



Written submission from the
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women
for its study on challenges faced by senior women

March 28, 2019

Submitted on behalf of CRIAOW-ICREF by Cindy Hanson, Board Member and Marion Pollack, Member

About CRIAOW-ICREF

Since 1976, CRIAOW-ICREF has been researching and documenting the economic and social situation of women in Canada. Using intersectional frameworks, we develop and undertake a variety of important, ground breaking research to advance social justice and equality for all women. CRIAOW-ICREF is a not for profit member based organization.

Senior Women and Access to Transportation: Challenges in Rural and Remote Locations

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE ISSUES:

There are **few subsidies available for transportation in rural and remote locations** and there are often no transit services. Where services exist, subsidies are required.

Medical assistance and healthcare are compromised for senior women without transportation. Lack of a publicly funded, networked bus service which is coordinated, reliable, and affordable forces vulnerable people to rely more on informal arrangements such as rides from relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, or strangers—or it may discourage them altogether from seeking medical help. In Saskatchewan, for example, over 70% of low income people used the public bus service that linked the province until 2017 (over 60% of these were women). Today many are increasingly marginalized and forced to miss appointments, hitchhike, and put themselves in more vulnerable situations. These kinds of barriers lead to longer-term health issues, mentally and physically.

Social isolation affects health and well-being. Buses allow families and friends to visit and provide a reliable way for older adults (and women live longer), and their families to travel between communities. The erosion and downgrading of service and access is forcing more people to rely on less trustworthy, informal arrangements or to forego travel altogether—with associated loss of connection, support, and wellbeing.¹

Seniors in rural and remote locations without access to transportation are pushed into urban centres. **Rural depopulation** and well being are compromised.

Financial and human resource supports rise with an aging population. In 2018, people aged 65 and over made up about 17.2% of the Canadian population.² Additional study on how this is linked to women's caretaking work with the elderly and those with disabilities cannot be ignored as it demonstrates how the cycle continues.

Senior women have lower incomes than senior men because they often earn less and take periods out of the labour force to have and raise children. This results in older women receiving less money in their Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and being more reliant on the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), making the high cost of transportation prohibitive. For immigrant and refugee women, who may not have had long periods in the workforce in Canada, their CPP, Old Age Security (OAS), and GIS payments are lower. An affordable transit pass is required to facilitate movement, encourage healthy behaviours, and reduce social isolation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Accessible, safe and affordable transportation a human right.**

Transportation should be seen as a human right. It creates financial independence, civic engagement, individual and community health.

¹ See "Loneliness and Social Isolation: Risk Factors Long Overdue for Surveillance"

<http://ccn.aacnjournals.org/content/33/6/8.full> and also <https://stcstories.wordpress.com/>

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501>

2. Public Transportation as a social determinant of health and well-being.

Public transportation should be considered a social determinant of health and funded; Social cohesion and family support are required components of well-being and health.

Quality buses with bathrooms onboard should be mandated as these are critical needs for many seniors. Most private vehicles do not have these amenities.

3. Government supports and subsidies.

Transportation, in particular public buses, need to be reliable, affordable, and timely and allow people who may otherwise lack mobility (e.g. because they cannot drive or do not own a vehicle) to access and attend medical appointments, counselling sessions, and other professional services that promote health and wellbeing, and therefore, they should be supported financially by federal and provincial governments.

The federal government should invest and subsidize public transportation services that are safe, affordable and accessible to decrease rural isolation and depopulation, older women, disabled women and indeed all women require this. The situation is especially difficult in rural and remote locations and this is where the federal government has invested less; we recommend that remote and rural locations receive subsidies that are at least equivalent to urban counterparts.

The federal government needs to work with provincial governments to secure changes to the criteria to access federal infrastructure funds, which would allow provinces to access monies for intra-provincial infrastructure development;

4. Safety and Environmental Audit

The safety of drivers and passengers should not be compromised when seniors are forced to use private vehicles and it is a safety oversight to force seniors to drive by providing no other options. Incentives to use alternative modes of transportation must be met with adequate and affordable services to alter the situation. Statistics Canada reports that the rural population is aging faster than the urban areas (eg. Saskatchewan³) and because people aged 70 or older have a higher accident rate per kilometer driven than any other age group except young male drivers,⁴ safety on highways would be significantly improved with the provision of public bus services.

A safety audit of public transportation services should be mandated for all rural and remote transportation.⁵

³ STC in Saskatchewan was a publicly owned transportation company with service to 253 communities shuttered by the provincial government in 2017. Its practices emphasized inter- and intra-provincial bus service that mandated safety, accessibility and affordability into its work.

⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-008-x/2012001/article/11619-eng.pdf> , 3.

⁵ See for example the *balanced score card* reports mandated under Saskatchewan Transportation Company and reported in its annual reports up until 2016 - https://stcbus.com/pub/docs/stc_annual_report_2016-17.pdf

Environmental issues are exacerbated when there are more private vehicles on the roads and people are forced to drive, public transportation should be rewarded and an environmental audit considered in all infrastructure developments and reporting.

5. Create Transportation Hubs.

The federal government should ***commission a study that looks at innovative ways of delivering services*** – for example that take into account innovations in technology and public service delivery such as seen in postal services and rural transportation in Scotland.

Transportation hubs could serve as sites for internet-banking (many seniors need assistance with internet use and a feeling of safety). These could also be linked to Canada Post, especially in rural areas and cross subsidization could become possible in this kind of arrangement. This also provides a safe and secure location to access transportation.

6. Take an intersectional approach that captures differences in lives of older women.

Different mobilities and needs need to be considered in planning. CRIAW-ICREF for example takes an intersectional feminist approach in its work. Similar to *GBA+* (Status of Women Canada), intersectionality helps capture the nuances and complexities in the lived lives of women – in all our diversity. For older women with physical disabilities, for example, the situation requires additional resources and services. CRIAW-ICREF's study *Changing Public Services* provides additional resources for examining needs for women using an intersectional analysis. <https://www.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/changing-public-services>