



## 5. Seniors in Nova Scotia

### Overview

The demographic profile of Nova Scotia is changing, and seniors are representing a bigger part of the population. Between 2007 and 2033, the seniors' population (65 years and older) is projected to increase by 86 per cent, from approximately 15 per cent to 29 per cent of the total population.

When focusing on the serious issue of senior abuse, it is important to remember that seniors are active, contributing members of society. Although abuse can happen to anyone, the risks are lower for those who are connected and involved in their community. The following statistics show some of the ways that Nova Scotia's seniors are involved in their communities—through employment, physical activity, generosity, and more.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the information in this section of the toolkit comes from the *Seniors' Statistical Profile, 2009*, Nova Scotia, 2009.

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## Finding and using demographic information

Community groups may need demographic information to plan projects, develop proposals, or for other purposes. There are several key sources of demographic and other information about seniors at [gov.ns.ca/seniors/publications.asp](http://gov.ns.ca/seniors/publications.asp).

**Nova Scotia Community Counts** is another excellent source of statistical information. It's at [gov.ns.ca/finance/communitycounts/](http://gov.ns.ca/finance/communitycounts/). Community Counts presents socio-economic and other data for 286 communities in Nova Scotia. It includes features to let you compare community resources at the regional, provincial, and national levels, and see the comparisons in charts, graphs, and maps. These comparisons can help you get a more complete picture of your community in relation to other communities. The Map Centre offers over 40,000 maps at thirteen levels of geography for population characteristics (such as age, education, and income) and community assets (such as seniors' centres and senior safety programs). Free training is available for users of Community Counts. Check the website for details.

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## Life expectancy

The life expectancy of Nova Scotians has been steadily increasing. People born in 1920 lived an average of 59 years. People born in 2005 can expect to live 79 years—an increase of 20 years. Much of this gain can be attributed to better medical care and better living conditions.

## Physical activity

Physical activity is one of the best ways to promote better health and prevent illness.<sup>2</sup> A physically active person has a lower risk of heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, depression, and premature disability.<sup>3</sup> In 2005, 28 per cent of those 65+ were considered to be moderately active or physically active, and 46 per cent of those 55–64 were considered to be moderately active or physically active. While males tended to be more physically active than females (across all age groups), physical activity between males and females in the 55–64 age range was nearly the same (19 per cent for males and 18 per cent for females).

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<sup>2</sup> [gov.ns.ca/hpp/pasr/physical-activity.asp](http://gov.ns.ca/hpp/pasr/physical-activity.asp). Department of Health and Wellness, Physical Activity Sport and Recreation. Retrieved July 26, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> [gov.ns.ca/hpp/pasr/physical-activity.asp](http://gov.ns.ca/hpp/pasr/physical-activity.asp). Department of Health and Wellness, Physical Activity Sport and Recreation. Retrieved July 26, 2011.

## Living arrangements

In 2006, a large majority of seniors who lived in a private household lived with their family (a spouse or other relatives), while only one-third (29 per cent) lived alone. Complex family relationships and dependencies can make a senior more vulnerable to abuse. However, seniors who are isolated—those who have few connections outside their homes—are at greater risk of being abused. This is one reason why it is important for seniors to stay connected and involved in their community.

## Housing

The majority of Nova Scotia seniors own or rent their homes. In 2006, 77.5 per cent of seniors owned their home and 22.3 per cent rented. A small portion (0.2 per cent) lived in Band housing.

The percentage of renters includes seniors living in public housing (4 per cent), licensed nursing homes (3.6 per cent), and licensed residential care facilities (0.8 per cent).

## Household income

Seniors tend to have lower incomes than younger Nova Scotians. The following table compares the average incomes for households headed by adults in three different age groups.

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Head of household	Household income (2006)
Under 65	\$61,532
65–74 years old	\$44,371
75+	\$36,858

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In 2006, two-thirds of seniors living in poverty were women living by themselves.

## Employment

The number of older workers increased dramatically between 2001 and 2006. For example:

- Employment among 55–64 year-olds jumped 52 per cent. The number of workers in this age group was substantially higher in 2006 than at any point in the previous 25 years.
- Employment of seniors (65+) jumped 60 per cent—from 6,350 in 2001 to 10,175 in 2006.

## Generosity

In 2006, in households headed by older seniors (75+), almost 8 percent of household spending went to charity—almost five times the rate of those under 65. In the 75+ age group, 95 per cent of households donated to charity.

In 2007, nearly 44 per cent of seniors (65+) volunteered their time. Their contribution represented 22 per cent of total volunteer hours that year. Their average volunteer time in one year was 298 hours. In comparison, youth (15–24 years old) volunteered at a higher rate, but contributed fewer hours per year. See the following table for the comparison.<sup>4</sup>

	Percentage who volunteered in 2007	Average volunteer hours in 2007
Older seniors (75+)	43.9 per cent	298 hours
Youth (15–24)	64.7 per cent	132 hours

## Senior abuse

It is difficult to say how many older people are abused, neglected, or exploited. Situations of abuse are often not reported and so the problem remains hidden. The best information available indicates that between 4 per cent and 10 per cent of older adults in Canada experience abuse. **This means that in Nova Scotia today, approximately 5,000 to 13,500 older people are victims of senior abuse.** Because abuse is severely under-reported, the real number is likely higher. As our population ages, the number of reported and unreported cases is likely to increase.

Because women live longer, there are more older women than there are older men. Therefore, senior abuse is and will continue to be a significant women's issue. It is also a women's issue because women are more likely to be abused than men. The number of reported cases of abuse is higher for older women than for older men, even when the numbers are adjusted to account for the greater number of women. (See the sidebar, "Some issues and facts about abused older women.")

## Adult protection

During 2008–2009, Adult Protection Services in the Department of Health and Wellness intervened on behalf of 926 seniors and 182 adults aged 50–64 who met the definition of "an adult in need of

<sup>4</sup> *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*. Statistics Canada, 2009, Catalogue no. 71-542-XIE

protection” according to the Adult Protection Act. Seventy-one percent of the cases involved self-neglect and 11 per cent of the cases involved caregiver neglect.

It is important to remember that many seniors do not meet the definition of “an adult in need of protection” under the Adult Protection Act. If they are able to care for themselves, they must navigate the healthcare system and rely on community supports in order to protect themselves from abuse. For more information, see section 6, Senior Abuse and the Law.

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### **Some issues and facts about abused older women\***

- Senior abuse is often hidden, taking place within family relationships that have been shaped by the experiences of each generation. Sometimes an older woman may not recognize that what is happening to her is abuse.
- Older women may be less willing to report abuse by adult children or their spouse for fear of losing those relationships. Older women also have a very large emotional and financial stake in their relationships, home, and community.
- It is common for abused older women to feel protective towards their children. Society also makes older women feel guilty or blames them if their adult child becomes abusive, by assuming it reflects something the mother did wrong.
- Older women tend to have fewer financial resources and therefore can be more greatly affected by financial abuse.
- Women are more likely to have disabling conditions than men as they age, and are therefore at a high risk of injury. They are also more likely to be caregivers to husbands with dementia.
- Spousal abuse happens to older women in three main ways:
  - It may start when a couple is young and “grow old” with the couple.
  - It may start with retirement or at the onset of illness.
  - It may start in a new relationship that a woman enters when she is older.

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\*Adapted from *Making Changes: A Book for Women in Abusive Relationships*, 8th edition (2012). Available at [women.gov.ns.ca/violence.html](http://women.gov.ns.ca/violence.html)

