

Mackenzie Age-friendly Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan

2023

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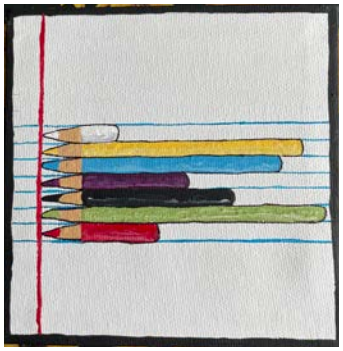


Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the development of this Age-Friendly Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan. This report would not have been possible without the dedication, expertise, and passion of numerous individuals and organizations working towards a more accessible and inclusive Mackenzie.

We want to thank the diverse group of community members who generously shared their experiences, insights, and perspectives. Your willingness to participate and engage in this process was invaluable, and your voices have truly shaped the direction and focus of this report.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the many volunteers who devoted their time and energy to assist with various aspects of this project. Together, we have taken a significant step towards creating a more accessible and inclusive community.



Cover Image:
The concept behind this painting is that regardless of what we come to the table with we should all be able to live meaningful and engaged lives that are purposeful. This art piece was created by local resident, Cassandra Carter, with the prompt 'What does inclusion look like to you?'. It is now owned by Mackenzie Community Arts Council and is a reminder that equality does not mean we all get the same - but that we get what we need to engage in the same way.

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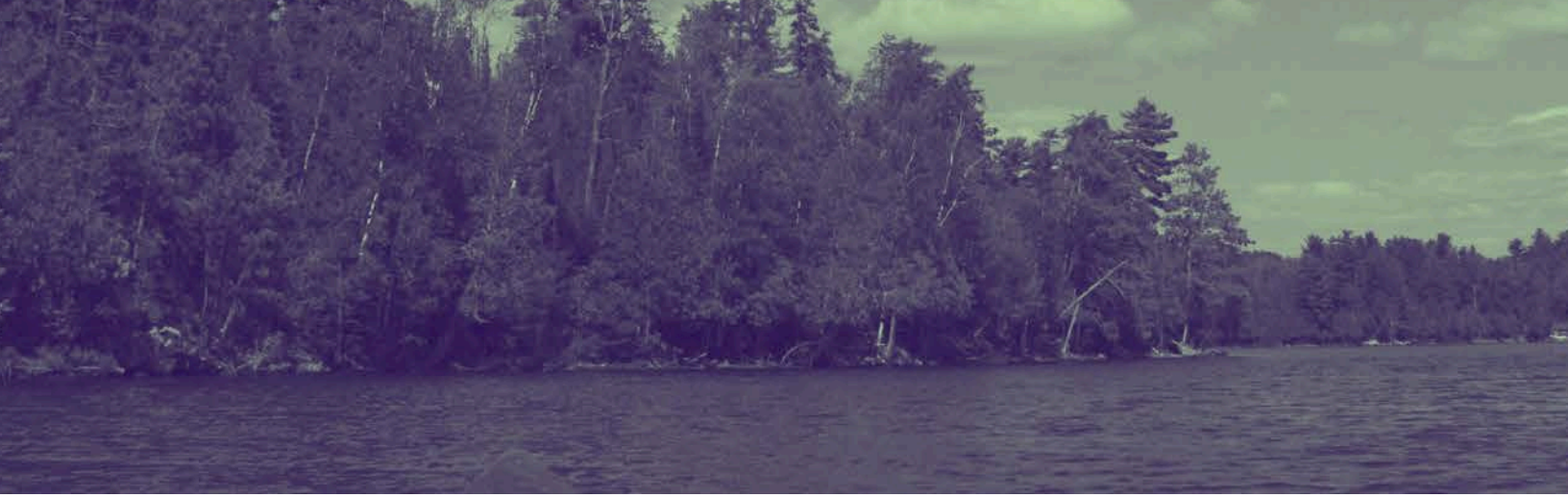
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Executive Summary

An inclusive community emphasizes safety and accessibility, supporting residents to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. A good "person-environment fit" (the balance between an individual's physical and mental abilities and environmental demands) fosters independence, enhanced health outcomes, and stronger social connections. Assessing accessibility features with an age-friendly lens is key to this process.

In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated the age-friendly movement with the publication of the Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide. The WHO's approach enables municipalities to assess and strategize their communities. The approach uses eight dimensions of communities' physical, social, and wellbeing. An assessment of these dimensions is typically used to establish a baseline in communities aspiring for a more inclusive future.

This report outlines the results of an assessment conducted in the District of Mackenzie in the winter of 2023. The assessment included desk research and a community engagement process with feedback gathered through open houses, one-on-one interviews, and an online and paper survey. The data was compiled and categorized using the Public Health Agency of Canada's Age-friendly Evaluation Indicators, which served as the foundation for devising an action plan.

Community consultations revealed existing accessible features in Mackenzie. However, the consultations also identified barriers to inclusivity and suggestions for mitigating or eliminating those barriers. Community members offered invaluable insights and recommendations moving forward. The recommendations are presented with proposed lead organizations, timelines, linkages, and potential grant funding opportunities. The report's final section provides strategies for implementing the action plan.

Introduction

The Canadian age-friendly community initiative is designed to establish welcoming environments for individuals of all ages, ranging from young children to older adults. The movement has gained traction, and British Columbia now has hundreds of communities that have undergone age-friendly assessments.

An age-friendly community prioritizes accessibility and inclusion for all, irrespective of age or ability. Notable features of age-friendly communities include safe, accessible streets, public transportation, affordable housing, social and cultural events, and healthcare services. Age-friendly communities also nurture social connections, promote active lifestyles, and provide opportunities for engagement and participation.

The District of Mackenzie, a small community in northern British Columbia, is working to become more accessible and inclusive. This report thoroughly examines Mackenzie's current accessibility and inclusion status while proposing recommendations to enhance the community's services for all age groups.

The report is grounded in the eight dimensions of an age-friendly community, focusing on the physical environment (outdoor spaces and buildings, housing, transportation), social environment (social participation and recreation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment), and personal wellbeing (communications and information, community health and wellness services).



Community Profile

Background

The District of Mackenzie is situated on the traditional territories of the McLeod Lake Indian Band (Tse'Khene Nation), Kwadacha Nation, and Tsay Keh Dene Nation. Nestled between the Rocky and Omineca Mountains in northern British Columbia, Mackenzie was established as a planned community in the Rocky Mountain Trench.

In 1966, the first families arrived in Mackenzie, an "instant town" developed with an emphasis on a resource-based economy. Land clearing for the main townsite began the previous year, and British Columbia Forest Products constructed a pulp mill and two sawmills to capitalize on the region's abundant forest resources. The town was designed as a walkable, compact settlement, with industrial and residential zones separated to maintain clean air.

As a small community, Mackenzie offers many essential services, such as a District hospital, College of New Caledonia campus, swimming pool, community arts center, and public library.

Population

In the Stats Can 2021 census (updated November 30, 2022), the current population in Mackenzie is 3281 residents - a decrease of 433 residents (12% of the population) since 2016. Children and youth (0-14 years old) make up 17% of the population, while 66% are between the ages of 15 and 64. The median age of the population is 44 years.

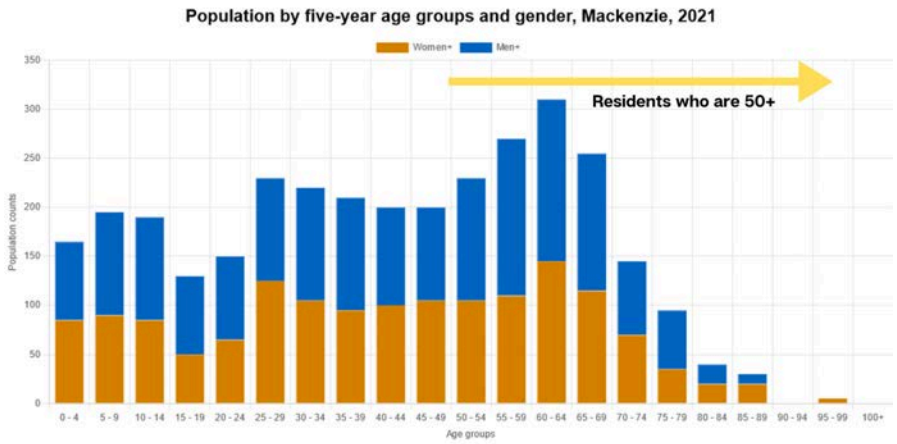
Population aging is a significant issue impacting municipalities across Canada. It is projected to continue over the upcoming years, with the proportion of the population aged 65 and over expected to increase significantly. The youngest baby boomers will turn 65 by 2030, further accelerating the phenomenon over the next two decades. The proportion of the total population aged 65 and over is projected to reach between 21.3% and 22.9% by 2030 and between 21.6% and 29.8% by 2068.[1]

Currently, the percentage of Mackenzie residents over 55 is 35%. The number of people 65 and above is 17% (an increase of 6% since 2016).

[1] Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Mackenzie District Municipality. Statistics Canada

Population Distribution

Mackenzie's changing population



Adapted from: Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Mackenzie District Municipality. Statistics Canada

3281

Residents as of 2022

66%

Residents between the ages of 15-64

44

The median population age

Culture

Mackenzie has a thriving Indigenous population, encompassing members from the McLeod Lake Indian Band, Kwadacha Nation, and Tsay Keh Dene Nations. These Nations possess a deep-rooted and rich heritage, with their culture and traditions remaining influential in the area. The Indigenous community in Mackenzie actively participates and contributes to the region's growth.

