



**MANITOBA ASSOCIATION  
OF  
SENIOR COMMUNITIES**



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## **Critical Linkages:** **Communication, Social Isolation, Safety & Security**

### **FINAL REPORT:**

### **WHAT WE HEARD AND LESSONS LEARNED**

2022/23

#### Project Introduction:

Communication and information are one of eight age-friendly community domains. Within this domain and within others, safety, security, and social inclusion are key elements.

This project builds on the premise that if communication does not have its intended reach, people of all ages, and including older people, are more likely to become isolated. With isolation, safety and security risks are escalated, especially during disasters brought on by both global health, and climate change issues, such as the current pandemic, floods, wildfires, and extreme heat and cold events.

Building on effective working relationships with key provincial organizations and selected municipalities, the project identified emergency preparedness planning mechanisms and explored opportunities to enhance the information and resources available to older people to feel safe and be connected.

The *Emergency Measures Act* (see Appendix I for a more detailed overview) outlines the duties and responsibilities of public sector agencies during an emergency, including the requirements for emergency plans by municipalities. Responsibility for the Act lies with Emergency Measures Organization (EMO). To this end, EMO oversees and co-ordinates all aspects of emergency preparedness in the province. EMO offers a range of resources and supports to municipalities in developing their plans.

The responsibility for the health and welfare of its citizens rests with the elected officials of the municipality. Municipalities are responsible to prepare, review, update and submit their emergency plan to EMO annually. This includes:

- appointment of a Municipal Emergency Coordinator (MEC) to undertake preparation and coordination of its emergency management programs. The MEC may be a paid or a voluntary position. Some municipalities may contract this service to a provider

- establishment of a committee of local community members (Local Emergency Response Control Group (LERCG)) to advise the authority on the development to its plans
- provision of information as to how residents can look after themselves and their families during an emergency or a disaster. This includes a public awareness campaign alerting residents to existing emergency management tools and information. Some municipalities may utilize a contractor to broadcast alerts or information.

MASC Age-friendly Resource Team members engaged eight communities in this project. Communities were in regions across Manitoba, with a population range from 1,000 to just under 15,000.

Of interest to the Team, as they engaged communities, were considerations including:

- What planning model is in place in your community and are there opportunities to share information in the planning process?
- Who comprises the advisory committee and are there opportunities to participate, share information or better support the work of the committee?
- Are there more vulnerable people in the community that may not be identified or accounted for in the community emergency plan?
- What information is provided to community residents to help them care for themselves and family members?
- Are there resources within the local senior serving community that might support the municipality's efforts, to help people prepare and remain safer?

## What we heard and lessons learned:

### 1. What planning model is in place in your community and are there opportunities to share information in the planning process?

*“Having service providers involved in the planning and communication of the Emergency Response Plan could enhance the supports to older and more vulnerable people and help them to feel and be more safe and secure.”*

*“I feel these conversations were very timely, considering the upcoming EP week of awareness. I think connections were made and a more concerted effort to connect with other organizations to help share information will be made.”*

- senior municipal staff are generally intimately involved in the process
- elected officials are generally aware of plans and process
- MEC role is defined
- emergency plans are not always well publicized or readily available
- there seems limited consultation with community organizations in planning, as well as education, and awareness
- multiple living facilities, like apartments, hotels, assisted living residences and PCHs should share plans with the emergency coordinators and vice versa
- on the community websites there is an Emergency Management Program that brings a team of volunteers together to help coordinate activities during an emergency
- the Plan was developed on a template developed by a group of MECs based on guidelines from Emergency Measures Manitoba.
- the plan was developed by the Commissionaires, on a contract basis, in consultation with community staff
- the community has a team of five community members that forms their Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). This Team meets once a month to actively discuss training, promoting emergency preparedness, CodeRED notifications and developments in the community.
- there is no mention that the MEC position includes public education about the plan or the need for personal preparedness

#### Learning considerations:

- engaging a broader public could make plans better and could serve as a vehicle to raise awareness
- time constraints and competing demands challenge staff who are very busy in the positions they hold, but many indicate they are open to discussions

## 2. Who comprises the advisory committee and are there opportunities to participate, share information or better support the work of the committee?

