

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The right to lifelong learning: Addressing policy challenges for late-life learning in Canada

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(This article belongs to the *Special Issue: Active Ageing and Educational Gerontology*)**Abstract**

Lifelong learning is essential to support optimum development, cope with life challenges, improve healthy autonomy and contribute to a just, sustainable, and prosperous society. The value of the legal right to lifelong learning is not well understood, tested, or applied, as lifelong learning is rarely extended to all people till the end of life. Education or learning was formally accepted as a human right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Together with UNESCO Recommendation against Discrimination in Education (1960), these two international agreements ensure access, relevance, and equity of lifelong learning. Possible reasons for low compliance and slow implementation of lifelong learning to the end of life are discussed. Canada's efforts can serve as a model for lifelong learning policies for later life because, as a federated country, it requires national and provincial laws to work together to achieve the same desired outcome for lifelong learning across thirteen different provinces and territories. Furthermore, for the first time, the 2021 Canadian census provided detailed data for the population aged 65–100 years, and it supports evidence-based policy development regarding for whom, when, what, when, where, and how lifelong learning outcomes can be provided nationally. A combination of need and capacity is a better measure than determining eligibility by age 65–100 years, and the quality of learning should be based on responsiveness to specific needs and its relevance to learners in the last four decades of life. The needs for knowledge range from life management, personal growth, societal contributions, and legacy for the future. Learning options should be continuous, encourage individual choice, and rely on geragogy. To be equitable, learning in later life should be delivered in formal, non-formal, or informal means in residential and institutional settings.

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Keywords: Late-life learning; Human rights; Disaggregated data; National policy**1. Introduction**

Lifelong learning is, by definition, a learning process that lasts till the end of life. It was not a concern when human life expectancy after World War II was around 65 years, covering the working years. However, the life span is growing globally due to better health and living conditions. The number of centenarians is projected to grow from about half a million today to almost 3.7 million in 2050 (Steppler, 2016). Life expectancy after retirement is projected to be as much as 25 years (OECD, 2011), and lifelong learning has to continue throughout life.

As longevity grew, it was possible to delay the provision of learning for people in the later years while gaining a better understanding of the need for learning during the later years and the appropriate process to provide it. Research was conducted to determine if learning was even necessary at this stage and, if so, what purposes it would serve for older persons and society. However, the context has changed. The imperative for late-life learning policy is now additionally impelled by human rights rather than purely societal requirements or optional policies. It is clear that the current learning infrastructure and practices are not designed for the later decades in a century of life. The right to learning requires a systemic approach to learning provision throughout life for all citizens.

1.1. Two international instruments for the right to education

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, education or learning was formally recognized as a human right – The first international instrument. Article 26 stated that learning should be provided through the stages of life, though it did not specify until the end of life (United Nations, 1948). The right to learning values the individual's dignity and ensures optimum development. Learning was seen as vital for all individuals, particularly because knowledge is necessary for accessing other interdependent civil, political, economic, and social rights (United Nations, 1948). Individuals are seen as active agents in their own learning to thrive, participate and contribute to the societies in which they live. As a legal right, compliance by signatory countries was obligatory.

Universal human rights have specified principles that must be understood for policy development and national governance. They are: (i) Universality and inalienability; (ii) indivisibility; (iii) interdependence and inter-relatedness; (iv) equality and non-discrimination; (v) participation and inclusion; (vi) empowerment; and (vii) accountability and the rule of law (United Nations Population Fund, 2005). These overarching principles govern the way in which other related United Nations (UN) treaties that govern human rights are conceived and implemented.

The Universal Declaration adopted in 1948 states that human rights are the rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status but does not specifically mention age and other conditions such as disability. Later, additional international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), offered protection for vulnerable groups such as girls and women, children, and persons with disabilities. There are efforts

currently to formulate a convention on the rights of older persons so that there will be one comprehensive legal international treaty for their protection (Coalition to Strengthen the Rights of Older People, n.d.).