The two most prominent visible minority groups in Mackenzie are the South Asian (1.3%) and Filipino communities (2.5%), with overall visible minority groups increasing from 3.5% in 2016 to 4.7% in 2021. Official language bilingual speakers make up 13% of the population. At the same time, Tagalog is the most highly spoken non-official language, followed by Punjabi, Spanish, German and Hindi.[2]

[2]Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Mackenzie District Municipality. Statistics Canada

Housing

In Mackenzie (District municipality) in 2021, 1,015 of the 1,515 occupied private dwellings were single-detached houses, representing 66.7% of all occupied private residences in the region.[3] Of residents 55 and older, 715 were owners (78% single-detached homes, 12% movable dwellings, 5% other attached dwellings, 3% semi-detached, and 2% row houses), and 60 were renters.[4]

The District faces challenges related to the need for more affordable rental housing. According to the 2021 Census, the vacancy rate in Mackenzie was 2.6%, far below the provincial average of 3.7%. Mackenzie is actively pursuing strategies to increase the amount of affordable, long-term rental housing in the area. Initiatives are underway to investigate options to diversify the housing stock to meet the community's current and future needs.



The high number of movable dwelling residences reported in the 2021 census may be potentially misleading; community stakeholders who participated in the Housing Needs Assessment reported that in 2019, more than half of the mobile home park lots were vacant. Additionally, it was observed that very few dwellings had stairs, which would not limit the accessibility of the park for seniors and those with mobility issues.[5]

According to the 2019 District of Mackenzie Housing Needs Report, the housing shortage has been exacerbated by the lack of new housing units built in the past decade, leading to a decrease in the overall housing supply. This ripple effect makes it increasingly difficult for people to find suitable rental housing, especially those with mobility needs, seniors, and those seeking smaller housing units. Furthermore, the number of existing housing units needing major repairs is increasing, leaving those needing access to emergency housing with few options.[6]

[3]Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Mackenzie District Municipality. Statistics Canada
[4] Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0232-01Age of primary household maintainer by tenure: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions DOI: https://doi.org/10.25318/9810023201-eng
[5] https://mackenzie.civicweb.net/document/44847/
[6] https://mackenzie.civicweb.net/document/44847/

Income

Mackenzie has seen many economic changes throughout its history. After being founded as a forestry-based town, the community has faced many challenges, including the decline in the wood products industry. However, Mackenzie has seen a resurgence of economic growth in recent years, with a focus on diversifying the local economy and boosting tourism. The town has seen an influx of start-ups, new businesses, and local infrastructure investments. There has also been an increase in the number of retirees and new residents, boosting the local economy.

Most Mackenzie residents are employed in trades, manufacturing, transport and related occupations, as well as sales, service, business, finance, and administration. Since 2016, the unemployment rate has increased significantly from 9.4 to 20.6% among 15-24-year-olds and from 7.8 to 10.5% among 25-64-year-olds. Labour market participation has also dropped for those over 65 to 20%. In Mackenzie, the median after-tax income of households experienced a decline of 9.9% between 2015 and 2020, dropping from $86,000 to $77,500. [7]



Health

The health of people in the Northern Health Authority (the area in which Mackenzie is located) is generally good, with a strong focus on prevention and health promotion. The Authority has a range of programs and initiatives to improve the health of people in the region, including a focus on healthy eating, physical activity, mental health and wellbeing, chronic disease management, and preventative health. The Health Authority also partners with local communities, organizations and service providers to ensure access to healthcare services and promote healthy lifestyles. They also actively engage in research and evaluation activities to help inform their programs and services.

The people of Mackenzie have access to essential health care services, including primary care services such as family medicine, some mental health services, and public health services. In the past few years, the local healthcare system has seen several improvements, resulting in better access to services and increased availability of healthcare professionals.

Mackenzie has more than the provincial average number of physicians (i.e., eight family doctors). Mackenzie & District Hospital and Health Centre provide local services with a nine-bed facility with four acute beds, four long-term care beds, and one respite/palliative care bed. It provides medical and emergency services, medical imaging, laboratory services, mental health and substance use services, a medical clinic, dietitian services, and diabetes education.

[7] Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Mackenzie District Municipality. Statistics Canada



The community has also seen increased preventative health initiatives and programs to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce chronic disease. The people of Mackenzie enjoy good health overall, with a low rate of chronic conditions and a high life expectancy.

Mackenzie's remote location can be a barrier to those who need to access services outside of the town. It can be difficult for many to travel to the nearest city (Prince George) for medical or other services, and those who do must often rely on private transportation.

Local Policies

Mackenzie has been working toward becoming a more inclusive, accessible, and age-friendly community for over a decade. In 2011, the community began a planning process called Mackenzie in Motion to provide their vision for the future. This included surveys, workshops, and public events. The Mackenzie Housing Review identified senior housing as a critical gap and recommended monitoring the need for housing (and planning for accessible housing) and proposed assisted living close to amenities.

In 2013, Northern Health held a public consultation on Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness, and in 2014, the Official Community Plan (OCP) was released. In the OCP, The District outlined comprehensive, long-term goals for the community. Through the OCP, the District committed to creating a sustainable, vibrant, and welcoming community for all. To achieve this, the District is committed to investing in economic development, infrastructure, housing, transportation, and recreation. It is also committed to protecting the natural environment, increasing public engagement, and promoting social equity. Additionally, the District is focused on creating a culture of sustainability, where sustainability is embedded in all aspects of the community.

In 2017, the District's Accessibility Committee hosted an Age-Friendly Open House to review what was working well and what needed improvement.



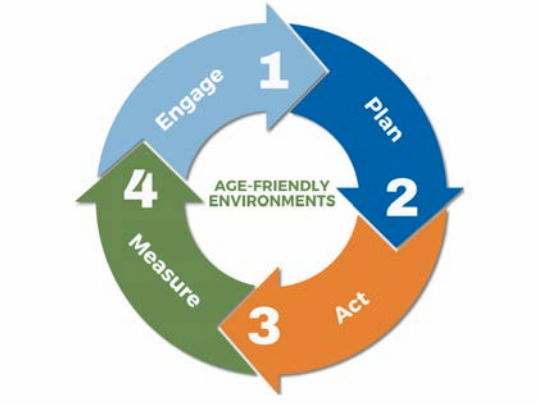
The Age-Friendly Housing Health Care Plan was released the same year, and in 2020, a New Horizons for Seniors Program project with the College of New Caledonia was released.

Finally, in 2021 a Mackenzie Seniors Survey was conducted by the Community Development Institute at UNBC, and in 2023, this age-inclusive Age-friendly Accessibility and Inclusion Plan will be released.

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is an organized method of collecting and examining information to identify the requirements of a community. This process assists in making informed decisions and addressing challenges by understanding the present situation, pinpointing potential areas for improvement, and formulating action plans to tackle the identified needs.

The Age-Friendly needs assessment process aims to develop age-friendly communities by adopting a "bottom-up" approach, beginning with the viewpoints of community members and from public, voluntary, and commercial service providers in the local region. The data thoroughly evaluates the community's strengths and weaknesses concerning age-friendliness. Subsequently, this assessment is shared with community members and decision-makers to guide actions toward fostering a more age-friendly community.[8]



Methodology

The Engage-Plan-Act-Measure (EPAM) process is a specific assessment tool age-friendly communities use to plan for and improve their services and programs. The process ensures that decision-making is informed, collaborative, and evidence-based. The process involves four stages:

1. Engage: To facilitate engagement, age-friendly communities typically host listening sessions, surveys, and other forms of outreach to gather feedback and build consensus.

2. Plan: After engaging stakeholders, age-friendly communities develop a plan that outlines their goals and strategies. This plan identifies the services and programs that will be recommended, how they will be implemented, and how they will be evaluated.

3. Act: Once the plan is in place, age-friendly communities implement their services and programs. This includes training and support for staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

4. Measure: After implementation, age-friendly communities measure the effectiveness of their services and programs.

[8] WHO Age-Friendly Cities Project Methodology: Vancouver Protocol. World Health Organization (2007)

This includes evaluating their impact on the community, the number of individuals served, and the outcomes achieved. The results of this evaluation are used to inform future decisions.

The EPAM process is an integral part of age-friendly planning and helps ensure that the needs of older adults are met. By engaging stakeholders, developing an evidence-based plan, and measuring the impact of services and programs, age-friendly communities can ensure their efforts are effective.

We conducted an age-friendly needs assessment of the District of Mackenzie between December 2022 and March 2023, structured to facilitate future evaluations. Data collection in each age-friendly domain relied on indicators identified in the Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) Age-friendly Communities Evaluation Guide. The PHAC indicators, developed from the original age-friendly communities guide and adapted to the Canadian context, enable communities to systematically plan, implement, and evaluate age-friendly initiatives. Using indicators in the assessment process establishes a baseline measure and streamlines future age-friendly assessments.

We employed a mixed methods approach for the needs assessment. The process included desk research and a community engagement strategy. Community engagement included a survey (online and in print), open houses, and one-on-one interviews with community members, caregivers, and service providers. This community engagement process yielded qualitative data and input and suggestions from participants that informed the subsequent recommendations listed in each domain.

Desk Research

Academic literature offers a context for devising data collection strategies and understanding community engagement outcomes. The process commenced with the following:

1. Reviewing the most pertinent academic literature and grey materials (i.e., information produced outside traditional academic and research publications, such as government documents, white papers, and professional reports).

2. Reviewing city strategic policies and documents.

3. Assessing characteristics, demographic profiles, social and emerging trends of Mackenzie's local population.

4. Reviewing secondary data, including administrative-level program and service data and current program and service inventories.



Community Engagement

Community engagement is typically included in a needs assessment, enabling community members to participate in decision-making. Community engagement in age-friendly planning involves working with people of all ages to create environments that cater to everyone's needs. This collaborative process emphasizes the importance of including the older and younger generations in decision-making to ensure that the resulting plans are genuinely inclusive and effective.

