

Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults in Whistler: Assessment and Awareness Campaign Strategy

September 2024



The Resort Municipality of Whistler is grateful to be on the shared, unceded territory of the Lil'wat People, known in their language as Lil'wat7úl, and the Squamish People, known in their language as Skwxwú7mesh. We respect and commit to a deep consideration of their history, culture, stewardship, and voice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ACRONYMS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	7
BACKGROUND	7
REPORT FOCUS AND STRUCTURE	7
SECTION 1: PROJECT CONTEXT	8
2021 CENSUS PROFILE	8
RMOW OFFICIAL COMMUNITY PLAN.....	8
WHISTLER AGE-FRIENDLY ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN.....	8
WHISTLER EMERGENCY THREATS	8
WHISTLER EMERGENCY PROGRAM	10
SECTION 2: PROJECT METHODOLOGY	10
ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN	10
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	11
SECTION 3: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS.....	12
PREPARATION	13
RESPONSE	18
RECOVERY.....	25
SECTION 4: AWARENESS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY	27
OBJECTIVES	27
TARGET AUDIENCE.....	28
KEY MESSAGES	28
SLOGAN	28
BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES.....	29
PROPOSED TOPICS	29
MARKETING CHANNELS.....	29
INDICATORS FOR EVALUATION.....	30
APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES.....	30
APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WHAT WE HEARD SUMMARY	32

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of individuals and organizations contributed to this initiative, and the Resort Municipality of Whistler wishes to extend its thanks for their time and effort. We are grateful for their contributions. In particular, we wish to thank those who participated in the engagement process.

We also wish to extend our thanks to BC Healthy Communities for providing a grant in support of this project.

Last but not least, we extend our thanks to Cardea Health Consulting Inc., the consultant for this project, for their work leading the community engagement, conducting the analysis and writing many parts of this report.



ACRONYMS

AIC	Accessibility and Inclusion Committee
BCHC	BC Healthy Communities
CEMP	Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
ESS	Emergency Support Services
MAC	Whistler Mature Action Community
RMOW	Resort Municipality of Whistler
WCSS	Whistler Community Services Society
WFRS	Whistler Fire Rescue Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whistler Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Assessment and Awareness Campaign was funded by a BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) grant under the Age-Friendly Communities Program.

This project was designed to address the following two recommended actions from the 2021 Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan:

1. Explore existing emergency preparedness plans and how they meet older adults' needs; and
2. Consider a campaign to bring awareness to older adults about current emergency preparedness plans.

The main objectives of the project were to:

1. Consult with members of the older adult community in a meaningful and inclusive manner;
2. Assess whether existing emergency plans include the needed direction and resources required to meet the unique needs of older adults both during and after emergency situations; and
3. Enhance the community's ability to proactively address the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by older adults, by providing older adults, their caregivers and the wider community with key information in advance of emergency situations.

The assessment involved an environmental scan followed by community consultation. The environmental scan consisted of a brief analysis of peer-reviewed literature and non-peer-reviewed "best practice" content, followed by a review of Whistler's existing plans, resources and practices and a consideration of practices in similar-sized BC municipalities. The engagement process consisted of focus groups and interviews with older adults and service providers and a meeting with the RMOW's Accessibility and Inclusion Committee. Participants in the focus groups and interviews provided feedback in a facilitated conversation, answering questions based on a Canadian Red Cross and National Institute on Ageing document.

The needs assessment findings are organized according to the three recognized phases of emergency preparedness planning: preparation, response and recovery. For each phase, the discussion focuses on understanding older adult needs, understanding the RMOW's existing plans, resources and practices, and then assessing the RMOW's existing plans, resources and practices for their current age-friendliness. This portion of the report also proposes considerations that could be integrated into the RMOW's ongoing emergency planning.

The campaign strategy developed as part of this project is designed to increase awareness among older adults in Whistler of the resources available for emergency preparedness. The project's proposed campaign strategy offers a targeted and effective path forward by prioritizing the specific needs identified in the assessment. By fostering a culture of preparedness and providing the tools and resources necessary for older adults to navigate emergencies, the campaign is aimed at reducing reliance on emergency services and promoting a more resilient community overall. Key components of the strategy are proposed objectives, target audience, key messages, slogan, best practice principles, proposed topics, marketing channels, indicators for evaluation, and approaches and actions to overcoming anticipated challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The Whistler Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Assessment and Awareness Campaign (the project) was designed to prepare the community to support older adults during a disaster or emergency. With a focus on further improving the age-friendliness of the community in a way that prioritizes the safety, well-being and social inclusion of Whistler's permanent older adult residents, the project's specific objectives were to:

1. Consult with members of the older adult community in a meaningful and inclusive manner;
2. Assess whether existing plans include the needed direction and resources required to meet the unique needs of older adults both during and after emergency situations; and
3. Enhance the community's ability to proactively address the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by older adults, by providing older adults, their caregivers and the wider community with key information in advance of emergency situations.

Background

The project resulted from two recommended actions from the 2021 Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan. This action plan presented 30 strategies and 71 actions for the Whistler community within each of BC's eight age-friendly dimensions. The two actions that were addressed by this project are:

1. Explore existing emergency preparedness plans and how they meet older adults' needs; and
2. Consider a campaign to bring awareness to older adults about current emergency preparedness plans.

To specifically address these two actions, the RMOW applied for a 2023 BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) grant under the Age-friendly Communities Program. The program is funded by the Ministry of Health and aimed at supporting communities to prepare for an aging population that can age actively in place. The RMOW successfully obtained a grant under Stream 2 of this program.

Report Focus and Structure

As the key output of the project, this report summarizes the needs assessment of emergency preparedness supports for older adults in Whistler and proposes an awareness campaign strategy based on the assessment results. The assessment was focused on enhancing the RMOW's municipal Emergency Program, which aims to prepare the RMOW and the Whistler community for significant emergencies and disasters.

