

Security

Independence

Principles
of the
National Framework
on Aging:
a Policy
Guide

Participation

Dignity

Prepared for
The Federal/Provincial/Territorial
Ministers Responsible for Seniors
in recognition of the International
Year of Older Persons in 1999
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Fairness



International Year of Older Persons 1999

Additional copies are also available from:

Division of Aging and Seniors
Health Canada, Address Locator 1908A1
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1B4
Tel.: (613) 952-7606
Fax: (613) 957-7627
E-Mail: seniors@hc-sc.gc.ca
Internet: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/seniors-aines>

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1. Introduction

Seniors wish to be full and active members of Canadian society – a society that accommodates equally the needs and aspirations of all age groups. Seniors would also like to be appreciated for life accomplishments and be respected for continuing roles and contributions to family, friends, communities and society.

Canada is currently undergoing significant demographic change. The population of seniors, those over 65, is expected to increase to five million by 2011 from 3.6 million in 1998. Policy makers, researchers, and planners are aware that this will make planning for the future of an aging population an important activity now and in the coming years.

The Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, with the exception of Quebec¹, proposed the development of a National Framework on Aging (NFA) in 1994, to assist them in responding to the needs of this population. Designed as a voluntary Framework, it has as its core, a shared Vision Statement and five Principles that seniors and governments across Canada endorse.

Seniors are a diverse group, with lifestyles, incomes, health status and personal and social needs that can vary dramatically. However, seniors themselves in consultations across Canada, have expressed certain shared values that are remarkably consistent which form the basis of this Guide. Policy makers from all jurisdictions need to be aware of these shared values and their importance in developing policies that affect the well-being of seniors.

¹ Quebec indicated that it supports the Vision and Principles put forth by the other governments, but that it intends to assume full responsibility for the entire range of activities pertaining to health and social services.

Seniors today are generally living longer, are healthier, and are economically better off than seniors of previous generations. However, the older they are, the more likely they are to live alone, be women, have health-related problems and be less affluent.

And all these things become increasingly more likely as seniors grow older. The oldest old among the senior population, those over 80, number about 820,000 today and will grow to some 3.1 million by 2041, almost quadrupling in number. Most important, we know that seniors are not a homogeneous group and that the factors that contributed to the design and development of policies and programs several decades ago may have changed.

We also know that the well-being of seniors and their overall status in Canadian society are determined by a broad range of interconnected factors. These determinants of healthy aging interact before and during the senior years and are the accumulation of a lifetime of effects. They include gender, income and social status, social support networks, personal health practices and coping skills, physical and social environments and health services, among others. As these determinants do not fall within a single sector, collaboration across many sectors is essential to successfully address them. New approaches to policy and program development need to be considered to reflect this reality.

The Policy Guide has been designed as a component of the National Framework on Aging. It has been developed as a result of a series of consultations with policy analysts, seniors and others interested and knowledgeable about the diverse needs and concerns of the aging population. The Guide is offered as a resource to government policy planners, decision makers and other stakeholders in designing and reviewing policies and programs for Canadian seniors that address their needs and expressed values and concerns.

VISION

The National Framework on Aging (NFA) Vision Statement: **Canada, a society for all ages, promotes the well-being and contributions of older people in all aspects of life** , promotes the well-being of seniors, recognizes their valuable contributions and reflects the goals of elimination of ageism in all sectors. It lays out the current challenges and the desired outcome and direction of efforts applicable to all policy areas.

PRINCIPLES

The principles associated with the NFA should guide the actions by which its Vision will be achieved. They reflect the core values of seniors inherent in the Vision Statement. The principles need to be considered together as they are inter-related in promoting the overall health and well-being of seniors. Focus groups of seniors favoured the following core principles: **Dignity, Independence, Participation, Fairness and Security** which were subsequently approved by Federal/ Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, as the most important principles for policies affecting seniors.

