

## Central Alberta Older Adult Employment Strategy Assessment Project 2023

The Golden Circle Senior Resource Centre, in partnership with the Red Deer & District Chamber of Commerce, with funding provided by the Province of Alberta, initiated the Central Alberta Older Adult Employment Strategy Assessment Project in April 2023. The project sought to understand the current barriers to employment faced by adults over 55 in Central Alberta (from here forward “Individuals”), as well as the needs of employers confronting a shortage of skilled, experienced, and available labour (from here forward “Employers”). By exploring the region's current employment services and listening to the experiences of Individuals and Employers, significant gaps and resources were identified within the 248 voices represented. The report provides recommendations to enhance systems navigation, address the intersectionality of ageism, gender, ability, and ethnicity, leverage community partnerships, and tailor resources specifically for adults over 55 and employers.

One of the key findings was a significant lack of awareness among Individuals and Employers regarding the existing employment resources, tools, and assistance available, particularly a shortage of programs tailored for adults over 55 (including mature workers, seniors, and older adults). In Central Alberta, although seventeen organizations offer resources, training, and employment services, only two have specific programs or resources for adults over 55. Only 6% of Individuals had received or identified resources specifically tailored to their age group while seeking employment opportunities, and only 8% of Employers were aware of or utilized resources that assist in recruiting or retaining adults over 55.

Survey data and interviews highlighted the influence of ageism on Individuals' self-perception and self-confidence and their ability to transfer their skills and experience to employment opportunities. A prevalent sentiment emerged where participants, despite substantial evidence suggesting otherwise, expressed skepticism about their ability to re-enter the workforce and the value of their experience.

The top barriers to employment identified by Individuals included an inability to identify their skills and experience in new job settings, feeling disrespected or excluded, the lack of financial compensation, and feeling unsupported by policies and practices related to adults over 55. Meanwhile, Employers expressed high regard for the work ethic, reliability, insight, experience, and dedication of adults over 55 but noted a substantial knowledge gap regarding existing resources to hire, recruit, and retain such adults.

Interestingly, the top core workplace skills that Individuals identified as having were almost identical to the top needs of Employers, suggesting a matching supply and demand. Adults over 55, like most working adults primarily seek flexible, meaningful, and stable employment that offers challenge and opportunities for social interaction.

We recommend tailoring existing employment resources and services to adults over 55. There is a pressing need to establish a navigation system that bridges the divide between current employment resources and the skilled, experienced workforce of this age group. Employers expressed the need for resources that inform and help to guide their hiring and retention practices for adults over 55.

We emphasize the importance of viewing employment not just as a job but as a vital component of holistic health and wellness for adults over 55.

For future endeavours, a comprehensive examination of the effects of various social identities, especially focusing on the intersectionality of ageism, gender, and ethnicity, should be prioritized.