



**Valemount Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan
Consultant Report**

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- **Valemount and Area seniors and other residents (who participated in the survey)**
- **Valemount Anglican-United Community Church**
- **Golden Years Lodge (Valemount)**
- **Valemount Public Library**
- **Village of Valemount Staff**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Age-Friendly communities are those that support healthy active living across the lifespan. Many of the community features that contribute to healthy aging also support other members of the population to thrive; these include affordable housing, safety, and reliable transportation, accessibility to health and social services, and strong social networks. Conducting an Age-Friendly assessment is a way in which communities can understand the local assets and barriers to support their citizens to engage in lifetime healthy living. These assessments are typically guided by the *World Health Organization's (WHO) Checklist of Essential Features of Age-Friendly Cities* and the *WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide*. Rural and remote communities can also utilize the Canadian resource *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide*. These three documents provided the framework to assess and explore the Age-Friendly features in Valemount.

This document is informed by both primary and secondary research, which was collected during the assessment process. The assessment began with an inventory of current Age-Friendly features and challenges for older adults living in the community. This was followed by an analysis of official documents, a review of related literature, and a community consultation process.

The community consultation took place in August and September 2015. This mixed-methods approach involved a community survey, two World Café focus groups, group interviews, and individual interviews. All parts of the community consultation sought the opinions of older adults, service providers, and stakeholders.

An examination of the collective data revealed many additional existing Age-Friendly features in Valemount. It also highlighted challenges and barriers for older adult citizens in maintaining their independence. This information is detailed in the following document and reflects the voices of the community members who participated in the consultation process. The report is split into three overarching sections; Valemount now, Valemount looking forward, and Valemount in the future. The consultation results are categorized by the Age-Friendly dimension-specific features as outlined by the WHO. The data are presented by identifying priority actions items, future action items, and recommendations for implementation. Suggestions for future planning are outlined in the final section of the report.

1. INTRODUCTION

Healthy aging is multidimensional, encompassing the avoidance of disease and disability; the maintenance of high physical and cognitive function; and the sustained engagement in social and productive activities. The concept of active aging emphasizes the benefits of maintaining an active lifestyle throughout a lifetime, as well as having meaningful work (either paid or volunteer), play (hobbies, creative expression), relationships with family, friends, and community; giving service to others; maintaining physical and spiritual health; and engaging in continued learning through self-discovery and the achievement of new skills.

Communities that support these aspects of healthy aging are considered to be “Age-Friendly”. The Global Age-Friendly Cities Project was started almost a decade ago by the World Health Organization (WHO), and was based on the active aging model. The WHO project defined eight formal Age-Friendly dimensions; these include *outdoor spaces and public buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services*. To date, 22 countries have participated in the project, with multiple Canadian cities undergoing an Age-Friendly Assessment (with many of those cities implementing Age-Friendly Action plans). Much of the focus of this work has taken place in large urban centres.

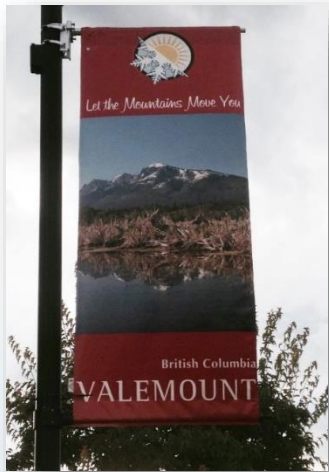
With the recognition that a significant number of Canadians live in rural or remote communities, in 2007 the Canadian Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors sponsored a project that resulted in the launch of the *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* handbook. The process of developing the handbook used the community engagement protocol of the original WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Project, but with a lens unique to those communities with populations of 5000 or fewer residents.¹ This handbook has provided a way in which to better examine Age-Friendly features in rural and remote Canada. The British Columbia provincial government has advanced the Age-Friendly agenda since 2007 in collaboration with the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) and other key partners to engage and support local governments in preparing their communities for an aging population. Age-Friendly British Columbia (AFBC) is built, in part, around grants administered by the BC Ministry of Health and the UBCM.