The report is divided into the following four sections:

- Section 1 discusses the project context;
- Section 2 details the project methodology;
- Section 3 identifies the results of the needs assessment and provides general recommendations that may be considered in future RMOW emergency planning work; and

- Section 4 presents the awareness campaign strategy.

This report also includes the Community Engagement What We Heard Summary as Appendix A.

SECTION 1: PROJECT CONTEXT

To set the project context, this section starts with an overview of Whistler’s demographics based on Census data, with a focus on older adults. This is followed by subsections that highlight Whistler’s municipal policy direction supporting this project, identify local emergency threats, and touch on current community emergency plans and programs.

2021 Census Profile

Whistler has a population of about 14,000 permanent residents. Of the permanent resident population, about 20% are 55 or older, making older adults a vital and growing part of the Whistler community.¹

RMOW Official Community Plan

The RMOW’s Official Community Plan provides policy direction to support the project. Specifically, Policy 8.7.4.3 and Policy 8.10.2.1 in ‘Chapter 8: Health, Safety and Community Wellbeing’ respectively state that Whistler will:

- Provide public education opportunities that ensure citizens are prepared for, and can respond to, climate-related emergencies; and
- Encourage services, programs and facilities that support the health and social needs of seniors, with a focus on cultural and recreational opportunities and social programs tailored to the needs of Whistler’s seniors.

Whistler Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan

The Whistler Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan final report was received by RMOW Council on December 7, 2021. The action plan guides community partners and the RMOW to help Whistler seniors to age-in-place and further make Whistler an age-friendly community. As noted above, it presented 30 strategies and 71 actions, two of which were addressed by this project.

Whistler Emergency Threats

Currently, the biggest emergency threats in Whistler, in no particular order, include:

¹ Census Profile: Statistics Canada (accessed November 15, 2023). *Census of Population, 2021*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&DGUIDlist=2021A00055931020&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0>

- **Wildfire:** Because of the extensive forested area surrounding Whistler, wildfires are considered a significant threat to the community. It is important to note that wildfires pose a particular danger due to their ability to start close to populated areas, spread rapidly, block escape routes and be somewhat unpredictable. These factors may have a greater impact on older individuals.
- **Wildfire smoke:** Systematic reviews establish a direct link between exposure to wildfire smoke or wildfire particulate matter (PM 2.5) and an increase in overall mortality and respiratory illnesses. The smoke from wildfires can have a significant impact on air quality and can pose increased health risks, for older individuals, vulnerable populations and those with preexisting lung conditions.²
- **Extreme heat:** In the past two decades, there has been a marked increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that threaten older adults' safety. Research has shown that extreme heat can worsen older adults' health and mental well-being, as their ability to regulate their body temperature decreases due to age-related biological changes.³
- **Earthquakes:** While infrequent, earthquakes are also a threat to the Whistler community, primarily because of the potential isolation following the event and the possible support needed for a substantial number of tourists. Damage to the highway and bridges during an earthquake could also render them inoperable.

What is considered a “Disaster” or an “Emergency”?

The provincial *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* provides the following definitions:

“**Disaster**” means a calamity that:

- (a) is caused by accident, fire, explosion or technical failure or by the forces of nature; and
- (b) has resulted in serious harm to the health, safety or welfare of people, or in widespread damage to property.

“**Emergency**” means a state that:

- (a) is the result of any of the following:
 - (i) an event that
 - (A) has occurred, is ongoing or appears imminent, and
 - (B) is caused by one or more incidents, whether or not those incidents occur in the same location or at the same time, of accident, fire, explosion, technical failure, rioting, security threat, terrorist activity within the meaning of section 83.01 of the *Criminal Code*, force of nature or a prescribed type of incident;
 - (ii) the presence, suspected presence or imminent spread of a transmissible disease or an environmental toxin;
 - (iii) a prescribed type of event or the presence or suspected presence of prescribed circumstances, and
- (b) requires the prompt coordination of action, or the special regulation of persons or property, to protect
 - (i) the health, safety or well-being of persons, or
 - (ii) the safety of property or of objects or sites of heritage value.

² Cascio, W. E. (2018). Wildland Fire Smoke and Human Health. *Science of the Total Environment*, 624, 586-595. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2017.12.086>

³ Carr, D., Wing, I. S., Falchetta, G., & Cian, E. D. (2024). Population Aging and Heat Exposure in the 21st Century: Which World Regions Are at Greatest Risk? *The Journals of Gerontology Series A*, 79(4), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gerona/glae053>

- **Flood:** The primary cause of flooding in Whistler is rainfall, but flood risk can be influenced by several factors such as stream flow conditions, freezing levels, snowpack composition and depth, and soil saturation levels.
- **Storms and severe weather:** Severe weather, like blizzards, hail, lightning, high winds or heavy rain, can happen unexpectedly throughout the year. Isolation is a significant impact of severe weather. Highways may be closed for extended periods due to washouts, landslides (debris torrents, etc.), heavy snow and ice, making resupply of provisions very difficult. Prolonged power outages and structural damage could necessitate evacuations.

Whistler Emergency Program

The municipal Whistler Emergency Program prepares the RMOW organization and community for major emergencies and disasters. Program staff closely collaborate with local first responders, such as police, fire, ambulance and rescue services, provincial emergency management, and community groups, to develop and implement plans that promote public safety during emergencies and disasters. Additionally, RMOW staff training is a key objective. The program’s guiding document is Whistler’s Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP), which outlines how the municipality will prepare, plan, mitigate and respond to manage a major emergency or disaster in Whistler. The program is further supported by volunteer teams, the Emergency Planning Committee, the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), public education and training exercises. These and other aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program are described further below under Section 3.

