

# Recognizing and combating Ageism

By: Jane Dougan

As Canada experiences unprecedented growth in the number of older adults in the population, the impact of ageism becomes more important. A 2012 study (the Rivera

Report on Ageism, Independence and Choice) found that ageism – negative stereotypes and assumptions about older adults – is the most tolerated form of social prejudice in Canada. In another study, more than

50 per cent of Canadians 77+ reported that others assume they can't do things for themselves.

Older Canadians value independence just as much as any other age group. As Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General

of the World Health Organization (WHO) points out that although “most older people will eventually experience multiple health problems, older age does not imply dependence ... There is no ‘typical’ older person.”

Nonagenarian, politician and businesswoman Hazel McCallion was

allied with the Rivera Report, and echoes their findings. “Older Canadians want what everyone else wants – independence, respect and the chance to live their lives as they please.”

The benefits of combating ageism may be personal. A Yale University study found that

those who held positive attitudes towards aging were more likely to age better themselves, living an average of 7.5 years longer, and to recover from severe disability. In short, the best advice simply may be this: whatever your age, don't let a number define you – or anyone else you know.

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Volume 20 No. 17

Thursday, April 27, 2017

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# Planning today for aging in place tomorrow

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This is a wake-up call about a critical shift taking place in our communities. Older adults (65+) make up Halton's fastest growing population. This age group increased in Halton Hills by 57 per cent between 2001 - 2011. According to the Halton Region Older Adult Plan 2015-2018 (HOAP), the percentage of seniors will nearly double again by 2031. Additionally, the average life span for Canadians 65+ is 87 for men and 89 for women. Between 2006 - 2011, almost 26 per cent more Canadians lived to 100. This brings challenges and opportunities for all, both individually and within our communities.

In the 1950s, the average Canadian man's lifespan was 66, the average woman's was 71. Today, when definitions of 'senior' may refer to anyone from 55 to 100 years, there is a greater discrepancy in terms of individual attitude, experience and health. 'Aging in Place'; e.g. being able to remain in our home communities, close to friends, family and familiar social supports is a goal for most Canadian

seniors and near seniors.

An intergovernmental Forum of Federal/Provincial/Territorial (F/P/T) Ministers has prepared a free online guide and workbook for Thinking About Your Future – Plan Now to Age in Place – Checklist that covers step-by-step considerations related to health, home, transportation, finances, connections (e.g. social networks), safety, supports and services, community, and your partner (if applicable). These are relevant to seniors and to those decades younger; e.g. highlights related to Health include “I have talked with my doctor about ... what services and supports I may need as I age” and “I am aware of my family's medical history”. For others, to whom independence may be an increasing concern, considerations include “I have written down my wishes for care in the event I become incapable of giving my consent”.

These materials, and other relevant resources, may be found on the government of Canada website (www.canada.ca) under *Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors Forum*.

# Happy 99<sup>th</sup> Birthday Dorothy



**BIRTHDAY BELL:** Members of Trinity United Church helped Dorothy Rognavldson recognize her 99<sup>th</sup> birthday, with a cake after services on Sunday. This edition of *The New Tanner* features issues affecting today's seniors. See stories on pages 1, 2 and 3. - File photo



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