



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2024

Message from the Advocate

I am always surprised at how fast the holiday season sneaks up on us; one minute we're barbecuing in July and the next we're hanging up stockings!

Reflecting on 2024, our small but mighty team had a busy and productive year with town hall sessions, advocacy actions, presentations, submissions, the release of our annual **Status Report on Recommendations** and, a new report, **Seniors' Report 2024 Monitoring Key Indicators of Seniors' Wellbeing in NL: A Baseline Report**. You can read more about these reports further along in this newsletter.



We have also experienced some change with Systemic Advocacy Consultant, Tanya Billard, leaving the Office for a new, exciting career opportunity and Gabrielle DuPont anticipated to begin at the end of December. You will learn more about Gabby in the coming weeks!

Looking ahead to 2025, we look forward to continuing to elevate your voices to improve the programs and services most important to you; it is a sincere privilege.

From all of us at the Office of the Seniors' Advocate, we wish you a season of peace and joy and a healthy, happy new year.

Susan
Susan Walsh
Seniors' Advocate NL



Status Report on Recommendations 2023-2024



On November 20th the Office of the Seniors' Advocate released its annual **Status Report on Recommendations 2023-2024**.

The greatest advancement of the OSA recommendations are from the 2019 report **Long May Your Big Jib Draw** with 72% implemented, 24% partially implemented and 4% not implemented. This represents an improvement in all categories over last year from 64%, 28% and 8% respectively. It is very positive that all outstanding recommendations, except one, are in progress. We will continue to advocate for the outstanding recommendation which is to offer the shingles vaccine free of charge.

There has been less progress on the **What Golden Years?** report recommendations, which were issued to address the financial challenges seniors are facing. However, it is acknowledged that this report was released in November of 2023 and the covering period of the status report ended on March 31, 2024.

While the Office is pleased that the majority of the recommendations continue to move towards implementation, it is imperative that government advance on the OSA recommendations outlined in the **What Golden Years?** report, which are all related to improving the finances of seniors in this province.



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Seniors' Report 2024

Monitoring Key Indicators of Seniors' Wellbeing in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Baseline Report



On December 10, we released a new report which is the first of its kind produced by the OSA. This Report provides information and data pertaining to seniors in the areas: Wellbeing, Health, Income, Housing, Transportation, Safety and Protection.

[Watch the Release](#)

Monitoring this information is critically important to support seniors' wellbeing and ensure that appropriate and adequate services are available to meet their needs. The Report highlights that NL's population of adults 65 years of age and over has grown by 20.3% over the past five years and now comprises 24.4% of the provincial population. By 2033 seniors will comprise 29% of the total population of the province.



**CLICK THE
COVER TO
READ THE
SUBMISSION!**



Some of the key findings about Newfoundland and Labrador seniors in the report include:

- The percentage of seniors who consume the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables is 12 percentage points lower than the national average.
- The percentage of hip and knee replacement and cataract surgeries meeting national benchmarks, are well below the national average and significantly below pre-pandemic rates.
- Restraint use and the potentially inappropriate use of antipsychotics in long term care continues to be well above the national average.
- Seniors have the lowest median income and the largest uptake of Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) in Canada.
- 12.9% of senior homeowners living alone, and 31.6% of renters living alone, are in core housing need; they cannot afford suitable and adequate housing in their community.
- 82% of seniors hold a valid driver's license, but the cost of operating a vehicle has increased - gasoline up 26% and insurance up 15%, since 2018.
- Crimes against seniors has increased from 3 violations per 1000 seniors (2019) to 4.4 per 1000 seniors (2023).

Taken together, the findings in this report are concerning as they confirm that seniors continue to struggle in many of the social determinants of health. It is the intent of the OSA to produce this report annually to determine if the wellbeing of seniors in this province is improving or worsening.



ADVOCACY ACTIONS



Issue: On October 25, 2024, the Department of Health and Community Services (HCS) issued a News Release titled **Beds to be Added at Health Care Facilities in Western Region**. It included an announcement that 15 single occupancy rooms at Corner Brook Long-Term Care (LTC) would be modified to double occupancy rooms. It was noted that this change was to accommodate alternate level of care (ALC) patients in the region.