In some respects, urban and remote communities have common issues related to becoming more Age-Friendly; both types of communities tend to struggle equally with issues of building accessibility and

¹ *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* (2007). Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors. Public Health Agency of Canada.

affordable housing.² Unlike their urban counterparts, rural and remote communities also face unique challenges in achieving other Age-Friendly features. These can include challenges in the ability to “age-in place”, access to healthcare (particularly in communities that are geographically isolated from comprehensive healthcare facilities), available supported housing, and reliable local transportation.³

2. VALEMOUNT: COMMUNITY AND AGE-FRIENDLY PROFILE



The Village of Valemount is a remote community located in the North Thompson region in British Columbia (BC). The village is situated on the Yellowhead Highway in close proximity to the BC/Alberta border. McBride is the closest nearby community (89 kms) and the closest major city is Prince George (295 kms). As of the last printing of the long form census by Statistics Canada (2011), the population of Valemount was reported to be 1020. At that time, one hundred and seventy of Valemount’s citizens reported that they were 65 years old or older. Of those aged 65 and older, 57% were women and 43% men.

Valemount’s population is aging overall with over 30% of residents over the age of 55. It is also important to recognize the additional population of older adults not captured in census data, who live beyond the borders of Valemount in neighbouring communities such as Tête Jaune Cache. Many of these older adults use services and attend events that are specific to seniors in Valemount. Finally, although there are anecdotal accounts of many seniors living in poverty, recorded information about socioeconomic status, employment, or housing types regarding those over age 65 in Valemount does not appear to exist.

The Village is a designated Resort Municipality and, along with 13 other BC communities, participates through a contract with Destination BC in the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) Program. Tourism is the mainstay of the local economy, with forestry being the second most important economic contributor. Hiking, snowmobiling, mountain biking, fishing, hunting and other activities make Valemount an ideal community to live or visit for outdoor enthusiasts. This focus on the outdoors has

² Menec, V. H., & Nowicki, S. (2014). Examining the relationship between communities' 'age-friendliness' and life satisfaction and self-perceived health in rural Manitoba, Canada. *Rural and Remote Health*, 14(2594).

³ Barber, Clifton E. “Perceptions of Aging-Friendly Community Characteristics: Does County Rurality Make a Difference?” *The Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy* 8.2 (2013): 1-10.

made Valemount the focus of a major destination ski resort proposal that may have a significant impact on the local economy in the future.

The Village of Valemount Integrated Community Sustainability Plan identifies “...employment and a lack of well-paying jobs, the lack of solid industry, challenges with maintaining businesses and local social services/amenities including education offerings, environmental concerns including access to timber, and challenges with infrastructure like electricity”, as some of the most significant challenges facing the community.

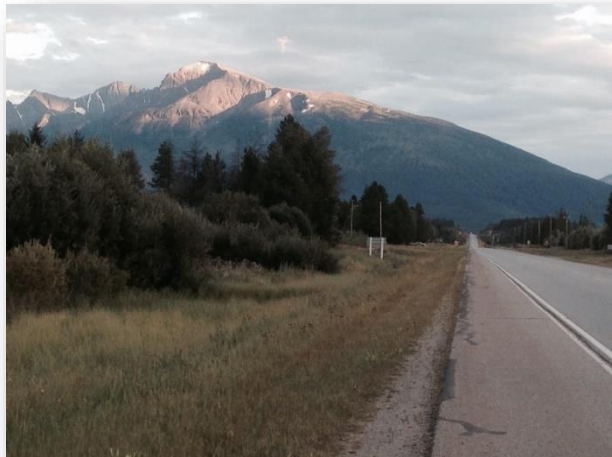
Existing Age-Friendly Features

Although dimension-specific Age-Friendly features will be noted throughout this report, it is important to highlight the following important services and structures in place that support Age-Friendly planning:

- **The Valemount Senior Citizen Housing Society (VSCHS)**, who provide and maintain affordable housing for low-moderate income seniors.
- **The Better at Home pilot program**, a proposed pilot program that is intended to provide non-medical home support services to Valemount seniors. The program is currently under development with Robson Valley Support Services.
- **The Golden Years Lodge**, offering subsidized seniors housing.
- **Valemount House**, 10 apartments of modular housing in Valemount for seniors in need and people with disabilities.
- **Valemount Health Centre**, a full service health centre with 3 full-time doctors, support staff, lab technicians, and nurses.
- **Meals on Wheels.**
- **The committed volunteer and community support base.**



3. AGE-FRIENDLY VALEMOUNT: LOOKING FORWARD



In the summer and fall of 2015, our staff collected primary and secondary data in order to better understand how the Village of Valemount could begin Age-Friendly planning. This included a review of relevant Village documents, a brief review of related academic and grey literature, and consultation with the local community. These consultations included World Cafés, individual and group interviews, and an online and paper-based survey. Local seniors, service providers, and community stakeholders participated in the consultation.

