

2024 PROFILE SURVEY REPORT

Exploring the needs of Seniors Active Living
Centres and other OACAO members across
Ontario



**LEADING SUPPORT FOR OLDER ADULT
CENTRES IN ONTARIO**

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ABOUT THE OACAO

This report has been prepared by the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OACAO). We are a non-profit provincial organization, and registered charity, that is a trusted partner and recognized leader in the development of quality and relevant resources, services and support for 250+ community-based older adult centres. We continue to share a strong commitment to ongoing liaison and advocacy with the Government of Ontario and other provincial associations in matters that affect older adult centres, Seniors Active Living Centres (SALCs), seniors clubs and other seniors serving organizations.

Our Vision is to have a province where older adults age successfully, are connected to their community and remain active and engaged.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We recognize that the work of the OACAO and our members takes place on traditional territories of many Indigenous peoples who have lived here and cared for this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge the importance of the lands, and we do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to enhancing relationships between nations and to improving our understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

We honour and respect Indigenous heritage and the long-lasting history of the land and strive to protect the land, water, plants and animals that have inhabited this land for centuries, and for the generations to come.

We acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work and live on this land, and by doing so, we give our respect to its first inhabitants.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of this report was a collaborative effort with partners from across the province. We are deeply appreciative of those who lent their expertise to design the survey, and of the dedicated staff and volunteers who shared their experiences and perspectives. Their contributions play a vital role in supporting and enhancing Ontario's network of older adult centres and seniors active living centres.

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OACAO
The Voice of Older Adult Centres
La voix des centres pour aînés



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Profile Survey of Seniors Active Living Centres shows a sector that is both growing and evolving in response to the changing needs of older adults in Ontario. Despite facing financial and operational hurdles, SALCs continue to serve as vital community hubs, fostering engagement, wellness and inclusivity for thousands of older adults across the province.

Over the past two years, the demand for programs and services has grown. More older adults than ever are seeking opportunities for social connection, health and wellness support and lifelong learning opportunities. Yet, while the number of participants has grown, the resources required to sustain these valued services have not kept pace. Rising operational costs - particularly food, staffing and program materials - are straining centre budgets and focusing many to make difficult decisions about the programs they can offer.

Despite these challenges, centres remain resilient and have adapted creatively to offer innovative programs and reach underserved communities. Fitness classes, social events, and health programs are thriving, with increased participation in activities like pickleball, dance, and wellness activities. Health services, such as chronic disease management and social prescribing are also integral components of SALCs, reflecting a holistic approach to aging well.

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Inclusivity has emerged as a key priority, with centres working to create welcoming spaces for diverse older adults. Many have introduced new culturally or linguistically tailored programs; provide equity, diversity and inclusion training to staff and volunteer; and have built new partnerships with organizations serving equity-deserving communities. Despite these efforts, accessibility barriers persist, with outdated infrastructure making it difficult for some centres to provide truly inclusive environments.

Dedicated staff and volunteers are the key driving force of the sector's resilience. However, workforce challenges are a growing concern. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff has proven difficult for some centres, particularly for part-time and instructor positions. Volunteers, too, are facing burnout, as the same small group of dedicated individuals take on multiple roles to keep centres running. The sector needs a renewed focus on volunteer recruitment, training and retention strategies to continue growing this critical support system.

The OACAO continues to be a key source of advocacy and support for SALCs, providing operational guidance, funding opportunities and professional development. As the sector looks to the future, increased core funding, improved accessibility and targeted staff and volunteer support will be critical for ensuring that seniors active living centres remain a vibrant, inclusive, well-resourced environment to support older adults across Ontario.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

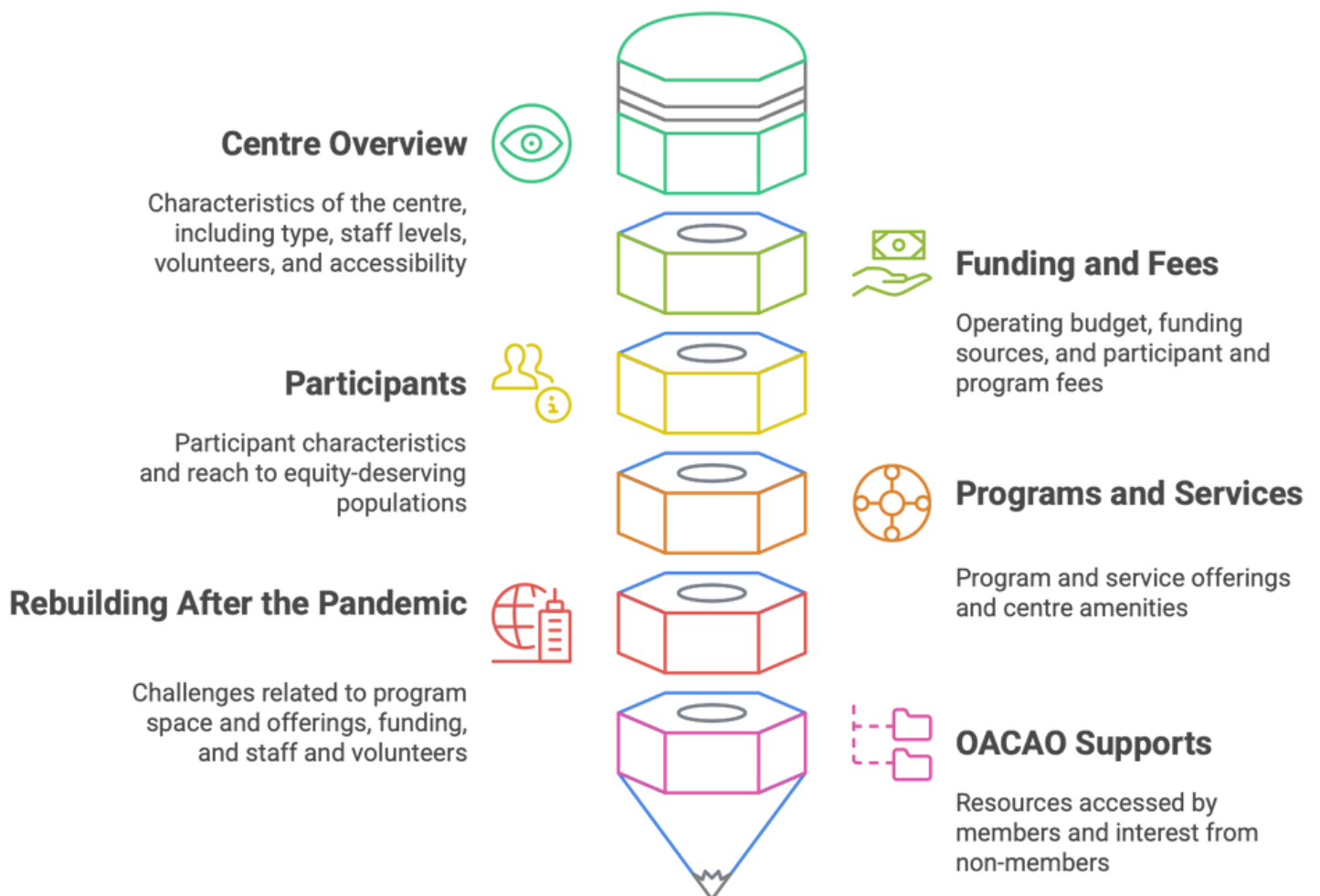
This report highlights key findings from a province-wide profile survey of Seniors Active Living Centres (SALCs) and other OACAO members (hereby referred to as "centres" throughout this report). The goal was to gather valuable insights into current trends and emerging issues affecting the sector. The 2024 Profile Survey reported here focuses on how centres are navigating the post-COVID-19 landscape and identifies what supports are needed for continued recovery and long-term sustainability.