OSA Action: The OSA reviewed this matter and met with representatives from Government and NL Health Services. On November 4, 2024, the Advocate wrote the Minister of HCS, and issued a New Release to express her adamant opposition the conversion of single occupancy rooms in LTC homes to double occupancy, which she viewed as a regressive policy action. Modifying these rooms negatively impacts the people currently living in these rooms; reduce the availability of single rooms for seniors in the future; creates a risk that other LTC homes could convert single rooms to double; and does not resolve the outstanding issue of people requiring care. Research supports the position of the OSA and documents the positive impacts of living in a single room with a private bathroom including: privacy, dignity, infection control, family/friend visitation, patient safety, quality of care and person-centred focus. While the OSA acknowledged the efforts made to reduce the impact of this decision on the residents currently living in these single occupancy rooms, this decision is not a solution. Addressing the care needs of NL seniors requires improved community services. The Advocate encouraged the Minister to use the **Health Accord NL**, OSA's **What Golden Years?** report, and the pending Long Term Care and Personal Care Home Review as the guiding reports and processes to inform decisions to address changes and development in LTC. Further, provincial Long Term Care Legislation is needed to protect the best interests of seniors living in LTC.

Response: The provincial government reversed its plans to convert the 15 rooms. The Premier responded "having heard from some individuals and from the Seniors' Advocate, we are today going to put a stop to that."



ADVOCACY

ACTIONS



Issue: On December 5, 2024, NL's Seniors' Advocate (OSA) joined with her national colleagues in writing the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland and Minister of Labour and Seniors, the Honourable Steven MacKinnon, to highlight the importance of including seniors in the \$250 rebate, currently called the Working Canadian Rebate.

OSA Action: This letter acknowledges the fact that the median income of seniors in Canada is \$33,350 (2022). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the median income of seniors is the lowest in the country at \$27,800. Seniors struggle to deal with the rising costs for housing, heating, transportation, medical supplies, and food. Seniors have paid taxes for decades - and are still paying taxes - yet they are now the fastest growing group of food bank users in Canada.

In a News Release issued on December 5, NL's Seniors' Advocate states that any government initiatives utilizing tax dollars to assist citizens to deal with the cost of living should be targeted to those in our society who need it most.

Response: To date, no response to the letter has been received but there has been a fair amount of interest in this provincially and nationally to ensuring if the benefit proceeds, it is done with consideration of seniors.



ADVOCACY

ACTIONS



Issue: During the OSA's public engagement sessions, seniors were very clear that they are struggling financially and our research and the data confirms this.

OSA Action: In its **What Golden Years?** report (November 2023) the OSA recommended that the NL Seniors' Benefit be annually indexed for inflation so that it reflects increases in the cost of living.

Response: During the last sitting of the House of Assembly, the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Siobhan Coady, committed to indexing the NL Seniors' Benefit to inflation in the upcoming budget cycle.

Issue: The OSA heard from seniors who had paid out-of-pocket for the Pneumococcal vaccine (often referred to as pneumonia vaccine) at their pharmacy.

OSA Action: The OSA reached out to the Department of Health and Community Services for information and clarification about this vaccine which we understood was a publicly funded (free of charge) vaccine for seniors.

Response: The Department of Health and Community Services stated that this fall, the Pneu-C-20 vaccine replaced the previous Pneu-P-23 vaccine for adults age 65 and older. It is free of charge if it is received through the publicly funded system, which is your community health centre/public health office. Which means, at this time, if seniors receive this vaccine at a different location i.e., a pharmacy, they may be charged a fee. As well, seniors are encouraged to reach out to their local public health office or primary care physician to discuss eligibility for the vaccine.



ADVOCACY ACTIONS



Issue: Government is considering developing a Decision-Making Framework to help people who require support when making decisions. Government had an online survey that the public could complete. The OSA was invited to complete the online survey.

OSA Action: The provincial government is considering developing a framework to modernize decision-making legislation and policies in NL. Legal capacity is the ability for people to make their own life decisions: signing contracts, choosing medical treatments, etc. As adults we are presumed to be capable of making our own decisions unless it has been proven otherwise. There are many laws in NL to support persons without legal capacity and many do so through substitute decision-making, meaning that someone else makes decisions on the person's behalf.

The OSA wrote the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development seeking a meeting on this important matter and subsequently provided a submission to government with our input including concern that there was insufficient public education and awareness of this issue to ensure seniors had adequate opportunity to provide informed responses.

This is a very important issue for seniors who may currently be directly impacted, but there are potential future implications for all of us.