*“The overarching planning process probably took place at a higher level as an advisory group is not known.”*

*“Yes, there could be value in an advisory committee. It could provide information on the level of citizen awareness of issues related to emergency preparedness and advise on methods of communication with the public. It could also create opportunities for organizations to have a role in public education through their communication networks.”*

- there isn't a group per se, the CAO is the key point of contact and developer of the plan. Other staff are well aware of the “plan” and how it is executed. The community has strong relationships with many Emergency Response organizations – Fire, Police, etc.
- there is no community advisory committee
- the MEC oversees emergency management, planning, volunteers & resources. About 44 volunteers are involved which require ongoing training & management.
- the LERCG meets to develop ongoing plans. They consult with the Manitoba EMO Regional Office as needed. They also communicate & consult with the Regional Health Authority to coordinate emergency response planning and resources.
- there could be discussions about expanding the LERCG to include representatives from other agencies that are concerned with emergency preparedness of residents. These could include the seniors resource council, management of senior residences, schools and the Chamber of Commerce. This would also facilitate communication among the agencies concerned about this issue. These are important components of emergency preparedness as “word of mouth” is an important communication tool.
- include businesses and independent farmers in the planning for their expertise and potential use of facilities, equipment or technology
- engagement in this project has raised awareness of this gap and of the needs of older adults and vulnerable people. Staff recognize that there is a need to “operationalize” the plan, including communication to the public. Developing an “advisory” group of citizens, including older adults, to support updating the plan could be considered moving forward.

### Learning considerations:

- the LERCG function is not always as inclusive as it might be
- plans could be made to collaborate and coordinate with community organizations that can help support social connectedness and reduce social isolation

**3. Are there more vulnerable people in the community that may or may not be identified or accounted for in the community emergency plan?**

*“There are more vulnerable people in the community... we advertise everywhere but there are vulnerable seniors we still don't know about.”*

*“Many come from rural areas and have had to deal with risks in the past. Times change and they don't realize their health has declined, for example, due to a fall and then needing more services and information for supports that will help them live in their homes.”*

- vulnerable seniors appear to remain vulnerable
- families/caregivers can assist older adults to complete relevant information through easily visible ERIK Kits, with information regarding medications, oxygen, CPACs, wheelchairs, family contact info and other immediate needed supplies
- The MEC consulted with Home Care and found that all its clients have a means of being alerted in an emergency. They have a triage system in place whereby the most vulnerable and those with the least supports would be attended to first.
- people felt that through communication and community relationships – the town and its “partners” were/are very effective in reaching the more vulnerable
- the Seniors Resource Coordinator indicated there is no inventory of the vulnerable, nor isolated - people just know who and where they are
- yes, there are vulnerable people and there are people who may need help but don't want it, whether high risk or not. There are heavy caseloads for mental health and Home Care. I do know about many people but are restricted in contacting due to privacy legislation.
- due to several circumstances, including limited resources and high staff turnover post-pandemic, there has been little recent emphasis on operationalizing the emergency plan. There also has been limited focus on communication with the public about the plan or their personal emergency preparedness
- Senior Resource Coordinators have some clients who need more time and help as they get older, frailer and more isolated. Many phone calls are needed to occur to arrange appointments, transportation, etc. Knowing who these people are will help reach them during an emergency

**Learning considerations:**

- Enhanced collaboration amongst the MEC, LERGC, community officials, senior serving organizations, including the senior resource council and the regional health authority, could enhance awareness and inclusion of more isolated residents within emergency plans

#### 4. What information is provided to community residents to help them care for themselves and family members?

*“There has been information shared but some people don’t pay attention, because they live in a rural house with wood heat and stove so are self-sufficient. They have lots of canned goods and only worry about losing food in the freezer. When you live in the country, you pride yourself about being self sufficient.”*

*“Some people don’t realize they need assistance and fall through the cracks”.*

- electronic communication seems the norm, which may limit access to important information for folks less tech savvy
- use popular social media platforms and other sites to keep accurate information flowing in times of an emergency
- automated phone systems are not helpful for seniors and hard of hearing. It is frustrating to get through for information.
- public education is an increasing part of the role as awareness of the importance of emergency preparedness evolves, including information about the 72 Hour Kits, CodeRED alert system & the importance of registering to receive alerts.
- this is the weakest area of the planning and needs to be addressed.
- the plan currently isn't shared with the community...promotions occur during EP week in May. However, during an emergency, information is shared on social media and local radio. The message on the radio asks that residents check on vulnerable neighbours. There is also a siren that goes off during an emergency.
- the community website has an easy access tab that outlines in detail the emergency response plan for the community and the surrounding area. The website also has a self-registry process for automatic email ALERT in case of emergency.
- The plan itself is not published. There are limited if any public education processes, to ensure that community residents can access resources in case of emergency

##### Learning considerations

- the Age-Friendly initiative and the Seniors Resource Council programs could include emergency preparedness topics in their education programs.
- ongoing involvement of community organizations would better engage them in the topics to be considered in preparing for and reacting to an emergency. These organizations are likely willing and able to be involved.

