

TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING
SENIORS IMPLEMENTATION
FRAMEWORK 2008 – 2010

FINAL – Dec. 2008



Toronto
Community
Housing

Sustaining Age-Friendly Communities for Senior Tenants

A livable community enhances and extends active participation by citizens regardless of their age, removing barriers and ensuring inclusiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Toronto is recognized globally as a livable city — its vibrant downtown core connected by diverse neighbourhoods. Sustaining the health and vitality of the city by ensuring people have safe, affordable places to live is a central goal of Toronto Community Housing.

Each year, Toronto Community Housing delivers an updated Community Management Plan (CMP), a strategic roadmap focused on supporting the needs of the 164,000 tenants the organization serves. In the plan, healthy communities are described as:

“Places where people can choose to live because the quality of housing is good, they feel safe, and they are empowered and feel able to participate in civic life.”

In 2008, as part of its commitment to healthy communities, Toronto Community Housing created a Seniors Operating Unit to develop and implement policies and programs, as well as a service delivery culture focused on improving the quality of life for its senior tenants. The Unit will primarily focus its policy and program implementation on the 66 senior-designated buildings housing 56 percent of Toronto Community Housing’s senior tenants.

However, in order to promote learning and best practices to a wider range of seniors, expertise and experiences will be shared with other community operating units working with senior tenants. Toronto Community Housing will also champion seniors’ issues at the federal, provincial and municipal level.

Sustaining Age-Friendly Communities will be a guide over three years to ensure Toronto Community Housing sustains the capacity now and in the future to support its seniors to live independently. The plan is informed by the latest research on aging, along with ongoing consultations with tenants, community service partners and staff.

A livable community enhances and extends active participation by citizens regardless of their age, removing barriers and ensuring inclusiveness. One of the largest social housing providers in North America, Toronto Community Housing is uniquely qualified to contribute to this growing global movement in building age-friendly cities.

Toronto Community Housing has created Sustaining Age-Friendly Communities to ensure senior tenants continue to benefit from the latest research and best possible support and services as they contribute to the social, cultural and economic life of their city.

PROFILE OF SENIORS LIVING IN TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING

- › 26,000 seniors live in Toronto Community Housing buildings
- › 69 buildings are designated 'Seniors Only'
- › 6,500 seniors are over 80 years of age
- › 18,500 seniors live alone
- › 16,900 seniors are women
- › Toronto Community Housing seniors speak 26 languages

BACKGROUND

Toronto's senior population is expected to grow dramatically in the next two decades. The City of Toronto Planning Division projects nearly half a million persons aged 65 and over will be living in the city by 2030. The demand for affordable housing will continue and will be most prevalent amongst older seniors, renters and those living alone.

Toronto Community Housing is taking steps today to meet current demand and build organizational capacity and responsiveness to an aging tenant population.

In 2006, the Toronto Community Housing Board of Directors recognized the need for a comprehensive seniors' strategy by establishing a special Seniors' Strategy Steering Committee. Consisting of Toronto Community Housing staff, tenants, community service partners and academic affiliates such as Ryerson University, the Committee commissioned extensive research on demographics, distribution of community services, as well as front-line studies pointing out service gaps.

The committee identified several key elements for a Toronto Community Housing seniors' strategy:

- › Accessibility – create an accessibility plan tailored to specific needs of seniors.
- › Inclusiveness – adopt a 'seniors lens' to evaluate barriers in developing future Community Management Plan initiatives and programs.
- › Organizational Preparedness – build organizational capacity by offering training and resources to enhance Toronto Community Housing staff's ability to respond as factors such as demographic changes place increased demands on the organization.
- › Health and Well-being – improve livability of Toronto Community Housing buildings to ensure 'age-friendly' status, as well as outreach programs for isolated seniors.
- › Housing mandate – review how seniors are served in each type of Toronto Community Housing building i.e. senior designated and mixed age buildings.

The Sustaining Age-Friendly Communities plan is aligned with the Community Management Plan mandate and principles, and also benefits from a wealth of research.

In June 2008, Toronto Community Housing established a Unit mandated to develop a plan for responding to these and other recommendations. **Sustaining Age-Friendly Communities** provides a framework to ensure the mandate is consistent with the Community Management Plan and links to other service delivery plans across Toronto Community Housing's entire portfolio.