Response: The OSA will monitor this process and advocate for the seniors, and senior-serving organizations, to be informed on this initiative and provided opportunity for meaningful engagement.





ADVOCACY

ACTIONS



Issue: The OSA and many community partners are hearing from seniors and/or their family members about situations where an adult child, other family member, or caregiver moves into a senior's home, becomes abusive or intimidating and then refuses to leave when asked to do so. Further, there was no legal recourse to have the person removed. The solution found was to expand the categories of persons who may apply for an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) through the **Family Violence Protection Act (FVPA)**, specifically to allow a family member or a person in a care relationship to make an application for an emergency protection order.

OSA Action: Beginning summer 2023, the OSA and community partners worked together to find a solution and advance it to government. This expansion of the **FVPA** would bring this province in line with five other provinces which currently allow family members and other persons in trusted relationships, not just intimate partners, to apply for protection orders in cases of family violence and/or abuse.

Response: The Department of Justice and Public Safety accepted our proposal and expedited the legislative amendment process. On December 4, the **FVPA** amendments received Royal Assent and now seniors can apply for an EPO that enables them, under specific circumstances, to have the family member or a person in a care relationship removed from their home and other conditions. There will be further community awareness and education on this new support.



Public Engagement



On October 3, Advocacy Consultants, Tanya Billard and Pamela Dawe, attended the Seniors' Expo in CBS.



Advocacy Consultant, Pamela Dawe, presented to the NL Public Service Pensioners Association on October 10. As well, the OSA set up an information booth at this gathering.



On October 11, Advocacy Consultant, Pamela Dawe, attended the Random Age-Friendly Communities Board's 8th Annual Seniors' Information Fair, at Clarenville Middle School.





Public Engagement



On November 15 & 16 the Seniors' Advocate travelled to Corner Brook to participate in a collaborative event for researchers, community organizations and stakeholders. The session, *Collaborative Development for Aging Research in Newfoundland and Labrador: Planning Priorities, Partnerships, and Projects* was organized by the Aging and Research Centre (ARC-NL).

The Seniors' Advocate had some great discussions with seniors on November 21. Thanks to Earhart's 50+ Club in Harbour Grace, and the North River Friendship Club in South River, for hosting!



On November 21, Advocacy Consultant, Pamela Dawe, was a guest speaker at Memorial University for *Critical Issues in Healthy Aging* course.

On November 26, Advocacy Consultant, Pamela Dawe, presented to the Post-Secondary Education and Learning Across the Lifespan Pillar Committee of the Education Accord NL to help guide the Pillar Committee's work.

The Seniors' Advocate was pleased to present to the City of St. John's Seniors' Advisory Committee on November 28th outlining issues impacting seniors and ongoing work in our Office.



Media Interviews



On September 3, the Advocate was interviewed for an article in the Telegram about access to transportation for rural seniors

Read here!



On October 2 the Seniors' Advocate spoke with VOCCM's Geri Lynn Mackey about National Seniors Day and International Day of the Older Person.

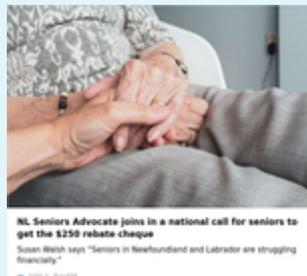
The Seniors' Advocate issued a news release on November 4 about the plan to convert 15 single occupancy rooms at Corner Brook Long-Term Care (LTC) to double occupancy rooms, she was interviewed by Jodi Cooke, NTV News, on November 5.

Watch here!

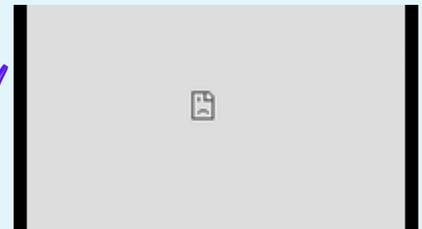
[https://ntv.ca/evening-newshour/%20\(November%205,%202024\)](https://ntv.ca/evening-newshour/%20(November%205,%202024))

The OSA issued a News Release on December 5 regarding the December 2 letter from the Seniors' Advocates from NL, BC and NB to the federal government about the importance of including seniors in the \$250 rebate, currently called the Working Canadian Rebate. Susan Walsh was interviewed by BayFM 100.1 as well as CBC Here and Now on December 5. VOCCM also ran a story on the issue.

Listen here!



Watch here!



Read here!