Respondents represented a mix of SALC and non-SALC funded centres that were members of the OACAO, as well as SALC organizations who were not members. A total of 262 organizations were invited to participate, with responses from 144 (55% response rate), representing 166 SALC programs across the province.

The survey was available via SurveyMonkey from November 18, 2024 to February 5, 2025. Those who completed the survey by the initial deadline were entered into a draw for a chance to win a free OACAO introductory membership (for non-members) or 50% off of their OACAO Membership (for current members).

PROFILE SURVEY

The 2024 Profile Survey explored a variety of topic areas, including: centre characteristics; funding and fee structures; participants served; programs and services; rebuilding after the pandemic, including emerging and ongoing operational challenges; and supports from the OACAO.



SECTOR TRENDS

Older Adults

2024: 171,000
2022: 165,000

Volunteers

2024: 10,088
2022: 8,420

Volunteer Hours

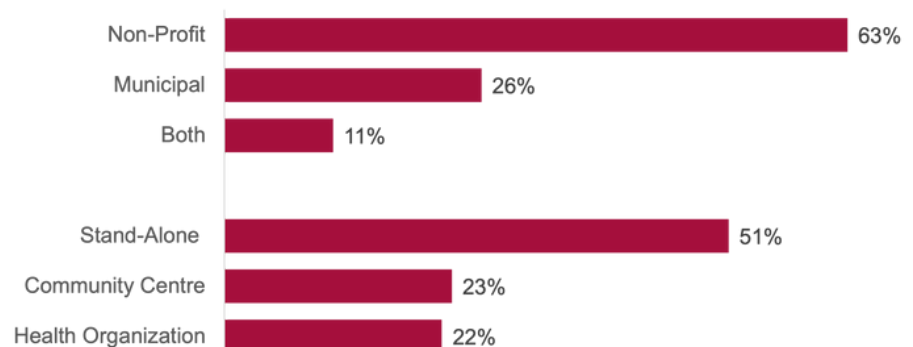
2022: 549,140
2020: 482,617

CENTRES AT A GLANCE

Centres were located across Ontario (including 17 in Northern communities) and were a mix of municipal and non-profit agencies; 16 centres indicated they were both, suggesting they were municipally operated with a non-profit board of directors. Over half of centres were stand-alone. Others were part of a community centre or a health organization, such as a community support service agency, a community health centre or long-term care community.

Eleven new centres were established in 2023 or 2024. However, most others had been serving older adults in their community for several decades, for an average of 33 years.

There is diversity in both centre type and organizational affiliations



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Staff and Volunteers

Centres reported an average of four paid staff, made up of two full-time and two part-time positions. This represented an average loss of one full-time position compared to 2022. Non-profit centres had half as many staff as municipally-run centres. Centres with more staff had larger operating budgets and served more participants.

Volunteers have increased since 2022, but have still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Over 10,000 volunteers across Ontario contributed more than half a million hours of service to their local centre. This includes 20 centres that were entirely run by volunteers. These centres were typically in rural areas, had smaller operating budgets, and served fewer participants.

Centres also relied on paid instructors to host specialized fitness and skill-based classes; however, **this has declined from 11 paid instructors in 2022 to six in 2024.** Similar to 2022, 30% of centres reported no paid instructors.

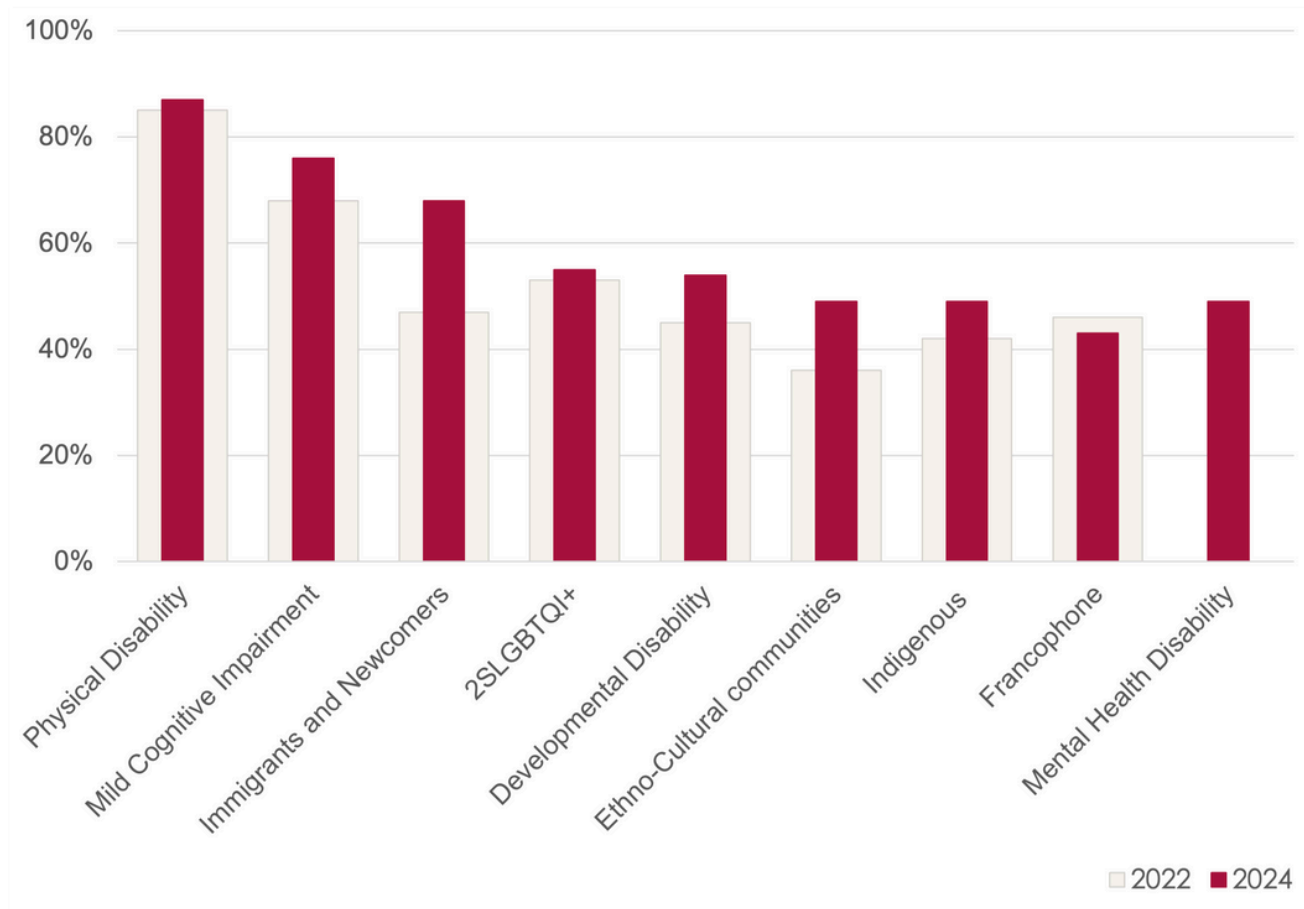
Participants

Centre participants continue to be mostly older women (71%) who are aged 65-74 (37%) or 75-84 (33%). Centres also continued supporting older adults living alone (95%), from rural areas (64%) and in caregiving roles (63%).