The second international instrument focuses on discrimination in education. This convention against discrimination in education contains 19 articles that define discrimination and the goals and policies of education systems free from discrimination. The Recommendation against Discrimination in Education was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference on December 14, 1960. Countries agree to respect, protect and fulfill this right, and they are obliged to make national commitments for compliance. One hundred and seven countries have ratified the convention and enshrined the right to education without discrimination in their constitutions (UNESCO, n.d.). All countries in the world have ratified at least one treaty covering certain aspects of the right to education. UNESCO regularly monitors the implementation of the Convention and the Recommendation against Discrimination in Education to hold all countries accountable through legal mechanisms. At the international level, human rights mechanisms are competent to receive individual complaints and have settled the right to education breaches. Where the right to education has been violated, citizens are able to have legal recourse before the courts of law (United Nations, 1999).

There is increasing clarity in the way the rights are expressed with time. The right to education and learning are not the same, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) list them both (UNESCO, 2015). The right to lifelong learning is associated with the life outcomes of individuals, while the right to education is a societal or institutional means to assure it. The United Nations expects each country to choose its own approach to resource and implement the way these rights are guaranteed to its citizens.

In 2015, world leaders agreed to 17 interrelated SDGs to create a better, fairer world by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). SDG 4 states: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015). Target 4.7 reads: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development" (United Nations, 2015).

However, the value of the legal right to lifelong learning is not well understood, tested, or applied. Some advocates

are working to make the rights for lifelong learning stronger and legally binding.

1.2. Low compliance and slow implementation of lifelong learning

Several shortcomings and gaps in the protection of the human rights of older persons have been noted. The human rights of individuals are to be respected until the end of life. However, the obligation of countries is not established internationally, nor are they confirmed in national laws. Among the top reasons are that the rights are in multiple international treaties, promulgated by different UN agencies without a common legal framework. There are no specified norms, penalties for infractions, or standards in international law, which are described as “the normative gap” (Coalition to Strengthen the Rights of Older People, n.d.). Due to this multiple and fragmented systems of laws, countries opt out of some. Compliance becomes voluntary and not legally binding. Furthermore, countries could be exempt from the monitoring and reporting regimes that are associated with only some of the treaties. For instance, in many countries, it is unlikely that Target 4.7 of SDG 4 will be met so that lifelong learning will be available to the end of life by 2030. Older people could go to court in a class action lawsuit to claim non-compliance and a violation of human rights to ensure equal access to lifelong learning, but currently, the legal options are complicated.

2. The right to lifelong learning in Canada

Canada is a large federated country, with ten provinces and three territories, with a diverse multicultural population speaking two official languages. Canada has a national Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as human rights legislation (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Every province and territory has its own set of legislation governing human rights and education. Due to the complexity of the federation, Canada is not a signatory of the Convention against Discrimination in Education but complies with the recommendations and reports regularly to UNESCO (Council of Ministers of Education Canada [CMEC], 2018).

Education is a significant human right in Canada. Governments in Canada have established a solid legal framework through legislation at the federal, provincial, and territorial levels that firmly entrenches equality in all spheres of life, including education or learning. Rather than focus on discrimination, Canadian governments recognize education as a fundamental social good, striving for a system which provides equitable and fair access to quality education for all at every level (CMEC, 2018). The effort is directed at ensuring investment and equal opportunities for success. The goal is to provide quality

education through collaborative efforts by governments, civil society, and actors in the education system to ensure Canadians are equipped for life in modern society and can contribute to society throughout their lives.

2.1. Objectives

Some promising conditions make Canada unusually well-placed to pioneer a framework for lifelong learning that includes people 65–100 years. Such upstream thinking can be helpful for the international sharing of ideas regarding policy and infrastructure for full-fledged lifelong learning till the end of life. First, there are 7 million people aged 65–100 years in Canada, forming 18% of the population (Table 1). It would not be possible to claim a policy for lifelong learning if almost one-fifth of the population had no provision for learning. Societal costs are high if there is an asymmetry in knowledge and skills between cohorts resulting in a generation gap. Second, the policy would have to serve a multicultural and multilingual population which requires a level of complexity for delivery. Many other countries are experiencing increased migration, too, and are likely to face similar situations. Third, Canada has a fairly well-developed education system (CMEC, 2018), and those aging out of the system into old age would demand such services. Fourth, while the UN Declaration of Human Rights does not specify age as a basis for discrimination, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom does. Fifth, developing a policy framework without granular data for the population aged 65–100 years would be difficult.