In the first three years, the plan will

- › Guide the way Toronto Community Housing delivers property management services in senior-designated buildings;
- › Inform the level of organizational capacity to provide similar services in mixed age buildings;
- › Engage internal and external stakeholders in working towards 'healthy communities' in senior-designated buildings;
- › Promote learning, shape the way progress is measured and influence decision making.

RATIONALE FOR SUSTAINING AGE-FRIENDLY BUILDINGS

Toronto Community Housing's Community Management Plan principles call for an open and inclusive process, experimentation and learning, and a phased approach to change.

The Sustaining Age-Friendly Communities plan is aligned with the Community Management Plan mandate and principles, and also benefits from a wealth of research including:

- › Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide — World Health Organization
- › Women, Aging and Health: A Framework for Action — World Health Organization
- › Principles of the National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide — Health Canada
- › The Advantage Initiative, Center for Home Care Policy & Research
- › Advice from the Seniors' Strategy Steering Committee, staff, tenants and community partners
- › Participation in a workshop, Aging in Place, developed for Toronto Community Housing by international expert on seniors, Liz Cross
- › Review of research related to Toronto Community Housing, Front-line perspectives on support and service gaps, Janet M. Lum, Simonne Ruff and Joseph Springer
- › Mayor's Roundtable on Seniors report: Housing Toronto's Seniors – Planning for the Future

IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

Several implementation principles guide the Seniors Operating Unit in its work:

- › Look beyond demographics in program design by focusing on the unique experience, knowledge and wisdom of seniors
- › Different approaches to respond to independent living and aging in place will be practiced/trialled in different communities housing senior tenants
- › Focus on building relationships with community partners and strategic alliances that create conditions for sustainability and growth
- › Progress and results of activities in senior designated buildings are measured, analyzed and reported
- › Qualitative and quantitative measures are equally valid and important

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING'S SENIORS UNIT

Opportunities

Toronto Community Housing is Canada's largest provider of non-profit housing, and the second largest in North America, providing homes to nearly 26,000 seniors over the age of 59. Of these, 56 percent live in a senior designated portfolio.

Toronto Community Housing's large, diverse population leaves it well positioned to actively pursue and participate in age-friendly initiatives, as well as champion seniors' issues at the federal, provincial and municipal level.

- › A senior focused unit in Toronto Community Housing creates leadership and knowledge-sharing opportunities in areas such as design of physical space, policies and programs promoting age-friendly communities.
- › Established partnerships with community-based service providers ensure a solid foundation for service enhancement and improvement, as well as access to new funding sources.

- › Research and academic partnerships encourage innovation in design and delivery of services.
- › Tenant engagement is established in Toronto Community Housing communities, creating a solid foundation to increase and diversify engagement opportunities for senior tenants.

Challenges

Toronto Community Housing is home to a significant number of 'at risk' senior tenants characterized by low income and advanced age. Women over age 59 make up the majority of this senior tenant population, with 74 per cent of them living alone. Mental health and social isolation are serious issues for 'at risk' seniors that are often compounded by addictions and cognitive impairment.

- › Toronto Community Housing must position itself to manage these risks effectively by developing and sustaining best practices, as well as by working with partners to secure access to innovative services, new sources of funding and pursuit of research.
- › The Seniors Operating Unit is organized to focus on 66 senior designated buildings, but seniors are dispersed across the Toronto Community Housing portfolio (44 percent in 'mixed-age' buildings).

The quality of life and independence of older people is influenced by the linkages between appropriate housing and access to community and social services.

This presents several challenges regarding capacity of the unit and the infrastructure required to respond equitably to issues of aging across the entire portfolio.

- › Accessibility gaps exist in the physical design of several seniors' buildings, with eight buildings having a Toronto Community Housing 'zero accessibility' rating. As outlined in the Community Management Plan, significant shortfalls exist in Toronto Community Housing's ability to cover capital costs required to bring buildings to an acceptable accessibility standard for an increasingly frail population.
- › The senior portfolio includes 8,093 bachelor units for which demand is low compared to one bedroom units. This supply and demand presents several challenges related to future sustainability and the Social Housing Reform Act requirement to maintain constant levels of rent geared to income units.