Survey

A survey provided quantitative and qualitative information as part of the needs assessment. Currently, no standardized survey tool is available for assessing age-friendliness in communities. The instrument for this project was developed using a combination of demographic questions already employed by the Canadian Community Health Survey, indicators identified in the PHAC evaluation guide, and minor modifications to accommodate a significant number of age-diverse respondents. The Canadian Community Health Survey questions facilitate demographic comparisons with other communities and national statistics.

Due to time and logistical constraints, we used a convenience sample to collect survey responses. No age restrictions were imposed on survey participation.

The survey received a significant response rate (n=143) and included residents, caregivers of a person 55 and older, caregivers of a person under 55, and service providers. Most respondents (76%) rated Mackenzie as a "good" or "excellent" place to live and retire.

Focus groups and interviews

Stakeholders were also consulted through open houses and interviews. Participants were recruited through District advertising and local service providers' support. Respondents were asked open-ended questions about their experiences with accessibility and inclusion in Mackenzie. Multiple opportunities for input were provided, including:

- Three open houses (n=40) for various stakeholder groups.
- In-depth interviews with key informants (n=24) encompassed various age groups, needs, and experiences within the community.

Mackenzie's overall response to community engagement was positive. Future age-friendly work should include those unable to participate in the community consultation, such as additional representatives from the Indigenous Community and Northern Health Authority.

Findings and Recommendations

The desk research, community engagement findings, and subsequent recommendations are structured according to the Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide's eight domains pertaining to age-friendliness. Each domain includes a section on the District's current age-friendly features, areas for improvement identified during the community engagement process, and suggestions made by community members and service providers for future changes.

Recommendations within each domain are presented with completion targets classified as ongoing, short-term (one to two years), medium-term (two to five years), and long-term (over five years). Whenever feasible, actions have been designated for review by particular community organizations or District Leads. The abbreviation n/a (not applicable/available) is used when relevant connections are nonexistent or require creation. The recommendations aim to align with goals and actions delineated in other District documents, such as the Official Community Plan or Housing Plan.



Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

Age-friendly planning uses outdoor spaces and public buildings to craft a secure, accessible, and welcoming environment suitable for individuals of all ages and abilities. Outdoor areas, including parks and trails, offer physical activity, social engagement, and relaxation opportunities.

Designing age-friendly outdoor spaces and public buildings involves considering all age groups' physical, social, and psychological needs. Examples include providing ample seating and sufficient lighting and ensuring pathways and stairways are wide and equipped with handrails. Additionally, it may involve confirming that entrances are wheelchair accessible and that an adequate number of accessible washrooms are available.

Furthermore, age-friendly planning should foster a sense of community. This can be achieved by allocating space for social events and activities or promoting interaction among various age groups. Public buildings must be designed with a welcoming and accessible approach, incorporating features such as ramps, elevators, and tactile markings for those with vision impairments.

One of the goals of the Mackenzie Official Community Plan is to provide a high quality of life for residents, including access to public facilities and services, public parks, and recreation opportunities. The objectives outlined as part of this goal are to provide parks and recreation facilities and services required for the community, provide for the institutional needs of the community, and create an attractive, pedestrian-friendly, and vibrant downtown for residents and visitors.[9]

Strengths/Assets

The District of Mackenzie has many strengths and assets, particularly in outdoor spaces and buildings. The natural beauty and access to outdoor recreation was the asset most identified during community engagement activities. The specific features below also contribute to residents' overall wellbeing and quality of life, as they promote physical activity, social interaction, and environmental sustainability.

1. **Little Mac Ski Hill and Mountain Bike Trails:** A short walk from town, Little Mac is the perfect spot for beginner skiers and snowboarders. The hill has a dedicated tobogganing slope. When the snow melts, the trails are used by mountain bikers.

2. **The Signature Trail Project and Community Park:** The Signature Trail Project and Community Park will create a safe and vibrant environment for the community and visitors. This project phase will include a new multi-use trail and a bike skills park. The project will also create an interconnected trail system throughout the downtown and surrounding areas. It will also include upgrades to the existing trail system, such as improved signage, erosion control, and trailhead amenities. These upgrades will make the park more accessible and enjoyable for the community and visitors.

3. **Revitalization:** According to the OCP, the District is committed to revitalizing the Downtown Core by implementing aesthetic and functional investments in streets, walkways, and public spaces. These investments will create human-scaled streets, buildings, and active public spaces while also encouraging investment in the community through incentive programs.

4. **A compact downtown core:** A vibrant downtown is essential for any community. Having businesses, restaurants, and other services clustered together creates an atmosphere that encourages people to visit and linger.

5. **The Forest Stewardship Plan:** The Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) has been developed for the McLeod Lake Mackenzie Community Forest Limited Partnership (MLMCF), a collaborative effort between the McLeod Lake Indian Band and the District of Mackenzie, which maintains Community Forest Agreement K2M. Within the Mackenzie Natural Resource District, the McLeod Lake Mackenzie Community Forest encompasses six geographically unique operating areas, each named after prominent landscape characteristics.

Other assets include John Dahl Regional Park and Morfee Lake's two beaches. Additional attractions include Morfee Lake Perimeter Trail & Morfee Waterfall, the rec centre climbing wall, Cicada Ball Diamonds, Gantahaz Lake, and Cross-Country Ski Trails.

[9] District of Mackenzie. (2014). Official Community Plan. https://districtofmackenzie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Mackenzie_OCP_2014.pdf

Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy Morfee Mountain, Alexander Mackenzie's Landing Rec Site, and Mackenzie Golf & Country Club. Nature lovers can utilize the Mugaha Marsh Bird Banding Station or visit Bijoux Falls, Whiskers Point, Tudyah Lake, Pine Le Moray Provincial Park, Heather-Dina Lakes Provincial Park, and Gataiga Lake Recreation Site. Finlay Bay Recreation Site, Wicked River, Six Mile Bay, Cut Thumb Bay, and Williston Lake provide ample opportunities for water-based activities. Lastly, Mackenzie Fire Rescue Association and Mackenzie RCMP contribute to the community's public safety needs.

Issues identified in the community engagement process

The data collected in the Outdoor Spaces and Buildings dimension were by far the most significant discussion points in the community consultation. This dimension includes many aspects of the built environment and subsequent accessibility issues. Active Living Environments, building accessibility, and public safety break down the dimension.

Active Living Environments

Active Living Environments (ALEs) are the evolving combination of natural, constructed, and social features within neighbourhoods that encourage physical activity and overall wellbeing while ensuring fair access to resources promoting health.[11] Several indicators were used to assess ALEs from the Mackenzie community members' perspective.

These included looking at the number of rest places (and the distance between them), the number of accessible washrooms, safe crosswalks, and sidewalks and trails that are in good condition.

ALEs 1: Sidewalks, trails, and walkways exist and are in a safe condition (e.g., they have smooth surfaces, curb cuts, separated bike lanes, are wide, well-lit, and are clear of ice and snow).

The majority of survey respondents gave fair or poor ratings for sidewalk design (67%), and crosswalk safety. Ratings for prompt snow removal were lower, with 53% rating fair or poor. The specific concerns that were shared during the community engagement process were as follows:

1. **Sidewalks and paths have maintenance issues that limit mobility:** Many of the issues that respondents reported were weather-related. This included icy sidewalks during winter, which pose a risk of falls. Many respondents suggested they would like to see better clearance of pedestrian areas in the winter. Conversely, in the springtime melt, flooding can make it unsafe for pedestrians to walk on sidewalks, and subsequently, they are forced to walk on the road. Some reported that gravel used during the winter on sidewalks and paths impedes safety when not cleared promptly during the spring and summer months (e.g., respondents identified the west side of Mackenzie Blvd sidewalk as particularly problematic).

[11] Giles-Corti, B., Sugiyama, T., Cerin, E., Frank, L., Foster, S., Koohsari, M. J., ... & Owen, N. (2022). Active Living Environments (ALEs). BMC Public Health. Retrieved from https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-022-12747-3

Other issues were related to gaps or damage in sidewalks and paths that can make navigating with a wheelchair, stroller, or scooter difficult or dangerous.

Finally, respondents identified issues with the Spirit Square surface. A mix of cobblestones, concrete blocks, and paving stones has created a surface that has many different angles. This type of surface can be challenging for those with mobility issues.

2. **Sidewalks are not continuous:** One of the most talked about issues related to outdoor spaces is the need for sidewalk connectivity in Mackenzie. Users were concerned that many areas were missing sidewalks; in some areas, sidewalks abruptly stopped. Many respondents were concerned about the lack of sidewalk connectivity disproportionally impacting children and those with mobility issues.

3. **The need for better trail location signage:** Some users suggested that trails would be more user-friendly if they had periodic location identification, ratings for difficulty, and visual information about trail features and elevation changes. Others wanted to see more posted trail information overall.

4. **The need for mobility-friendly sidewalks and curbs:** Some curbs are not mobility aid-friendly, and sloped sidewalks can be problematic for those with balance issues.

5. **The need for trails built in favour of broader accessibility of community members:** Some residents suggested that they would like to see a better balance or equal access for biking interests while improving accessibility for all community members. This includes local pathways like the community perimeter trail (e.g., some respondents reported that moguls built into the trail for mountain bikes make the trail inaccessible for other users). The potential of introducing additional E-bikes to the community was also raised as a risk to riders and pedestrians.

6. **The need for improved surfaces that provide access to recreational areas:** Some respondents indicate that uneven surfaces limit access to recreation for users with differing requirements (e.g., sand limits access to the water at First Beach; no sidewalk on Fraser Blvd. makes visiting the community garden challenging).