SECTION 2: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The project methodology employed a two-pronged approach to assess the current age-friendliness of Whistler’s emergency plans, programs and practices, and then develop an awareness campaign strategy. First, an environmental scan collected and reviewed relevant information from literature, the RMOW and other BC jurisdictions. Second, facilitated community consultations with older adults, caregivers and service providers as well as with the RMOW’s Accessibility and Inclusion Committee of Council (AIC) offered insights from community members. The environmental scan and community engagement activities are further described below.

Environmental Scan

The environmental scan first involved a brief analysis of peer-reviewed literature and non-peer-reviewed “best practice” content. The literature review provided foundational information for assessing the unique needs of older adults in Whistler during the preparation, recovery and response phases of emergency preparedness efforts. This review included an examination of the Canadian Red Cross and National Institute on Ageing document titled *Closing the Gaps: Advancing Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery for Older Adults*.⁴ It also included a review of the Canadian Red Cross document titled *Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults: A Practical Guide to*

⁴ Canadian Red Cross & National Institute on Ageing (2020). *Closing the Gaps: Advancing Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery for Older Adults*. crc_whitepaper_en.pdf (squarespace.com)

Help Plan, Respond and Recover.⁵ The Closing the Gaps document was particularly relevant to the project because it identified the questions that were used to guide the community consultations.

To assess the direction and resources of Whistler’s existing plans, resources and practices for meeting the needs of older adults in emergency situations (considering their needs before, during and after emergencies), an interview was then completed with the RMOW Emergency Program Coordinator. A review of municipal documents and other resources was conducted after this interview.

Additionally, a scan of plans and resources in similar-sized jurisdictions was completed as part of this project to identify any resources specifically dedicated to older adults; an in-depth analysis of the age-friendliness of their plans and resources was not completed. While reviewing emergency preparedness plans and resources in similar communities such as Sun Peaks Mountain Resort Municipality, District of Squamish, City of Cranbrook, City of Salmon Arm and City of Powell River, it became apparent that there were no specific resources dedicated to older adults. This may reflect the common challenge small communities face when trying to create dedicated resources in the midst of limited capacity and resources.

Community Engagement

A key project objective was to consult the community in a meaningful and inclusive manner. The engagement process consisted of focus groups and interviews with older adults and service providers and a meeting with the AIC. An overview of the engagement activities is listed in the following table and the activities are summarized below. A complete overview is presented in the Community Engagement What We Heard Summary, attached to this report as Appendix A.

Engagement Method	Format	Participants	Timing
Older Adults Focus Group	In-person	14 participants	May 30, 2024
Service Providers Focus Group	In-person	4 organizations; 4 participants	May 30, 2024
Interviews	Phone	1 community-based caregiver participant 1 service provider participant	June 6, 2024
AIC Meeting	In-person	AIC	June 5, 2024

⁵ Canadian Red Cross (July 13, 2022). *Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults: A Practical Guide to Help Plan, Respond and Recover*. https://www.redcross.ca/crc/documents/Emergencies-Guide-for-Older-Adults_web.pdf

Consultation focus groups were held in Whistler on May 30, and the meetings included 14 community members and four service providers. The AIC meeting took place on June 5. A community-based caregiver and an additional service provider participated in one-to-one phone interviews. The following organizations participated in either the Service Providers Focus Group or an interview: Vancouver Coastal Health (Community Services and Older Adult Mental Health and Addiction departments), Sea to Sky Better at Home, Whistler Community Services Society (WSSC) and the RMOW Protective Services department.

The consultation questions were designed to understand the current state of preparedness in the community. They also focused on understanding the information sources and resources participants relied on for emergency preparedness and what additional information could help Whistler's older adults prepare for and respond safely to an emergency. As noted above, data was collected using questions based on the Closing the Gaps document produced by the Canadian Red Cross and National Institute on Ageing.

SECTION 3: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

The overall purpose of the needs assessment was to identify whether existing RMOW emergency plans, resources and practices include the direction required to meet the unique needs of older adults in emergency situations and consider recommendations to improve the age-friendliness of the RMOW's approaches to emergency preparedness.

It is well-recognized that there are three phases of emergency preparedness planning: preparation, response and recovery. The needs assessment findings are organized according to each of these phases. For each phase, the discussion then consists of the following subsections:

- **Understanding Older Adult Needs:** These subsections identify the key older adult needs during the particular phase of the emergency. These needs were derived from peer-reviewed literature and non-peer-reviewed "best practice" content. These needs were also identified from the output of the community engagement.
- **Understanding the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices:** These subsections identify aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program relevant to the particular phase of the emergency.
- **Assessing the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices:** These subsections assess the current age-friendliness of Whistler's emergency plans, resources and practices in consideration of key older adult needs for the particular phase of the emergency. The subsections also propose considerations that could be integrated into the RMOW's ongoing emergency planning.

Preparation

Understanding Older Adult Needs

Given their heightened vulnerability during disasters, emergency preparedness efforts tailored to older adults are critical.⁶ Despite this increased risk, studies have shown that many older community members may not be adequately prepared for emergencies.⁷ Older adults are a valuable asset in emergency preparedness and can contribute to enhancing community resilience.⁸ Tailored emergency preparedness materials and community-based outreach have been shown to enhance awareness and readiness among older adults.⁹ Important considerations to help older adults prepare for an emergency event include:

- **Education and outreach aimed at an older population are essential.** Educational materials and outreach efforts on preparedness are crucial ways to help older adults be involved in creating their own personal emergency preparedness plans. Researchers have found that education about preparedness is most effective when it includes information about the communication methods available during and after an emergency, emergency kit preparation, and what to store, including water, food and alternative power sources.¹⁰
- **Efforts to assist older adults in making their own emergency plans are critical.** Studies indicate that only a minority of community members aged 50 and older have formal emergency preparedness plans in place prior to disasters, and most have not engaged in formal preparedness educational programs.^{11,12}

What We Heard:

Service providers advocated for encouraging self-sustainability and resilience in older adults, but noted this requires clear communication, further education and planning. They shared their efforts, such as patient education materials, seasonal readiness programs, and creating care plans tailored to emergency scenarios.