KEY PILLARS FOR SUSTAINING AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Four pillars comprise the foundation of Toronto Community Housing's framework for sustaining age-friendly communities. The pillars provide an organization-wide

direction for the creation of policies and programs that enhance Toronto Community Housing's ability to better serve the housing needs of seniors.

PILLAR 1: Buildings for Seniors

Ensuring access to adequate housing

Housing is essential to a person's safety and well-being and is particularly important for those who live alone. The quality of life and independence of older people is influenced by the linkages between appropriate housing and access to community and social services. Toronto Community Housing will take a leadership role in ensuring access to safe, adequate housing in senior-designated buildings and in making aging an organizational priority.

Outcomes:

- › Buildings and outdoor spaces remain barrier-free
- › Home safety and neighbourhood security improvements are a priority in planning and promotion to prevent isolation and promote independence
- › Ongoing innovations, designs and retrofits enable safe aging
- › Promotion of green building culture
- › Information about essential building services is easily accessible

The pillars provide an organization-wide direction for the creation of policies and programs that enhance Toronto Community Housing's ability to better serve the housing needs of seniors.

PILLAR 2: Health and Well-being

Promoting physical and mental health, participation and engagement

Social participation and social support are strongly connected to good health and well-being. Active aging is a process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. Toronto Community Housing will take the role of a catalyst by giving the issue spotlight with community partners.

Outcomes:

- › Diverse social, recreational, educational and faith activities are promoted and integrated into the broader community in every neighbourhood
- › Policy review and outreach are carried out in the interests of safeguarding vulnerable and isolated seniors
- › Information about essential services and choices for preventive health, medical and social services is accessible
- › 'Independent living' and 'aging at home' is facilitated

PILLAR 3: Community Engagement

Enabling connection, engagement and partnerships with the community

Community engagement is vital to building healthy communities and to sustaining Toronto Community Housing's senior-designated buildings as age-friendly communities. Social integration, political activism and meaningful opportunities for paid and volunteer work provide options for older people to continue to contribute to communities. Active participation sustains a senior's sense of self worth, while maintaining health and social connections.

Toronto Community Housing will bring people together to enable connection and engagement.

Outcomes:

- › Opportunities for active involvement in community life are promoted
- › Meaningful connections fostered with family, neighbours and friends
- › Opportunities are created for economic and volunteer work

Tenant engagement is established in Toronto Community Housing communities, creating a solid foundation to increase and diversify engagement opportunities for Toronto Community Housing seniors.

- › Community consultations and service sector partnerships are continued on an ongoing basis to ensure high standard of services
- › Age-friendly issues promoted as a community-wide priority by the organization leading, encouraging and participating in forums on issues important to seniors

PILLAR 4: Culture of Change and Continuous Learning – Making aging an organizational priority

Toronto Community Housing is undergoing significant organizational shifts as it builds for the future. Dynamic cultural change is a challenge requiring energy, improved practices and new enabling processes. Toronto Community Housing must create and maintain opportunities for staff to be actively involved in effecting change, as well as offer support, training and required resources to successfully transition to a responsive 'learning culture'.