In 2021, for the first time, the Canadian Census provided preliminary disaggregated data on this population group (Statistics Canada, 2022a). These data can drive discussion on a policy framework regarding whom, what, when, where, and how lifelong learning can be provided in later life. Most countries only report aggregated data on the population aged 65 years and over. With these points

Table 1. Age distribution of the Canadian population aged 65–100 years and over by 5-year cohorts, Census 2021

Age	Total	Men	Women
65 years and over	7,021,430	3,224,680	3,796,745
65–69 years	2,210,975	1,065,305	1,145,670
70–74 years	1,847,580	879,845	967,735
75–79 years	1,260,935	589,090	671,845
80–84 years	840,550	370,900	469,645
85–89 years	525,440	212,740	312,700
90–94 years	258,035	87,305	170,730
95 – 99 years	68,385	17,670	50,710
100 years and over	9,540	1,825	4,660

Source: Statistics Canada (2022c): Canadian census 2021.

in mind, a policy framework in compliance with the human right to education could be developed for lifelong learning. The objective of the present study is to develop a preliminary model framework of rights-based lifelong learning based on national statistics that would extend lifelong learning to the end of life.

2.2. Principles for a rights-based approach to late-life learning

Since learning is one of the universal rights, every individual is entitled to it. It is inalienable, which means that once granted to an individual, it cannot be extinguished or removed due to age. As entitled individuals, they do not need to claim it or activate it. Strong evidence is that late-life learning improves economic, social, and civic outcomes (AARP Research, 2022; Boulton-Lewis, 2010). Therefore, the right to learning is strongly interrelated with other rights. Since all individuals are equal under human rights law, neglecting people's late-life learning would be considered discrimination due to age. Older persons could make free and autonomous decisions regarding their learning and be entitled to meaningful societal participation and opportunities for contribution to other spheres of life, such as paid or unpaid work, civic activities, and social engagement. Compliance with learning rights by governments and education-related organizations will be a challenge because completely new learning opportunities may have to be created for later life within these strict requirements. A rights-based approach should ensure access, relevance, and equity of lifelong learning opportunities for all members of this population group, and governments can be held accountable for such provision.

2.3. Data evidence for the policy framework

Statistical data systems were set up decades ago, and the general standard since then was to present aggregated data on those 65 years and over since it was a minor proportion of the population. Due to population aging, this segment is now large and continues to grow. For the first time, preliminary Canadian census 2021 data were used to provide a more comprehensive picture of the population aged 65–100 years. Although the granularity and variables are not as rich as for other age groups, this is a great advancement recognizing the importance of such data for many policies of all levels of government for this population group. More detailed disaggregated data for statistical analysis would be required for the development of evidence-based learning policies and programs for later life for action by governments.

A descriptive analysis of these preliminary data is used in this paper to discuss objectives for policy goals for late-life learning and the potential infrastructure for delivery.

2.3.1. Available data on the population aged 65–100 years (and over) from the Canadian Census 2021 and related collections

The policy framework requires the analysis of available data to determine the size of the policy target group, the diversity of the population segment, the relative distribution of needs and demands, the potential nature of the response, equity in provision and outcome compared with other population groups, and the degree of defensible legal compliance.

2.3.1.1. Size and proportion of the population aged 65–100 years

The size and relative proportion of the population aged 65–100 years is essential to plan for the target clientele to be served and to ensure fairness and equity relative to other groups since they all enjoy the same right. The provision of learning opportunities, however, has to be related to the priorities of their stage of life.

There were 7 million Canadians aged 65–100 years, compared to 6 million children under the age of 15 years. In 2020, 15.9% of the population was aged 0 to 14 years, 66.1% fell into the 15 to 64 age group, and 18.0% were 65 years and over (Statistics Canada, 2021b).

2.3.1.2. Age distribution of the population aged 65–100 years

Eligibility for a targeted policy will depend on the age distribution within this older population. There is a vast difference in the need and purpose for learning between 65 year olds and 95 year olds. Further, they are likely the most diverse population group because of their varied work and learning backgrounds and because they develop additional intersectionalities such as disability and changed economic status (including retirement) over decades of life. Living “century lives” is no longer rare. There were over 9500 centenarians living in Canada in 2021—a 16% increase from 2016. Centenarians represent 0.03% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022c). [Table 1](#) presents the age distribution of the population aged 65–100 years and over from the Canadian Census 2021.