Several centres (41%) reported reaching older adults who live in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities.

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Centres are reaching more older adults from equity-deserving communities.



* Mental health disabilities was not included in the 2022 MPS

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Creating Inclusive Spaces

Centres implemented a variety of strategies to create inclusive spaces for older adults from equity-deserving communities. Some examples included displaying pride flags, offering linguistically or culturally tailored programming, using assistive devices and technology to support people with disabilities, and providing training to staff and volunteers on equity, diversity and inclusion.

“

Fostering an inclusive environment for equity-seeking groups requires ongoing education and tailored outreach efforts to ensure everyone feels welcome and represented. Creating awareness and addressing unique needs can help bridge gaps and build a truly inclusive space for all.

”

Centres called for more training and resources to create more inclusive environments and better meet the needs of equity-deserving communities. Suggestions included cultural awareness and sensitivity training, strategies to assess program and service needs, support for developing tailored promotional materials, and opportunities to develop new partnerships with other community agencies that serve these groups.

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Centre Amenities

Centres have access to a variety of amenities on-site to enhance their programs and services. In addition to those shown below, centres also reported having tea rooms, second-hand shops, billiards rooms, pickleball courts, indoor walking tracks and outdoor skating rinks.

Centres also continued to provide digital access through free wifi (74%), digital device loans (45%) or data plans (2%).

Several new centres were operating as mobile programs. This meant that they offered programs in different locations across the region they served. These programs relied on partnerships with municipalities or other community organizations to facilitate access to program spaces and amenities. This had direct implications for the physical accessibility of their programs, and these centres explained that some spaces were more accessible than others.



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Recreation, Education & Social Programs

Recreation, education and social programming at centres has returned to pre-pandemic levels, and demand for programs is growing. While interest in group games (like Euchre or Scrabble) has declined substantially, there is a growing demand for active fitness and sports programs, including pickleball, table tennis, Zumba, ballroom dancing and line dancing. Centres also reported increased popularity in lunch programs, day-trips, intergenerational programs, and unstructured socializing opportunities.

Looking ahead, centres aim to introduce more maker-space activities (such as sewing or quilting), and programs that focus on mental wellness (like meditation). However, space and staff constraints make it difficult to expand offerings to implement these innovative programs.

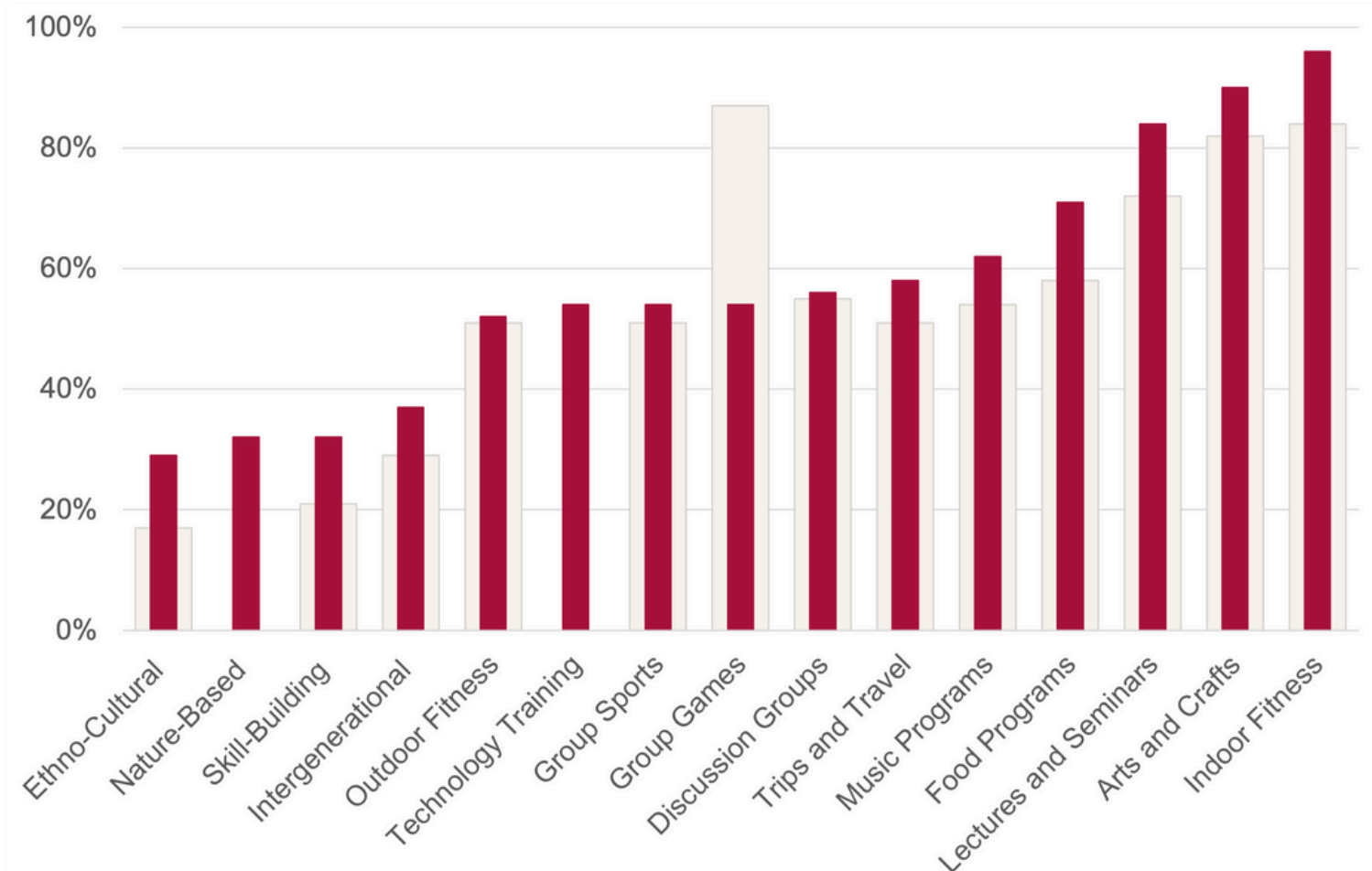
“

All of our programs have taken off, and there is an increase demand for fitness programs but we don't have any additional instructors or space in our schedule to add more classes.

”

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Compared with 2022, centres are offering more recreation, education, and social programs.