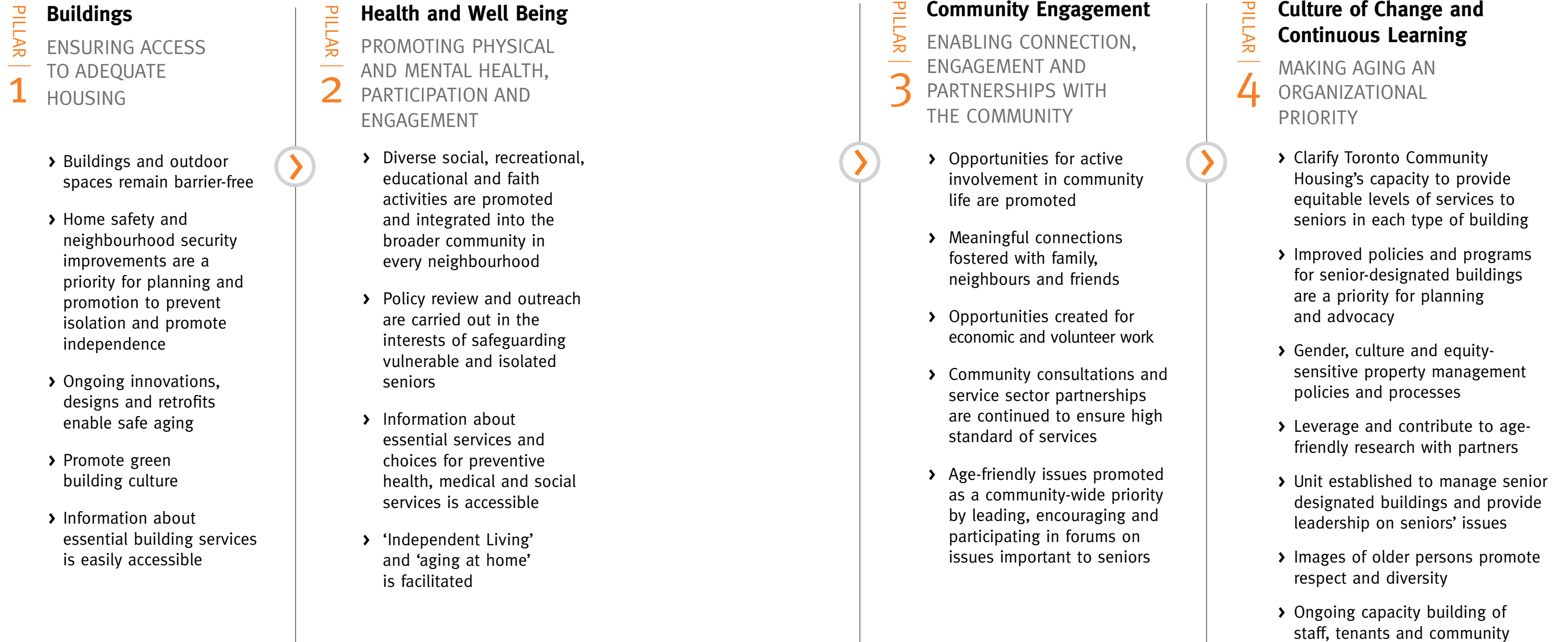
Outcomes:

- › Unit established to manage senior designated buildings and provide leadership on seniors issues
- › Improved policies and programs for seniordesignated buildings are a priority for planning and advocacy

- › Gender, culture and equity-sensitive property management policies and processes are maintained
- › Leverage and contribution to age-friendly research with partners
- › Ongoing capacity building of staff, tenants and community
- › Images of older persons promote respect and diversity
- › Clarification of Toronto Community Housing's capacity to provide equitable levels of services to seniors in each type of building.

Sustaining Age Friendly Communities

FOUR PILLARS IN THE STRATEGY:



Sustaining Age Friendly Communities

PILLAR 1: Buildings

ENSURING ACCESS TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

OUTCOME	KEY INITIATIVES	STARTING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Buildings and outdoor spaces remain barrier-free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Create a 'repair and cleanliness' program, including standards, communication monitoring and assessment for senior-designated buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Home safety and neighbourhood security improvements are a priority for planning and promotion to prevent isolation and promote independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Design and implement senior specific program on home safety and neighbourhood security in senior-designated buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Ongoing innovations, designs and retrofits enable safe aging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Create a three year strategy for barrier-free senior-designated buildings, including funding and priority design changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Promote green building culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Promote green culture program in senior-designated buildings based on reuse, recycle and reduction principles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Information about essential building services is easily accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Develop communications strategy and tools to promote awareness of essential building services in senior-designated buildings › Collaborate on marketing tools for housing seniors in Toronto Community Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2008 › 2010

Sustaining Age Friendly Buildings

PILLAR 2: Health and Well Being

PROMOTING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

OUTCOME	KEY INITIATIVES	STARTING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Diverse social, recreational, educational and faith activities are promoted and integrated into the broader community in every neighbourhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Support tenant leadership in the development of an agenda for educational, social, recreational and civic activities in senior-designated buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Policy review and outreach are carried out in the interests of safeguarding vulnerable and isolated seniors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Create protocols in senior-designated buildings on issues such as relocation, hospitalization, loss, grief, 'check-ins' for isolated tenants and elder abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Information about essential services and choices for preventive health, medical and social services is accessible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Assess use, interest, barriers and gaps in health, social and educational services and activities in senior-designated buildings and neighbourhoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 'Independent living' and 'aging at home' is facilitated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Strategize with tenants and partners on new approaches to health services, including location, culture specific provision, partnerships, communication and service pilots in senior-designated buildings › Hold Toronto Community Housing Seniors Health Forum › Strategize with partners on ways to respond to identified barriers for 'independent living' and 'aging at home' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009 › 2009 › 2009