What We Heard:

Older adult community members want to receive timely updates and access information in multiple formats. Service providers mentioned using a variety of channels, such as mailing inserts (for preparation instructions), social media and direct outreach. Factors like visual impairments, language barriers and differences in technological proficiency were identified for consideration.

⁶ Bell, S., Singer, D., Solway, E., Kirch, M., Kullgren, J., & Malani, P. (2020). Predictors of Emergency Preparedness Among Older Adults in the United States. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 15(5), 624-630. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2020.80>

⁷ Shih, R., Acosta, J., Chen, E., Carbone, E., Xenakis, L., Adamson, D., & Chandra, A. (2018). *Boosting Disaster Resilience Among Older Adults*. <https://doi.org/10.7249/rb10001>

⁸ Howard, A., Blakemore, T., & Bevis, M. (2015). Older People As Assets in Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery: Lessons from Regional Australia. *Ageing and Society*, 37(3), 517-536. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X15001270>

⁹ Bogdan, E., Krueger, R., Wright, J., Woods, K., & Cottar, S. (2024). Disaster Awareness and Preparedness Among Older Adults in Canada Regarding Floods, Wildfires, and Earthquakes. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 15(2), 198-212. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-024-00555-9>

¹⁰ Thompson, A. R., Little, K., & Kim, Y. K. (2024). Emergency Preparedness Among Community-Dwelling Older Adults: Risk and Protective Factors. *Activities, Adaptation & Aging*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01924788.2024.2336748>

¹¹ Malik, S., Lee, D., Doran, K., Grudzen, C., Worthing, J., Portelli, I., & Smith, S. (2017). Vulnerability of Older Adults in Disasters: Emergency Department Utilization by Geriatric Patients After Hurricane Sandy. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 12(2), 184-193. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2017.44>

¹² Shih, R., Acosta, J., Chen, E., Carbone, E., Xenakis, L., Adamson, D., & Chandra, A. (2018). *Boosting Disaster Resilience Among Older Adults*. <https://doi.org/10.7249/rb10001>

- **Resources should not all be digital.** Educational outreach and materials and response efforts should not be solely based on digital materials. Older adults are less likely to use the internet regularly or adopt new technologies. Some older adults have limited access to web-based services and may be less likely to own or use smartphones.¹³
- **Understanding the influences on disaster preparedness can make outreach efforts more targeted.** Understanding the behavioural factors that drive preparedness among older residents is crucial for developing effective training programs and preparedness information, particularly in smaller communities.¹⁴ Social support and regular community participation significantly influence disaster preparedness behaviours among older adults.¹⁵
- **Responses are better when older adults are involved in planning.** The life experiences of older adults can be a strong foundation for improving their emergency preparedness, as past experiences often influence preparedness decisions.¹⁶ Moreover, older adults can contribute positively to disaster response efforts by leveraging their expertise, resources and relationship-building skills to prepare themselves and assist others during emergencies.^{17,18} The exclusion of older adults in planning can lead to adverse outcomes. This is especially true for those with low literacy levels and sensory challenges and for those from more vulnerable or marginalized groups.¹⁹

What We Heard:

Based on engagement with older adult community members, wildfire preparedness and evacuation procedures are identified as a key topics for additional education and awareness.

Understanding the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices

Key aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program that are relevant to the 'prepare' phase of emergency preparedness are described below:

- **Emergency plans:** Whistler's CEMP is the program's guiding document and outlines how the municipality will handle a major emergency or disaster in Whistler. There are several

¹³ Heponiemi, T., Virtanen, L., Kaihlanen, A.-M., Kainiemi Päivikki Koponen, E., & Koskinen, S. (2024). Use and Changes in the Use of the Internet for Obtaining Services Among Older Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Longitudinal Population-Based Survey Study. *New Media & Society*, 26(6), 3146-3167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221097000>

¹⁴ Ashida, S., Robinson, E., & Gay, J. (2015). Motivating Rural Older Residents to Prepare for Disasters: Moving Beyond Personal Benefits. *Ageing and Society*, 36(10), 2117-2140. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x15000914>

¹⁵ Kim, H. & Zakour, M. (2017). Disaster Preparedness among Older Adults: Social Support, Community Participation, and Demographic Characteristics. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 43(4), 498-509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2017.1321081>

¹⁶ Ha, K.-M. (2023). Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Via Culture. *Working With Older People*, 28(1), 61-73. <https://doi.org/10.1108/wwop-01-2023-0001>

¹⁷ Shih, R., Acosta, J., Chen, E., Carbone, E., Xenakis, L., Adamson, D., & Chandra, A. (2018). *Boosting Disaster Resilience Among Older Adults*. <https://doi.org/10.7249/rb10001>

¹⁸ Wu, H., Walsh, C. A., Drolet, J. L., & Breen, K. (2024). Promoting Older Adults' Engagement in Disaster Settings: An Introduction to the Special Issue. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 15, 181-185. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13753-024-00559-5>

¹⁹ Powell, S., Plouffe, L., & Gorr, P. (2009). When Ageing and Disasters Collide: Lessons from 16 International Case Studies. *Radiation Protection Dosimetry*. 134(3-4), 202-206. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rpd/ncp082>

annexes to the CEMP that focus on specific functions or hazards. The CEMP and other RMOW plans are discussed further below under the ‘response’ portion of Section 3.