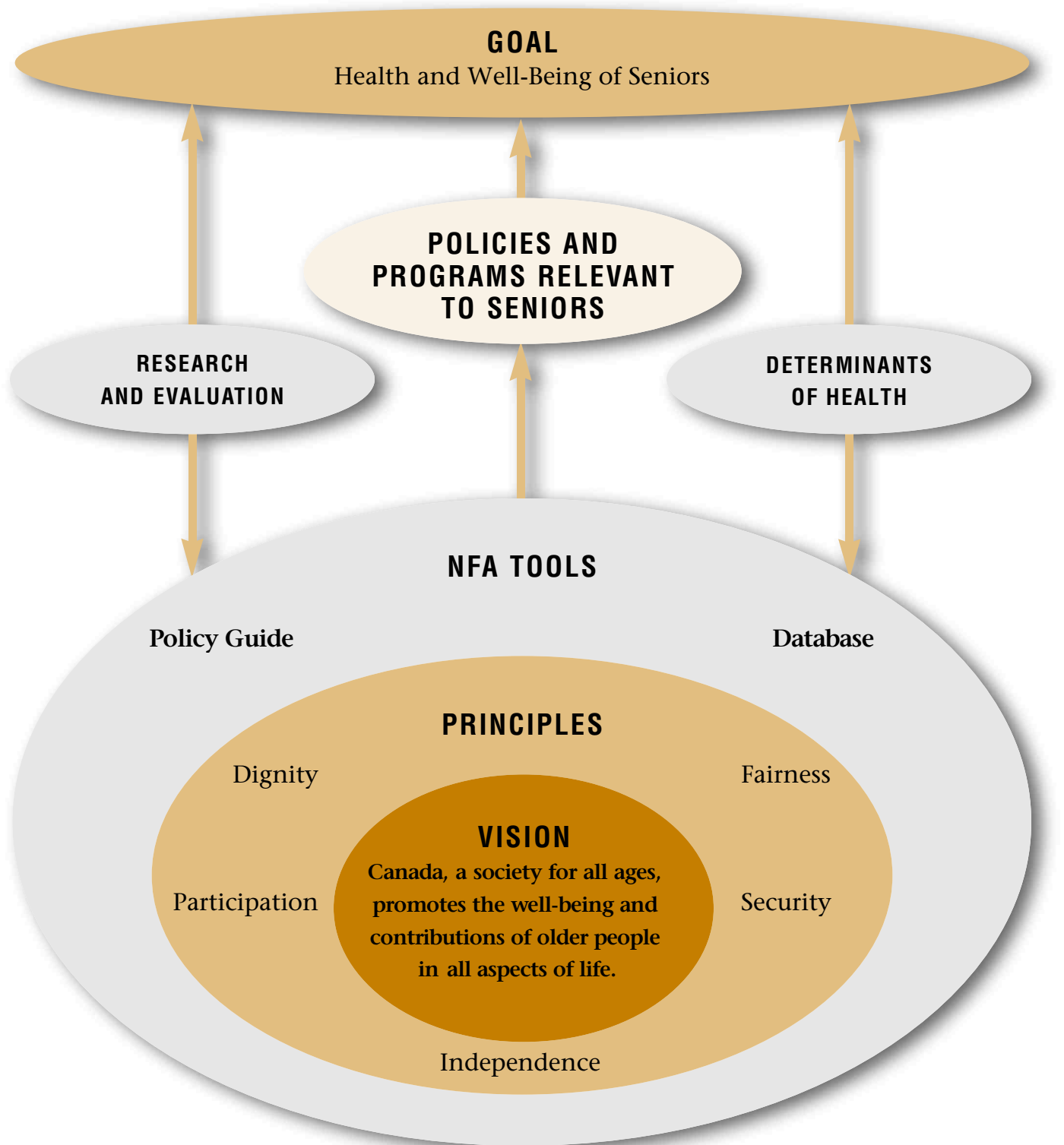
THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON AGING TOOLS

One of the initial tools of the NFA, this *Policy Guide* is designed to help policy makers understand and respond to seniors' needs and values. Its policy questions will help guide policy development in all sectors and across jurisdictions. Another tool, *a database* of federal, provincial, and territorial government policies and programs for which seniors are the primary beneficiaries, will be developed over the next two years. The Seniors Policies and Programs Database will assist decision-makers by providing information about policies and programs relevant to seniors across Canada and aid in identifying policies or programs that potentially would be affected by a change in any given policy or program.

The diagram on p. 7 illustrates the different elements of the NFA and how they relate to each other, and shows where this policy guide fits within the total Framework.

Overview

THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK ON AGING (NFA)



2. Development & Application

OF THE POLICY QUESTIONS

2.1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY QUESTIONS

A series of policy questions was developed to assist policy makers in the application of the principles. The policy questions set out in this document represent a synthesis of suggestions from some 150 seniors, policy analysts and other experts who took part in a series of consultative “policy circles” held in most provincial, territorial and federal capital cities and in Montréal. While representation varied from one jurisdiction to another, the policy circles enjoyed input from a wide array of disciplines and sectors, including: treasury/cabinet policy and priorities, seniors’ affairs, health, housing, municipal and community affairs, social services and development, aboriginal affairs, women’s issues, education, justice, cultural affairs and finance.