7. **Concerns about outdoor lighting:** Some respondents indicated that they felt that there should be improved lighting along paths and trails to improve nighttime safety. Others thought the current lighting system was too bright and hazardous to those with sensitive vision.

8. **Snow clearance issues:** Respondents indicated that they would like to see improvements in snow removal services, including efforts to clear snow from pedestrian walkways and driveways (including business locations such as the Mackenzie Mall parking lot). Uncleared sidewalks during the winter were cited as a significant barrier to safety and year-round District connectivity for active living.

Some participants also indicated that snow plowed to the end of driveways makes it difficult for those who can't clear the snow on their own. This also impacts the safety of those who might need to be evacuated from their home during an emergency or because of a health crisis.

ALEs 2: Number of accessible washrooms.

Inaccessible public washrooms were identified as an area of concern throughout the community engagement process. Seventy percent of survey respondents indicated that the availability of accessible washrooms in Mackenzie was fair or poor. The following are specific areas of concern:

1. **The need for more public washrooms in outdoor areas:** Respondents identified specific areas that would benefit from public washrooms, including the Tree Crusher area and by the Morfee Lake turnoff.

2. **The need for accessible washrooms in public buildings:** Many respondents talked about the inaccessibility of public washrooms (i.e., narrow doorways, no grab bars, raised sinks and high soap dispensers) because of aging infrastructure not originally designed with accessibility in mind. Respondents identified specific areas, such as Mackenzie Mall, where washroom design severely limits accessibility.

3. **Outhouses:** Respondents would like to see more outhouses at parks and trailheads.

There was also a concern that the ongoing disrepair of public outhouses is limiting accessibility (e.g., the broken door on the Gantahaz Lake accessible outhouse and grab bars that have been installed upside down at the Second Beach outhouse).

ALEs 3: Number of rest places and distance between rest places.

Having rest places and benches in public areas is one of the easiest ways to promote active living. Notably, less than half of those surveyed felt that there were sufficient rest areas in the community. A significant number of those interviewed also indicated that adding regular opportunities to sit by adding benches would encourage them to walk more often. Other suggestions to improve rest places included:

1. **Adding Benches with Tables:** Respondents suggested finding strategic locations to add more benches with tables in public areas for people to rest and socialize.

2. **Including trash bins with seating:** Respondents reported that adding trash bins along pathways and sidewalks would help keep the community clean.

3. **Planting shade trees:** Respondents suggested planting more shade trees in the community to provide relief from the sun during the summer months.

Building Accessibility

Buildings have adequate access and maneuverability around buildings (e.g., access at ground level, level entry, wheelchair ramps, automatic doors, and wide aisles to accommodate scooters and wheelchairs).

Sixty-two percent of survey respondents indicated that building accessibility was fair or poor. Specific issues related to building accessibility included:

1. **Older infrastructure means that many buildings have poor accessibility:** Respondents reported that older buildings in Mackenzie were not built to meet modern accessibility standards. Many expressed concern that building owners and operators may not be aware of accessibility issues and may not have made modifications to improve accessibility, such as adding automatic doors, mobility ramps, wider doorways, and accessible washrooms.

The inaccessible entrance to the pharmacy was cited most often in consultations. Users also reported that having only one entrance with automatic doors at the Mackenzie Mall limited access for some. The automatic doors at the post office were also cited as problematic, and users suggested that they be sped up for better accessibility.

2. **Some entranceways are inaccessible because of surface issues:** Some users reported that many businesses that otherwise had accessible entrances limited access for those using a mobility device, stroller or similar by adding mats or raised door sills.

3. **There is tension between aesthetics and accessibility in the community:** Some respondents indicated that there could be a conflict between what some may see as reduced aesthetics when adding accessible features to buildings (e.g., accessibility ramps may be perceived as an "eyesore").

4. **The loss of the Ernie Bodin Community Centre:** Many respondents were concerned that both the mainly accessible building and the organizations that are housed in the Centre will be a significant loss to the community.

5. **The need to improve overall District accessibility:** Respondents discussed the need to make everything the District runs and oversee fully accessible.

6. **Making sure that efforts towards improved accessibility are inclusive:** Participants discuss the importance of making the town accessible for everyone, including those with invisible disabilities or challenges. This includes creating spaces that are accessible for both humans and bikes, as well as addressing issues related to signage, colour differentiation, and other barriers that may be present.



Age-friendly Business Program

To cultivate a more accessible and inclusive environment for all members of Mackenzie, the District could adopt an Age-friendly Accessibility Business Program. The idea involves businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, and local government in the effort. Incentives could be provided to businesses to encourage them to become more accessible, and a guide could be created that lists the accessibility features of public places.

By implementing targeted initiatives that encourage local businesses to adopt universally designed spaces, provide staff training on disability awareness and etiquette, and offer adaptive technologies, the District could foster a sense of belonging and empowerment within the community. This program would not only improve the quality of life for residents and visitors with disabilities but also elevate Mackenzie's reputation as a forward-thinking and compassionate destination for people from all walks of life.

Public Safety

Availability of public safety measures

1. **The need to ensure emergency preparedness:** Some felt that Mackenzie could work to ensure that emergency preparedness plans consider the needs of people with disabilities. This could include providing accessible emergency shelters and ensuring emergency communication systems are accessible to all.

2. **The need to improve safety and reduce crime:** The safety and crime-related themes in consultations included theft, drug use, and spousal/family abuse.

3. **The need to increase bylaw enforcement for off-leash dogs:** Respondents wanted to see more enforcement of bylaws regarding dogs running at large to increase safety for those walking in the town and on trails.



Recommendations

The following tables provide recommendations, proposed parties responsible and partners, timelines, and linkages to improve accessibility in outdoor spaces and buildings in Mackenzie.

Active Living Environments Section 1

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Establish a comprehensive maintenance plan for sidewalks and paths, addressing weather-related concerns like ice, flooding, and gravel removal. Prioritize problematic areas, such as the west side of Mackenzie Blvd. sidewalk.	District of Mackenzie	Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure	Ongoing
Repair and upgrade sidewalks and paths to ensure a smooth and safe surface for all users, including those using wheelchairs, strollers, or scooters. Address specific concerns, such as the accessibility ramp at the Chichouyenily bridge.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Ongoing
Enhance sidewalk connectivity throughout Mackenzie to ensure safer and more accessible routes for all, with particular attention to children (e.g., building a sidewalk along Nechako Drive for students of Morfee Elementary School) and individuals with mobility challenges.	District of Mackenzie	School District 57	Long-term
Retrofit existing sidewalks and curbs to be more mobility aid-friendly and examine the need for sloped sidewalks as well as the absence of accessible curb cuts throughout the town.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Medium-term
Improve surfaces providing access to recreational areas to accommodate users with differing needs, such as building a wheelchair-accessible path to First Beach and a sidewalk on Fraser Blvd. for easier access to the community garden.	District of Mackenzie	MORATA, District Grant-in-Aid Community Grant Program	Medium-term

Active Living Environments Section 1

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Strive for a balance between recreational interests and accessibility on local pathways, including community perimeter trails, by considering the needs of various users during trail development and maintenance.	District of Mackenzie	MORATA, Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Medium-term
Plan for increased e-bike usage by reviewing policies and programs adopted by similar-sized communities.	District of Mackenzie	MORATA	Short-term
Install better trail location signage to make navigation more accessible and user-friendly for all residents and visitors.	District of Mackenzie	MORATA	Medium-term
Re-evaluate outdoor lighting, aiming for a balance between adequate illumination for safety and minimizing hazards for those with sensitive vision.	District of Mackenzie	Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure - Electrical and Traffic Engineering Manual	Short-term
Enhance snow clearance efforts, prioritizing pedestrian walkways, driveways, and business locations. Highlight snow removal assistance to residents who cannot clear snow independently.	District of Mackenzie	Better At Home Program	Ongoing

Active Living Environments Section 2

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Install additional public washrooms in strategic outdoor areas, such as the Tree Crusher area and down by the Morfee Lake turnoff, to accommodate the needs of residents and visitors alike.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Long-term
Work with the local business community to assess and upgrade existing public washrooms in public buildings to ensure they meet modern accessibility standards.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee and the Mackenzie Chamber of Commerce	Medium-term
Increase the number of outhouses at parks and trailheads to provide more accessible options for individuals using these outdoor spaces.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Long-term
Implement a regular maintenance schedule for public outhouses to address issues that may limit accessibility, such as broken doors or improperly installed grab bars. Use the Gantahaz Lake Accessible Outhouse and Second Beach Outhouse as initial examples for review and repair.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term

Active Living Environments Section 3

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Increase the number of benches (and consider some spots to include tables) in public areas, focusing on strategic locations such as parks, walkways, and popular gathering spots.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Medium-term
Install trash bins at a close proximatey to benches and seating areas to encourage responsible waste disposal and maintain a clean and enjoyable environment. Set a recurring schedule for the emptying of bins.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Medium-term
Plant shade trees in key areas throughout the community to offer relief from the sun during the summer months and to enhance the overall aesthetics of the town. Consider working with local experts or community groups to identify suitable species and planting locations. Consider an "adopt-a-tree" program.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term
Monitor and maintain the quality and condition of benches, tables, trash bins, and other public amenities to ensure they remain safe, clean, and functional for all residents and visitors. Establish a regular maintenance schedule and address any issues promptly.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing