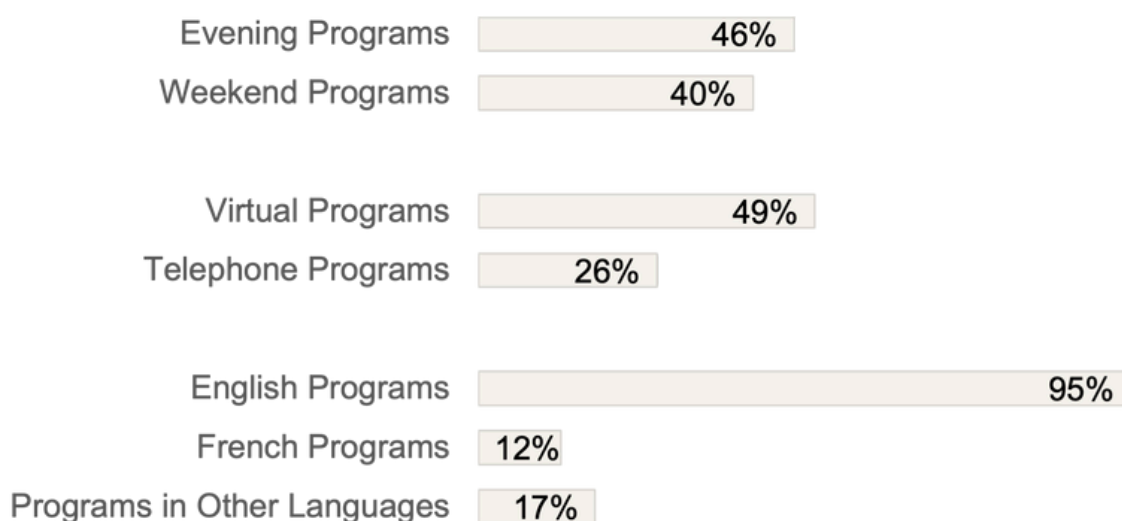


* Nature-based programs and technology training were not included in the 2022 MPS

2022 2024

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Centres offer programs on evenings and weekends and in multiple languages



Although in-person program offerings have re-bounded to pre-pandemic levels, **several centres continue to offer both virtual and telephone-based recreation, education and social programs.**

The availability of weekend programs has remained stable, but evening programs are available in almost half of centres, which is up from 32% in 2022. For some centres, expanding evening and weekend offerings has been one strategy to manage the increased demand for programs, but others reported that resource constraints limit this opportunity.

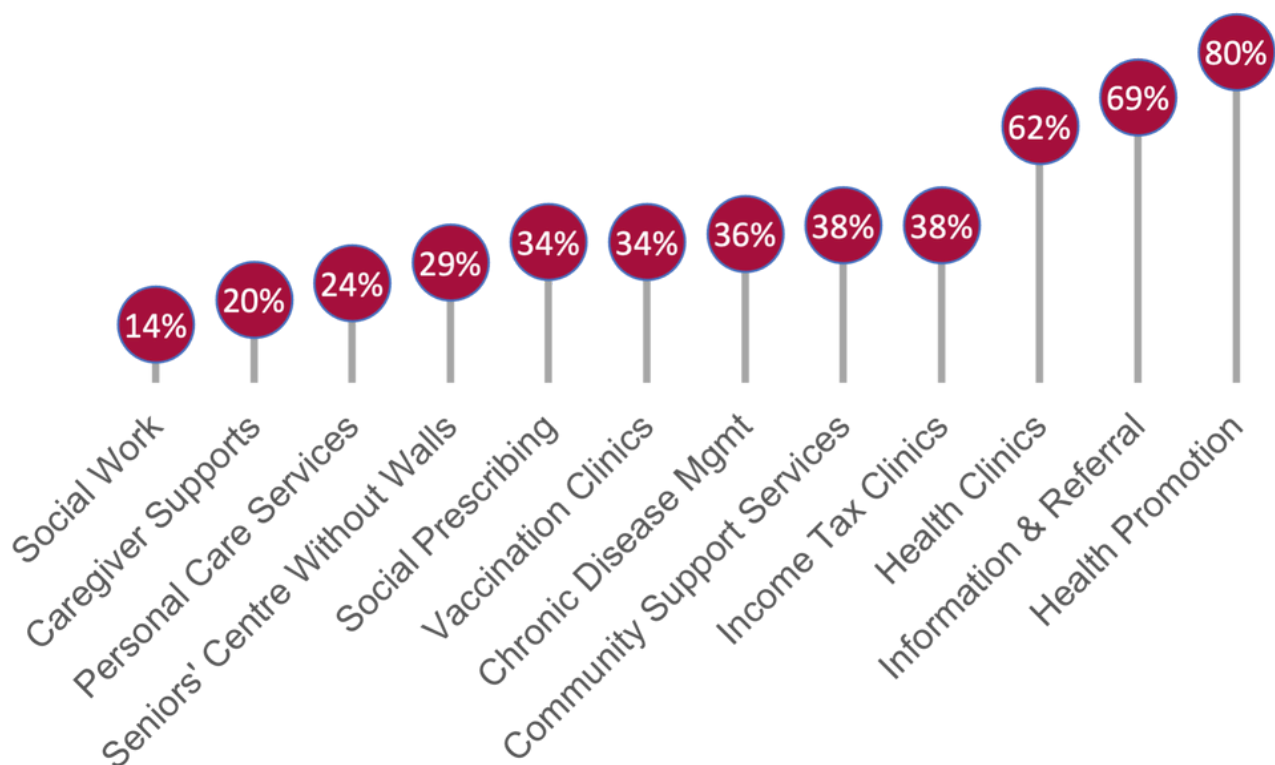
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Health and Support Services

In addition to recreation, social, and educational activities, centres offer a wide range of health and support services. Health promotion remains the most common, with many providing health seminars, clinics (e.g., foot care or hearing testing), and programs to support chronic disease management.

Social prescribing programs increased from 26% in 2022 to 34% in 2024. For instance, there are over 100 SALC Programs and centres actively engaged in Links2Wellbeing: Social Prescribing for Older Adults that is a partnership between the OACAO and the Alliance for Healthier Communities. This innovative program helps refer socially-isolated older adults to tailored, non-clinical services at seniors centres, to support health and well-being.

Other innovative health and support services being offered include primary care clinics with physicians, nurse practitioners, or community paramedics, programs for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia, and hospice services.



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Funding Sources

The median annual operating budget was \$139,000. Although the operating budget did not vary by centre classification (i.e., non-profit, municipal, or charitable), centres serving more older adults had larger budgets.

While centres receive funding from all levels of government, one-third of their financial support continues to come from non-government sources. This includes donations, sponsorship, fundraising, and participant fees. Non-profit centres, in particular, demonstrated a greater reliance on these revenue streams.

Three quarters of centres received Seniors Active Living Centre (SALC) program funding from the Government of Ontario, and it was an essential part of their operating budget, especially for smaller, non-profit, and volunteer-led centres. **Furthermore, almost all of these centres made use of SALC special grants.** Several centres expressed concerns over the reductions to SALC special grants and the impact it had on their ability to purchase necessary program equipment and supplies. Centres relying on SALC funding were also worried about reductions in municipal support due to changes in the political landscape and rising costs.