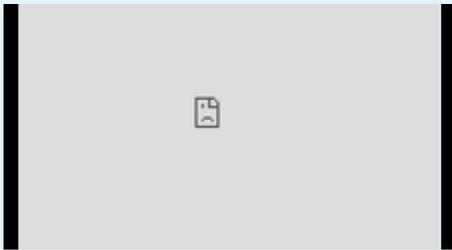
Media Interviews



As mentioned on page 3 of this newsletter, on December 10 the Seniors' Advocate held a media event to release **Seniors' Report 2024 Monitoring Key Indicators of Seniors' Wellbeing in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Baseline Report**. And, not surprisingly, there was a considerable amount of media coverage.

Listen here!

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-210-cbc-newfoundland-morning/clip/16115049-the-provinces-seniors-advocate-says-older-people-newfoundland>

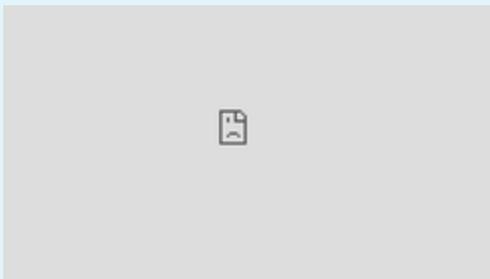


Seniors in western zone long term care are at 20 percent when it comes to clinical restraining
Seniors Advocate Susan Walsh says the Canadian average is 5 percent however in NL from 2022-23 it was 12 percent.
— 100.3 BayFM

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-47-on-the-go/clip/16115162-seniors-wellbeing-report>



Watch here!



Seniors advocate's report highlights rise in crime, long-term care concerns
From a rise in crime, to the inappropriate use of restraints in long term care homes in the province; these are just some of the issues facing seniors, as highlighted in a recent report by the Seniors' Advocate. NTV...



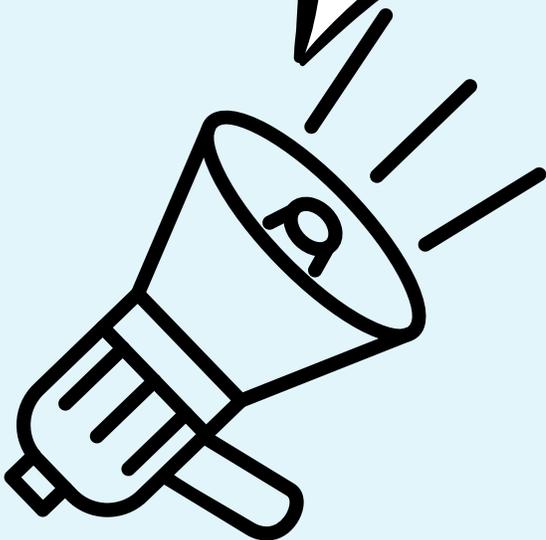
Read here!



Town Hall Meetings with the Seniors' Advocate

This Fall, the Seniors' Advocate completed a number of community engagement sessions, to network with seniors, provide an update on our work and seek input from seniors on her current and future recommendations to government.

If your organization/group would like to meet with Susan in the Spring of 2025, please call 709-729-6603, 1-833-729-6603 (toll free) or email: seniorsadvocate@seniorsadvocatenl.ca. The schedule books up quickly, so be sure to reach out as soon as possible!

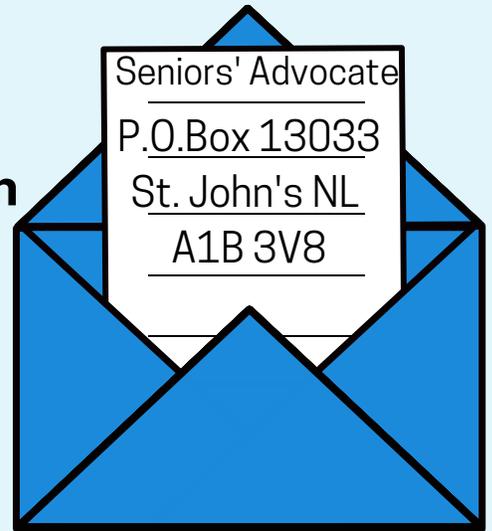




Our Team

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To receive updates and information from the Office of the Seniors' Advocate, contact us to be added to our email list. If you prefer to receive our reports in paper form, please contact the office and we can mail them to you.



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