The sections below reflect the feedback provided by stakeholders during the community consultation process. Each section represents one of the eight WHO Age-Friendly dimensions.⁴ Each dimension is further detailed by current Age-Friendly features, informant-prioritized recommendations for the future, and an associated table outlining steps for implementation. This information is intended to provide a planning framework for services that are within the Village’s mandate and therefore are under Village (and the Village’s community partners) control. For example, improving pedestrian safety on the Yellowhead Highway may be an Age-Friendly improvement, but may be a provincial rather than municipal responsibility.

3.1 Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings

The built environment plays a paramount role in the ability of older adults to maintain good health, independence, and quality of life. Communities that support walking and provide access to fixed route transportation may enhance the “person-environment” fit by improving seniors’ mobility and increasing their travel choices.⁵⁶ Other environmental features such as the presence of fall hazards,

⁴ World Health Organization. (2007). Global Age-Friendly cities: a guide. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf

⁵ Lynott, J., McAuley, W.J., & McCutcheon, M. (2009). Getting out and about: the relationship between urban form and senior travel patterns. *Journal of Housing for the Elderly*, 23, 390-402.

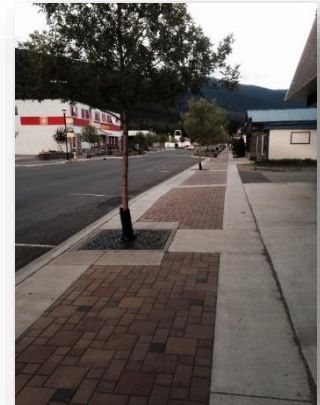
⁶ Van Cauwenberg, J., Van Holle, V., Simons, D., Deridder, R., Clarys, P., Goubert, L., Nasar, J., Salmon J., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Deforche, B. (2012). Environmental factors influencing older adults’ walking for transportation: A study using walk-along interviews. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9, 85.

sidewalk quality, inaccessible stairs and narrow entryways are factors that can influence an older adult's ability to navigate their community.⁷

Current Age-Friendly Features

Community consultation respondents identified Valemount's Age-Friendly outdoor spaces and public building features as follows:

- The Bigfoot trail, and in particular, the wheelchair accessibility of the trail.
- Some park space that provides sheltered seating.
- Some benches along community walkways.



Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

When we examined the information from the community consultations, the following areas were considered to be priority actions:

- 1. Ensure snow removal efforts are done with the consideration of seniors. Snow should be cleared in such a way that it does not block access to and from homes and businesses, for those who have limited ability to perform additional removal, or for those who are dependent on a mobility device.**
- 2. Increase sidewalk safety by increasing snow and ice removal (especially in front of public buildings) and reduce snow bank accumulation on sidewalk areas.**
- 3. Improve overall accessibility of public buildings.**

Other possible future actions identified by respondents (in order of importance) are:

4. Increase access to public washrooms (e.g. increased hours, make some public toilets year round, encourage businesses to allow public access to washrooms).
5. Improve accessibility at the Health Centre by repairing the entrance ramp.
6. Setting up a community garden.
7. Improve seating and shelter for those waiting for the Health Connections bus, the train, and for access to the Health Centre.

⁷ Van Cauwenberg, J., Van Holle, V., Simons, D., Deridder, R., Clarys, P., Goubert, L., Nasar, J., Salmon J., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Deforche, B. (2012). Environmental factors influencing older adults' walking for transportation: A study using walk-along interviews. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9, 85.

Implementation

The table below provides an outline for implementation for the proposed priority actions for Outdoor Spaces and Public buildings:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Review Village policy and bylaw on snow clearance procedures.	Short-term	Local businesses
Have Public Works Committee review how to best manage issues of accessibility with snow removal operators.	Short-term	
Conduct an accessibility audit of local public buildings and local businesses. Develop an “Age-Friendly business” endorsement for those who voluntarily increase access for those with mobility challenges.	Medium-term	Local businesses
Provide these recommendations to the Health Centre administrators to alert them to the public perception of the building accessibility issues.		Northern Health, Health Centre Administration/ Building Manager

3.2 Transportation

Community mobility is essential to an older adult’s quality of life.⁸ Affordable, available, and reliable transportation allows seniors to maintain independence, stay longer in their homes and communities, and to fully participate in social and community life. In rural and remote communities, this is especially important for seniors who do not drive, or who have disabilities or other health problems that limit their transportation options.

⁸ Puleo, R. M. (2007). Keeping an Older Population Mobile. In G. Lesnoff-Caravaglia, G. Lesnoff-Caravaglia (Eds.), *Gerontechnology: Growing old in a technological society* (pp. 243-267). Springfield, IL, US: Charles C Thomas Publisher.