Building accessibility improvements

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Assess older buildings in Mackenzie for accessibility issues and develop a long-term plan to bring them up to modern standards. Provide guidance and support to building owners and operators to make necessary modifications, such as installing automatic doors, mobility ramps, wider doorways, and accessible washrooms.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Chamber of Commerce	Long-term
As part of the Accessible Business Program, address entranceway surface issues by working with businesses to remove barriers like mats or raised door sills that impede access for those using mobility devices or strollers.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Chamber of Commerce	Short-term
Foster a community dialogue on balancing aesthetics with accessibility, emphasizing the value of creating an inclusive community that welcomes all residents and visitors.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Chamber of Commerce	Short-term
Work towards improving overall District accessibility by prioritizing accessible features in all District-operated buildings and spaces, including trails intended to be accessible, benches, and community facilities such as libraries and recreation centers.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, Mackenzie Public Library	Medium-term
Ensure that efforts towards improved accessibility include individuals with visible and invisible disabilities or challenges. This includes designing spaces that accommodate diverse needs, addressing signage and colour differentiation concerns, and considering other potential barriers to access.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	AIMHI, IMSS, Mackenzie Counselling Services Society	Medium-term

Building accessibility improvements

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Engage community members, particularly those with disabilities, in the decision making process to guarantee that accessibility improvements are both practical and effective in meeting the community's diverse needs.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	AIMHI, IMSS, Mackenzie Counselling Services Society	Ongoing

Public Safety Improvements

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Review and update emergency preparedness plans to address the needs of people with disabilities specifically. This should include accessible emergency shelters, clear evacuation routes, and accessible emergency communication systems for all residents.	District of Mackenzie	BC Emergency Health Services, Emergency Operations Centre	Medium-term
Increase bylaw enforcement for off-leash dogs to create a safer environment for individuals walking in the town and on trails.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing
Encourage open communication and collaboration between community members, law enforcement, and local government to identify and address ongoing safety concerns. Regular town hall meetings or online forums can allow residents to voice their concerns and contribute to potential solutions.	District of Mackenzie	Local RCMP	Medium-term

Transportation

Transportation serves as a crucial aspect of age-friendly planning. Ensuring community members access safe and dependable transportation allows them to remain independent and actively participate in their communities. Transportation planning should consider the requirements of individuals of all abilities, offering accessible and convenient options for those unable to drive; this could encompass public transportation, ride-sharing services, or even volunteer-driven initiatives.

Moreover, it is vital to establish pedestrian-friendly environments that are secure and easy to navigate for those who cannot drive. This might involve expanding sidewalks and bike lanes, enhancing street lighting, and implementing crosswalks and other traffic-calming measures. Age-friendly planning also accommodates the needs of older adults who still drive, providing accessible parking spots close to their destinations and incentives for using public transportation.



By addressing the diverse transportation needs of all age groups, age-friendly planning contributes to a more inclusive and accessible community for everyone. One of the goals of the Mackenzie OCP is to provide a safe, convenient, and compatible means for moving people and products to, from, and within Mackenzie.

To accomplish this, the OCP outlines fourteen policies to increase active transportation trips, improve the condition and number of sidewalks, crosswalks, and trails; improve connections to key destinations in town and access to recreation opportunities; encourage future transit options; improve air, water, and rail connections; and reduce empty surface parking lots.

The District of Mackenzie is a highly walkable community, with 95% of its population living within a 20-minute (1.5km) distance of the downtown core. Infrastructure such as improved connections, crossings, and sidewalks should be implemented to continue this approach to compact land use and encourage active transportation. Despite the compact size of Mackenzie, 82% of its residents drove to work in 2021, a higher ratio than the rest of BC, indicating that active transport and other alternatives to driving should be encouraged.

One of the significant issues of accessibility in Mackenzie is the lack of public transportation. There are no public buses in Mackenzie, which means that many residents cannot easily access essential services. This is particularly problematic for those with mobility, health issues, or those who cannot afford to own or maintain a personal vehicle.

Strengths/Assets

1. **Evergreen Taxi Service:** There is a licensed taxi service available in Mackenzie, and District of Mackenzie taxi savers can be used, which offers a 50% discount on taxis for people 18-54 that have a disability and show a financial need. The company has recently added a wheelchair-accessible vehicle that can take up to two wheelchairs at a time.

2. **Kimta Transportation Society:** The Kimta Transportation Society delivers an accessible and budget-friendly bus transportation service for Mackenzie and McLeod Lake communities. With a 24-seat bus that accommodates two wheelchairs, the service will transport groups to any destination. They also provide a six-day-a-week shuttle service run by Evergreen Taxi to Prince George for $30.00 one way.

3. **Northern Health Connections Bus:** The once a week Northern Health Connections Bus Program provides an affordable way of travelling for Northern residents visiting hospitals and medical facilities in other cities. It is also available to those transferred to other cities for medical treatment, such as by air or ambulance, who need a way to return home. The system has routes throughout the North and to Vancouver and Kamloops. Those 60 years or older can ride the Northern Health Connections bus for the same price that medical travellers pay without providing a medical reason for their trip. If a driver is unavailble for the return home, Northern Health will book the patient a taxi.

4. **The Better at Home volunteer driver program:** The Better at Home program is relatively new in Mackenzie and plans to offer a volunteer driver program to eligible recipients.

Issues identified in the community engagement process

The following themes were identified during the community engagement process:

1. **Affordable and accessible community transport services (e.g., shuttle vans/taxis):** When asked about affordable and accessible community transport, 47% rated these services as fair or poor. Many residents expressed the need for local transportation services (e.g., shuttle bus, ride share) to access services within the town. Need for Non-Motorized Travel Lanes: There is a need for non-motorized travel lanes on Mackenzie Blvd to make it less intimidating for people to bike on the Provincial Highway that runs through town alongside loaded logging trucks and transport. The suggestion is to dedicate the two outside lanes on Mackenzie Blvd to non-motorized traffic only.

2. **Accessible transportation services for health appointments:** Fifty-two percent of respondents rated these services as fair or poor. This is especially problematic for older adults with complex health needs and youth who don't have transport to get to medical appointments but also can't afford the taxi shuttle service.

District of Mackenzie. (2014). Official Community Plan. https://districtofmackenzie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Mackenzie_OCP_2014.pdf

3. **Availability of volunteers or an informal network of drivers who are compensated for their efforts:** Almost half of the survey respondents and a majority of participants in the community weren't aware of volunteer driver services. Respondents suggested better communication about available transportation and information about snow-clearing plans and responsibility for the roads and parking lots throughout the community.

4. **Visibility and placement of street signage:** Over half of the survey respondents rated this category as fair or poor. Specific issues heard in the community engagement included the need to repaint sidewalks and better indicators in particular areas (e.g., the Selwyn to Centennial crosswalk).

5. **Prompt snow removal from roads** Fifty-two percent of survey respondents rated this service as excellent or good. Participants in the community engagement process indicated that snow removal in Mackenzie is efficient but had specific areas of concern (e.g., they would like to see better snow and ice removal by private businesses and shop owners).





Recommendations

Based on the themes identified, these recommendations could address the concerns and improve transportation services and infrastructure for better accessibility.

Transportation Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Work with the Better at Home Coordinator to make a plan to increase awareness among service providers and community members of the volunteer driver service program.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	The Better at Home Program, New Horizons for Seniors Program	Short-term
Consider the addition of a non-motorized travel lane on Mackenzie Blvd to enhance safety for cyclists and pedestrians.	District of Mackenzie	Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure	Long-term
Consider advocating for a partnership with the Northern Health Connections bus or TransLink to subsidize the cost of the Evergreen taxi shuttle for youth in need.	School District 57, Youth for Christ Mackenzie Area Director	Youth Innovation Component of the Enabling Accessibility Fund (GOC), Northern Health, TransLink	Medium-term
Conduct an audit of street signs and crosswalks, identifying areas with poor visibility or insufficient signage.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	District of Mackenzie	Medium-term
Repaint faded crosswalks and consider installing reflective materials to improve visibility, especially at high-traffic locations like the Selwyn to Centennial crosswalk.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term

Transportation Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Continue to maintain efficient snow removal on public roads and communicate snow-clearing plans to residents.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing
Encourage private businesses and shop owners to maintain snow and ice removal on their properties through awareness campaigns or by implementing and enforcing local bylaws.	District of Mackenzie	Chamber of Commerce	Short-term

By addressing these concerns and implementing the recommendations provided, the community can work towards a safer, more accessible, and more efficient transportation system that caters to the needs of all residents.

Housing

Age-friendly housing emphasizes universal design principles and focuses on the availability of accessible, affordable, and appropriately designed homes for people of all ages. Key features include single-story living, wide doorways and halls, bathroom grab bars, and low-maintenance landscaping.

Promoting social engagement and community connections is another aspect of age-friendly housing. This includes access to social activities, programs, and services tailored to meet the diverse needs of the residents. Supportive services like meals, transportation, and health care are also incorporated, helping to reduce isolation and loneliness while encouraging active participation in the community.

Mackenzie's economy has experienced periods of boom and bust since its inception as a mill town. This has caused housing challenges for the District, as evidenced by the aging housing stock. The average dwelling is nearly 40 years old, and almost 10% of units require major repairs. The population decline in recent years has exacerbated these issues. While there is a market availability of housing, the lack of newer and larger homes had pressured the District to develop new residential lots.