The policy questions found in this Guide are viewed as an important tool to develop new policies and programs affecting seniors or to review existing ones in the light of the situation of seniors and the aging of the Canadian population. While the policy questions are designed for use in all sectors, they may need to be tailored to particular areas. Examples of policy/program responses from different sectors and jurisdictions are provided to illustrate the use of these questions in developing senior-sensitive policies.

2.2 HOW TO USE THE POLICY QUESTIONS

Policies and programs responding to seniors’ needs and the aging of the population are different in each jurisdiction. Users of the questions proposed in this document should therefore exercise latitude in selecting and adapting the policy questions so that they are meaningful in their own policy and program context, and complement other tools of analysis and review at their disposal. The purpose of the Guide is to support discussion and assessment of the impact of current and proposed policies and programs on seniors, in relation to the Principles of the NFA.

The Guide makes policy principles concerning seniors and an aging population more explicit, but it does not make the task of choosing between alternative strategies and outcomes any easier.

2.3 WHO SHOULD USE THE POLICY QUESTIONS

The policy questions are designed for use by policy planners and analysts at all levels of government to review policies and programs relevant to seniors. Groups outside of government can also benefit from this Guide in developing and providing programs and services to seniors.

2.4 WHEN TO USE THE POLICY QUESTIONS

The questions put forward can be used by all levels of government to review their policies, determine if existing programs should continue to be supported, critique proposed policies, guide studies of the impact of programs or develop a policy response to an issue or need. The policy questions can be applied to any aspect of the review of existing or new policies, programs and legislation geared to both internal and external audiences including: legislative reform, funding, eligibility criteria, administrative procedures, client accessibility, consultation with seniors, coordination with other policies and programs, impact assessment, pilot programs or projects, education and awareness, research, program evaluations, and staffing and training.

3. Policy QUESTIONS

3.1 QUESTIONS COMMON TO ALL PRINCIPLES

Policy circle participants came up with a number of policy questions that did not correspond neatly to one principle or another, but related to the NFA Vision as a whole. These included some questions that might be consistently repeated for each principle, reflecting concerns that are common to all Principles, rather than one in particular. For example, the relative impacts of a policy on different sub-groups of the seniors population is a recurring concern with respect to each principle. The following questions may be applied in addition to those questions specific to each principle.

For ease of reference, these questions can also be found on a flip-out page at the back of the Guide.

- Does the policy/program address the diverse needs, circumstances, and aspirations of various sub-groups within the seniors population (e.g., age, gender, family status, geographic location, Aboriginal status, official language minorities and ethnocultural minorities, income status, health status, etc.)?
- Is consideration given to the cumulative impacts on later life of policies/programs targetted at earlier life stages?
- Is the policy/program inclusive in nature, or does it separate and isolate seniors from the rest of society?
- Does it take into account the full costs and benefits of supporting the aspirations of society, including those of seniors? What is the cost or consequence of not responding?
- Does the policy/program reflect and respond to the different realities between genders?

- Does it adequately consider the diversity among various age segments of older Canadians (e.g., those who lived through the Great Depression, wars, linguistic or cultural differences, etc.)?
- Does it build on the capacity of seniors and adjust to different circumstances?
- Does the policy/program actively engage the commitment and support of all relevant sectors of society for the achievement of the Vision and Principles (governments, industry, service providers, the private and voluntary sectors, etc.)?
- Does it consider individual versus collective needs?

3.2 SPECIFIC QUESTIONS RELATED TO EACH PRINCIPLE

The questions in this section have been designed to determine if and how a policy or program supports each of the five Principles of the NFA. These questions are intended to stimulate thinking but are not program-specific or all-inclusive. In any review undertaken, additional questions may need to be considered within the context of a specific sector. Examples of policy/program responses sensitive to each principle from a variety of sectors are presented to illustrate the application of these questions to policy development.

Dignity



Being treated with respect, regardless of the situation, and having a sense of self-esteem e.g., having a sense of self-worth; being accepted as one is, regardless of age, health status, etc.; being appreciated for life accomplishments; being respected for continuing role and contributions to family, friends, community and society; being treated as a worthy human being and a full member of society.

*** The number of people in the very oldest age groups is expected to increase rapidly in the approaching decades. Statistics Canada has projected that there will be almost 1.6 million Canadians aged 85 and over in 2041, a number more than four times greater than the figure in 1995.**

* All text in colour marked with a star has been taken from A Portrait of Seniors in Canada, Second Edition, Statistics Canada, 1997.