**5. Are there resources within the local senior serving community that might support the municipality's efforts, to help people prepare and remain safer?**

*"The Senior Resource Coordinator knows most older people, notices changes and red flags a personal emergency. She reaches out to groups about safety and security and to individuals when asked. She shares emergency information and ERIK kits."*

*"No older adults are involved in the planning process. There might be volunteers that serve during the actual emergency."*

- senior serving organizations have in some communities, been consulted, however, in other communities, the planning process seems limited to municipal staff and related professionals (policing, fire-paramedic, hospitals)
- include senior agencies and other organizations in the planning to determine who the most vulnerable and isolated older adults are so the emergency volunteers will have quick contact and access to ensure their safety
- Senior Resource Coordinators are made aware of vulnerable people by neighbours or family and then they provide choices to the neighbour or family to let them know what supports are available
- the Senior Resource Coordinators seemed very willing to be a part of the process - this would have the potential to identify and support more vulnerable people in the community
- there does not appear to be any attempts to engage older adults directly in the planning, nor the information sharing aspects of Emergency plans
- the Senior Resource Coordinator was aware of the idea of EMO but did not know there was an MEC and who that person was. She was unsure of what and where the community emergency plan was, nor what it may entail

**Learning considerations:**

- Senior Resource Coordinators appear to be a valuable but underutilized resource
- Local leadership within the Senior serving agencies may also need additional training and awareness of any emergency plans, and the importance of same

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## Appendix I

**Note:** The following sections are excerpts from legislation, regulations, and related documents, and do not reflect the entire content/context of those documents.

### Emergency Preparedness:

The *Emergency Measures Act* outlines the duties and responsibilities of public sector agencies during an emergency, including the requirements for emergency plans by municipalities. Responsibility for the Act lies with Emergency Measures Organization (EMO).

To this end, EMO oversees and co-ordinates all aspects of emergency preparedness in the province (2.1(a)). This includes responsibility to prepare a provincial emergency management program and a provincial emergency plan. The emergency management program establishes and formalizes the processes to be used to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency or disaster.

EMO is responsible to conduct regular reviews and revisions of the program and plan. This may include a registry containing a copy of every emergency management program and plan in effect in the province (2.2(a)(b)). EMO is also responsible to prepare and maintain disaster assistance policies and guidelines for emergencies and disasters in Manitoba (2(3)(a)) and to consult with local authorities (and others) to prepare specific proposals for the establishment and implementation of disaster assistance programs (2(3)(b)).

### Local Authorities:

A local authority may include but is not limited to the council of a municipality or the council of an incorporated city, town, or village. The responsibility for the health and welfare of its citizens rests with the elected officials of the municipality.

Every local authority is responsible to appoint a person to undertake preparation and coordination of its emergency management programs and emergency plans and to adopt and submit those plans to EMO for approval and co-ordination with other programs and plans. The work of the local authority includes the establishment of a committee of local community members to advise the authority on the development to its plans (8.1(a)(c)(d)).

The purpose of the emergency plan is to provide for a prompt and coordinated response to emergencies or disasters that fall outside of day-to-day situations that are dealt with by emergency first responders. The goal of the plan is to provide the earliest possible coordinated response to prevent or limit the loss of life, property, and damage to the environment and to support restoration of essential services.

The *Emergency Measures Act* provides for the *Local Authorities Emergency Planning and Preparedness Regulation* \* which details requirements of a local authority's emergency management programs and emergency plans. Each local authority must prepare a hazard and risk assessment (8) that identifies all natural and human-made hazards and risks that could reasonably cause, in its geographic area of jurisdiction, loss of life; harm or damage to the safety, health and welfare of people; damage to property; or an interruption of a critical service.



Each emergency management program must (9) assist the local authority to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate any hazard or risk identified in its most recent hazard and risk assessment. It must also include information as to how residents can look after themselves and their families during an emergency or a disaster and must provide for a public awareness campaign alerting residents to existing emergency management tools and where to obtain additional emergency and disaster information.

EMO plays an essential role during crises, large-scale emergencies, and disasters of all kinds. In such events **EMO coordinates support** for those areas of government responding to the hazard. Emergency management does not take over as firefighters during wildfires, flood fighters during high water, or the health system during pandemics, but rather ensures government and its partners are able to coordinate, collaborate, and communicate effectively so the appropriate experts can tackle the crisis.

### Definitions:

**"disaster"** means a calamity, however caused, which has resulted in or may result in

- (a) the loss of life, or
- (b) serious harm or damage to the safety, health or welfare of people, or
- (c) wide-spread damage to property or the environment;

**"disaster assistance"** means assistance provided under a disaster financial assistance agreement or program as provided for in the regulations;

**"emergency"** means a present or imminent situation or condition that requires prompt action to prevent or limit

- (a) the loss of life, or
- (b) harm or damage to the safety, health or welfare of people, or
- (c) damage to property or the environment;

**"emergency management program"** means a program

- (a) to reduce vulnerability to hazards and increase emergency and disaster resiliency, and
- (b) to establish and formalize the processes to be used to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from an emergency or disaster

**"emergency plan"** means a plan for preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies and disasters