visibility among the older population.

5.2 Select themes for seniors' programs that deal with specific interests identified in the library's user surveys or focus groups, in circulation statistics reflecting borrowing patterns by seniors, or from liaison with seniors themselves, through their organizations or a seniors' library advisory council.

5.3 Plan programs for specific age groups or generations within the older population, being aware that interests and information needs do vary greatly.

5.4 Include intergenerational programs and participate in intergenerational projects, possibly in cooperation with the library's youth services, with local schools, daycare facilities or community organizations.

5.5 Pursue other opportunities for cooperative programming for seniors in the community, through community and seniors' centres, community agencies, educational institutions offering continuing educational programs for older adults. Cooperative efforts might involve active participation in planning and delivering programs, assistance in advertising programs, or providing book displays and booklists in conjunction with programs.

5.6 Consider developing computer and internet courses specifically for older adults. This accommodates a slower pace of instruction, time to develop "mousing skills," and to account for the probability that some participants will have visual or hearing problems. Include individual tutoring if possible.

5.7 Take the library to older people in the community. Provide programming for seniors outside the library, in seniors' or community centres, and in nursing homes and seniors' housing units. Consider offering computer and internet training in these locations.

5.8 Use library displays to combat ageism or the stereotypes in our society about older people.

6. Reach out to older adults in the community who are unable to get to the library.

6.1 Plan to adjust library budgets and practices to accommodate an increased need for homebound delivery service. The fastest growing age group in Canada is the very old, those aged 75 and older, and we can therefore expect to see more demand everywhere for services to older people confined to their homes. Only by closely monitoring community demographics, population forecasts, and housing trends can libraries effectively plan for these adjustments.

6.2 Offer the library's homebound service to all nursing homes and seniors' residential or care homes in the community. Also include older people who are confined to private residences, or who are unable to carry library materials home.

6.3 Advertise homebound library service through local media, seniors' organizations and centres, public health agencies, and other community agencies working with older people.

6.4 Eliminate waiting lists for homebound service, through innovative approaches to delivery of materials, a redistribution of personnel, or establishment of a volunteer delivery system.

7. Train the library's staff to serve older adults with politeness and respect.

7.1 Provide sensitivity training to staff at all levels to make them aware of difficulties older people may have in using the library, and how to make the library a more welcoming and comfortable place for older adults.

7.2 Train staff to recognize the stereotypes about older people, and to avoid condescending service.

7.3 Ensure that all staff are aware of any special services the library offers that may be of interest to older patrons, such as home delivery service, a talking books collection, a service to retrieve materials from the stacks, reading aids, or waiving of fines or fees.

Guidelines written by members of the [CLA Interest Group on Services to Older People](#), 1999.