- **Emergency Planning Committee:** This select committee of Council meets quarterly to advise Council and emergency program staff on matters related to emergency preparation and response. The committee includes representation from all emergency services and other community partners.
- **Training and exercises:** Program staff and Whistler Fire Rescue Service (WFRS) lead and participate in regular training exercises with community partners and other agencies to test systems, improve communication and build capacity for responding to wildfire emergencies. For example, in April 2024, the RMOW, Emergency Support Services (ESS), WFRS and RCMP organized an emergency wildfire evacuation drill, allowing 30 emergency management staff to practice responding to the simulated scenario.
- **Public education, including workshops:** The program helps prepare the community, including residents, businesses, schools and tourism operators, for emergencies through public education initiatives and offers free emergency preparedness workshops. Additionally, the RMOW participates in the annual Great BC ShakeOut, which allows community members to practice staying safe during an earthquake. The RMOW also participates annually in Emergency Preparedness Week, which is a national awareness initiative coordinated by Public Safety Canada in collaboration with the provinces, territories, partners and local governments.
- **RMOW website:** Related to public education, the RMOW website provides considerable information on emergency preparedness. This includes encouraging individuals to create personalized emergency plans. Key messages on the RMOW website are: know the risks; have an emergency plan; build a kit; and know the importance of water. The RMOW also focuses on communicating: following instructions from emergency officials; leaving when instructed; keeping car gas tanks full if evacuation is possible; arranging transportation if you do not have a car; and sheltering-in-place instructions.
- **Relationships with Squamish Nation and Lil’wat Nation:** The RMOW has existing relationships with Squamish Nation and Lil’wat Nation that are important in emergency preparedness. The Senior Manager Emergency Planning and Response for Squamish Nation recently attended an Emergency Planning Committee meeting. At this meeting, there was some discussion of Squamish Nation demographics, which is relevant to considering older adults in emergency preparedness.
- **FireSmart Whistler:** Whistler offers a number of resources on wildfire prevention and mitigation. This includes FireSmart Home Partners Program assessments that evaluate structures and the surrounding landscape for potential vulnerabilities, and thereby help homeowners understand the risks to property and mitigation strategies.

What We Heard:

Older adult community members identified the following information sources to develop their emergency plans:

- FireSmart program;
- Resources provided by schools for children to take home;
- The news;
- Personal experiences;
- Learnings from other communities; and
- Information available within the community.

There are also a number of resources relevant to the ‘prepare’ phase that have been created by various organizations. These documents were not specially prepared for Whistler, but can be used by Whistler organizations, residents and visitors. These sources include the following:

- **Government of BC’s emergency preparedness website:**²⁰ This website provides extensive resources to help people prepare their households, neighbourhoods and communities for emergencies.
- **Canadian Red Cross’ emergency preparedness and recovery website:**²¹ This website provides a collection of resources for helping people to prepare for emergency events and includes sections on emergency preparedness for older adults.
- **United Way of BC’s Emergency Preparedness Guide: What Seniors Need to Know:**²² This guide is designed to empower older adults and their support networks to prepare effectively for emergencies.
- **BC Centre for Disease Control and University of British Columbia ‘do-it-yourself’ air filters:**²³ A partnership between these two entities resulted in designs for people to build low-cost air purification systems to help manage poor air quality.

Assessing the RMOW’s Existing Plans, Resources and Practices

The following are the main observations about the key aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program relevant to the ‘prepare’ phase of emergency preparedness.

Emergency Preparedness Information and Awareness

The RMOW currently has a large collection of online resources. These resources are designed to meet the needs of the entire community, including older adults. The information provided in existing resources reflects best practices as the materials provide guidance on diverse topics like communication methods available during and after an emergency, emergency kit preparation, and what to store, including water, food and alternative power sources. However, based on what we heard from the community

What We Heard:

Participants suggested that the RMOW could provide more opportunities and resources for community education and awareness of emergency preparedness, such as workshops, newsletters or social media campaigns. Both older adult and service provider participants indicated an interest in co-creating educational materials and resources tailored to the needs and preferences of older adults.

²⁰ Government of BC (accessed August 7, 2024). *Emergency Management in B.C.*
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management>

²¹ Canadian Red Cross (accessed August 7, 2024). *Be Ready: Emergency Preparedness and Recovery.*
<https://www.redcross.ca/how-we-help/emergencies-and-disasters-in-canada/be-ready-emergency-preparedness-and-recovery>

²² United Way BC (Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, Katzie, Seniors Network and partner organizations) (2023). *Emergency Preparedness Guide: What Seniors Need to Know.* Healthy Aging CORE BC.
<https://bc.healthyagingcore.ca/resources/emergency-preparedness-guide-what-seniors-need-to-know>

²³ Thomson, C. (July 6, 2021). Here’s How to Make a DIY Air Filter Scientifically Tested to Take on Smoky Summer Skies. *Squamish Chief*. <https://www.squamishchief.com/highlights/heres-how-to-make-a-diy-air-filter-scientifically-tested-to-take-on-smoky-summer-skies-3935388>

engagement, there may be a lack of awareness of the plethora of existing emergency preparedness information and resources.

Community wildfire plans, described below under the ‘response’ section, recognize the importance of public education and outreach as a critical tool for the community to prepare for and prevent a wildfire event and highlight the success of the FireSmart program.

In an effort to ensure resources are not all digital, the RMOW provides in-person workshops and has some printed materials available at the municipal hall. These printed materials include information on the FireSmart program and “recipe for disaster preparedness” cards on preparing pets and preparing at work for an emergency. While older adults suggested using alternative outreach channels, like flyers and community events, for those with limited technology access, there is also the opportunity to empower older adults through digital literacy education and support. This ensures the information provided is up to date.