Current Age-Friendly Features

Respondents indicated the following as Age-Friendly transportation assets in Valemount:

- The Northern Health Authority “Health Connections Bus”.
- The local taxi.
- Neighbour, friend and family support for transporting seniors in private vehicles.



Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

The following recommended priority actions were identified by respondents regarding Age-Friendly transportation improvements:

- 1. Ensure the Health Connections bus is more accessible for those with mobility challenges. The waiting area for the bus could also be improved by providing shelter in the winter.**
- 2. Increase snow removal efforts in public parking lots.**
- 3. Increase access to parking for seniors by enforcing disabled parking space regulations.**

Other proposed actions are:

4. Explore the possibility of a bi-weekly local shuttle that could transport groups of seniors for grocery, medical, and social outings.
5. Approach the local taxi company to add a service that operates on a specific route several times a day stopping at two or three places —and consider subsidizing such a service to make it economically feasible and accessible to older people.
6. Consult with Northern Health regarding the possibility of increasing the frequency of the Health Connections Bus service to accommodate more seniors.
7. Increase Village information regarding transportation options, especially for newcomers.

Implementation

The table below outlines the steps to implement the proposed Age-Friendly Transportation improvements:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Work with Northern Health to make sure all accessibility options are in place for boarding the Health Connections Bus.	Short-term	Northern Health
Provide a sheltered area for the Health Connections bus pick-up and drop-off. Explore the possibility of using an existing sheltered area to designate as the pick-up and drop-off area.	Medium-term	Local businesses, Northern Health
Work with Public Works Committee to ensure public parking lots are cleared of snow and ice in a timely fashion.	Medium-term	
Review parking enforcement of disabled parking spots in order to provide better access to seniors who require closer building access.	Short term	

3.3 Housing

Housing for seniors is a complex issue. For example, home modifications can alleviate some obstacles to staying in one’s home but they cannot address social isolation if there are no friends or family nearby, or if accessibility issues such as having no car or transport, limit community mobility.⁹ Continuing care retirement communities can be costly. Living in the right house that meets the needs of the older adult allows aging in place safely and comfortably, but being able to age-in-place may require more services than those in other living arrangements.

Other housing needs may change as the older adult ages, and some of the challenges that arise can be affordability and the type of housing options available; proximity to multiple services; in-home mobility issues; a lack of support to remain in the home or inadequate awareness for independent living support; and difficulties maintaining family and community connections.

⁹ Stone, R. (2013). What are the realistic options for aging in community? *Journal of the American Society on Aging*, 37(4), 65-71.

Creative options such as shared housing can be achieved using outside agencies to match homeowner and tenant. The homeowner may offer a rent reduction in exchange for support services such as transportation or housekeeping. This option may work for older adults who share the home with others, as this can give the family respite options. Further along the housing continuum is Assisted Living (providing housing, hospitality and up to two personal care services)¹⁰ and Long-term Residential Care (housing with 24 hour care).¹¹



Current Age-Friendly Features

Current Age Friendly features of Valemount include:

- The Golden Years Lodge, which provides 13 units of subsidized seniors housing.
- Valemount House, a development with 10 apartments of modular housing for seniors in need and people with disabilities.
- An affordable housing study that is currently underway.

Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

Housing in Valemount was by far the most talked about issue in the consultation process. Community members were clear in that the two top priorities around Age-Friendly planning should be:

- 1. Create more supported housing options for seniors to stay, and be cared for, in Valemount.**
- 2. Develop more affordable housing options for seniors.**

A large number of stakeholders expressed their concerns regarding the lack of supported housing for seniors. There were, however, differing opinions about what types of housing would work best to address the issue. Others expressed concern about which organization would manage, administer, and allocate any future housing. Given these community concerns, these additional priority actions are also recommended:

¹⁰ BC Assisted Living Registrar (2015). Retrieved from <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/accessing-health-care/assisted-living-registrar>

¹¹ Long-Term Residential Care (2015). Retrieved from <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/accessing-health-care/home-community-care/care-options-and-cost/long-term-residential-care>

3. **Set-up an independent Valemount Housing Society (and include members of the older adult community) to help explore best options, create a long-term strategy, and champion seniors housing initiatives.**
4. **Ensure seniors’ needs for sufficient, safe affordable housing are outlined in the current Affordable Housing study and report.**

Other proposed future actions include:

5. Define targets of affordable housing specific to seniors in Valemount.
6. Expand the current Robson Valley Support Society handyman program to allow more seniors access to handyman services.
7. Work with health partners to ensure sufficient home and respite support is provided locally for disabled and frail older adults and their caregivers, as well as for those with dementia.