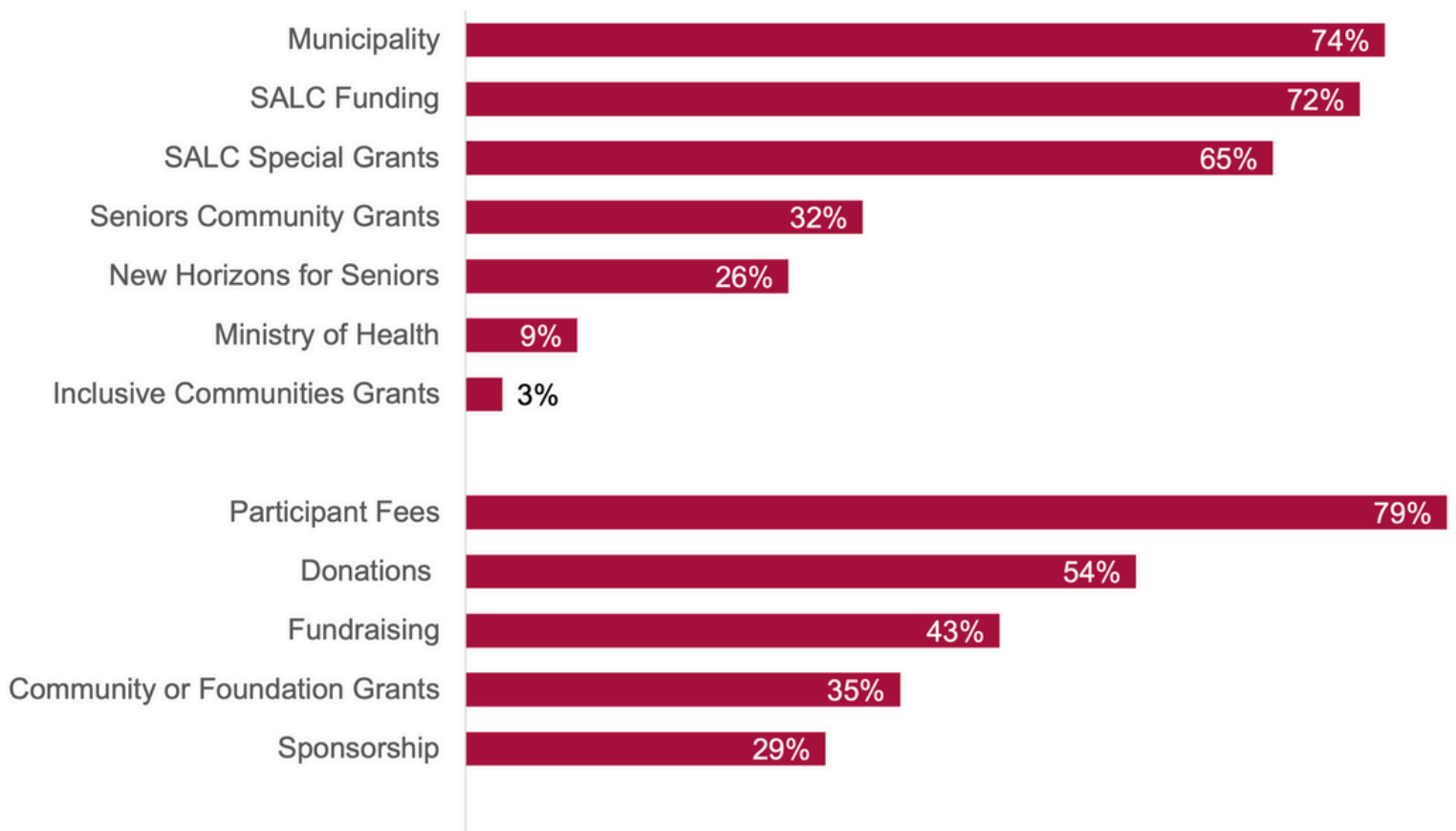
“

We have been able to purchase equipment with the SALC special grant in the past. But this year it was next to nothing, and we rely on this to replace equipment. Our municipal funding was also reduced this year, so we worry it may happen to us in the future.

”

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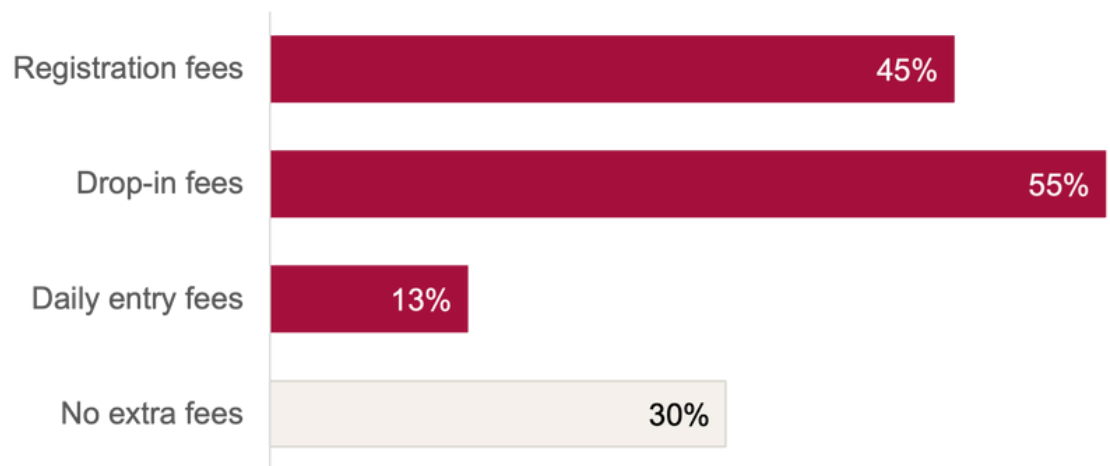
Centres rely on funding from all levels of government. Budgets are supplemented by user fees, donations, and fundraising.



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Two thirds of centres (68%) had a membership fee. This is down from 80% in 2022. Fees ranged from \$5 per year to \$40 per month, with an average fee of \$42, up from \$35 in 2022. Some centres had higher fees for non-residents, and others offered discounts for couples, low-income households, and individuals over the age of 90.

For centres with membership fees, most charged extra fees to access programs and services



One third of centres had no membership fee. These centres were usually part of a community centre or a community health centre. Most centres with no membership fee (70%) offered their programs completely free, but some charged drop-in fees or registration fees, especially for programs with a specialized instructor.

Less than half of centres (43%) offered subsidies on program fees. For some centres, subsidies were available only for certain programs. Others implemented subsidies on a case-by-case basis. **Notably, half of centres with subsidies reported an increase in requests over the past year.**

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Accessibility

Centres recognized the importance of accessibility, but significant structural, financial and logistical barriers hindered their efforts. Nearly one fifth of centres reported needing to renovate their spaces to improve accessibility and modernization but lacked the funds to do so. Aging infrastructure, ownership constraints and limited financial resources made it difficult for centres to implement required upgrades, despite most centres (68%) having high knowledge of their obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

“

Our space has been retrofitted as best it can but is not truly accessible. We have reached the end point of grandfathering our space. Either significant financial expense needs to be incurred to make the space accessible or we will have to find another location.

”

Many centres operate in older buildings, making accessibility upgrades complex and costly. While many relied on grants and donations to fund these improvements, available funding was insufficient and forced some centres to prioritize urgent repairs over accessibility upgrades. Additionally, 25% of centres lease their program space, leaving them dependent on landlords to implement necessary modifications. This created further delays towards accessible program spaces.

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Creating Accessible Spaces

Centres shared their efforts in creating accessible program spaces.