Strengths/Assets

1. **Autumn Lodge:** BC Housing provides eight affordable one-bedroom units catering to adults with disabilities and older adults. This development is overseen and managed by BC Housing. [12]

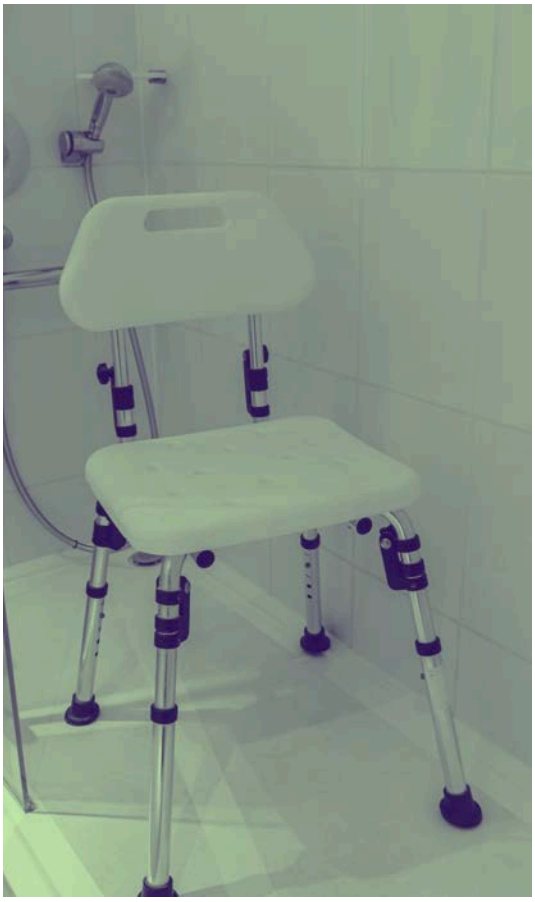
2. **Homeownership affordability:** Compared to other communities, Mackenzie is generally more affordable. The median income is notably higher than in many other small BC communities, and the median homeownership cost is generally much lower. As a result, monthly shelter costs for owned dwellings are usually cheaper.

Issues identified in the community engagement process

The existing housing stock in Mackenzie is not very accessible. Most are single-family homes with multiple levels, making navigating difficult for those with limited mobility. There are limited apartments available, making downsizing difficult. Additionally, there are no assisted living beds/units available. Renting is also more expensive in Mackenzie, making it more difficult for those on a fixed income to make ends meet. This can make it difficult for older adults in Mackenzie to age in place and puts greater pressure on the existing housing options.[13]

The community identified several concerns regarding housing, particularly for older adults, people with disabilities, and those with low incomes. These concerns included a lack of support for single persons with disabilities in BC Housing, the need for funding to construct senior housing and care facilities, better communication about available support services, more affordable housing options for fixed-income residents, incentives for modular homes, and improvements in accessibility.

Many of the same issues have been raised in previous consultations and are the subject of recommendations of the 2017 Age-friendly Housing and Healthcare report, the 2019 District of Mackenzie Housing Needs Report, and the 2020 Seniors Profile: Mackenzie BC. As such, further recommendations will not be made as part of this project.



[12] Community Development Institute. (Fall 2020). Seniors Profile: Mackenzie, BC - New Horizons for Seniors. University of Northern British Columbia. https://www2.unbc.ca/community-development-institute/news/seniors-profile-mackenzie-bc-new-horizons-seniors

[13] District of Mackenzie. (2017). Mackenzie Age-Friendly Housing Health Plan. Retrieved from https://districtofmackenzie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MackenzieAge-FriendlyHousingHealthPlan.pdf

Respect, social inclusion or cultural safety

Age-friendly planning necessitates respect, social inclusion, and cultural safety as its cornerstones. By valuing all community members, their physical, mental, and emotional needs should be considered when fostering a more inclusive environment.

Social inclusion plays a critical role in municipal planning, signifying the importance of including various individuals in decision-making to account for diverse perspectives and effectively address their needs. Cultural safety is equally vital, ensuring everyone feels safe and respected, and has their cultural needs acknowledged. This could involve offering culturally appropriate services or considering cultural values during decision-making. Respect, social inclusion, and cultural safety form the foundation of age-friendly planning, ensuring that all community members feel secure and respected in their communities and have their needs considered when making decisions.

Strengths/Assets

1. **The Mackenzie Library:** The library resources provide access to a wide range of information and services for those looking to become citizens of Canada, learn a new language, or gain an understanding of Canada's multicultural society. Resources such as Decoda Literacy Solutions, First Voices, and Pronunciator help with language learning and cultural awareness. NewToBC provides newcomers to Canada with access to services and programs, while IMSS Prince George can help with settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees. Finally, Click Law and KnowBC Online provide authoritative legal resources to those looking to understand Canadian law and gain citizenship.[14]

2. **New Horizons for Seniors Project:** An initiative designed to improve the inclusion of seniors in the community.

3. **Mackenzie and District Museum**

4. **Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society (IMSS)**

5. **Legion Branch #273**

6. **Living Joy Christian Center**

7. **Mackenzie Baptist Church**

8. **Mackenzie Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses**

9. **Mackenzie Sikh Society**

10. **St. Peters Catholic Church**

11. **Tai Chi/Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism**

12. **A responsive District with progressive ideas, including the activism of the mayor**

[14] https://mackenzie.bc.libraries.coop/research/information-by-subject/citizenship-multilingual-resources/

Issues identified in the community engagement process

Sixty-four percent of Mackenzie residents answering the survey indicated that their sense of community belonging was good or excellent. Only 20% felt that they lacked companionship, felt left out, or were isolated from others. In community consultations, several other issues emerged concerning respect, social inclusion, and cultural safety. These themes are pivotal in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all community members. Issues included:

1. **The current language used about accessibility in the community:** Some respondents observed the current language around accessibility is not inclusive, noting that it should be framed as "accessible to everyone" rather than "disabled-friendly."

2. **The need to frame accessibility as a right:** Respondents emphasized that accessibility is not a favour or a request, but a fundamental human right.

3. **The need to educate the community about people living with disabilities:** Some felt that there might be people in the community who are not aware of the challenges faced by those with disabilities.

4. **The need for experiential learning related to understanding the needs of people with disabilities:** Participants suggested that more experiential activities could be helpful for people to understand the challenges faced by those with visible and invisible disabilities. For example, creating activities that simulate what it feels like to be in a room and not be able to read any of the signs on the wall could help increase empathy and awareness. Others suggested sharing stories to help illustrate the challenges faced by those with invisible disabilities, increasing empathy and understanding.

5. **The need to make public events more accessible:** Public events in Mackenzie could be made more accessible by providing sign language interpretation, live captioning, or other accommodations as needed.

6. **The need for better community collaboration:** Participants suggest that the community needs to come together to address issues related to accessibility and inclusivity. This includes holding community awareness committees and other events where service providers and stakeholders can discuss issues and brainstorm solutions.

7. **The need to not group older adults and those with mobility issues:** Some respondents noted that those with mobility challenges tend to be grouped with those 55+ but don't identify with the issues specific to older adults.

8. **The impact of accessibility issues on isolation and health:** This was reported as especially prevalent among older adults.

9. **The challenge of language barriers for those who do not speak English:** A lack of translation services exacerbates this issue to help non-English speakers access programs and services.

10. **There is a need for more awareness of challenges faced by families with sensory issues and other children with special needs.**

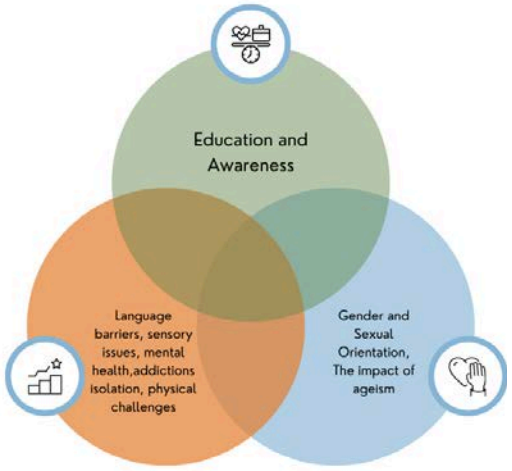
11. **The lack of support and understanding for people dealing with addiction and mental illness:** Respondents reported that a lack of awareness could make those with mental health and addiction feel excluded from the community.

12. **The need for greater tolerance for gender identity and sexual orientation.**

13. **The impact of ageism. Some members of the older population reported feeling ignored and neglected:** Some indicated that social groups might be exclusive and may not want to include newcomers.

14. **Newcomers to Mackenzie may face challenges in integrating into the community:** This includes those from larger cities or communities with more resources.

15. **The need for more formalized programs or groups that could help promote inclusivity in Mackenzie:** Respondents noted that many ad hoc initiatives are well done but felt that there might be more impact if these initiatives were more widely known and structured more formally.





Recommendations

The following table provides recommendations to increase respect, social inclusion or cultural safety in Mackenzie.

Respect, Social Inclusion or Cultural Safety Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Develop and implement more experiential activities that can help people understand the challenges faced by those with disabilities.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	District of Mackenzie	Medium-term
Initiate intergenerational programs to bring people of different age groups together. Consider a yearly celebration for June 1 on Intergenerational Day Canada.	The New Horizons for Seniors Program	Intergenerational Connections - Province of BC, District of Mackenzie, PACs from both schools, Mackenzie Secondary School and Morfee Elementary staff	Short-term
Consider a campaign to share personal stories to increase empathy and understanding of the challenges faced by those with disabilities to motivate people to take action to address accessibility issues.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	n/a	Short-term
Develop and implement more diversity and inclusion workshops which include topics such as mental health and addiction, ageism, and inclusion and support for the 2SLGBTQI+ and create community safe places.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	New Horizons for Seniors Program, College of the New Caledonia, Mackenzie Counselling Services Society	Medium-term

Respect, Social Inclusion or Cultural Safety Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Address families' challenges with children with sensory issues by increasing sensory-friendly activities and exploring neurodivergent support and options.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Mackenzie Counselling, School District 57, The Mackenzie Public Library	Medium-term
Create accessible and inclusive business programs in the community developed using standardized programs.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee and the Mackenzie Chamber of Commerce	Rick Hansen Foundation Accessible Spaces 101 training	Medium-term
Include land acknowledgments in all public communication and events and invite Indigenous community members to open community events.	District of Mackenzie	McLeod Lake Indian band, Kwadacha Nation, and Tsay Keh Dene Nation	Short-term
Organize a multicultural fair, inviting community members to share their food, activities, and events related to multiculturalism and diversity.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society (IMSS), faith communities	Short-term

Social wellbeing and participation

Inclusive and accessible recreation services are also crucial to increased social participation. The goals for inclusive and accessible recreation services focus on fostering a welcoming and supportive environment accommodating all residents. Emphasis is placed on designing accessible facilities and infrastructure, such as parks, playgrounds, and community centers, that cater to the specific requirements of individuals with different mobility and cognitive abilities.