To improve emergency preparedness education and awareness and the self-sustainability and resilience of older adults, the following opportunities may be considered:

- Implement the awareness campaign described in Section 4 of this report to communicate key messages and promote existing resources;
- Create RMOW emergency webpage bookmarks on Whistler Public Library computer web browsers (i.e. <https://www.whistler.ca/services/emergency/emergency-preparedness/>);
- Continue ongoing efforts to enhance awareness of wildfire risks, evacuation procedures and preparedness measures through workshops, campaigns and targeted messaging that is specific to older adults, newcomers and caregivers of those who have cognitive challenges;
- Promote emergency preparedness at community events (e.g., the farmers market); and
- Add more resources that are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of older adults and encourage local organizations to promote information and resources (e.g., the RMOW can develop a preparedness checklist for older adults that can be shared with local organizations, including WCSS and Whistler Mature Action Community (MAC), for distribution).

Workshops and Personalized Emergency Plans

Through its workshop offerings, the RMOW currently has a strong mechanism to provide ongoing education on emergency preparedness topics including developing a personalized emergency plan for individuals, families, pets and people with disabilities. Providing workshops exemplifies the best practice to assist older adults in making their own emergency plans.

The following opportunities may be considered to further encourage older adults to create personalized emergency plans and to continue to utilize workshops as an effective training tool for the older adult community:

- Encourage older adults specifically to create personalized emergency plans that outline their personal support networks, evacuation procedures, contact information and specific needs;

- Increase awareness of workshop opportunities among older adults and local service providers who support older adults in the Sea-to-Sky corridor, by reaching out directly to local organizations, such as MAC;
- Tailor workshop content to the needs of older adults and their caregivers; and
- Consider expanding workshop content (e.g., teaching older adults to create “do-it-yourself” low-cost air-purification systems to help manage poor air quality).

Emergency Planning Collaboration

The RMOW’s Emergency Planning Committee offers an effective forum for discussing preparedness issues in the community. The existing committee is a valuable venue to coordinate efforts, identify gaps and ensure consistency across plans to address the needs of the entire community, including older adults. Additionally, as described below under the ‘response’ section, Whistler’s emergency plans identify external support agencies, including federal and provincial agencies and local partners, and outline how organizations can work together in the event of an emergency including how to support vulnerable people.

Moving forward, the following emergency planning collaboration opportunities may be considered:

- When RMOW staff capacity is available, and in consideration of other priorities, consider supporting the development of a neighbourhood resiliency program in which community members could learn how to effectively mobilize to support each other (and more vulnerable community members) during an emergency; and
- Further involve Lil’wat Nation and Squamish Nation in regional emergency planning efforts.

Response

Understanding Older Adult Needs

Despite heightened risks, older adults often receive insufficient attention in disaster response and recovery. Planning efforts for response sometimes do not fully account for the unique needs of older individuals. As a result, there may be a tendency to employ a standardized approach that inadvertently overlooks their potential physical, psychological, social and economic vulnerabilities. Essential considerations for response efforts include:

- **Those in need should be identified in advance of the event.** Some older adults with additional support needs may be “invisible” to responders during an emergency event. This can result from the individual not seeing themselves as requiring extra support or from the mistaken assumption that those who are more vulnerable will be supported by family or friends. If older adults with

What We Heard:

Participants expressed concern regarding how emergency officials would reach out and assist isolated or vulnerable older adults and those requiring additional assistance during an emergency. Community members who might need additional support are typically only identified by service providers if they receive direct support and are on a caseload.

additional support needs are not identified in advance, outcomes during emergency response tend to be worse.²⁴

- **Multiple methods of communication are necessary to reach older adults who are not digitally literate.**

Reliance on digital communication during emergencies can pose significant risks to older adults. In a review of disaster responses, this issue was highlighted by an example of wildfire response in which older adults only accessed information through traditional emergency response channels (e.g., calling 911). They missed vital and potentially lifesaving response details that were only available to the public in online information.²⁵ This type of possible low digital use and literacy among older community members necessitates creating communication efforts through non-digital channels.

- **Accessible and supportive shelter spaces are vital.** As older adults are at an increased risk of falls and fractures, ensuring shelter spaces are well-lit and hazard-free is key. Shelter spaces should also include accessible entrances and exits, appropriate sleeping and washroom provisions, and supportive services for individuals with additional needs.²⁶

- **Older adults may depend more on electricity than other groups.** Many older adults rely on medical equipment to maintain their basic comfort and mobility. Power failures can also pose significant risks. Loss of lighting can lead to increased falls, and the absence of heating or air conditioning can create dangerous temperatures during extreme weather conditions.²⁷

- **Older adults tend to be more impacted by environmental issues such as air quality:** As noted above, reviews establish a direct link between exposure to wildfire smoke or wildfire particulate matter and an increase in overall mortality and respiratory illnesses. As also noted above,

²⁴ Jenkins, J. L., Levy, M. J., Rutkow, L., & Spira, A. P. (2014). Variables Associated with Effects on Morbidity in Older Adults Following Disasters. *PLoS Currents Disasters*.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/currents.dis.0fe970aa16d51cde6a962b7a732e494a>

²⁵ Jensen, D. (2021). Multi-Dimensional Disaster Response for Older Adults. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 1(43), 10-18. <https://doi.org/10.55671/0160-4341.1156>

²⁶ McSweeney-Feld, M. H. (2016). Assistive Technology and Older Adults in Disasters: Implications for Emergency Management. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 11(1), 135-139.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2016.160>

²⁷ Smith, R., Mozzer, M., Albanese, J., Paturas, J., & Gold, J. (2017). Enhancing Resiliency for Elderly Populations: Shelter-In-Place Planning and Training at Facilities Serving Elderly Populations Through the Rhode Island Senior Resiliency Project. *Journal of Business Continuity & Emergency Planning*, 10(4), 384-393.

What We Heard:

Participants discussed the specific needs of older adults, such as health conditions and medication requirements that must be considered during emergencies. They also mentioned prioritizing preparing for extreme weather events like heat, cold and smoke, with initiatives like air conditioning programs and water bottle distribution.

