

NORC Innovation Centre Policy Recommendations for 2023 City of Toronto Mayoral Candidates

Current Landscape

There are currently more Torontonians aged 65 or older than there are children under the age of 15 (Statistics Canada, 2022a). The number of older adults in Toronto is expected to grow, with estimates suggesting that older adults will make up one-fifth of the City's population by 2041 (City of Toronto, 2018).

Accompanying this growing demographic, is an increasing desire among older adults to age in the homes and communities of their choosing (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2016b; Mahmood et al., 2022). Research shows that more older adults are choosing to live in urban areas and move into condos and rental apartments than ever before (Recknagel et al., 2020). According to the 2021 Census, of the 456, 895 older adults who live in the community (non-institutional), 167, 610 (37%) live in apartment buildings at least 5 storeys tall (Statistics Canada, 2022b). This is higher than any other housing type, including single detached homes (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

“489 residential buildings are naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), which house over 70,000 adults aged 65 years and older”

In Toronto, 489 residential buildings are naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), which house over 70,000 adults aged 65 years and older (Huynh et al., 2021). These are apartments, condos and co-ops where at least 30 percent of the residents are seniors. This kind of density has gone relatively unrecognized, but holds great potential for reshaping Toronto as a senior-friendly city.

Policy Recommendations

Aging in place is a key pillar of NORC programs but more needs to be done to support older adults to age in place. The upcoming Mayoral Election provides an opportunity for

candidates to prioritize policies that push aging in place initiatives forward. We have listed recommendations relating to public health, pedestrian safety, parks, recreation & community centres, zoning & development, housing affordability, public transit, and social supports and funding for your consideration below.

Public Health: Replicate health initiatives that work

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the public health potential of NORCs, where NORC criteria was used to propose and inform a mobile vaccination program to administer vaccines on-site in NORC buildings located in high-risk neighbourhoods (Huynh et al., 2021).

- This initiative can be replicated for other public health initiatives that provide routine vaccinations, like the flu shot or a range of health promotion activities operated by Toronto Public Health. Such place-based services are convenient, improve accessibility, build community, and can reach large numbers of seniors efficiently.

Pedestrian Safety: Implement and invest in older adult safety

Safe and accessible roads and sidewalks help older adults stay healthy and connected to the community. Of the 487 pedestrian fatalities in Toronto between 2006 and 2021, 241 were adults aged 65 or older (approximately 49%) (Toronto Police Service Public Safety Data Portal, 2023).

- The city should intensify investments in its Vision Zero strategy, prioritizing engineering changes proven to slow down vehicles and improve pedestrian safety, particularly in areas with a significant population of seniors, such as NORCs.
- Senior Safety Zone is a road safety initiative specifically targeting seniors, however, its effectiveness needs urgent evaluation. We urge the City to prioritize the evaluation of this program, and consider additional measures aimed at improving safety for seniors, especially in locations with a high concentration of NORCs.
- Delays in snow removal around NORCs also prevent older adults from reaching their destination and going on walks during the isolating winter months. While older adults can request snow clearing service for their sidewalks outside of their homes, snow removal should be prioritized around NORCs and other public

places where older adults tend to visit for exercise and social engagement – like malls and coffee shops.

Parks, Recreation & Community Centres: Create age-friendly community and spaces

- Benches in public spaces serve a number of different purposes. They can provide older adults with a place to rest during their daily walks or serve as a place to build community. There should be a wider effort to build more benches in public spaces as a way to encourage older adults to visit local parks and green spaces, and improve their overall health. These efforts should give priority to areas surrounding NORCs where there is a high concentration of older adults.

Zoning & Development: Expand RAC Zoning and compensate for demolitions

- The City has already allowed Residential Apartment Zoning on more than 400 buildings across the City. RAC Zoning allows for small-scale non-residential uses like retail and community facilities in buildings that were previously residential-only. RAC Zoning should be expanded across the City, with a priority on NORCs, as it can be leveraged to offer programming that helps older adults age in place. The city should also improve incentives for RAC zoning uptake.
- Privately-operated public spaces like malls are places where older adults like to gather and exercise. The increasing number of mall closures and demolitions of malls and plazas has a social cost to older adults and other marginalized communities. Developers should be asked to outline the community and social impacts of proposed demolitions and closures, and propose alternatives that provide collective community benefits.

Housing Affordability: Designate affordable housing units to older adults

With the growing housing affordability across the province, the waiting for subsidized housing is also continuing to grow – especially for older adults. At the end of 2022, approximately 44% of applicants for subsidized housing administered by the City were older adults (City of Toronto, 2023).

- While the City's Inclusionary Zoning policy adopted in 2021 makes it mandatory for certain new developments in designated areas to include affordable units, there is an urgent need to improve access to the number of units available to older adults. The City should ensure that a minimum percentage of these new affordable units are designated specifically for older adults. This would help

reduce wait lists, help older adults age-in-place, and potentially reduce unnecessary institutionalization.

Public Transit: Reduce barriers to transportation

- Many older adults rely on public transit to get to appointments and run errands. However, the lack of bus shelters causes barriers for older adults to access transit in a safe way, especially in extreme weather conditions. The City should ensure that all bus stops have bus shelters so civilians can access transit in an accessible and safe manner.
- Wheel-Trans' transition to Family of Services has made it difficult for older adults and disabled people to access the transit they need. Being restricted from full door-to-door services means that residents are taking inaccessible, unreliable, and inefficient routes to reach their destinations. Cancelling the transition to Family of Services and resuming full door-to-door services will improve access to transit.
- Transit expenses can add-up for low-income older adults, despite the lower fare for adults aged 65 years and older. The City's Fair Pass Transit Discount Program offers a 33% discount on adult fare single rides and a 21% discount on adult monthly passes for those receiving social assistance. However, similar discounts are not offered on seniors' fares.

Social Supports & Funding: Increase funding support & empower older adults

- NORCs have a high density of older adults already residing within the community and NORC Programs integrate health, social and physical supports within the community that are resident driven to make it easier to age-in-place. The City should offer small-sized grants (perhaps through the Community Initiatives Category of their Grants, Incentives and Rebates) to help bring in community programming for older adults in NORCs.
- Sometimes older adults would prefer to downsize from their single-unit homes to multi-unit residential buildings, but are hesitant due to the high costs associated with moving. The City should look at ways to support older adults interested in downsizing by offering a grant or one-time incentive to support them through this process. This would ensure that overhoused seniors live in homes appropriately sized for their needs, and add additional supply to help address the city's housing crisis.
- Not all older adults want to retire – and some would rather continue to work if they had the opportunity. Older adults have a wide variety of skills and knowledge through years of work experience that the City and its funded agencies can take

advantage of by hiring more older adults to fill municipal roles. Similarly, some older adults like to keep busy by staying involved in their community through volunteering. The City should launch a campaign outlining different ways older adults can support their community.

About NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network

The NORC Innovation Centre at University Health Network is a first-of-its-kind centre dedicated to advancing a 21st century model of integrated care in naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), and developing community-led solutions that provide new options for aging in place with dignity and choice.

University Health Network (UHN) is Canada's leading research hospital. UHN encompasses Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Western Hospital, Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute and the Michener Institute of Education at UHN. The breadth of research, the complexity of the cases treated, and the magnitude of its educational enterprise has made UHN a national and international resource for patient care, research and education.

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