POLICY QUESTIONS

- Does the policy/program support the dignity and self-esteem of seniors?
- Does it honour and respect the accomplishments, and the contributions to society, of seniors throughout their lives?
- Does it respect the aspirations and rights of seniors, including the ability to make meaningful choices about how they will live their lives and how they will die?
- Does it help to dispel negative stereotypes and misperceptions about seniors, their accomplishments and abilities?
- Does it adapt and adjust to limitations or disabilities of seniors, when present, in a manner that maintains their dignity?
- Does it respect the privacy of seniors (e.g. access to information, mail delivery in residential care, assistance with personal care?)

EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PROGRAM RESPONSE

Residential facilities will accommodate the special needs of seniors who have a hearing and/or visual disability, so they can fully participate with dignity in the life of their community.

Independence



Being in control of one's life, being able to do as much for oneself as possible and making one's own choices e.g., decisions on daily matters; being responsible, to the extent possible and practical, for things that affect one; having freedom to make decisions about how one will live one's life; enjoying access to a support system that enables freedom of choice and self-determination.

*** The vast majority of seniors reside in the community: only about 7% live in institutions, although this proportion increases with advancing age, reaching 40% among seniors aged 85+.**

POLICY QUESTIONS

- Does the policy/program promote and enhance the ability of seniors to live as independently as they wish?
- Does it contribute to overcome barriers that might otherwise restrict opportunities for seniors about how they can live their lives as self-sufficiently as they wish?
- Does the policy/program promote and support options and informed choices for seniors in all aspects of their lives?
- Does it strengthen the capacity of family, friends, and other formal and informal caregivers upon whom seniors may rely for support?
- Is the policy/program based on a general presumption of ability, not inability, on the part of seniors?
- Does it enable seniors to make the most of their abilities?
- Does it allow or provide for timely and effective intervention in the interests of seniors, if and when warranted (e.g. living wills, guardianship arrangements, etc.)?

EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PROGRAM RESPONSE

Development of policies and programs for senior drivers will reflect the integration of safety, personal responsibility, and educational awareness of driving alternatives to maintain independence.

Participation



Getting involved, staying active and taking part in the community, being consulted and having one's views considered by government – e.g., being active in all facets of life (socially, economically, politically); having a meaningful role in daily affairs; enjoying what life has to offer; participating in available programs and services; and being involved and engaged in activities of daily living (decisions/initiatives in all spheres, not just those specifically oriented to seniors).

*** Growing numbers of healthy seniors continue to be active and involved in their families and communities. At least 20% of seniors engage in formal unpaid volunteer work. Seniors also comprise a large proportion of informal caregivers who provide the everyday care and support to very elderly, frail seniors.**

POLICY QUESTIONS

- Does the policy/program promote and support the active and meaningful participation of seniors in daily affairs and decisions that are important to them?
- Does the policy/program promote and enhance opportunities for seniors to participate meaningfully in all aspects of life: physical activities, economic and financial affairs, political and policy decisions, intellectual and cultural pursuits, etc.?
- Does it provide effective means for seniors to be consulted and actively involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs of importance to them?
- Does the policy/program impose barriers (e.g. financial, technological, institutional, attitudinal, etc.) to the participation of seniors in all that life has to offer them?
- Does it equip formal and informal caregivers with tools, knowledge and resources to promote seniors' participation?
- Does it promote communication and direct contact with seniors themselves?

EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PROGRAM RESPONSE

Housing policy supports the development of a range of housing options for older people that eliminates barriers to independent living and encourages full participation in community life.

Fairness



Having seniors' real needs, in all their diversity, considered equally to those of other Canadians e.g., having equitable access (socially, economically, politically) to available resources and services; not being discriminated against on the basis of age; and being treated and dealt with in a way that maximizes inclusion of seniors.

*** Seniors are very diverse: relatively more of them (26%) are immigrants than younger Canadians, more of them (10%) speak a language other than one of the official languages; and there are more women (58%).**

POLICY QUESTIONS

- Does the policy/program provide for equal consideration of seniors and their various sub-groups, in relation to other segments of the population?
- Does it ensure a fairness of treatment of seniors in relation to others, even where outcomes may not be equal?
- Does it reduce disparities – either within the seniors population, or in relation to other segments of the population?
- Does the policy/program relieve burdens on seniors and their formal and informal caregivers?
- Are the procedures and criteria inherent in the policy fair and reasonable?

EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PROGRAM RESPONSE

As seniors wish to be full and active members of Canadian society, health promotion policy should strive to accommodate the needs and aspirations of all age groups.

Security



Having adequate income as one ages and having access to a safe and supportive living environment e.g., financial security to meet daily needs; physical security (including living conditions, sense of protection from crime, etc.); access to family and friends; sense of close personal and social bonds; and support.

