



SUBMISSION TO THE

Policing Transformation Working Group

and

Policing and Public Safety Division

SEPTEMBER 1, 2026



Office of the

SENIORS' ADVOCATE

Newfoundland and Labrador

INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate (OSA) is pleased to offer this submission in response to an invitation to provide input on public safety legislative initiatives, dated August 6, 2026. While there are many similarities to the experiences of the general population, seniors' experiences with policing services can have some unique elements; hence the importance of this submission for your consideration.

Beginning in 1946, many countries experienced a significant increase in the number of births. This growth continued every year through 1964 when the number of births began to decrease. People born during 1946-1964 are the baby boomer generation. This generation is now between ages 61 and 80 years and has a major global influence on the economy, labour market and healthcare.

Medical advancements, economic changes, and strikingly low birth rates have all contributed to Canada's aging population where it is most pronounced in the Atlantic provinces, with Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) having not only the largest proportion of seniors but also one of the fastest growing population of seniors in Canada. In NL, 47.3 per cent of the province are 50 years and older, 25.2 per cent are 65 years and older, and 5.3 per cent 80 and older. Given these aging (and growing) demographics, the likelihood that seniors will require policing services, in some capacity, will increase.

Seniors are typically identified as people aged 65 and older but some people identify as a senior after age 50. But whether a person identifies as a senior at age 50, 65 or 90, as a population group, there is no other cohort with as large an age span. Despite the large number of seniors, ageist attitudes and actions make many feel marginalized and vulnerable; negative feelings can elicit negative treatment. And while this is not unique to older adults, this age group is routinely subjected to adversity. While most destructive "isms" like sexism and racism are globally censured, ageism is too often regarded as less serious and seniors, therefore, less important.



WHAT IS KNOWN

Ensuring the safety and protection of NL seniors is a critical aspect of their wellbeing. The OSA's **Seniors' Report 2025** notes that Canada reports similar levels of abuse towards seniors as the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. This abuse can look very different for everyone who experiences it and can be incredibly distressing to seniors and those who care for them. We know that seniors are victimized far more frequently than what is reported to police. The reasons for their reluctance to report offenses varies, but often includes fear of retaliation, sense of shame or embarrassment, and an inability to do so due to cognitive impairment.



Adults at risk of abuse and neglect who do not understand or appreciate the risk are protected by law in NL under the **Adult Protection Act (APA)**. The **APA** applies to every adult resident of NL to whom the **Children, Youth and Families Act** does not apply; this means individuals 18 years or older, regardless of living arrangement. Every person has a legal obligation to report suspected abuse or neglect. Each report of abuse or neglect is reviewed by a social worker and, if appropriate, a plan is put in place to protect the adult. In 2025, there were 554 reports made under NL's **APA** – an increase of about 13.3 per cent from 2024 and 89.7 per cent from 2020. This increase was noted about the same time as the proclamation of the **APA** in 2021 which was accompanied by an extensive public awareness campaign on reporting suspected abuse and neglect, as well as training for front-line personnel.

Seniors may be victims, perpetrators and/or witnesses. Seniors may be targets of every kind of abuse, especially physical, emotional, financial, sexual and spiritual. Crimes against seniors encompass various offenses that can take advantage of their vulnerabilities. Seniors may be perceived as easier targets due to physical and cognitive limitations. Increased frailty can place seniors at greater risk of harm, especially in cases involving violence. Seniors are sometimes likely to refrain from reporting themselves as victims of a crime in general, but especially not to law enforcement.

The number of violations involving a senior victim rose significantly from 329 in 2019 to 565 in 2023. In 2025, there was a provincial decrease of 19.1 per cent compared with the previous year. While yearly variations are expected, it is noteworthy that the change is not equal across urban and rural areas. Data from urban regions shows a 26.3 per cent decrease over the past year and rural data indicates a 13.5 per cent decrease.

The Department of Justice and Public Safety's (JPS) Victim Services' data shows that in 2025–26, there were 227 requests by, or for, seniors. This is the first year showing a decrease after four years of increases. And while the growing number of seniors plays a factor, the rate of crimes per 1,000 seniors had also increased although not uniformly across regions. RNC data shows a 12 per cent increase in the number of crimes against seniors, while RCMP data shows a 4 per cent increase.

It is also important to monitor the level of criminal behaviour perpetrated by seniors, because sudden changes in this area may indicate a range of systemic issues such as financial insecurity, mental health and addiction issues, and a lack of appropriate and necessary supports and services. The number of criminal violations perpetrated by a senior increased by 15.8 per cent from 2020 to 2025 and increased by 6.1 per cent from 2024 to 2025. In 2024, a total of 78 seniors were in custody.

Seniors who are isolated, dependent on others, institutionalized, or have an impairment or disability are at great risk. It is no surprise that seniors who experience violence are more likely to suffer extreme negative outcomes than younger age cohorts, including institutionalization and death. Ensuring that police officers are aware of the differences within the age group, including age-related health concerns, increased risk of victimization, as well as available community resources, is essential to keeping seniors safe in the community. Protecting seniors requires public education and awareness, appropriate support services, and adequate reporting and judicial processes.