High Accessibility

Features are widely available & ensure access for all.

Many accessibility features were well-established across most centres, ensuring a strong foundation for equitable access. These included accessible parking spaces and drop-off/pick-up zones (92%), sidewalk pathways to entrances (94%), and accessible washrooms (94%).

"We have made accessibility a priority over the years, and our facility is well-equipped to meet the needs of our members."



Moderate Accessibility

Features that improve access but have limitations.

Certain features that ensure accessibility were in most but not all centres but there were limitations in their functionality. These included automatic doors (88%), entrance ramps (71%), and access to transit stops (60%).

"We would love to improve accessibility, but certain upgrades - like additional automatic doors - are costly. Public transit is technically available, but the schedule isn't always reliable."



Low Accessibility

Features that are less common and may hinder access.

Some features remained underdeveloped, which may create barriers for people with disabilities. These included elevators (56%), AODA compliant websites (53%), AODA compliant signage/lighting (51%), and universal washrooms (49%).

"Our building is multi-level, but we have no elevator, which makes it difficult for those using mobility devices to participate. Our signage meets basic requirements but is not fully AODA compliant. This makes navigation difficult for some visitors."

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Operational Challenges

Centres have rebounded after the pandemic, and are now faced with new challenges that are impacting how they are responding to growing demand for services within their communities.

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Constrained Program Space

“Our centre is bursting at the seams. Everyone wants to take part, but we physically cannot squeeze more people in.”

Most centres operate out of buildings they own (32%) or lease (25%), or in spaces provided in-kind by municipalities (27%). A small number borrow spaces from libraries, churches or other community groups. While most centres have stable, long-term arrangements, some are facing uncertainty due to rezoning, redevelopment plans or short-term leases.

The need for more space was a pressing concern for 42% of centres. However, most were unable to secure it due to high costs and lack of suitable locations. Even when space was available, one quarter of centres compete for space with other programs, leading to scheduling conflicts. Additionally, limited storage space and outdated facilities impacted the types of programs centres are able to offer.

For those centres that have managed to expand their program space, rising operational costs posted a significant challenge, and centres explained that increased spaces come with increased expenses and thus the need for more funding.

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Rising Demand for Programs and Services

Nearly 90% of centres reported an increase in demand for their programs and services over the past year.

The majority of centres have been able to fully (44%) or partially (52%) manage this increased demand through strategies such as increasing operating hours, hiring more instructors, and adjusting program schedules to maximize space. Other key strategies included:

- Increasing program offerings - 71%
- Increasing class sizes - 59%
- Implementing program waitlists - 50%
- Requiring pre-registration for classes - 49%
- Running programs in satellite locations - 27%
- Implementing participation restrictions - 12%

For the subset of centres (11%) who experienced a decline in demand, most described barriers to promoting their programs in the community. Therefore, these centres were actively working to increase participation through marketing efforts, outreach, and community engagement. Key strategies included word-of-mouth promotion, social medial advertising, direct mail-outs, flyers and collaborations with local organizations. Some also conducted needs assessments to better tailor their programs to community interests.

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Stagnating Revenue in Face of Growing Costs

Over the past fiscal year, a significant number of centres have reported rising operating costs across multiple areas. The most commonly affected expense categories included food, with 96% of centres experiencing an increase, followed by staff salaries and benefits (87%), and program materials and equipment (81%). Other areas such as administration costs, office expenses, and salaries for program instructors have also increased for the majority of centres. These rising costs create financial pressure, making it increasingly difficult for centres to sustain their current level of programming and respond to increasing demand among participants.

At the same time, many revenue sources that centres rely on have remained stagnant or declined. Municipal and federal funding sources have been particularly affected, with 71% and 64% of centres, respectively, reporting decreases. The change to federal funding may be linked to the completion of COVID-related grant programs.

Similarly, a majority of centres have seen a decline in donations, fundraising, sponsorships, and advertising. While some funding sources, such as membership and program fees, have remained steady or increased slightly, they have not been sufficient to cover the growing costs.



We need more financial resources to be able to keep up with the increased costs of maintaining our centre.



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Ongoing Skill Gaps and Staff Burnout

Staffing remains a complex challenge for over half of centres. Primary barriers to recruitment and retention included non-competitive wages (29%) and difficulty finding candidates with the right skill set (25%). Program instructor positions were also hard to fill due to high fees (32%) and low availability (38%). The part-time or casual nature of these positions was also thought to encourage high turnover due to the fact that they are short-term commitments with limited hours. As explained by one centre, *“Casual and contract positions for program instructors have a lot of turnover, and there is a lack of commitment and accountability (ie. taking last minute vacations and interrupting programs).”*

Managing staff burnout and stress was also a challenge for some (20%), and one centre shared, *“While we have not had turnover in staff, we have noticed an increase in the use of sick time and personal time.”*

Many centres were also facing skill shortages, particularly in fundraising (28%), volunteer management and coordination (27%), communications and social media management (24%), IT support (23%) and program evaluation (22%). Some bilingual centres also found it difficult to hire staff with the desired language background.

“We are a small organization and have many skill gaps. Our staff are primarily focused on program delivery. They cannot take on these other roles and we cannot hire more staff.”

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Centres have implemented several strategies to address staff challenges.

Key strategies implemented by centres included increasing wages (24%), offering professional development opportunities (23%) and flexible work hours (23%). Although less common, centres providing mental health supports (14%) and wellness programs (11%) felt they were important for reducing staff burnout.

Centres also stressed the importance of fostering a strong and supportive team environment as one of the ways they address staffing-related challenges. As shared by one centre, *“It’s all hands on deck - we really work as a great team.”*

While centres have seen some successes with these strategies, budget constraints limit their efforts. For many, skill gaps persist not just due to recruitment and retention but because they lack the funding to hire the level of staff that their growing program require. Enhancing staff capacity will therefore require increased funding, strategic workforce planning and innovative approaches to recruitment and staff development.

Notably, staff challenges were not universally experienced. Centres with fewer difficulties tended to be municipally operated, which offered more competitive hiring processes and compensation guidelines. Larger centres with more staff and more flexible budgets also faced fewer obstacles in recruiting and retaining staff with the desired skillset.

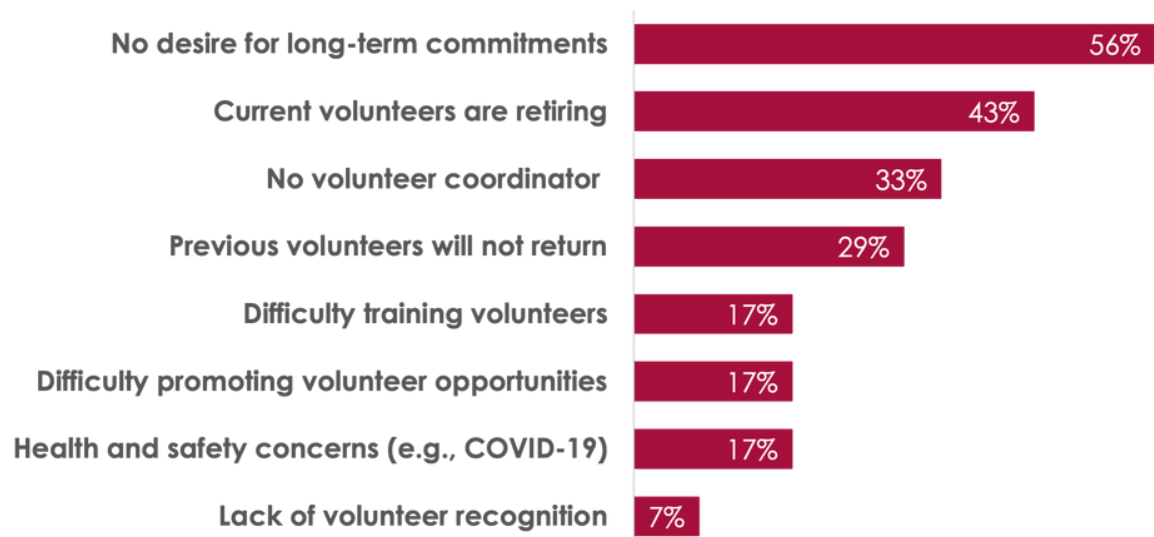
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Persistent Challenges Building Volunteer Capacity