Implementation

The following table outlines the steps necessary to implement the proposed actions for Housing:

Action	Timeline	Partners
<p>Organize members to initiate a Valemount Housing Society that could partner with BC Housing, Columbia Basin Trust, and Northern Health to explore the possibility of the creation of new seniors housing in Valemount. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the needs of the community to determine priorities for new seniors housing (e.g. independent living vs. assisted living) along with a long-term strategy to create a local continuum of care. • Explore co-housing models that might provide a way in which to address both affordable housing problems for younger families and provide secure and supported housing for older adults in need. • Develop a long-term plan to house those in Valemount’s aging population who will/may have increasing care needs (e.g. those with dementia or who need complex care). 	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>BC Housing, Columbia Basin Trust, Northern Health</p>

3.4 Social Participation

Social participation is something that includes involvement with friends and family, as well as participating in community and civic life. Older adults who are active socially and in their communities have been shown to have higher levels of independence and improved quality of life.¹³ Social participation has been used as an indicator in Age-Friendly assessment and planning because it not only includes the positive aspects of social connectivity but also highlights the importance of addressing issues such as social isolation and social exclusion.¹⁴

Current Age-Friendly Features

Overall, seniors in Valemout reported being actively engaged in social life and in their community. This included:

- Social evenings and events (e.g. yoga, music night, and exercise for seniors) open to the public.
- Community events such as the Farmers Market and community groups such as the Lions Club that are inclusive of seniors.



Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

The following priority actions items are opportunities by which respondents felt that Valemout could increase social participation for seniors:

- 1. Create a focus on marketing of community events and seniors activities in a way that is less reliant on technology and social media.**
- 2. Ensure spaces that hold seniors' social events are accessible to those who have challenges with mobility.**
- 3. Ensure that home-bound and isolated seniors are included in outreach efforts for community/ social events.**
- 4. Plan for transportation alternatives for those who do not have transportation to attend community and social events.**

¹³ Gouliquer, L., Poulin, C., & Lesmana, M. (2015). Mobility Boundaries Between Home, Community, and Beyond: Experiences of Exceptionally Old Adults Living in Eastern Canada. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 11(3), 124-150.

¹⁴ Menec, V. H., Means, R., Keating, N., Parkhurst, G., & Eales, J. (2011). Conceptualizing Age-Friendly communities. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 30(3), 479-493. doi:10.1017/S0714980811000237

Other future actions recommended are:

5. Work with the Regional District of Fraser Fort George to extend opening hours and leisure offerings of the Canoe Valley Recreation Centre to better address the needs of local seniors.
6. Work with the local school district to explore facility access in non-school hours to provide more seniors programs.

Implementation

The following table outlines the steps to implement the proposed actions for Social Participation:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Consider expanding community events listings to include more traditional forms of community communication (e.g. bulletin board notices, flyers, word of mouth) to include those who are less comfortable with computer technology.	Short-term	
Conduct an accessibility audit of local public buildings and local businesses. Develop an “Age-Friendly business” endorsement for those who voluntarily increase access for those with mobility challenges.	Medium-term	Local businesses
When choosing venues for community social events, consider the needs of those with limited mobility and/or those who use mobility aids.	Ongoing	Community partners
Implement a range of strategies to conduct outreach to vulnerable older adults (e.g. add an information insert to monthly Meals on Wheels invoice).	Ongoing	Community Partners
For seniors who have limited transportation options, provide information regarding those who may be able to rideshare in their neighbourhood.	Medium-term	Community partners/members

3.5 Respect and Social Inclusion

Many factors influence how older adults are respected and included in their communities. Ageism can be perpetuated by a lack of contact between generations or by persistent misunderstandings about aging and older people. These perceptions can be addressed by involving older people in community events, connecting different generations with programs through schools and community occasions, increasing public education and awareness of disabilities such as dementia, and exposing incidences of elder abuse.



Current Age-Friendly Features

Respondents in the community consultation strongly reported having a sense of being respected and included by their community. Some of the related Age-Friendly features that were highlighted included:

- The overall sense that seniors are valued and respected by the community.
- The efforts made by the community to make seniors feel welcome at public events.

Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

Priority actions to improve respect and social inclusion for seniors in Valemout are:

1. Older adults reported low levels of feeling that their voice was heard on issues of public importance or by the Village council. **Actively recruit, and have a strategy to engage, older adults in public decision making.**
2. Many felt that given the issues around housing, community health, and isolation, an independent senior's advocate with a broad view of the community would help to give a voice to all members of the seniors' community. **Identify an impartial Senior's Advocate with no ties to existing seniors' organizations.**
3. **Make a plan for community outreach to socially isolated members of the community.**

Other potential future actions identified are:

1. Explore the possibility of establishing a Neighbourhood House. Neighbourhood houses are “...a welcoming place where everyone, all ages, nationalities and abilities can attend, participate, belong, lead and learn through programs, services and community building.”¹⁵
2. Create a “foster grandparent” program to match those who are isolated with young families or those new to the community.