*** Seniors are less likely than people in younger age groups to be the victims of a crime. Seniors, though, are more likely than younger people to feel unsafe when walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark.**

POLICY QUESTIONS

- Does the policy help lessen the financial and other hardships experienced by seniors or their caregivers?
- Does the policy/program support and enhance the safety and security, and the sense of security of seniors?
- Does it allow seniors, and equip them with sufficient knowledge, to make reasonable choices about the risks they are willing to take and live with?
- Does it provide for the timely and effective management and communication of risks, and for the reduction of risks to the health, security and well-being of seniors?
- Does the policy/program strengthen the physical security of seniors at home, at work, or in the community? Does it reduce risks of crime, disease, or injury?
- Does it protect seniors from financial and other forms of exploitation and abuse? Does it expose individuals to unnecessary risks?
- Does it provide for timely and effective intervention by the appropriate network of support when warranted?

EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PROGRAM RESPONSE

Policy initiatives to counter violence and fear of violence to seniors will enhance security for seniors in their communities.

4. Feedback

FROM USERS

Feedback on the practical use of this Guide in your policy development work would be greatly appreciated. Please forward any comments or questions to the appropriate address below.

Policy & Planning Division
Department of Health
Confederation Building
West Block, P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, Newfoundland, A1B 4J6
Tel.: (709) 729-5021
Fax: (709) 729-5824

Ontario Seniors' Secretariat
Mowat Block, 3rd Floor
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1R3
Tel.: (416) 326-9906
Fax: (416) 326-9338

P.E.I. Dept. of Health and Social Services
P.O. Box 2000
16 Garfield Street
Charlottetown, P.E.I., C1A 7N8
Tel.: (902) 368-6190
Fax: (902) 368-6136

Manitoba Seniors Directorate
822 - 155 Carlton Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 3H8
Tel.: (204) 945-2127
Fax: (204) 948-2514

Nova Scotia Senior Citizens' Secretariat
P.O. Box 2065
1740 Granville Street, 4th Floor
Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2Z1
Tel.: 1-800-670-0065 Toll Free
Tel.: (902) 424-0065
Fax: (902) 424-0561

Policy and Planning Unit
Saskatchewan Social Services
1920 Broad Street
Regina, Saskatchewan, S4P 3V6
Tel.: (306) 787-3615
Fax: (306) 787-3650

Office for Family & Preventive Services
Dept of Health & Community Services
P.O. Box 5100
5120 King St, 4th Floor
Fredericton, N. B., E3B 5G8
Tel.: 1-888-762-8600 English
1-888-762-8700 French

Seniors Policy and Programs
Alberta Community Development
6th Floor, Standard Life Centre
10405 Jasper Avenue, Room 660
Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 4R7
Tel.: (403) 427-2705
Fax: (403) 427-1689

Office of Seniors
Ministry Responsible for Seniors
1-2, 1515 Blanshard Street 15th Floor
Victoria, British Columbia, V8W 3C8
Tel.: (250) 952-1238
Fax: (250) 952-1159

Dept. of Health & Social Services
(H-1), Policy and Planning
Government of Yukon
P.O. Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 2C6
Tel.: (867) 667-5747
Fax: (867) 667-3096

N.W.T. Dept. of Health & Social Services
6th Floor, Centre Square, Box 1320
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
X1A 2L9
Tel.: (867) 873-7737
Fax: (867) 873-0444

Division of Aging and Seniors
Health Canada, Tunney's Pasture
Jeanne-Mance Bldg, 8th Floor
Address Locator 1908A1
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 1B4
Tel.: (613) 952-7606
Fax: (613) 957-7627

Questions

COMMON TO ALL PRINCIPLES

- Does the policy/program address the diverse needs, circumstances, priorities, and aspirations of various sub-groups within the seniors population (e.g., age, gender, family status, geographic location, Aboriginal status, official language minorities and ethnocultural minorities, income status, health status, etc.)?
- Is consideration given to the cumulative impacts on later life of policies/programs targetted at earlier life stages?
- Is the policy/program inclusive in nature, or does it separate and isolate seniors from the rest of society?
- Does it take into account the full costs and benefits of supporting the aspirations of society, including those of seniors? What is the cost or consequence of not responding?
- Does the policy/program reflect and respond to the different realities between genders?
- Does it adequately consider the diversity among various age segments of older Canadians (the Great Depression, experience with wartime conditions, etc.)?
- Does it build on the capacity of seniors and adjust to different circumstances?
- Does the policy/program actively engage the commitment and support of all relevant sectors of society for the achievement of the Vision and Principles (governments, industry, service providers, the private and voluntary sectors, etc.)?
- Does it consider individual versus collective needs?