

Older Adult Care Pathway

Phase 2 Findings

Timeline of Data Collection:

June 2022  August 2022

23 One-on-One Interviews

Purpose of Research:

To engage and consult with additional service providers, caregivers, and older adults to gain greater insight into their experiences accessing and coordinating care in the community.

Participant Breakdown:

OLDER ADULTS

(Adults 55+)

4 Interview Participants

CAREGIVERS

(Caring for an adult 55+)

4 Interview Participants

SERVICE PROVIDERS

(Supports and Interacts with 55+)

16 Interview Participants

Findings:

Aging in Place:

There is a societal push locally and provincially towards aging in place due to population trends signaling an increase in the proportion of older adults and a shift away from nuclear family structures leading to older adults aging alone. Caregivers rely heavily on in-home supports to assist with caring for their dependent, often finding it the most beneficial to both them and their dependent.

Barriers to Aging in Place included:

- Financial circumstances
- Misconceptions surrounding the costs of services
- Lack of coverage
- Rising housing costs/limited availability of affordable housing
- Difficulty accessing needed transportation
- Availability of local doctors

“Dynamics of families nowadays is often the children aren’t... the family aren’t directly here to provide the care, but that’s the assumption is that family will coordinate that care. And so, we have a number of clients living purely on their own without any support from family and that’s difficult.” – Service Provider Participant

Hybrid Services:

Many service providers have adopted a hybrid model to continue serving older adults in the community during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Service Providers shared positive experiences with implementing this service model including enabling them to service more clients as demands increased but it has also increased staff workload.

Caregivers expressed preference for face-to-face services.

Older Adults shared positive feedback about accessing service through the hybrid model as it increased accessibility of services.

Hybrid Services challenges included:

- Limited knowledge of required technology
- Lack of inclusivity for varying cognitive levels
- Outdated computer technology
- Issues with internet connectivity
- Concerns surrounding internet safety

“I just would like to see, make sure that the virtual part of it, particularly for seniors, continues because, you know, a lot of them embraced this and learned how to use zoom and stuff through COVID, and I think it’s really important for some people that can’t get out.” – Older Adult Participant

Awareness:

Participants indicated a lack of awareness of available services in the community.

Service Providers and **Older Adults** indicated that the most effective method of increasing awareness of services is through word-of-mouth.

Caregivers indicated that they gather information on available services via online support groups and personal networks but are often unaware of available services pre-crisis as information gathering primarily began once in crisis.

There is a need for up-to-date and accurate information on services available in the community and for improved awareness strategies.

“It’s always a battle to try to get the word out of what we provide and then hopefully cut down on people searching around.” – Service Provider Participant

“I think a lot, there is a lot of services, but people are not aware of how to go about accessing them.” – Caregiver Participant

Coordinating Care:

Service Providers revealed that care coordination is primarily client-initiated, with multiple services being accessed at once by older adults and caregivers. As a result, clients and caregivers often feel overwhelmed coordinating their own care, driving a need for service navigation supports locally.

Caregivers revealed that they are often responsible for coordinating care with service providers, navigating information, appointments, follow-up, and dependents needs entirely on their own.

Older Adults also felt responsible for coordinating care independently.

Locally, there is a need for patient-focused care, increased client advocacy amongst agencies, and up-to-date information on available resources. Developing a streamlined and seamless process when transitioning between agencies, improving follow-up processes, and increasing the quality of time spent with clients accessing services would support care coordination.

“Yeah, so I was doing all the phone calling. I was, you know, if she needed to see the doctor, or we needed the extra medications, or getting her medication delivered, I was doing all the calls.” – Caregiver Participant

Communication:

Service providers expressed the need for keeping up-to-date client/organizational records, increased communication between agencies, and the overall importance of inter-agency communication.

Caregivers indicated that they often experienced barriers when accessing services due to a lack of information given upon discharge from a service or by a lack of follow-up from agencies once a service is received, increasing the amount of care coordination responsibilities on the caregiver.

Older Adults stressed the importance of regular follow-up to support their transition between services.

Overall communication needs included:

- Improve effective communication amongst agencies
- Patient-focused communication and assessment process
- A central reference point to access and distribute information effectively

“It was hard to keep up with what the changes ... who is doing what role now, when are there waitlists, when are there not waitlists? ...It’s very hard for us. You know, it’s especially your system navigators to keep up with what’s all happening in the community because it changes very quickly.” – Service Provider Participant

Waitlists:

Waitlists are a primary barrier to accessing services. Waitlist times varied depending on the service being accessed.

Service providers strategically utilize their available resources to satisfy demand. They also stressed the importance of communicating the waitlist process to clients and follow procedures with the ability to accommodate immediate needs.

Older adults shared that waitlists are common across the system as a whole.

There is a need for effective recruitment and retention strategies to address limited human resources and lack of qualified candidates to reduce waitlists.

“I think there’s a fair amount of waiting. That would be wonderful if it could be eliminated.” – Older Adult Participant

Referrals/Intake & Software:

Intake and referral processes varied depending on the service offered with most referrals being initiated by older adults/caregivers.

Barriers that impacted client referrals included:

- Cognitive impairments amongst clients limiting their ability to coordinate or self-advocate
- Difficulty obtaining a physician's referral delaying access to services
- A client's inability to re-access previously discontinued services
- Inability to access services unless in crisis

There is a need for a streamlined patient-focused intake process, increased referrals between agencies, and an increase in the amount of client information collected at intake to improve an agency's ability to service clients.

Service providers shared that a primary barrier to increased communication between agencies is due to a lack of consistency with software used across service providers, resistance to sharing information externally, and a lack of training amongst staff on how to use software effectively. There is a need for user-friendly, streamlined multi-purpose software to increase secure, practical, and useful information sharing amongst service providers.

"Sometimes an individual comes to us and says, well, here's my situation, here's what I need, and we get that little piece of the picture, not being aware that, well, other services are providing these supports. And sometimes there we're duplications or there were gaps and here's a need that is there nobody's filling." – Service Provider Participant

Caregiver Burden & Supports:

Caregivers expressed:

- Loss of freedom due to the need to provide continuous care
- Burnout due to difficulty balancing caregiver role and personal life
- Concerns over quality of care received from service providers due to inconsistent staffing resulting from high turnover.
- Lack of privacy and security in their own homes due to frontline staff continually in and out of their home
- Lack of availability of caregiver supports locally
- Current support structures do not adequately suit their needs
- Need for service providers to increase their time spent with clients
- Services needed to reduce burden on caregivers.

"We had 40 to 50 different PSW's going through our home, and I felt safer going to the hospital than I ever did in my own home." – Caregiver Participant

"And with the respite it's never time for me, the 2 hours a week is spent in town picking things up for my husband that he needs or toiletries. So, it's never "me" time at all." – Caregiver Participant

Challenges to Accessing Care:

Challenges to accessing needed care for older adults included:

- Financial costs
- Lingering concerns due to the pandemic
- Staff shortages creating staff turnover and waitlists
- Lack of availability of primary care providers
- Quality of care concerns
- Accessibility due to geographic location and mobility due to a lack of reliable transportation.

Moving Forward:

There is a need to increase the overall awareness of services supporting older adults and caregivers and to improve processes for care coordination to reduce the level of responsibility and burden set on older adults and caregivers.

To achieve this, systematic barriers related to labour shortages, access to affordable housing, and financial support must be collaboratively addressed at a provincial level and by the community as a whole to provide older adults with the necessary support and quality of care needed to age safely in place.