Implementation

The following table outlines the steps necessary to implement the proposed actions for Respect and Social Inclusion:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Provide the WHO Age-Friendly Framework and this Action Plan to Village council and staff with a query for suggestions to be more inclusive of older adults in the public decision-making process.	Short-term	Village Council members and Village staff
Create a Seniors Advisory Group (made up of older adult volunteers) to formally advise council on seniors issues in the community.	Medium-term	Community members
Engage the Seniors Advisory Group to develop a description of roles and responsibilities required of a Seniors Advocate. Budget an honorarium (or similar) for the advocate position. Advertise the position broadly throughout the community.	Long-term	Community members, Northern Health
Encourage a formal or informal neighbourhood “telephone assurance” program that matches neighbours with isolated seniors and have a scheduled telephone check-in time. Use this safety-promoting activity to help reduce isolation by informing the senior about events in the community.	Long-term	Community members

¹⁵ Association of Neighbourhood Houses of BC (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.anhbc.org/>

3.6 Civic Participation and Employment

Civic participation and employment focuses on the ways in which seniors can contribute to their communities in both paid and volunteer roles, and in public life. Age-Friendly communities recognize the value of their older adult citizens to provide a wealth of experiences to volunteer and paid roles and act as mentors for younger citizens. Older adults who are engaged in civic life also tend to see themselves as having an important voice in their communities.

Current Age-Friendly Features

- Multiple opportunities for older adults to volunteer exist in Valemout.

Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

Older adults reported that they comprise a significant portion of the volunteer base in Valemout. Many expressed concern, however, about burnout (i.e. a small number of people are working a large number of volunteer hours), the lack of engagement by younger people to volunteer, and no succession plan for when current volunteers are unable to continue working in their roles. Priority action items related to volunteerism and other topics identified are:



- 1. Provide a centralized source for advertising volunteer opportunities.**
- 2. Reduce barriers to volunteering in Valemout (e.g. cost).**
- 3. Create awareness with local businesses about the value of hiring older workers for paid employment.**

Proposed Future Actions

Other future actions to consider are:

4. Extend volunteer recruitment efforts to include neighbouring communities.
5. Extend opportunities to older adults to volunteer with Village Council.

- 6. Increase access, transportation options, and accessibility at polling stations.

Implementation

The following table outlines the steps necessary to implement the proposed actions for Civic Participation and Employment:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Create a volunteer management plan to improve access to volunteer information, inventory volunteers, and plan for recruitment for future volunteers.	Long-term	Community partners, Valemount Learning Centre
Work with the Valemount Learning Centre to develop information for employers about how to find, hire, and retain older adult workers.	Medium-term	Community partners, Valemount Learning Centre

3.7 Communication and Information

Having access to information is a vital part to healthy, active aging. Age-Friendly communities recognize the importance of understanding the information-seeking behaviour of their older citizens. Many older adults report that the complexity of accessing information (e.g. complicated automated phone systems) to be one of the most significant barriers.¹⁶ Many of those interviewed in focus groups in remote and rural communities in Canada suggested that using computer technology to reach older adults is not always effective; not all older adults own computers or know how to use all of the communication features. Others suggested that while sometimes computers can be frustrating to use, taking a course to learn the technology improved confidence and proficiency.¹⁷ These concerns were echoed in the Valemount community consultation process.

Current Age-Friendly Features

Age-Friendly features related to communication and information Valemount are:

¹⁶ Everingham, J., Petriwskyj, A., Warburton, J., Cuthill, M., & Bartlett, H. (2009). Information provision for an Age-Friendly community. *Ageing International*, 34, 79-98.

¹⁷ *Age-Friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* (2007). Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors. Public Health Agency of Canada.

- The Valemount Learning Centre.
- The Rocky Mountain Goat Newspaper.
- Valley Sentinel Newspaper
- Valemount Community Television.
- The Valemount Library.
- The Canada Post Community Bulletin Board.
- The IGA Bulletin Board.
- Information posted and distributed through the Golden Years Lodge.

Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

Communication and information priorities have already been discussed in other areas of this report (i.e. section 3.4 and 3.5). Other ways in which Valemount could take action to improve Age-Friendly information and communications are:

- 1. Provide more information by way of bulletin boards, in areas frequented by seniors, on the local community events TV service, and in the newspaper.**
- 2. Many people reported that the post office bulletin board was difficult to access for those who have limited transportation or mobility issues. Create a more centralized community bulletin board.**
- 3. Create a local community services directory.**

Implementation

The following table outlines the steps necessary to implement the proposed actions for Communication and Information:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Discuss with Village staff and stakeholders the need to reduce reliance on social media and other computer technologies when disseminating information important to older adults.	Short-term	
Work with community partners to inventory local services for seniors. Create a paper copy of a services directory for distribution at the Health	Medium -term	Community Partners

Centre, Library, Golden Years Lodge and other places that seniors might frequent.		
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3.8 Community Support and Health Services

Good quality health and community support services are fundamental to an older adult maintaining health and independence. Age-Friendly communities offer a wide range of health services such as primary care services, medical and non-medical home support, nursing and paramedical services, allied health services (e.g. physiotherapy services) and facilities for people no longer able to live at home.

Current Age-Friendly Features

Valemount’s current Age-Friendly community and health services have been identified as:

- A fully accredited diagnostic and treatment centre (the Valemount Health Centre) staffed by three physicians, nurses and lab technicians. Services include General/Family Practice as well as visiting specialist physician services, x-ray, counselling, laboratory, and outpatient services.
- The Northern Interior Health Unit (NIHU) (located downstairs in the Valemount Health Centre). The NIHU has one full time clerk and one nurse on staff.
- The 911 service, which includes the RCMP, a volunteer Fire Department, and BC Ambulance Service.
- Five Community Care Aides.
- Home support services.
- The planned pilot of the Better at Home program to provide seniors with non-medical home support services.
- Meals on Wheels.

Recommendations for an Age-Friendly future

The priority Age-Friendly community and health services action items identified are:

1. **Design a strategy to attract more frequent visits from allied health professionals (e.g. physiotherapy, optometrists, and podiatrists).**
2. **Explore ways to provide increased respite care to those caring for an older family member.**
3. **Increase the focus on providing dementia care training/services.**
4. **Include the healthcare community in discussions of strategies to implement supportive housing and/or a seniors’ affordable housing strategy.**

Implementation

The following table outlines the steps necessary to implement the proposed actions for Community Support and Health Services:

Action	Timeline	Partners
Work with healthcare Community Partners to develop a strategy to attract allied health professionals to more frequently visit the community. This work could be part of the mandate of the Seniors Advisory Group.	Long -term	Healthcare Community Partners
Work with Northern Health to develop strategies for providing increased respite care for families caring for an older relative	Long -term	Northern Health
Explore the Dementia Friendly Communities Training initiative by the Alzheimer’s Society of BC.	Medium-term	

PART 3: AGE-FRIENDLY VALEMOUNT: THE FUTURE

In order to turn the Valemount Age-Friendly Assessment recommendations into actions, consideration needs to be given to implementation and logistics. From the experiences of other communities, this is made more seamless by following these important suggestions:

1. **Set up an Age-Friendly Committee.** The recommendations outlined in this document will need a considerable and coordinated effort to implement. This means that a dedicated team of supporters will need to plan, prioritize, oversee, monitor, and evaluate implementation efforts. It is vital that members of the older adult community be included in this committee.
2. **Create a vision and guiding principles.** Most communities develop a vision statement as well as guiding principles specific to their needs and according to their Age-Friendly assessments. This is necessary to guide the direction and efforts of the committee and community during the planning and implementation phase.
3. **Establish priorities and stay focused.** Having strong core priorities anchors each initiative and helps to keep people and the initiatives focused and achievable. The most effective approach appears to be when communities start with actions that they can quickly achieve. This creates momentum to work towards longer-term goals.
4. **Encourage strong local partnerships.** Partnerships are critical as comprehensive planning and implementation will require coordination between many parties.
5. **Encourage community ownership.** Personal relationships where individuals work across sectors are vital to bridging barriers, and finding champions and advocates who are active vocal community members is essential to long-term success.¹⁸ Champions can be found from among a range of backgrounds – local council members, public health nurses, and local seniors. Champions help to gather momentum for action items and help see projects to completion.
6. **Declare the initiative as an official policy direction.** Communities that have become more Age-Friendly have included the Age-Friendly principles into not just planning for seniors, but for all

¹⁸Lawler, K., & Berger, C. (2009). Lifelong communities: re-imagining the Atlanta region from the ground up. *Journal of the American Society on Aging*, 33(2), 76-78).

community planning. For example, Saanich, BC now requires all municipal plans and priorities to be integrated with approved Age-Friendly principles.