What We Heard:

Participants recognized the value of having strong community networks and connections that could offer mutual assistance and support during an emergency, such as neighbourhood groups, volunteer organizations or local businesses.

Additionally, they stressed the importance of collaboration between organizations for effective emergency response and recommended leveraging local resources and building relationships with neighbouring communities, including First Nations, for comprehensive preparedness and responses. The challenge of sharing information and resources between organizations while preserving confidentiality was also discussed.

wildfire smoke can have a significant impact on air quality and can pose increased health risks for older individuals, vulnerable populations, and those with preexisting lung conditions.²⁸

- **Older adults are more vulnerable to disasters because of higher rates of chronic illness:** As chronic illness rates increase with aging, older community residents may be managing health conditions that the stresses of an emergency situation may exacerbate. Adverse reactions can be both physical and psychological.²⁹
- **Coordinating with local organizations improves response outcomes:** Community-based organizations and healthcare providers have been identified as key players in bolstering older adults' resilience to disasters by providing essential services and support during emergency response.^{30,31}

Understanding the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices

Key aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program that are relevant to the 'response' phase of emergency preparedness are described below and, where applicable, information that may be relevant to older adults is noted:

- **Emergency Operations Centre:** During emergencies, Whistler will activate an EOC. At the EOC, key municipal staff and other organizations come together to plan and support response efforts, support the community and provide public messaging.
- **Whistler Alert and other communications:** Whistler Alert is the official emergency notification system employed by the RMOW during emergency situations. Enrollment in the system is required for individuals to receive notifications. The system is designed to deliver notifications and instructions, keep individuals apprised and establish a call center. The RMOW would also use BC Alert as a way to reach all cell phones in the community. Other communication tools and considerations that may be used in emergency response situations include:
 - **RMOW website:** Up-to-date information will be posted on the RMOW website during an emergency.
 - **Social media:** Information and instructions will be shared on the RMOW's official social media pages (e.g., Facebook, Twitter).

²⁸ Cascio, W. E. (2018). Wildland Fire Smoke and Human Health. *Science of the Total Environment*, 624, 586–595. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2017.12.086>

²⁹ Al-rousan, T. M., Rubenstein, L. M., & Wallace, R. B. (2015). Preparedness for Natural Disasters Among Older US Adults: A Nationwide Survey. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(Supp 4), S621-S626. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301559r>

³⁰ Engelman, A., Guzzardo, M., Muñoz, M., Arenas, L., & Gomez, A. (2022). Assessing the Emergency Response Role of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) Serving People with Disabilities and Older Adults in Puerto Rico Post-Hurricane María and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2156-2176. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042156>

³¹ Pendergrast, C., Belza, B., Bostrom, A., & Errett, N. (2020). Examining the Role of Ageing-In-Place Organisations in Building Older Adults' Disaster Resilience. *Ageing and Society*, 41(12), 2888-2913. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x20000653>

- **Radio and news:** Information and instructions will be shared to local radio stations and news outlets (e.g., Mountain FM 102.1, Whistler FM 101.5, Pique Newsmagazine).
 - **Public address systems:** Emergency vehicles may drive through neighbourhoods broadcasting evacuation notices in urgent situations.
 - **Door-to-door notification:** If evacuation is necessary, an initiative in which volunteers deliver evacuation orders in person may be considered. However, people should rely on Whistler Alert as their written notification.
 - **Public information call centre:** During an evacuation preparation phase, a call center may be set up to answer questions from the public.
 - **Posted notices:** Depending on conditions, evacuation notices may be placed at critical locations.
 - **Media briefings:** The EOC Information Officer will update the media to ensure accurate information reaches the public.
 - **Standardized messaging:** Consistent messages will be used across all communication channels to avoid confusion.
- **CEMP and other emergency plans:** As noted above, the CEMP is the Whistler Emergency Program’s guiding document and outlines how the municipality will handle a major emergency or disaster in Whistler. Additionally, the CEMP identifies the essential emergency responsibilities and potential EOC assignments for external support agencies, including federal and provincial agencies (e.g., Vancouver Coastal Health) and local partners. Annexes to the CEMP and other emergency plans include:
 - **Flood Hazard Specific Guide:** This describes how the RMOW will prepare for, and respond to, a flood event in the RMOW. Intended for municipal staff and Council, this document outlines response and coordination arrangements for predicted and spontaneous flood events.
 - In the event of a flood response as an EOC activity for consideration, when determining the potential impacts of a flood, the plan suggests the consideration of vulnerable populations.
 - **Sea to Sky Multimodal Evacuation Plan:** This establishes the principles, structures, roles and responsibilities for a coordinated evacuation of the entire community of the RMOW or District of Squamish. By addressing mass communication and evacuation issues, it specifies arrangements, agency roles and responsibilities, and a range of considerations and actions for the evacuation of people from a hazardous community environment to a safe location. While not a plan *per se*, it provides a valuable look at options for planning and helps to inform RMOW plans.
 - The document provides estimates of the number of people who may require evacuation assistance on a peak visitation day and speaks towards their transportation options.
 - It is identified that Vancouver Coastal Health/Ministry of Health/Health Emergency Management BC may provide support services for physically challenged or medically disabled people affected by an emergency.