The data were also available by single years of age and gender. [Table 2](#) presents the data for the subsample of Canadians aged 90–100 years. Single-years-of-age data are useful for examining policy impacts. For example, the number of Canadians impacted at 71 years, when they have to stop contributing to tax-free savings and start withdrawing funds which are taxed as income, can be seen. The average national life expectancy at birth in 2020 was estimated to be 81.7 years, down from 82.3 years the year before due to the COVID pandemic but is expected to return to pre-pandemic levels once the health crisis recedes (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2022;

Table 2. Number of Canadians 90 years and over by single age, Census 2021

Age	Total	Men	Women
90	73,790	27,050	46,740
91	60,655	21,065	39,585
92	49,550	16,215	33,335
93	41,235	12,880	28,355
94	32,805	10,095	22,715
95	25,445	7,245	18,200
96	16,320	4,250	12,070
97	12,125	2,940	9,185
98	8,555	1,960	6,590
99	5,940	1,280	4,660
100 years and over	9,540	1,825	7,705

Source: Statistics Canada (2022d): Canadian Census 2021.

Statistics Canada, 2022b). However, Canadians are likely to live for two decades after age 65, and they need knowledge about the world in which they live. The age distribution is important because, though some characteristics and conditions increase with age, individual needs may not be strictly associated with age, and learning opportunities must be matched with need rather than age.

By 2030, one in four Canadians will be 65 years and over, and those in this age group will have aged during this time period. A measure of the growth rate of the population aged 65 – 100 years and over is essential so that provision of appropriate learning opportunities keeps pace with the increase in age cohorts. The population aged 85 and older is one of the fastest-growing age groups, increasing by 12% from 2016 to 2021. Furthermore, it is projected to grow at an even faster pace, growing at a rate of 15.9% between 2021 and 2026, 24.7% between 2026 and 2031, and 32.7% between 2031 and 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Learning infrastructure will have to first meet current needs and then grow at the same graduated pace with a focus on opportunities for those aged over 85 who are growing the fastest.

Since women tend to outlive men, many end up living alone, affecting their access to learning opportunities. The majority of people aged 65 – 100 years and over are women, but the number of men in this age group is increasing at a faster pace, particularly at older ages. In 2021, for those aged 85 and over, there were 1.7 women for every man, compared to 1.9 women for every man in 2016. This trend is more evident among centenarians. In 2016, there were over five women for every man aged 100 and over, but by 2021, the ratio had declined to four women for every centenarian man (Statistics Canada, 2022a). See also

Table 3. Percentage of population aged 65 and over in Canadian provinces and territories, 2021

Canadian provinces and territories	Percentage of population aged 65 and over
Newfoundland and Labrador	23.1
Prince Edward Island	20.2
Nova Scotia	21.8
New Brunswick	22.5
Quebec	18.0
Ontario	18.8
Manitoba	16.5
Saskatchewan	16.7
Alberta	14.4
British Columbia	19.7
Yukon	13.8
Northwest Territories	9.3
Nunavut	4.1

Source: Statistics Canada (2021c).

gender data in Table 1. Still, opportunities must meet the specific needs of widows or women living alone.

2.3.1.3. Geographic distribution

The spatial distribution shows the number of older people in each province. Except for the three northern Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut), every province had more than 10% of their population aged 65 and over in 2021. In the Atlantic provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador), a fifth of the population was aged 65 and over (Table 3). The lack of learning opportunities for this group would cause not only inequitable access between generations but also affect the economic and social outcomes of the whole population.

2.3.1.4. Selected health conditions experienced by Canadians 65–100 years and over

The aging process can have varying impacts on Canadians 65–100 years and over in terms of health. The vast majority of them are able to conduct activities of normal life, including learning, despite experiencing aging-related health conditions and changing mobility capabilities. Under the human rights approach, no assumptions can be made that those with health conditions or limitations will not be learners. Although small minorities (under 5%) suffer from illnesses such as dementia that could prevent them from taking advantage of learning opportunities, the vast majority are eligible for them. Illnesses that could impact cognitive development and chronic conditions

Table 4. Selected illnesses and chronic conditions of Canadians 65 and over (2019/2020)

Health condition	Total		Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Illnesses						
Parkinson's disease	56,200	0.9	36,300	1.2	19,900	0.6
Alzheimer's disease	140,400	2.2	58,500	2	81,900	2.4
Stroke effects	262,900	4.1	140,400	4.7	122,500	3.6
Chronic conditions						
High cholesterol	2,855,900	29.2	966,100	12.7	889,800	26.2
High blood pressure	2,810,700	43.8	1,293,400	43.4	1,517,300	44.2
Osteoporosis	893,400	14.0	138,700	4.6	754,700	22.2
Arthritis	2,980,700	46.5	1,142,800	38.3	1,837,900	53.6
Diabetes	1,217,200	18.9	680,700	22.7	536,600	15.6
Heart disease	973,300	15.2	557,000	18.8	416,300	12.2

Source: Statistics Canada (2021a). Note: Illnesses that could impact cognitive development and chronic conditions (prevalence of over 10%), which could affect residential decisions of people 65 years, were selected.