HOW WE KNOW

In addition to regular ongoing contact with seniors via mail, email or telephone, the OSA has met with well over 1,000 seniors throughout Newfoundland and Labrador during community consultation sessions since its inception. The seniors we have been listening to come from all socio-economic backgrounds, from wealthy, independent seniors to the most vulnerable people in our society living in extreme poverty and wholly dependent on external assistance. In 2025-26, 6.2 per cent of calls received by the OSA concerned abuse of seniors.

Individual experiences with policing services differ regarding nature, intensity, and perceptions. Poor health and age-related conditions, such as dementia, can place a person at higher risk of abuse. Diminished cognitive capacity heightens susceptibility to being taken advantage of and maliciously manipulated. Many seniors subsist on fixed incomes. Living with limited financial resources makes recovery from victimization quite challenging if not impossible.

Police may be called to respond to a suspected case of elder abuse or a complaint of criminal activity involving a senior with cognitive impairment. When first responders lack training or have inadequate insight into the possible behaviours associated with certain illnesses or dementia, the situation can escalate to one of high-risk situation. For example, an individual with dementia may present as impaired, agitated, confused, emotional and/or fearful. The person may not be able to answer basic questions or provide any information. The person could even experience hallucinations or delusions. Police officers, like all first responders, must have an awareness of and recognize the signs of certain illnesses and



dementia, particularly if the individual is confused and agitated with no other obvious reasons for the behaviours. When a responder does not have appropriate training or access to effective de-escalation strategies, a situation can become more difficult to manage and can escalate.

After a tense situation has been resolved, the final action of a police officer should be to ensure that the family is made aware of available community resources, supports and services. On the surface this might sound like a duty beyond the scope and practice of a police officer. But this final action is an example of the preventative component of police work. The provision of information is akin to throwing a family a lifeline to help navigate a complicated situation during a very stressful time; this information might be what actually prevents repeat visits to the home by police officers. Without positive changes or assistance, it stands to reason that a situation will be repeated.

Globally, the increased use of technology has exposed all of us to a myriad of previously unimagined intimidations. Although seniors are becoming more comfortable using technology, some seniors tend to be less technologically savvy than younger cohorts of the population. Limited experience with the internet has led to a tendency for some older adults to be more naïve to the risks and take fewer precautions therefore placing them at a higher risk for falling victim to frauds/scams and abuse (Jiang et al., 2016). Some seniors actively avoid using technology for fear of falling victim to a cybercrime or scam. For the times we now live in, the decision to avoid technology is not a viable option.

Concerned family members, who have older parents who have fallen victim to such frauds/scams cite limited resources to help them navigate the situation or how to protect their parent from further harm. It is clear that as scams become more elaborate and continue to evolve to suit the needs of the perpetrators, the risk to the general population increases, further elevating the vulnerability of older adults (Alagood et al., 2023). To reduce such crimes, police officers must continue ongoing efforts to educate the public on safe internet use and protective resources, with a focus on older adults.

Data shows that reported criminal offenses perpetrated by seniors decreased prior to 2022, after which time these offenses began to increase. While it is difficult to make sound conclusions about senior offenders, sudden changes in this area may indicate a response to a range of systemic issues such as financial insecurity, mental health and addiction issues, and lack of appropriate and necessary supports and services (Holzer et al., 2022).

Some seniors have expressed a negative attitude about the quality and availability of police services. Generally, these sweeping opinions seem to be associated with personal, adverse experiences likely from not receiving the care and protection from the police that they expected. Some seniors attribute their perceptions to their precarious living circumstances, i.e., housing-insecure, homeless and economically disadvantaged. These seniors are especially vulnerable and live with the fear of retaliation from people within their social circles if they were to phone the police for assistance; they feel unprotected, unheard, and unimportant.



Other seniors believe that their dwindling confidence in the ability of police to serve and protect them is due to the absence of a regular community police presence. This opinion was expressed more often in the more rural and remote regions of the province. Seniors compared current circumstances to past partnership models when the bond between police and community was stronger. Citizens knew the police officers and the officers knew the people. Police officers remained in communities for long time periods so that they connected to the community and the people; it was community policing in its truest form. Consideration of geographic deployment with longer-term assignments/placements of police officers could enhance services and facilitate improved, positive contact between police and citizens, thus establishing stronger relationships and mutual

accountability. By knowing the communities and the residents, police officers know the people whose behaviours place others at risk, and they know who is at risk. While it might be naive to expect a complete return to this model, much can be said about the benefits of feeling connected to police officers. Citizens feel more secure knowing police are nearby and able to respond quickly. Further, whether there are more police officers available, or they have a greater ability to respond more immediately, this can be a significant factor in deterring crimes. The general premise is that the presence of more police officers means not only that they will apprehend more criminals but also that there is a deterrence effect theorizing if criminals or would-be criminals feel there is a greater chance of being caught in a criminal act, they may choose not to act (Dao et al., 2021).



