

Presented by The Calgary Foundation, in partnership with the Calgary Public Library, **Vital Conversations** create dynamic community forums for Calgarians to discuss local quality of life issues that build on the results of the *Calgary's Vital Signs Report*. Four events are planned for the 2011 Series.

The 1st event - '**Active Aging, Aging Well**' was held Friday, March 4th at Fish Creek Public Library. Approximately 85 Calgarians participated in group discussions. The following overview provides a transcription of those conversations.

MARCH 4TH VITAL CONVERSATIONS AT FISH CREEK PUBLIC LIBRARY ACTIVE AGING, AGING WELL — WHAT'S WORKING & WHAT'S NOT?

What's happening?

1. What stories and experiences can you share about what's working well when it comes to services for seniors and opportunities for seniors to be involved in community life in Calgary?
 - There are many opportunities and meaningful ways to involve people – great neighbours and meaningful connections are an important part of aging
 - Support services to encourage people to stay home – tapping in to the spirit of volunteerism
 - Availability of Seniors Clubs keeps seniors busy, with much to do
 - Ability to work past the age of 65 if you love your job
 - Libraries are wonderful areas to gather information – all very accessible. 50+ groups for learning about social opportunities
 - Seeing growth of seniors who are active in technology, social media, politics, etc.
 - Opportunities for seniors to volunteer in the city – many program are intergenerational and involve both young & old (LinkAGES, Ghost River Rediscovery, Pathways)
 - Free tuition at the University of Calgary for seniors
 - "Living Well Programs" in certain neighbourhoods
 - Kerby Centre, Trico Centre
 - Resource Guides that are regularly published and feature events, activities and requests for skills
 - Seniors Choirs – gatherings are weekly, visit many senior centres and cultural events
 - Programs such as "Access Calgary" and "Bus Buddies" and the city bus pass for seniors (\$35/year) assist with mobility
 - Many hobby interest groups available if you know where to find them - some of these include outdoor clubs
 - Opportunities for discounted recreation and retail
 - Collaborative efforts among service providers
 - Creative partnerships being built around the city to provide services more effectively (i.e. Coalition for Seniors)

- Seniors have a surplus of time to go out to restaurants, as they age the restaurants are also changing to accommodate them in meal portion size and price
- We live in an awesome city! Parks and walkable pathways, libraries, theatre, seniors groups

2. What stories and experiences can you share about what's not working well?

- Transit – need a better system with more C-train routes and a Handibus system with better scheduling, improved lighting on platforms, better signage, intra-community routes so people can better access services in their neighbourhoods
- Impact of increased bus fare will effect many seniors ability to get out and about
- Health System – generally difficult to understand the health care system, long wait times to see specialists, lack of doctors and information in regard to health management, no dental services provided in health care facilities, home care extremely expensive
- Not enough longterm care
- Not enough public places are senior-friendly
- Many seniors need increased confidence and self-advocacy skills – not many resources out there for this
- Older seniors feeling left-behind from lack of technology skills (computer use, etc.). Internet awareness and opportunities to learn can be limited. Challenge to keep up with the growth and changes in the city
- The “seniors” category is too broad. There is a significant range from those who are 65 to those who are 85
- Language barrier for immigrant seniors
- Seems to be a lot of resources and programs, but no central spot that is well-known that people could contact for information
- Calgary needs to take a community approach and get schools, churches and community associations working as a team on some of these key issues
- 211 phone line needs to be better promoted
- Lip reading lessons available at different locations through the city
- Many seniors are isolated and it is difficult to get them involved
- Unfortunate fragmentation of services to seniors – social services, health, disability are all separated and don't necessarily work together. The system is complex.
- Programs making budget cuts and not considering the needs of seniors
- Need more multicultural activities that encourage interactions of different senior ethnic groups

What's possible?

3. What's possible to energize seniors and the wider community to get more involved in addressing these challenges and in supporting what's working?
 - Communication and advertising – market services in a different way so that more seniors are aware of the options and more willing to take advantage of them
 - Use the “boomers” to share information – workshops to Boomers populations at corporations
 - Community projects (i.e. gardens) – think of where people gather
 - Cross-generational interaction
 - Using community centres for helping seniors access information and resources
 - More opportunities like Vital Conversations where seniors can convene and discuss the issues and connect with other people
 - Increase in peer learning groups, such as those offered through the Kerby Centre
 - Health talks to improve day-to-day life
 - Build community of seniors around creativity
 - Affordable housing near transit
 - Meet-up groups/online groups for people to come together through technology
 - Training programs to get older people into technology
 - A central repository of knowledge and information
 - Create self-assessment programs to assist seniors with benchmarking their health
 - Keep things affordable (i.e. transit, recreation, cultural events), financial incentives to keep people participating
 - Promote respect for the elderly
 - Caregiving support
 - More downtown green space and parks for seniors to visit
 - Communal locations such as Tim Horton's are available for informal drop-ins to meet new people
 - Ride sharing – group of capable drivers to assist in transportation
 - One-on-one connection with lonely strangers

What are the top three most inspiring ideas?

- Seniors considered “dependants” in benefit packages
- Community projects – public spaces that will allow for seniors to be involved in their community
- “Seniors Navigator” – experience senior guiding other seniors
- Programs for “Get Moving” , keep learning, move and mingle, fitness incentives
- Free tuition for Seniors at the U of C
- Lifelong learning programs
- Food stimulates conversation and community – create more senior gatherings around food
- Connecting and communicating using technology
- Keeping things affordable and accessible
- Resource sharing through umbrella partnerships (i.e. community associations), mentoring connections

Personal action:

4. What two key things might you do to further support and involve seniors in Calgary?

- Get someone else involved, get moving, keep learning
- Personal reflection
- Communicate to others the wealth of services and resources that are available to seniors
- Challenge myself to take part in some of the activities going on in my neighbourhood and at my local community centre
- Contact the City of Calgary to express my concerns about key issue areas like transit and health
- Become a mentor to someone younger than me and take part in intergenerational activities
- Share my knowledge of computers and technology to help integrate others