(prevalence of over 10%), which in turn could affect residential decisions of people 65 years and over, are presented in Table 4.

2.3.1.5. Location

The provision of learning can occur in institutions of learning, community facilities, or dwellings (Findson & Formosa, 2011). To plan for equal access, it is necessary to know where members of this population segment live and how capable they are of accessing learning in locations outside their homes.

The vast majority of people 65 and over prefer to age in place in their own dwellings. Table 5 shows the number of Canadians aged 65 and over who continue to live in their own homes with the help of home adaptations and care from family and community sources. About two million of them have adapted their homes. There are more women than men in every category, indicating that more women live in the community than men.

A significant number of people aged 65 and over possess a valid driver's license, but it likely declines as individual's age. Furthermore, some older drivers tend to drive short distances and prefer not to drive at night. The number of Canadians aged 65 and over with a valid driver's license is shown in Table 6.

Due to health status and need for care, the move to collective dwellings increases with age. In 2021, almost 238,000 Canadians aged 65 and over (28%) lived in retirement residences, long-term care facilities, or nursing homes. While 20.5% of those 85–89 years lived in such collective dwellings, the percentage rose to 36.4% among 90–95 year olds and 45.8% among 96–99 year olds

(Statistics Canada, 2022a). Among centenarians, about half (53.7%) lived in collective dwellings. The learning needs of those living in collective dwellings may differ from those aging in place, in terms of both content and provision.

2.3.1.6. Productive activity and contribution to society

Continuous learning is important for individuals to function in a dynamic society and make meaningful contributions to the community. During the 20 to 40 years between age 65 and the end of life, Canadians in this age range logged the most average volunteer hours (221), although they had a lower volunteer rate (32%) as shown in Table 7.

3. Framework for late-life learning policy development

A policy framework examines the objectives against statistical information to better develop policy initiatives with high odds of success. The preliminary data from the Canadian Census 2021 can be used to draft such a policy framework. The framework is based on a system which would rely on the independent learning decisions of the learner rather than the provider and not be associated with a process such as rehabilitation. It provides some guidelines that indicate the level of policy effort that would be required, the factors, such as functional ability, geographic location, and living arrangements) that would affect the cost per person for developing a budget, and the potential indicators for monitoring and evaluation when designing potential policy actions or programs. While later policy development will be based on detailed data analysis and research evidence, the framework narrows down the canvas and provides some indications of the potential types of client demand.

Table 5. Use of dwellings and services by Canadians aged 65 and over (2019/2020)

Descriptor	Total		Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Home has adaptations	1,985,400	31.0	762,000	25.6	1,223,400	35.7
Assistance from family, friends, or neighbors for health problems or limitations in the past 12 months	1,058,300	16.5	354,700	11.9	703,600	20.5
Assistance from community support services in the past 12 months	579,800	9.0	208,100	7.0	371,700	10.8

Source: Statistics Canada (2022d).

Table 6. Canadians 65 and over who possess a valid driver's license (2019/2020)

Descriptor	Total		Men		Women	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Valid driver's license	5,274,400	82.0	2,685,100	89.7	2,589,300	75.4

Source: Statistics Canada (2021a).

3.1. Rationale

During the last 20 years of life, learning cannot be denied to Canadians because they have to understand the world they live in (for example, climate change), adapt to societal changes that affect their quality of life (for example, online grocery shopping), participate as Canadian citizens (for example, voting) and continue their personal growth to ensure a meaningful life.

Furthermore, by 2030, a quarter of the population will fall into this age group. From a practical standpoint, ensuring an inclusive policy that allows meaningful societal participation and contributions from this group makes sense. They are also active voters.

Learning is a human right: Canadian human rights legislation prohibits discrimination by age. Access to knowledge for all citizens is a right, particularly because knowledge is necessary to access other interdependent civil, political, economic, and social rights.