Over 70% of centres were facing a range of volunteer-related challenges, from recruitment to retention to training and coordination. Many struggled to find volunteers with specific skills, such as language abilities, while others noted that volunteers faced personal barriers like health issues, transportation challenges, or caregiving responsibilities that limited their availability.

A key issue was burnout, as existing volunteers were said to take on multiple roles, both within the centre and other agencies. As explained by one centre, *“We only have volunteers here and they are starting to get burned out and quit, making it hard to continue offering our programs.”*

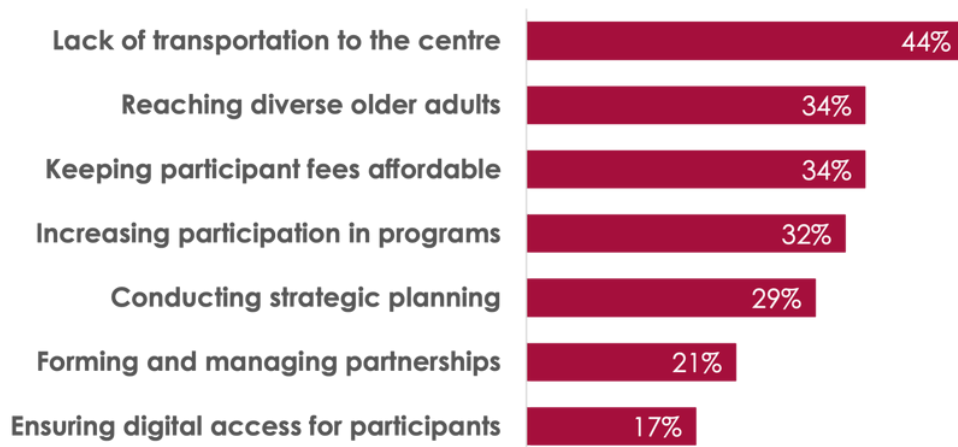
Additionally, volunteer engagement has become unpredictable, with some centres struggling to find volunteers who want to commit long-term. The absence of a dedicated volunteer coordinator in many centres further complicated these challenges, as staff were stretched thin and unable to properly manage and support volunteers.



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Other Challenges

Centres reported a range of other challenges. Some challenges, such as those related to strategic planning and partnerships, were linked to reduced staff and volunteer capacity. Others reflected broader challenges related to funding and infrastructure available at the centre and within their community more broadly.



Impacts on Centres

The challenges faced by centres have operational impacts and strain their ability to deliver programs and services effectively. With 36% of centres reporting that staff are having to cover duties traditionally led by volunteers, centres are struggling with role overload, leading to burnout and inefficiencies.

Program availability has also been impacted, with 29% of centres cancelling programs or events and 22% having to reduce offerings altogether. Limited staff and volunteer capacity has also impacted the ability to apply for grants and fundraise (19%), establish and maintain partnerships (24%), and lead outreach activities (27%).

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Thriving After the Pandemic

“We have the passion and the ideas, but without financial resources, dedicated volunteer management and better outreach, we struggle to sustain and expand our programs. More support in these areas would make the world of difference.”

Across the centres, a clear pattern emerged: while demand for programs and services continues to grow, the resources needed to sustain and expand them remain insufficient. Financial constraints, volunteer shortages, under-developed marketing and a lack of strong community partnerships are the most pressing challenges, creating barriers to accessibility and long-term stability. Addressing these gaps through targeted supports will ensure that centres can continue to meet the diverse needs of older adults across Ontario.

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Increasing Financial Resources

One of the most significant and recurring feedback from centres was the need for increased financial resources. While operating costs have increased, most funding streams have declined or stagnated. This had a direct impact on the ability of centres to provide innovative programming, hire qualified staff, cover essential costs, and make necessary facility upgrades.



“Increasing staffing would allow us to increase our community presence and avoid staff burnout.”



“More financial support and funding would allow us to provide more affordable programming to our participants. Many feel the instructor fees are already too much. We are in a low-income neighbourhood. Therefore, the affordability of programs may not match program costs.”

Adequate core funding that reflects rising operating costs and growing demand would ensure centres can expand their programming, reach more diverse seniors, and remove barriers to participation. It would also help recruit and retain high quality staff to carry out roles that were currently under supported. This includes volunteer coordinators, marketing specialists, IT support, and program facilitators. Importantly, consistent funding streams (rather than one time grants) would enable centres to prioritize long-term growth and sustainability.

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Growing Volunteers

The COVID-19 pandemic had lasting impacts on the volunteer sector, and centres are still struggling with volunteer recruitment and retention. For instance, most centres are still reporting declines in both the number of volunteers and the amount of time they are able to give. Centres have also observed a shift in how people want to volunteer, and there is a greater preference for short-term opportunities, rather than long-term commitments.



"It has been difficult to recruit volunteers since the pandemic. Many of the long-time volunteers have not returned, and younger volunteers are not stepping in to fill the gaps."



"We get a lot of interest from volunteers initially, but many don't stay long-term. They either move on to paid work or find they can't commit as much as they expected."



"The same small group of volunteers is doing everything, and they are getting burned out. We need to distribute the workload more evenly, but we just don't have enough people."



"Younger volunteers are interested in short-term or one-off opportunities, but we really need consistent, ongoing support for your programs."

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Centres require additional training and resources to build a robust volunteer base.

Centres identified three key resources to help strengthen their volunteer capacity: comprehensive training programs, dedicated volunteer coordinators, and more effective outreach strategies.

Many centres reported that **volunteers require training and onboarding to be effective in their roles**, and a lack of these supports has contributed to high turnover. As one centre noted, *“Volunteers are willing, but many need training and we don’t have the resources to properly onboard and support them.”* Providing clear expectations, skill development, and mentorship was seen as essential for increasing volunteer retention.

Several centres called for **more financial resources to hire a dedicated volunteer coordinator** to manage recruitment, retention, and recognition efforts. Without this role, existing staff - already balancing multiple responsibilities - struggled to support volunteers effectively. One centre shared, *“We rely on staff to manage volunteers, but without a dedicated coordinator, it’s hard to keep everything organized and ensure the volunteers have meaningful roles.”*

To attract and retain new volunteers, **centres recognized the need to rethink outreach and recognition strategies**. Some were developing partnerships with schools or local businesses to expand their volunteer base, while others were strengthening appreciation efforts. However, budget limitations restricted their ability to host recognition events or provide tokens of appreciation. As centres rebuild their volunteer networks, investing in these resources will be crucial for long-term sustainability.