An issue brought to the attention of the OSA is the challenge seniors experience when removing/evicting unwanted individuals from their homes who refuse to leave. These individuals may be an adult child/grandchild, other family member or a non-relative. In some of these cases, elder abuse or other types of violence directed at the homeowner occurs. While the **Family Violence Protection Act** allows for the issuance of Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs), the **Act** is limited in whom can apply for these orders. Currently, only the person who experienced family violence, a police officer, or a lawyer can apply for an EPO. This should be broadened to increase access to EPOs for individuals who need them.

Subsection 4(2)(a) of the **Act** allows a police officer or lawyer to make an application for an EPO on behalf of an applicant. Subsection 4(2)(b) of the **Act** allows for a member of a class of persons designated in the regulations to make a request on behalf of an applicant. One potential option is to designate certain groups of front line workers with authority to make applications for EPOs on behalf of applicants. This could assist with current access issues and make the process less stressful for individuals who've had negative experiences with police in the past.

The process for variation/termination hearings can be retraumatizing and not all survivors have legal representation. Anecdotally, we have heard of survivors having to face their abusers in Provincial Court in variation/termination hearings. Many abusers use the court system to maintain power and control over survivors. Legal representation should be provided for survivors who have to face their abusers at such hearings. Legal Aid is not always an option given resources and potential conflicts of interest. If such an approach were taken, it would need to be accompanied by an educational campaign explaining the rules around EPOs for service providers, law enforcement, legal system actors, and the general public.

Housing is a critical gap that must be addressed as it can lead to homelessness among seniors. Housing must be affordable, safe, accessible, suitable, and stable, and this province is falling short on each of these fronts. In Newfoundland and Labrador, 6.1 per cent of seniors are in core housing need, rising to 30 per cent among seniors who rent and live alone. These figures demonstrate that housing insecurity is not a marginal issue for older adults; it is a significant contributor to financial insecurity and poverty, particularly for seniors living on low incomes.

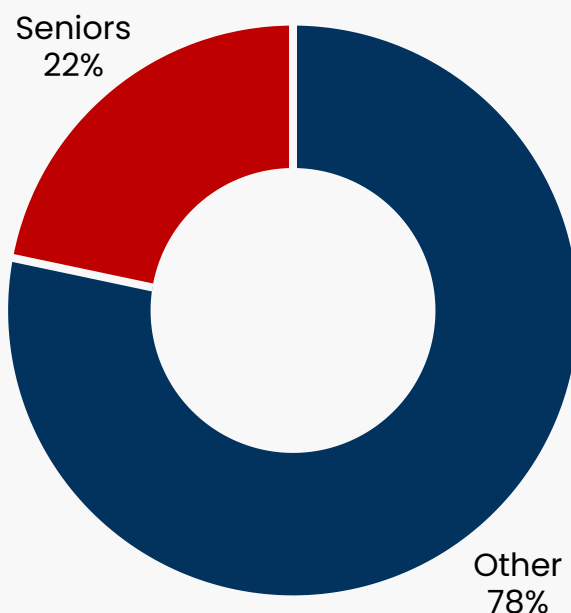
Stronger protections are needed for seniors who rent in the private market. This should include ending no-fault evictions, establishing a cap on annual rent increases, and providing greater support to community housing providers. Government should also set aggressive targets for the creation of new affordable and social housing units and address zoning and other barriers contributing to the current housing bottleneck.

When seniors cannot access or maintain affordable housing, the consequences can be severe, including housing instability and homelessness. Homelessness among older adults requires greater recognition and a specialized response. Twenty-one per cent of people using emergency shelters are aged 55 or older, representing an average of approximately 91 individuals every month.

In St. John's, 22 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are seniors, and 9 per cent of people experiencing homelessness report that they experienced homelessness for the first time after turning 55. These figures directly challenge the misconception that homelessness is primarily a problem affecting younger adults.

Homelessness among seniors can have a big impact on law enforcement. For example, conditions giving rise to homelessness, such as financial insecurity, mental health and addictions issues can lead to circumstances more likely to require police interventions thus putting pressure on limited human resources. This could further strain public relationships with and views on law enforcement. Addressing the issue upstream can help in mitigating potential challenges in the future.

People Experiencing Homelessness in St. John's



WHAT IS NEEDED

For consideration, the OSA offers the following improvement opportunities:

- Education for police officers and other personnel about how and why seniors are more likely to become victims of crimes;
- Ongoing community education and awareness raising sessions for seniors and their families about violence prevention, frauds, scams and abuse, including tips for prevention;
- Education/training on certain illnesses and age-related conditions, including dementia, in which symptoms can be misconstrued as aggression, agitation or non-compliance;
- Education/training about the impacts of poverty, homelessness/housing instability, and how the experiences of seniors differ from other age groups;
- Increased knowledge on community resources and supports for seniors and families;
- Education/training on EPOs for service providers and the general public;
- Establish/reestablish a community policing model throughout Newfoundland and Labrador; and
- Increased community presence of police officers to strengthen community partnerships.
- Establish stronger protections for tenants in the private market.

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate thanks the Policing Transformation Working Group for the opportunity to provide a submission on this very important issue and looks forward to learning about the PTWG's findings and final conclusions.





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