3.2. Target clientele

Canadians in later life are a large and under-served group in terms of learning opportunities, particularly those in the older decades. There are about 7 million potential learners in this population group aged 65 years to 100 (and over) (Table 1), and only about 500,000 of them could have conditions that would affect their cognitive capabilities. Their numbers are projected to grow to 9.5 million by 2030 when they will be one-fourth of the population. There are insufficient learning opportunities at present, but any new or augmented system for late-life learning has to be scaled up rapidly to meet current needs and continue to increase until 2030.

3.3. Equity

While equity results from the fair sharing of benefits through policy, inequities can be created either by a lack of policies or through poor policies disadvantaging a particular population group compared to others. Inequities can also result from poor policy performance due to the inability to handle the volume of demand or appropriate provision. For instance, there are consequences to aging persons and society if learning does not sufficiently support successful aging and the ability to contribute to society. Normal aging does not include cognitive deterioration but rather changes in the way the brain functions. This was demonstrated by the Seattle long-run longitudinal study of older adults (Schaie & Willis, 2010). The lack of necessary learning can reduce their autonomy, life expectancy, and quality of life. The value of the cognitive reserve of older people to society is diminished. Furthermore, in addition to the lost opportunity, learning poverty results in additional costs to society due to higher demands for healthcare, social services, and financial support.

Equity between generations and within the generation has to be considered. The learning needs of the population of children under 15 are well developed and funded, though it is smaller (16%) compared to the group 65 years to 100 years and over, which is larger (18%) (Statistics Canada, 2023). It can be argued that since everyone ages, investments in late-life learning benefit everyone when examined from a lifetime perspective. The current learning infrastructure progressively weakens from K-12 education and higher education when supporting the needs of adults in the workforce and post-retirement. For example, while almost all children attend school, less than a third of adults participate in training (Munro, 2019). Equity within this population group is also an issue because those in the 60–69 age group may have better opportunities than those older.

3.4. Access

Access is a measure of the ability of the targeted population group to find, choose, and use the learning options in a manner that meets their needs and ability. This means that information about late-life learning must be available to this group. At present, there are a few channels to reach them.

Table 7. Formal volunteer rates and hours by the Canadian baby boomer generation and the mature generation (2018)

Participation in formal volunteer activities	Baby boomers, born 1946–1965, currently aged 56–75 years	Mature generation born 1918–1944, currently aged 76–103 years
Total population (thousands)	9348	3148
Number of volunteers (thousands)	3608	996
Volunteer rate (%)	39	32
Total hours volunteered (thousands)	552	221
Full-time, year-round job equivalents (jobs)	287,451	115,114
Average hours volunteered per year (hours)	153	222

Source: Hahmann (2018).

For instance, the Government of Canada used full-page newspaper advertisements (covering the importance of exercise and avoiding internet scams) to reach them, which is generally inefficient compared to targeted dissemination. For this group, both accessible location and mode have to be considered. Private or public transportation to the learning location and a barrier-free learning venue would be essential. Although 82% of the people in this group have a valid driver’s license (Table 6), they may be reluctant to drive if the options are located far away or at night. Remote learning may not be a reliable strategy for this group as they may not have broadband internet or digital appliances. Many of them have never learned digitally and may not have the required skills. Furthermore, a substantial proportion, ranging from 20% of the generation in their sixties – 50% of those in their nineties, lives in collective dwellings. They may be captive to only offers in their institution and may not be able to engage in self-directed learning or have the skills for remote learning.

The British Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning (Schuller & Watson, 2009) showed that <15% of people over 75 take advantage of learning opportunities, based on research in the UK. Many older adults may find it difficult to participate in formal learning (Bjursell *et al.*, 2017). In general, older people with more education make an effort to engage in learning. Institutions such as Universities of the Third Age serve an important role, but their clients tend to be white, middle class, often women, and obviously mobile enough to attend the institution (Formosa, 2019). Access strategies for late-life learning may require that the same learning products may require a mix of modalities such as formal learning in institutions or community locations, learning opportunities brought into collective dwellings as well as some remote learning.