Strengths/Assets

1. The emphasis on the importance of recreation by the District

2. The Mackenzie Community Centre

3. The Mackenzie & District Museum

4. Mackenzie Community Arts Centre

5. Mackenzie Golf & Country Club

6. Mackenzie Recreation Centre

7. Pickleball

8. Walleyball

9. Badminton Club

10. BPO Elks #547

11. Curl Mackenzie

12. Golf & Country Club

13. Yoga

14. Mackenzie & District Museum

15. Mackenzie Community Arts Centre

16. Mackenzie Community Garden

17. Mackenzie Figure Skating Club

18. Mackenzie Mixed Darts

19. Mackenzie Nature Observatory

20. Mackenzie Outdoor Route & Trail Association (MORATA)

21. Mackenzie Pool Ladies

22. Mackenzie Slow Pitch

23. Nordiques X-Country Ski Club

24. Old Timer Hockey

25. Powder King Ski Club

26. Rocky Mountain Riders

27. Senior Lacrosse

28. The Mackenzie sports equipment lending library

Issues identified in the community engagement process

Seventy-five percent of those responding to the survey indicated their satisfaction regarding opportunities to participate in community activities as fair or poor. Survey respondents were evenly split on the accessibility, availability, and affordability of recreation programs. Other issues raised during the community engagement process included:

1. The lack of evening social opportunities that don't involve alcohol: Several respondents reported that Mackenzie's social life options that don't include alcohol are limited. Some suggested that options like evening dancing would be welcome.

2. The need for additional older adult programming: Many wanted to see specific older adult programming, including senior strength and fall prevention.

3. The beach is not accessible for wheelchair users without the assistance of others: Some respondents would like improved access, allowing those using mobility devices to access the water independently.

4. The isolation of older men: Respondents discussed the need for more opportunities for older men to socialize.

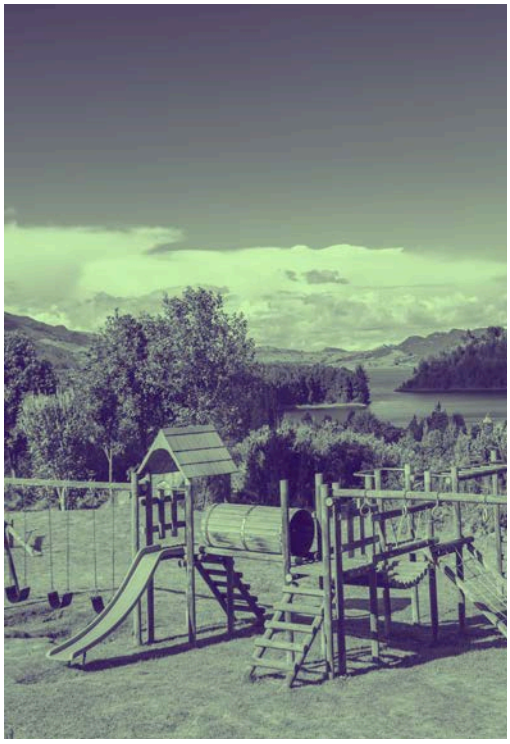
5. The need for space for various user groups: Some participants wanted to see better-dedicated areas for groups to gather (especially given the impending demolition of the Ernie Bodin Community Centre).

6. The issue of limited transportation, especially for those with mobility challenges, to participate in recreational activities.

7. The need for additional non-digital advertising of recreational activities and programs for older adults.

8. Concerns about the lack of staff for organizing and managing youth recreational programs, sometimes impacting the availability of offerings.

9. The need for improved outdoor recreational accessibility: Some participants indicated the need for accessible water access, specifically for people in wheelchairs. This could include installing an accessible mat to access the water and a ladder on the dock. Other respondents noted the lack of accessible playground surfaces and swings in the community. Finally, several respondents suggested the addition of accessible outdoor exercise equipment that is built for everyone.



Recommendations

Based on themes identified in the community consultations, the following table provides key recommendations to improve social wellbeing and participation in Mackenzie.

Social Wellbeing and Participation Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Establish alcohol-free social events such as dance, movie, and game nights.	District of Mackenzie	Mackenzie Legion Branch 273, Mackenzie Public Library, Mackenzie Autumn Lodge Society	Short-term
Introduce age-specific programs like seniors' strength training, fall prevention classes, and balance workshops. Collaborate with local healthcare providers and fitness instructors to ensure the programs are safe and effective.	District of Mackenzie	Northern Health	Medium-term
Install wheelchair-accessible access mats and dock ladders to facilitate independent access to the water.	District of Mackenzie, Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Employment and Social Development Canada Small Projects Component – Enabling Accessibility Fund	Short-term
Increase the availability and accessibility of public transportation to recreational facilities. Establish partnerships with local transportation providers for discounted fares or special shuttle services.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	The Better at Home Program, Kimta Transportation Services	Medium-term

Social Wellbeing and Participation Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Consider recreation and social event print advertisements, flyers, or brochures in prominent locations frequented by older adults.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term
Utilize the local community bulletin boards for program announcements.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing
Implement volunteer recruitment and training initiatives to supplement staffing needs.	District of Mackenzie	WorkBC Mackenzie, Mackenzie Counselling (Better at Home and Commuinity Navigator for Seniors)	Short-term
Upgrade existing playgrounds with accessible surfaces, swings, and equipment.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, Mackenzie Rotary Club, Small Projects Component – Enabling Accessibility Fund	Long-term

Social Wellbeing and Participation Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Add outdoor accessible exercise equipment designed for all users, including those with disabilities.	District of Mackenzie	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, Mackenzie Rotary Club, Small Projects Component – Enabling Accessibility Fund	Long-term
Recruit a community champion to spearhead a Men''s Shed program.	The New Horizons for Seniors Program	Men's Shed Association of BC, Men's Shed Microgrants Program, Mackenzie Legion Branch 273	Short-term

Communications and information

Implementing a diverse range of communication channels in remote communities, including print, digital, and face-to-face interactions, is vital to spreading information. Special attention is given to the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and those with limited access to technology or internet connectivity, to guarantee that vital information reaches them effectively and promptly.

Additionally, it is essential to create accessible and user-friendly materials, such as easy-to-read documents, large print formats, and materials available in multiple languages. This ensures that vital information is understandable and accessible to everyone. By prioritizing inclusive and accessible communication and information goals, Mackenzie can foster a more connected population.

Strengths/Assets

1. Community Calendar

2. CHMM 103.5 FM – Mackenzie and Area Community Radio Society

3. District Website

4. Community Facebook group

5. Let's Chat Mackenzie

6. District of Mackenzie and the Recreation Centre Instagram Pages

7. The Macktown Buzzette

Issues identified in the community engagement process

Fifty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated that they had excellent or good access to District information and services. The following concerns were noted during the community engagement process:

1. **The need for more community information to be disseminated to the public:** This includes information on emergency preparedness, fire evacuation plans, and grants/funding opportunities for small businesses. The need for more communication through multiple channels. This includes daytime sessions for public opinion opportunities and clear information in plain language.

2. **The need for advertising, both online and offline:** Many respondents stressed the need not to rely solely on social media platforms like Facebook.



3. **The need for better communication from the District:** This included access to information and more opportunities for public feedback.

4. **The issue of limited internet bandwidth:** Many participants talked about the impact of slow internet speed on their ability to access information effectively.

5. **The need for a centralized website for all the services of different organizations in town:** Many respondents felt that Mackenzie would benefit from a central information source that could be a "one-stop shop" to access community information.

6. **The need for more speakers events and consistent public communication channels to inform people about community events and activities.**

Recommendations

Based on the concerns raised, the following table of recommendations is suggested to improve local media, community information dissemination, and overall communication.

Communications and Information Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Have the Accessibility Committee spearhead a web accessibility audit of the District website and communication tools to ensure that digital materials meet current accessibility standards.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	District of Mackenzie	Short-term
Consider establishing a dedicated communication lead within the District to streamline and centralize information dissemination.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term
Develop a comprehensive local media strategy to disseminate important community information, such as emergency preparedness and fire evacuation plans.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Medium-term
Organize periodic daytime public opinion sessions or town hall meetings to allow community members to voice their concerns and receive updates on local issues.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term
Create more opportunities for public feedback, such as online surveys, public meetings, and suggestion boxes in community spaces.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term

Communications and Information Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Use clear, plain language in all communications to ensure easy understanding for everyone.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing
Utilize a mix of online and offline advertising channels, including local newspapers, radio, billboards, community bulletin boards, and social media platforms.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing
Continue to advocate for better internet infrastructure to improve access to information.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Ongoing
Develop alternative offline resources, such as printed materials, for those with limited internet access.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	On-going
Consider developing a user-friendly, comprehensive website that serves as a “one-stop-shop” for information on all the services provided by different organizations in town.	District of Mackenzie	The Mackenzie Library	Medium-term

Communications and Information Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Host regular speaker events featuring local experts to inform and engage the community.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	The Mackenzie Library	Medium-term
Consider sponsoring a consistent “calendar hour” on the radio or other mediums to discuss events and activities.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term
Advertise activities in a way to reach seniors who do not use social media or the internet.	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term
Create a civically run and moderated Facebook group for local information	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term

Community engagement and employment

In smaller communities, fostering inclusive and accessible civic participation and employment is critical to municipal planning. This involves collaborating closely with local enterprises, organizations, and service providers to advocate for age-friendly and accessible work environments, in addition to providing adaptable work arrangements and support services tailored to the needs of older adults and individuals with disabilities. By endorsing inclusive and accessible civic engagement and employment, Mackenzie can foster a more robust, diverse, and dynamic atmosphere where all residents can contribute to their community's collective welfare and success.