7. **Look at language in communication materials.** Rather than use terms such as “senior” or “elderly”, phrases such as “lifelong learning” emphasizes the multigenerational aspects of the community that are seen to be vibrant and sustainable. Relevant and timely information should be accessible to the public as well as the stakeholders. This keeps people interested and accountable.
8. **Develop a plan for monitoring and evaluation.** The Age-Friendly implementation process in Valemount should have a plan for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This not only allows an assessment and achievement of goals but also allows for opportunities to re-prioritize action items as necessary.

APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

A1.0 Secondary Research

Document Review

The following Village documents were reviewed as part of the desk research process:

- The Village of Valemount Official Community Plan
- The Village of Valemount Integrated Community Sustainability Plan

A 2.0 Primary Research: Community Consultation

The following sampling methods and tools were used to conduct a community-wide needs assessment. These consultations included:

- **A community survey** of 55 older adults and stakeholders. For a detailed demographic profile of the survey sample, please see Appendix B.
- **Two World Café focus groups (n=38)** which included both seniors, stakeholders, and service providers. Appendix C offers a detailed description of each focus group and the number of attendees.
- **In-depth group and individual interviews** with 22 key informants, including older adults, caregivers, and service providers. Appendix C provides more information about where these interviews took place.

APPENDIX B: DETAILED DEMOGRAPHIC TABLES – SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Question	Value Label	Frequency	Percent
Ages	20-49	7	15.56
	50-60	9	20.00
	61-65	5	11.11
	66-75	15	33.33
	76-80	4	8.89
	81-85	1	2.22
	85 or older	4	8.89
	total	45	100.00
Background of respondent	age 65 or older	29	80.56
	a caregiver of someone 65 or older	4	11.11
	a service provider of senior citizens	2	5.56
	other	1	2.78
	total	36	100.00
Years living in Valemount	minimum	3 years	
	maximum	68 years	
	mean	34.4 years	
Sense of belonging in Valemount	very strong	14	46.67
	somewhat strong	13	43.33
	somewhat weak	2	6.67
	very weak	1	3.33
	total	30	100.00
Valemount as a place to live	poor	7	23.33
	average	6	20.00
	good	11	36.67
	excellent	6	20.00
	total	30	100.00
Valemount as a place to retire	poor	6	20.69
	average	7	24.14
	good	11	37.93

	excellent	3	10.34
	don't know	2	6.90
	total	29	100.00
Overall health rating	poor	2	5.13
	average	16	41.03
	good	16	41.03
	excellent	5	12.82
	total	39	100.00
Mental/emotional health rating	poor	1	2.56
	average	11	28.21
	good	17	43.59
	excellent	10	25.64
	total	39	100.00
Quality of life rating	poor	3	7.69
	average	12	30.77
	good	13	33.33
	excellent	11	28.21
	total	39	100.00
Living situation	own home - rent privately	5	12.82
	own home - owned	23	58.97
	public housing - rental	1	2.56
	rental housing for seniors - subsidized	9	23.08
	rental housing for seniors - private pay	1	2.56
	total	39	100.00
Employment status	employed, full-time	6	15.38
	employed, part-time	6	15.38
	retired	26	66.67
	disabled, not able to work	1	2.56
	total	39	100.00
Gender	male	6	20.69
	female	23	79.31

	total	29	100.00
Total combined money household earned last year	0-9999	2	6.90
	10,000-24,999	12	41.38
	25,000-49,000	7	24.14
	50,000-74,999	3	10.34
	75,000-99,999	1	3.45
	prefer not to answer	4	13.79
	total	29	100.00
Highest level of education completed	less than high school	1	3.57
	high school diploma	9	32.14
	some college but no degree	10	35.71
	associate degree	2	7.14
	bachelor degree	4	14.29
	graduate degree	2	7.14
	total	28	100.00

APPENDIX C: DETAILED LIST OF FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWEES

Stakeholder Group	Where/ Number of Attendees
1. World Café focus groups: Older adults and stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golden Years Lodge (N=19) • United Church (N=20)
2. Group interviews: Older adults from the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A&W coffee time (N=9)
3. Individual interviews: Older adults from the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In community (N=4) • By phone (N=1)
4. Older adults (isolated)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By phone (N=1)
5. Caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In community (N=1)
6. Older Adult Service Providers (from health authority, non-profit and housing organizations working with older adults)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valemount Health Centre (N=2) • Robson Valley Support Society (N=2) • Golden Years Lodge (N=1)
7. Village staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village Hall (N=1)