3.5. Appropriateness

The provision of learning opportunities must be appropriate to the needs of this population segment to ensure uptake as well as positive learning outcomes. The learning system

is generally based on products and processes for a single age or single generation, for example, pre-schoolers. When needs are diverse in terms of content, timing, methods, and purpose, as it is for working adults, ensuring appropriateness is a challenge. In the late-life population segment, chronological age is a poor indicator of need. Furthermore, the group is extremely diverse in terms of past education, life experience, intersectionality, cognitive and sensory capacities, and needs, so a customization strategy rather than client segmentation would be practical. This means that the array of choices has to be wide to meet the needs of the entire 7 million in later life. Taking gender as an example, it is well known that women live longer, which means that more women are likely to be widowed and live alone than men, and their needs change with age. More women tend to have chronic conditions such as osteoporosis (22%) and arthritis (54%) (Table 4), both of which can affect mobility and the need for barrier-free environments for both living and learning. Hence, it is unsurprising that 10% more women live in homes that have been adapted than men (26%, compared to 36% of women). Perhaps due to their longer life expectancy, 100,000 fewer women than men have driver’s licenses (Table 6). It is likely that older cohorts in this group have less education and less income, too. Physical ability among both men and women could range from marathon runners to those with very limited mobility who spend most of their time in bed. For the latter, private tutoring or bedside consultation may provide information on topics such as bed exercises and palliative care. These gender factors could be considered in combination for an effective product. Regardless of prior knowledge or education of the learner, a formal course would be appropriate if learning is based on easy-to-understand progression using repetition and reinforcement (varying cognitive skills), relies on discussion and sharing in a small group (the ability for reflection and integration), visual aids adapted in terms of font size, sound quality, volume, and speed of scrolling (sensory limitations), and have the possibility for self-pacing (low stamina and concentration).

The potential for digitally supported learning and online learning can potentially grow in popularity as more people gain digital skills before aging. Older people are one of the fastest-growing clients to use digital gadgets and the internet. Statistics Canada reported that between 2013 and 2016, internet use rose from 65% to 81%, while among those aged 75 and older, usage rose from 35% to 50% (Statistics Canada, 2017). Online learning could be a solution for older people who are less mobile, who use wheelchairs, or who are in bed, but the long screen times can be difficult. Personal scheduling flexibility is offered so that learners can log on at convenient times, from any location and different digital gadgets, and they can learn at their own pace. However, the older learner may be hampered by poor or unstable connectivity or expensive Wi-Fi connections. Furthermore, because of technical advances, there would be a need for continuous upgrading of digital skills.

3.6. Relevance

According to the World Health Organization, healthy aging is the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age (Fallon & Karlawish, 2019). Learning must address the multiple roles people play in later life, not only for their own personal development but also for the benefit of society. People in later life volunteer a lot of time (equivalent to 402,565 full-time jobs (Hahmann, 2018), and learning can help them to make important choices to make their contributions worthwhile.

Four relevant learning goals are proposed for people in this population segment. These learning goals are linked with roles and examples of needs that are especially relevant to this segment and may be less interesting to younger people. So long as, there are good outcomes, the learning opportunities can be formal, non-formal, or informal. The offers have to include culture-sensitive products in official languages and, where necessary, other languages. Examples for each goal are provided below (Brink, 2021).

- (i). Life management: For a successful later life, learning to understand aging in relation to an individual's specific situation to adapt to changes in the living context.
 - *Managing health and well-being*: Understanding age-related health conditions; self-care, including diet and medication; exercise; fall avoidance; information on sensory loss and mitigation; palliative care; and maintaining an active social network.
 - *Prudent financial management*: Personal finance—budgets, loans, taxes; pension management; investment instruments; divestment; prepaid