Sustaining Age Friendly Communities

PILLAR 3: Community Engagement

ENABLING CONNECTION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

OUTCOME	KEY INITIATIVES	STARTING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Opportunities for active involvement in community life are promoted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Establish local tenant engagement in senior-designated buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Meaningful connections fostered with family, neighbours and friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Promote inclusion of family, neighbourhood and friends in activities in senior-designated buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Opportunities created for economic and volunteer work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Based on interest, link with procurement, local business, funding sources and training centre to identify economic opportunities and resources for business ventures and paid work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Ongoing community consultations and service sector partnerships to ensure high standard of services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Facilitate development of a neighbourhood based inter-agency forum to address seniors' issues in senior-designated buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Age-friendly issues promoted as a community-wide priority by leading, encouraging and participating in forums on issues important to seniors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Facilitate tenant leadership to develop advocacy agenda for an age-friendly city, including issues such as transit accessibility, public buildings and spaces (Toronto Community Housing's Council on Seniors' Issues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2010

Sustaining Age Friendly Communities

PILLAR 4: Culture of Change and Continuous Learning

MAKING AGING AN ORGANIZATIONAL PRIORITY

OUTCOME	KEY INITIATIVES	STARTING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Unit established to manage senior-designated buildings and provide leadership on seniors' issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Implement an infrastructure for Seniors Operating Unit, including staffing model, business systems, space, resources and linkages to other units. Evaluate outcome and impact of the three-year plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Launch Seniors Unit and office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Improved policies and programs for senior-designated buildings are a priority for planning and advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Develop a 'seniors lens' checklist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Gender, culture and equity-sensitive property management policies and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Prioritize, review and revise policies related to property management in seniors buildings for gender, culture and equity sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Leverage and contribution to age-friendly research with partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Contribute to the research agenda with academic and community partners on issues that affect seniors in social housing: women and aging, supportive housing successes, attitudes towards seniors, housing supply future needs, poverty, and elder abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Ongoing capacity building of staff, tenants and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Enable learning and development of staff working in senior-designated buildings through training, coaching and feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Images of older persons promote respect and diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Design and monitor a communication/visual identity plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Clarify Toronto Community Housing's capacity to provide equitable levels of services to seniors in each type of building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Review how seniors are served in each type of Toronto Community Housing building, assess challenges, establish and confirm criteria for senior-designated portfolio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › 2009

Sustaining Age Friendly Communities

INITIATIVES AT A GLANCE

PILLARS

› Buildings

› Health and Well Being

› Community Engagement

› Culture of Change and Continuous Learning



2008

- › Three-year strategy for barrier-free senior-designated buildings,
- › Awareness of essential building services in senior-designated buildings

- › Facilitate development of a neighbourhood based inter-agency forum to address seniors' issues in senior-designated buildings

- › Implement Seniors Unit
- › Enable learning and development of staff
- › Develop a communication/visual identity plan for the Seniors Unit.



2009

- › Create a 'repair and cleanliness' program for senior-designated buildings
- › Home safety and neighbourhood security program in senior-designated buildings
- › Green culture program in senior-designated buildings

- › Support tenant leadership in the development of agenda of activities in senior-designated buildings
- › Protocols in senior-designated buildings on specific issues
- › Assessment of use, interest, barriers and gaps in social services and activities in senior-designated buildings and neighbourhoods
- › Strategize with tenants and partners on new approaches to delivery of social services in senior-designated buildings
- › Seniors Health Forum
- › Explore responses to identified barriers for 'independent living' and 'aging at home'

- › Establish local tenant engagement in senior-designated buildings
- › Family and neighbourhood inclusion in senior-designated building events

- › Launch Seniors Unit and office
- › Develop a 'seniors lens' checklist
- › Review property management policies in senior-designated buildings
- › Establish research agenda
- › Review seniors services in each type of Toronto Community Housing building and confirm criteria for senior-designated portfolio



2010

- › Collaborate on marketing tools for housing seniors in Toronto Community Housing

- › Identify economic opportunities for business ventures and paid work
- › Tenant leadership for advocacy agenda

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