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In many regards, it’s never been better to be an older adult in Canada. Statistically people are living longer, in large part thanks to improved public health outcomes and medical advancements\(^1\). Also, the standard of living for many Canadians has seen a dramatic rise over the decades\(^2\), although inequality remains a critical issue. That being said, despite the increased longevity and buying power of Canada’s older adults they have been largely left out of discussions on innovation, and here lies a tremendous opportunity for the private sector and society as a whole.

As we demonstrated in the *Revera Report on Ageism* there is much bias and stigma attached to aging and older adults. Ageism is the most tolerated form of social prejudice in Canada when compared to gender or race-based discrimination. This bias and stigma are reflected in the business world, as well as with Canadian companies that often overlook older adults as a relevant demographic when it comes to product and service development.

In fact, older adults represent a great opportunity for Canadian businesses to tap into their expertise and rethink what the aging experience can look like. Canada’s seniors are actively looking for solutions to make aging easier, and they desire new tools that will increase their independence and choice.

Revera, as a leader in the senior living sector, has the opportunity to hear daily the wants and needs of our residents. In our consultations with them for this report they brainstormed a number of ideas that would deeply impact their lives, such as robotic assistants and a fleet of driverless vehicles. Contrary to the stereotypes, older adults are not afraid of new technologies and have a desire to embrace them.

As Canada’s population continues to age there is an incredible opportunity for innovative thinking, and the chance for intrepid businesses to capitalize on this growing market. At the heart of this issue is the older adult and how we can work with this segment to improve the aging experience.

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\(^1\) [http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2014001/article/14009-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2014001/article/14009-eng.htm)

\(^2\) [http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/canada/](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/canada/)
“Older adults are actively embracing new innovations”

—Hazel McCallion Chief Elder Officer, Revera Inc.
Commentary

I’ve always stressed the importance of living a life of purpose. As Revera’s Chief Elder Officer, I’m thankful for the opportunity to meet with seniors across the country and learn about the vibrant, purpose-filled lives they lead. These are the people I think of when I reflect on the importance of investing in innovations that improve the aging experience.

Seniors are looking for products and services that promote independence and choice. Just consider seniors and technology. Canadian seniors are the fastest growing segment of internet users¹. Many of us rely on technology, such as tablets or cellphones, to keep in touch with family, friends, and work colleagues. Older adults are actively embracing new innovations, and we are particularly interested in those that are designed with us in mind.

This generation of seniors built the innovations of yesterday. Let’s make sure they have a seat at the table to help build those of tomorrow.

Hazel McCallion
Chief Elder Officer
Revera Inc.

¹ http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171114/dq171114a-eng.htm
CALLING ALL CANADIAN BUSINESSES:

Innovate to improve the aging experience

Seniors want the private sector to develop products and services that empower independence

Canada’s seniors are not afraid of innovation and want the private sector to develop products and services that improve the aging experience, empower their independence and provide more choice. That is the overwhelming consensus from a national poll of older adults and consultations with Revera’s residents from coast to coast.

From January to April 2018, Revera consulted with more than 100 seniors across the country, and conducted a national survey to explore how older Canadians view innovation. Our research uncovered the role innovation can play in providing greater independence and comfort as we age.

Seniors shared how the world has undergone dramatic changes over the past century with their generation leading the way. Vehicles replaced horse and buggies resulting in roadways and highways crossing the terrain. Airplanes now carry people across oceans in hours, and vaccinations have eradicated many diseases. Communication technologies have evolved in almost every decade, with radios making way for televisions, televisions for computers, and computers for mobile phones and tablets. The internet has radically changed the way people communicate, and the list goes on.

Today’s older adults were at the forefront of these changes, so why is it that modern innovations rarely take them into account? Time and again during consultations, seniors said they are looking for innovations designed to help them remain independent as they age.

Seniors are looking for innovations that empower them to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives throughout their retirement. Surprisingly, these kinds of innovations are hard to find, or come about as an afterthought, in large part because seniors are not viewed as a primary market for many products and services.

This is an opportunity Canadian businesses can embrace, and there is good reason to do so. As census data from Statistics Canada and a recent report from the Bank of Montreal demonstrate, today’s older adults are better off than any previous generation after seeing their wealth quadruple since 1984. The senior demographic is a growing market with disposable income and a desire to spend on products and services designed for their needs and wants.
Who is a Senior?

Typically, market and other researchers view a senior as a person over the age of 65. There are no other requisite measures. This means that someone who is 65 is viewed, from a product development perspective, with the same lens as someone who is 85 or 100. Imagine categorizing all people between the ages of 20 and 55 as having the same needs and wants. It’s inconceivable.

A first step in viewing Canada’s seniors as an attractive market is the adoption of a more complete understanding of who a senior is. People over the age of 65 are not a homogenous group – they are as diverse as any other demographic cluster, with people in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s all at different life stages, and with different interests, wants and needs. Canadian businesses have the opportunity to develop and market products designed for each of these life stages.
Innovating the Aging Experience

Revera held a series of roundtables with seniors living in its Retirement Residences and Long Term Care Homes across Canada. The company also conducted a national survey of 1,099 Canadians over the age of 65 relating to innovation and the aging experience. The polling categorized older adults into three age brackets: 65-74, 75-84 and 85+. As we just explored, it is necessary to break down differences between these age groups because of the different points of view that arise at different moments in the life of a senior.