- funerals and burials; safe use of banking services; protection against scams, and fraud.
 - *Wise consumption*: Cost and energy saving purchases—car, home insulation; informed decision about when and where to downsize or to move to collective housing; online purchasing of age-related products; medically assisted death.
 - *Legal*: Purchase or sale of property; wills and estate planning, bequests, and donations.
- (ii). Personal development: To lead a life of purpose by directing personal growth, first by understanding the economic and social context of their living environment to age successfully, and second, to develop one's interests, talents, and natural abilities to flourish in that context.
 - *Understand the life-world context*. Information on political, social, and environmental matters; scientific advances related to health and aging; evaluate the accuracy, reliability, and credibility of information; media literacy.
 - *Personal interests*. Updating skills; improving digital competence; passion projects such as memoir writing, genealogy, or painting; learning a second language.
 - *Recreation and culture*. Visits to art museums, libraries; choices that increase social activity such as choirs and book clubs; learning through travel.
 - (iii). Societal contributions: To learn to maximize knowledge and abilities to contribute to family, community, and society commensurate with personal capacity.
 - *Caregiving*. Caring for a spouse with special needs; seeking complementary professional and social services care (e.g., respite care).
 - *Grandparenting*. Care and nurturing for the mutual benefit of child and grandparent.
 - *Work*. Knowledge and skills that can be used for current occupation (full or part-time or consulting) or for a second (encore) career.
 - *Volunteering*. Skills in demand in the community or online such as editing, teaching English/or other as a second language.
 - (iv). Legacy for the future: To transmit experience, ideas, and infrastructure for future generations.
 - *Next generation*. Provide a family history, photographic record, inherited health conditions, family artifacts, and genealogy to younger generations.
 - *Carriers of culture and tradition*. Transmit special knowledge, skills or trade, family traditions, traditional language, music, and cuisine to the larger family.

Table 8. Federal government’s roles to establish and operate a late-life learning system to ensure lifelong learning

Role	Example potential policy actions for lifelong learning
Leadership	Make national pronouncements about vision and goals; facilitate the creation of late-life learning to complete the lifelong learning system; stable efforts for long term policy.
Coordinator	Integrate multi-sectoral late-life learning provisions by other actors such as municipalities, learning institutions, unions, employers, private companies, etc.
Interlocutor	Public consultations and consensus building; manage relationships with national organizations, mediate issues; build active networks.
Intergovernmental linkage	Alignment between multilateral government efforts for late-life learning; facilitate exchanges; sharing of resources.
Inform and educate	Exhort universal participation while explaining life-altering benefits; publicize opportunities; public information campaigns; highlight success stories.
Evidence generation	Collect data, conduct, and finance research to create evidence to support decision-making by all actors; evaluation of late-life learning programs; regular dissemination of research results.
Assuror	Assure the provision of choice and opportunities for all stages of life.
Quality assurance	Standards of provision, credentials, proficiency recognition; consumer protection; ensure a reasonable return on investment (fees, time, and effort).
Funder	Support the creation of late-life learning content; cost sharing with other levels of government, incentives to create a diversity of providers, grants, and subsidies to learners.
Operations	Operate late-life learning demonstration programs in public institutions.

Source: Brink, 2023.

- *Citizenship responsibilities.* Knowledge about current issues such as climate change; information to make good voting choices; socially responsible investment.
- *World citizen.* National and international philanthropy; activism for collective well-being and against ageism.

3.7. Infrastructure for learning provision

While it is clear that people in their later years are rights holders, it is more complicated to identify the duty bearers. Such comprehensive provision for late-life learning in a short time cannot be provided by any one sector; but rather by private, public, non-profit, and volunteer sectors combined. However, for successful provision, other

supports are also necessary, such as training in geragogy available to teachers and a wide variety of professionals who provide expert and professional information.

3.8. Role of government

It is unlikely that the federal government will run a national program of late-life learning, particularly because education is a provincial responsibility. Such a complex and varied initiative requiring a diverse and trained workforce cannot be undertaken by the public sector alone; however, the federal government can actively play multiple roles to ensure that its responsibilities for lifelong learning rights are met. Table 8 enumerates the roles that government can undertake in establishing and operating a well-functioning lifelong learning system which includes later life.

4. Conclusions

The development of the policy framework for late-life learning with the help of preliminary census data has shown that it is a huge though worthwhile task to provide late-life learning for the successful development of Canadian citizens throughout life, resulting in national benefits. Ensuring that lifelong learning extends to include late-life learners is not a matter of including late-life learners in existing learning opportunities; rather, because of rising longevity, it is the creation of an effective late-life learning sector. This means additional public funds have to be allocated to partially finance late-life learning. Such investment is likely to find public acceptance for two reasons. First, people in later life are major contributors to the economy as consumers and taxpayers. Second, Canadians will benefit from late-life learning as they age. Though governments can take a leadership role, this would require multiple professionals and all sectors to work in a coordinated way to ensure learning for successful aging. While the framework provides guidance, the heavy work of policy development based on evidence, including the costs of policy options and the sharing of delivery, will have to be the next endeavor. Since the right to learning has been accepted, national governments are obliged to act to ensure compliance.

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Further disclosure

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