Strengths/Assets

1. Contributing seniors recognized during senior's week luncheon

2. AimHi Mackenzie

3. Chamber of Commerce

4. Community Futures Fraser-Fort George

5. Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society

6. Library

7. Mackenzie Chamber of Commerce

8. Mackenzie Community Market

9. Mackenzie Hospital Auxiliary

10. Service BC

11. Work BC – Mackenzie Employment Centre

Issues identified in the community engagement process

Survey respondents were evenly split about whether they feel like they "have a voice" in the community. Only 46% rated the opportunities to give their opinion to influence decisions about the community as excellent or good. The majority of respondents (65%) indicated that there are good opportunities to volunteer in the community. They also emphasized:

1. **The importance of ensuring that older adults are included in community decision-making processes.**

2. **The need to increase accessible employment opportunities:** People with disabilities often face barriers when finding employment.

3. **The importance of welcoming input from seniors and providing them with incentives, such as senior discounts, to encourage their participation.**

4. **The necessity to educate employers about the needs of people with diverse abilities and fill job positions accordingly.**

5. **The need to modify workplaces for accessibility with the help of available programs.**

7. **The importance of supporting and recognizing volunteers.**

Recommendations

Based on the identified issues, the following recommendations can improve community decision-making processes, increase accessible employment opportunities, and promote overall inclusivity:

Community Engagement and Employment Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Encourage older adults to participate in public forums, town hall meetings, and local government consultations.	District of Mackenzie, Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	New Horizons for Seniors Program	Ongoing
Develop and promote local programs to help match people with disabilities with suitable job opportunities.	WorkBC	SBBC -Workplace Accessibility Grants, AiMHi	Medium-term
Provide training and resources to help employers understand the unique needs of people with disabilities and how to accommodate them in the workplace.	The Age-friendly Accessibility Business Program	WorkBC	Medium-term
Encourage employers to utilize available programs and resources to make their workplaces more accessible to people with disabilities, including employees.	The Age-friendly Accessibility Business Program	SBBC - Workplace Accessibility Grants	Medium-term
Develop a volunteer recognition program to celebrate the contributions of volunteers within the community.	Mackenzie Chamber of Commerce	District of Mackenzie, Mackenzie Autumn Lodge Society	Short-term

Community Engagement and Employment Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Make it easier for individuals who cannot physically attend civic events to provide feedback (e.g., through call-in services).	District of Mackenzie	n/a	Short-term

Community Support and Health and Wellness Services

While healthcare is not a District of Mackenzie service, age-friendly planning highlights potential collaborations with local healthcare providers, wellness practitioners, and other community service organizations to develop partnerships and implement services. Most importantly, promoting inclusive and accessible health, wellness, and community services involves continuously evaluating and improving existing resources. This can be achieved through ongoing community engagement, feedback collection, and collaboration with local organizations and service providers.

Strengths/Assets

1. A high ratio of primary care physicians to residents

2. The informal medical equipment lending service at the Legion

3. The Community Awareness Select Committee in which service providers from Mackenzie and the area meet to discuss their programs and share information.

4. The Better at Home program

5. A.A. (Northern Pioneer Group)

6. Autumn Lodge Society

7. Azu Health

8. BC Ambulance/Emergency Health Services

9. Canadian Cancer Society

10. Canadian Red Cross

11. College of New Caledonia

12. Heart & Stroke Foundation

13. Mackenzie and District Hospital and Health Centre

14. Mackenzie Counselling Services

15. Mackenzie Community Health

16. Mackenzie Family Health Clinic

17. Mackenzie Recreation Centre

18. New Horizons for Seniors Program

19. Northern Health Authority

20. Northern Health Connections bus

21. Peter's Pantry at St. Peter's Catholic Church

22. The Purple Bicycle hot breakfast and grocery programs

Issues identified in the community engagement process

Community support and health and wellness services were among the most discussed dimension areas of community consultations. The following information reflects the most prominent themes and associated concerns identified by respondents:

1. Community health services:

Many of the survey respondents gave low ratings (fair or poor) to the availability of community health programs (55%), health programs specific to those 55+, and the availability of community support groups and services (47%, with 23% indicating "don't know"). Some of the other issues identified included:

- Limited medical facilities in the District – no critical care, emergency, maternity, or dental services.
- Falls are a significant concern for older adults, and programs and services to prevent falls must be improved in Mackenzie.
- More health care services are needed, such as home care and mental health support.
- The lack of assisted living, residential care, limited home support, and hospice care.
- Access to medical care for pets is limited, and residents have to go to Prince George for veterinarian services.
- The lack of access to transportation for vision, dental, and specialist appointments.

2. Services and Resources for Vulnerable Populations:

- Limited resources and services for vulnerable populations, such as seniors, veterans, and individuals with disabilities.
- The lack of respite care. Many families in the area are caring for elderly relatives with health issues, such as dementia and diabetes, and there is a significant need for respite care.
- The need for assistance with snow shoveling, yard work, firewood, etc., for older adults who can no longer do those tasks themselves.
- The lack of a record of people who are isolated or "shut in" who may need extra assistance during an emergency.
- Lack of services and programming for children and youth with disabilities.

3. Mental Health and Addiction Services:

- Challenges with addiction and mental health services include excessive wait times and limited resources.
- Barriers to accessing mental health and addiction services, especially for those over 19 years of age.
- Wait times for mental health support services for youth.

4. Child and Youth Services and Programs

- Limited programming and services for

youth, including limited after-school programs, lack of access to nutritious food, and lack of mental health support.

- There is no cafeteria at the high school; few affordable, nutritious options are within walking distance at lunchtime.
- Lack of transportation sometimes limits teens from medical care.

5. **Food Access and Availability:**

- High grocery prices and limited access to healthy food options.



Community Support and Health and Wellness Services Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
When internet bandwidth issues have been addressed, market a telemedicine program to connect residents with healthcare professionals and specialists in other locations, including consultations for emergency care, maternity, mental health, and addictions. This could also potentially be extended to veterinarian services.	Northern Health	Internet Service Providers, District of Mackenzie	Long-term
Work with the Better at Home program to advertise the services available and connect with older adults needing friendly visiting, yard work, snow shovelling, transportation, assistance with grocery shopping, and light housekeeping.	Mackenzie Counselling Services Society, New Horizons for Seniors Program, District of Mackenzie	The Better at Home Program, District of Mackenzie	Short-term
Work with organizations like BC Ambulance to establish a registry for individuals needing extra assistance during emergencies.	Northern Health	BC Emergency Health Services – Community Paramedic	Short-term

Community Support and Health and Wellness Services Recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Linkages	Timeline
Expand the community garden to increase access to fresh and healthy food options.	Mackenzie Community Garden	Mackenzie Autumn Lodge Society	Short-term
Address barriers in accessing mental health services, especially for those over 19 years of age, by promoting awareness and education about mental health resources.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Mackenzie Counselling Services, Northern Health Authority	Short-term
Continue to support teens through the library and recreation center with appropriate resources and programming. Consider expanding program hours.	District of Mackenzie, the Mackenzie Public Library	The 92	Ongoing
Promote mental health literacy and increase awareness about mental health issues through education and community programs.	Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	Mackenzie Counselling Services, Northern Health Authority	Ongoing

Next Steps and Planning for Implementation

The following suggestions aim to guide the District of Mackenzie and community stakeholders in effectively carrying out the action plan:

1. **Publicly post the Council-approved final version of the District of Mackenzie Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plan.** This aligns with the PHAC process of becoming an age-friendly community.

2. **Develop a logic model based on the recommendations from the action plan.** The model provides a roadmap for implementation and provides a framework for evaluation. The model should include specific activities, inputs, outputs, and outcomes required to make tangible improvements in the community's age-friendliness.

3. **Encourage partners to assume responsibility for their project activities and set anticipated completion milestones.** Clarifying accountability for each action can minimize confusion, and community ownership of age-friendly efforts can be promoted.

4. **Lead by example.** The District can lead improved accessibility and inclusion efforts by introducing and enforcing regulations that increase accessibility and auditing District-run programs and services for accessibility compliance.

5. **Choose a schedule for evaluation and monitoring, as understanding the process and outcomes of implementing an age-friendly program is vital to its success**. Evaluation is a continuous process to assess and supply evidence regarding successful aspects, areas requiring extra attention, and potential modifications to boost implementation efforts. Generally, age-friendly initiatives evaluate both process and outcome measures.

6. **Develop a communication strategy for sharing age-friendly implementation stories with the public.** Regularly updating community members and stakeholders on activities, irrespective of their success, is essential for retaining support for age-friendly initiatives.

7. **Determine individuals responsible for overseeing the execution of specific implementation efforts.** Both the Accessibility and Inclusion Advisory Committee and the District need to identify who will supervise the action plan's implementation.

The final aspect of implementation and evaluation entails maintaining transparency regarding age-friendly endeavours and initiatives with community members and stakeholders. This can be accomplished by having the District issue a statement affirming its commitment to reporting and measuring age-friendly activities. Subsequently, devise a multi-tiered strategy for consistent communication concerning ongoing age-friendly initiatives in Mackenzie. Additionally, ensure that any communication plan considers equitable information sharing among all community members.