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Enhancing Marketing

Centres were actively working to increase awareness and engagement in their programs through diverse marketing strategies, including social media, websites, email campaigns, print materials, and direct outreach. Word-of-mouth remains a key promotional tool, supplemented by community partnerships and open houses.

Even though many centres are seeing more demand for their programs, there was still a strong desire for more support with marketing and outreach. In particular, centres felt that a more coordinated, innovative, and robust marketing strategy would help them extend their services to hard-to-reach communities, build a strong volunteer sector, and foster new partnerships with local businesses and community agencies that could support new funding avenues and innovative programming.

Many centres emphasized the need for increased advertising budgets and dedicated staff to enhance outreach efforts. With the decline of local newspapers, centres were keen to expand their visibility on digital platforms and within local community events to foster engagement in their programming.

“We need marketing strategies with funding to reach more seniors in our community and secure financially stable partnerships in the community.”

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Building Partnerships

Centres identified a need for stronger partnerships with community organizations as a way to expand program offerings and increase reach. For instance, partnerships with local churches, libraries, and community centres have been important for establishing satellite locations for mobile centres or those wanting to expand offerings to new areas of the city. Centres also discussed the role of partnerships for supporting ethno-cultural programs, 2SLGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives, educational events, and intergenerational activities.



We are partnering with the municipality to create an outdoor space for seniors for relaxation and sports.

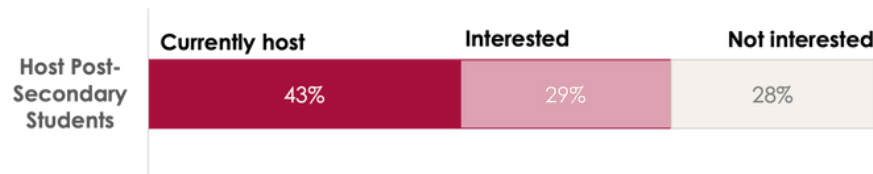


Centres identified several other ways partnerships with local businesses and municipal governments could be beneficial, but noted that more support was needed to help identify and sustain these relationships. Examples included:

- **Establishing corporate sponsorship opportunities** for wellness programs, technology training, and intergenerational activities.
- **In-kind donation opportunities for local businesses** to provide equipment, program materials, or professional expertise, such as partnerships with local grocery stores for congregate dining programs.
- **Community engagement and crowdfunding opportunities** to amplify fundraising efforts through media campaigns, charity events, and community sponsorship drives.

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Centres collaborate with post-secondary institutions to enhance programming.



Just under half of centres collaborate with local colleges and universities to host practicum students from fields such as social work, nursing, gerontology, kinesiology and recreation therapy. These students contribute by leading social activities, offering one-on-one support, evaluating programs, and assisting with technology training for older adults.

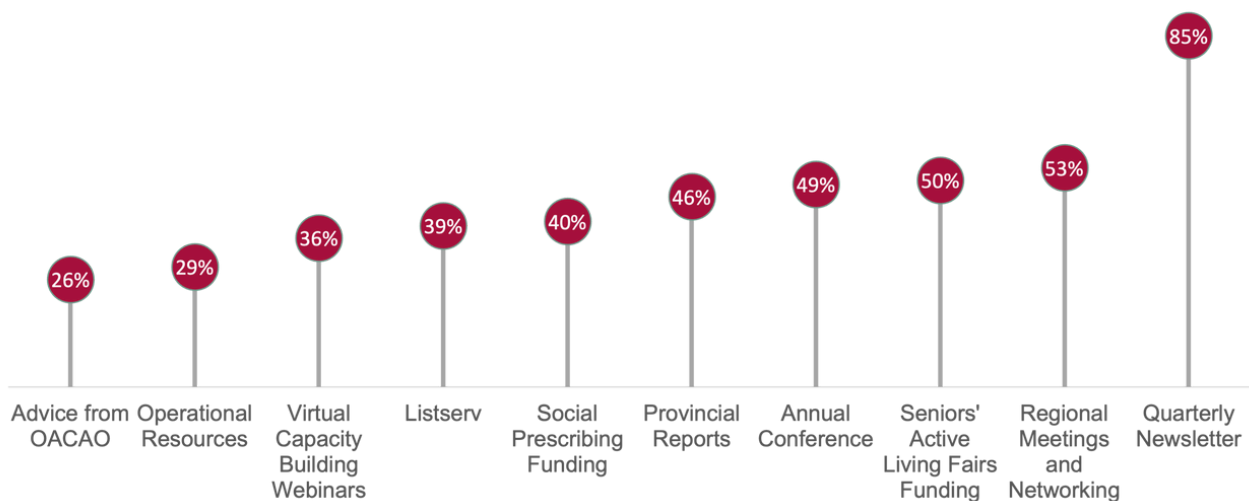
Several centres were interested in establishing new practicum opportunities in the future. More support in approaching post-secondary institutions and in establishing practicum opportunities that are meaningful for students and address a need at the centre may help in developing and maintaining these partnerships.

“Students have provided support to seniors through social activities, friendly visits, and other activities. We have provided students an opportunity to learn and have hands-on experience working with older adults.”

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ROLE OF OACAO

The OACAO provides valuable resources, funding and networking opportunities to centres across Ontario.



81% of respondents were members of the OACAO. The quarterly newsletter was most popular, but other resources such as regional meetings, funding opportunities, and provincial reports were widely used. Increasingly, OACAO members are accessing fundings for social prescribing, up from 21% in 2022 to 40% in 2024. Business partnerships and OASSIS employee benefit packages for non-profits also continue to be valued.

Most non-members were aware of the OACAO's advocacy work on behalf of centres. Non-members were most frequently interested in the quarterly newsletter (46%), seniors active living fairs micro-grants (46%), governance and operating resources (31%), and provincial reports (31%). As explained by one non-member, *"We are interested in reaching out to tap into these supplemental supports that might be there for us."*

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Throughout the past two years, the OACAO provided pertinent and timely resources, professional development, and networking opportunities for SALC operators. In the past two years, support focused on teaching seniors about technology, trends in volunteering and strategizing re-engagement, marketing to isolated older adults, aging with pride, and enhancing wellbeing for people living with dementia. The OACAO also developed a number of operational resources and training materials, including SALC governance modules, marketing tools to reach socially isolated seniors, artificial intelligence resources for centres, and a webinar on developing by-laws for non-profit organizations.

In 2024, the OACAO also provided support, networking and training to a new cohort of SALC operators. This included online training sessions that explored relevant topics such as innovative SALC programming, microgrant opportunities, and past research conducted by the OACAO.



"We are proud members of the OACAO and are thankful for their advocacy, resources, communications and commitment to making the province a wonderful place to grow Seniors."



"We would be lost without OACAO support! Excellent resources, conference was wonderful, and the online through covid conference was so welcome during a difficult time."



"We think the OACAO is doing a great job! So glad you are out there to keep us all connected. We are all consistently doing more with less and I think you guys are doing awesome!"

Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OACAO)

Question & Information



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