Research results show that nearly all Canadian seniors say they are worried about at least one thing as they age. Losing their health was the top response with 39 per cent of respondents saying this was their main concern. Interestingly, this was not the top concern for those over 85 with 32 per cent listing it as their top concern compared to 42 per cent in the 65-74 age range and 38 per cent in the 75-84 bracket. For those ‘super seniors’ over 85 years of age, the top concern was losing their independence at 46 per cent, compared to 35 per cent for those 65-74 and 37 per cent from 75-84.

The majority of Canadian seniors, 87 per cent, said they believed innovation would help solve many worries they have about aging. The results were similar across all age demographics with approximately a third of respondents strongly agreeing.

Eighty-four per cent of seniors believe Canada’s private sector can do more to improve the aging experience. Once again, we see that seniors of all ages are on the same page, and demand a wider range of products and services they can choose from that empower their independence. In fact, 59 per cent of those polled say they are looking for products and services to help them live independently longer. Women, especially, say that the private sector should be investing in products that promote independence (91%).
THE TOP WORRIES OF CANADIAN SENIORS AS THEY AGE...

- They worry about losing their health:
  - OVERALL: 39%
  - 65–74: 42%
  - 75–84: 38%
  - 85+: 32%

- They worry about losing their independence:
  - OVERALL: 37%
  - 65–74: 35%
  - 75–84: 37%
  - 85+: 46%

- They believe innovation will help solve many worries about aging:
  - OVERALL: 87%
  - 65–74: 86%
  - 75–84: 90%
  - 85+: 85%

- They believe the private sector can do more to improve the aging experience:
  - OVERALL: 84%
  - 65–74: 84%
  - 75–84: 85%
  - 85+: 85%

AND HOW CANADIAN SENIORS BELIEVE INNOVATION CAN HELP.
In Revera’s roundtables, residents spoke of their loss of independence as they’ve aged – loss of their driver’s licence, inability to complete daily chores and tasks for themselves, having to rely on others for transportation, meals, medications – and how innovations focused on these areas would allow them to be more independent.

Residents at Humber Valley Terrace Long Term Care Home in Etobicoke, Ontario, wondered if a robot could one day help with chores to make them less reliant on staff and more independent in their day-to-day tasks. Similarly, residents at Renaissance Retirement Residence in Regina, Saskatchewan, imagined a world where robotics could make a difference in healthcare, suggesting a robotic exoskeleton could help people with mobility problems walk again, and allow them to lead an active and independent lifestyle.

Some residents at the Portsmouth Retirement Residence in Winnipeg, Manitoba, dream of a future with only driverless vehicles. They imagined a day when nobody will own a car and instead one will order a car when it is needed. The car will arrive, with no driver, and head to the desired destination. They see this as a positive innovation as no one will require a driver’s licence, and therefore, seniors would not worry about losing their independence along with their licence as they age.

These views reflect the national poll which showed that there is high interest in better transit options for seniors. Women are more likely to be interested in a ride-sharing program for seniors, at 43 per cent, while men are significantly more likely to be interested in a fleet of driverless cars for seniors with 23 per cent saying they would use one. It’s important to note that we are on the cusp of driverless technology becoming more commonplace, and senior mobility must be a central consideration of its implementation.

In Calgary, at McKenzie Towne Retirement Residence, residents shared how innovations have become part of their lives. One resident explained how his iPad™ is like a library at his fingertips giving him access to endless amounts of information. Another talked about how her Fitbit® device allows her to keep track of her health. Others spoke about how banking innovations changed how they manage their finances, using telebanking and online banking. These residents clearly demonstrate how seniors are adopters of innovation, and are not technologically averse as society often labels them. They have embraced these technologies because it is important for seniors of all ages to remain connected in the rapidly changing world around them.

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Seniors are adopters of innovation and are not technologically averse as society often labels them.
Governments can create the conditions for innovation to thrive, but the private sector is the driver of innovation in our economy, creating products and services that meet the needs and wants of older adults. Based on Revera’s national survey and consultations, there are several key recommendations that will create a better environment for the private sector to improve the aging experience.

First, society needs to recognize seniors are diverse, not a single demographic group, with different needs and wants as they age. In so doing, businesses can understand how, by adapting current products and services, they can reach an important and growing market of seniors. Finally, companies need to embrace the opportunity to develop new innovative products and services for older adults who are eager to remain independent as they age.

If society is to truly empower older adults through innovation it must be a collaborative effort. Seniors need the private sector to recognize them as a valuable demographic, and hear their calls for products and services that will improve their lives, as well as empower their independence and provide more choice. Likewise, the private sector needs to work with older adults to identify ways their products and services can improve the lives of older people. A common theme raised during consultations with Revera’s residents was how seniors built this nation through hard work and innovative thinking. The private sector, and society at large, must realize that older adults have a relevant role to play in developing tomorrow’s innovations. Let’s not miss the opportunity.
Governments can create the conditions for innovation to thrive, but the private sector is the driver of innovation in our economy.
About us

Revera is a leading owner, operator and investor in the senior living sector. Through its portfolio of partnerships, Revera owns or operates more than 500 properties across Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, serving more than 55,000 seniors. The company offers seniors’ apartments, independent living, assisted living, memory care, and long term care. With approximately 50,000 employees dedicated to providing exceptional care and service, Revera is helping seniors live life to the fullest. The Revera Innovators in Aging Program is a platform for the company to invest in and scale innovations that improve the aging experience. Revera is investing up to $20 million through the program to bring the most promising innovations to seniors. Through Age is More®, Revera is committed to challenging ageism, the company’s social cause of choice. Find out more at ReveraLiving.com, Facebook.com/ReveraInc or on Twitter @Revera_Inc