

Seniors' Centres Funding Recommendations

Presented by:



and



to

The Minister of Seniors and Community Supports
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Introduction

In late 2006, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging worked together to learn about the financial status of seniors' centers in Alberta. They gathered information through a survey mailed to all centres in the province and consultation sessions to which all centres were invited. Having heard from 209 centres - more than 50 per cent of the seniors' centres in the province - they now have a clear picture of the financial situations that some Alberta seniors' centres enjoy and those that some find challenging. This report provides an overview of the findings and recommendations that flow from them. Detailed information gathered through the survey and consultation sessions can be found in the document entitled *Seniors' Centres Funding Report*.

Seniors' Centres Revenue

Membership fees charged by all centres **are modest**. More than two-thirds of the respondents reported that their membership fees **have not changed in the last five years**.

Beyond membership fees, most centres reported that they had **at least one other source of revenue**. Almost two-thirds report that they generate revenue through rental of their facilities to other groups/individuals and at least half reported revenue from individual donations, special events and gaming.

While 32 per cent of centres reported that their total annual revenue has not changed in the last five years, 26 per cent reported that it has increased slightly and 12 per cent reported that it has increased considerably. On the other hand, 20 percent reported slight decreases and 10 percent reported considerable decreases.

Seniors' Centres Expenditures

More than 70 per cent of centres reported increasing annual expenditures, with 31 per cent reporting that their total annual expenditure has increased considerably over the last five years and 42 per cent saying that it has increased slightly.

Utilities were identified as the greatest expenditure by 45.9 per cent of the centres and as the second largest expenditure by 12.9 per cent. When asked what annual costs they were most concerned about, 34.4 per cent said they were very concerned about utility costs.

While 12.9 per cent of respondents said **staff** was their greatest expenditure, 68.9 per cent didn't identify staff as a cost at all. Similarly 12.4 per cent said **rent** was their greatest expenditure but 71.8 per cent didn't identify rent as a cost. **Facility maintenance** was identified as the greatest cost by 10 per cent of centres and an additional 24 per cent listed it as their second greatest cost.

Some centres are very concerned about the increasing overall annual costs, liability insurance, property insurance and facility maintenance.

Financial Successes

More than 160 (76.5 per cent) of the 209 respondents said they were on a solid financial footing and described their greatest successes in generating revenue and managing expenses. The common themes reported by financially successful seniors' centres included:

- dedicated volunteers
- a variety of regular revenue-generating activities
- revenue from gaming activities
- strong, mutually beneficial relationships with other groups in the community and
- effective financial management including careful budgeting, prudent management of expenses and successful investment strategies.

Financial Difficulties

When asked about financial difficulties, 29 respondents reiterated that they are on a solid financial footing, have no financial difficulties or are holding their own, while 106 (50.7 per cent) respondents described the financial difficulties they currently face or expect to face in the future. Some common themes expressed by those facing financial difficulties were:

- low and/or declining memberships
- aging volunteer base
- lack of funds for additional staff/adequate pay rates
- cost of operating, maintaining and upgrading aging facilities
- lack of stable Family and Community Support Services funding flowing to seniors' centres

A number of respondents suggested the provincial government provide financial assistance to cover/help cover the costs of insurance, utilities and rent for seniors' centres.

Recommendations

The financial status of seniors' centres across the province varies tremendously and those experiencing financial difficulties face a wide range of challenges. While there is no single or simple solution that would put all centres on solid financial footing, it is clear that assistance of two types would have the most impact and would reap the greatest benefits across the province:

- ensuring all seniors' centres are aware of all potential sources of financial support
- helping seniors' centres with their rising but varied operating costs

Operational funding can be a very important resource for seniors' centres and clubs. Lack of funding can result in a decline in quality of lifestyle, loss of community good will, and volunteers. Therefore, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and the Alberta Council on Aging make these recommendations that would help all seniors' centres cope with the rising ongoing costs of operating their many programs and facilities:

1 – Provide information about all potential sources of financial support

- 1.1 THAT the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports ensure that his ministry create an overview information piece on all of the provincial funding programs relevant to seniors centres, and that this information be included in the relevant department publications and posted online.

2 – Provide assistance with covering increasing operating costs

- 2.1 THAT the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports work with his colleagues in the legislature to ensure that the new Community Spirit Program for Charitable Giving be designed so that seniors centres that receive donations would be eligible to apply for matching funds from the Community Spirit Fund to help cover their operating costs.
- 2.2 THAT the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports to advocate to his Cabinet colleagues for the provision of matching community program and specified operational funding on a yearly basis for seniors centres in Alberta, through an adjustment to the lottery funding granting process.