- Additionally, the document suggests the consideration of providing language translations for key public information messages.
- **Operational Evacuation Plan:** This annex to the CEMP provides guidance for the operations involved in an evacuation of some or all of the RMOW. It is intended to assist EOC staff in decision-making during an emergency before and during the requirement for an evacuation. It includes sections that cover situations requiring immediate evacuations as well as emergencies where there is greater time to plan for and manage an organized evacuation. This plan notes that certain vulnerable people in the community will require additional resources during an evacuation. A section is also included describing steps that may need to be taken to reduce the number of people in the community while the potential for an emergency is increasing but has not yet materialized.
- **Hazard, Risk, and Vulnerability Assessment:** This examines the hazards that may impact Whistler and the risk that each hazard event poses to the community as a whole and to vulnerable elements of the community. The objectives are to: investigate potential natural and human-caused hazards that pose a risk to the RMOW; identify potential hazards that may require a non-routine emergency response and as a result require the activation of various RMOW emergency response plans and policies; and recommend measures to mitigate the impact of the identified hazards.
 - The assessment includes an overview of Whistler’s population, family and household characteristics and social vulnerability.
- **Heat Emergency Response Plan:** This explains the BC Provincial Heat Alert and Response System and what classifies as a heat emergency in Whistler. The document also explains: roles of the RMOW and other agencies in heat emergencies; actions the RMOW may take as they relate to heat emergencies; measures the RMOW may take when an anticipated Heat Warning or Extreme Heat Emergency is announced by Environment Canada; and the communication plan that will be used to inform key partners and the public about an anticipated event, its possible impact and actions that may minimize its impact.
 - The plan includes the following as people who may be at risk during a heat emergency: seniors aged 65 years or older; people with limited mobility; people who live alone; people with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or respiratory disease; and people with mental illness such as schizophrenia, depression or anxiety. People at risk are advised to make a plan before a heat emergency occurs and the plan identifies that if they live alone, they may need additional supports.
 - The plan includes a number of strategies to connect with people at risk including using multiple communication channels, translating information, working with local social service agencies, community organizations and healthcare providers, and using mobile outreach teams.
 - The plan suggests that during pre-season planning activities and during an extreme heat emergency, the RMOW may work with local organizations to support vulnerable populations.

- **Air Quality Advisory Response Plan:** This confirms the measures the RMOW will take when an Air Quality Advisory is issued for Whistler. Specifically, it clarifies and confirms: the jurisdictions of authority for Air Quality Advisories and related warnings; the various types of advisories, bulletins and smoke forecasts that are issued; the measures the RMOW may take when an Air Quality Advisory is issued for Whistler; and the issuance of Evacuation Orders due to poor air quality.
 - The plan identifies elderly and people with chronic conditions, especially lung and heart diseases and diabetes, as groups who should reduce their exposure to smoke. Additionally, the plan provides guidance on personal preparedness regarding medication needs. The proposed response includes opportunities to meet and connect with others to prevent feelings of isolation and provide educational resources.
- **Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan:** This document took into account what has been accomplished in Whistler and what we have learned. It also identified Whistler’s path forward by providing an action plan to help make the RMOW more resilient to wildfire threats.
 - The plan acknowledges public education and outreach as a critical tool to help the community prepare for and prevent a wildfire and that participating in wildfire risk reduction and resiliency activities also promotes a sense of empowerment and shared responsibility.
- **Whistler Community Wildfire Defence Plan:** This provides an implementation strategy for the Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan. The plan focuses on policy, emergency planning and training. This includes a community overview focusing on wildfire risks, an assessment of the FireSmart program, Whistler’s response capability and critical infrastructure. The communications plan includes Whistler Alert, social media, the RMOW website and media outreach.
 - The plan speaks to the RMOW’s exemplary FireSmart program, including the extensive public education component. Specifically, the FireSmart workday projects and the community woodchipper service are identified as two very successful programs.
- **Volunteer teams:** The Whistler Emergency Program includes volunteer groups, namely the ESS Team and the Emergency Radio Team, which provide essential services to the RMOW and the public during emergencies.
- **Paratransit services:** These may be available for individuals with mobility limitations.

Assessing the RMOW’s Existing Plans, Resources and Practices

The following are the main observations about the key aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program relevant to the ‘response’ phase of emergency preparedness.

Whistler Alert and Other Communication Methods

Whistler Alert is the primary communication system for the entire community. While it is not specific to older adults, older adults and caregivers of older adults should subscribe to Whistler Alert to

receive up-to-date communications during emergencies. Whistler Alert is listed in the WCSS Seniors Resource Guide, published May 2024.

Other communication methods complement the Whistler Alert system. In addition to online communications during an emergency (i.e., RMOW website and social media), there are a number of channels that may be used depending on the circumstances including: radios and news, public address systems, door-to-door notification, the public information call center and posted notices. These channels provide for alternatives to online information for those who lack strong digital literacy. It is noted that Whistler Alert and other communication methods are largely in English; both the Sea to Sky Multimodal Evacuation Plan and the Heat Emergency Response Plan suggest considering language translations for key messages.

To increase Whistler Alert registration among older adults and generally improve its reach in the community, the RMOW could consider the following opportunities:

- Reach out to the older adult community to ensure this population is registered for Whistler Alert;
- Consider increasing Whistler Alert registration by advertising through community organizations, including the Whistler Public Library and MAC; and
- Provide Whistler Alert registration information and notifications in multiple languages.

Considering Older Adults' Needs in Emergency Plans

The RMOW has well-developed plans to assess risks and respond during emergencies that take into account the needs of the community including older adults. Both the Heat Emergency Response Plan and Air Quality Advisory Response Plan recognize that older adults and people experiencing chronic illness or disabilities are people at risk and speaks to their specific needs for additional preparation before an emergency, as well as potential support required during an emergency. The Sea to Sky Multimodal Evacuation plan accounts for people who may require evacuation assistance. The Flood Hazard Specific Guide recognizes considering vulnerable populations when determining the potential impacts of a flood.

Through ongoing work to evaluate and update these plans to further consider older adults' needs, the following opportunity may be considered:

- Ensure the plans reference the most recent demographic data and consider future additional support needs based on an aging population.

What We Heard:

Participants had questions and concerns about how to receive and share information before, during and after an emergency, and which sources and methods they could trust and use. Some concerns included understanding the Whistler Alert system, the reliability and availability of communication devices and networks, the diversity and accessibility of communication channels, and how to engage seasonal property owners.

Additional Emergency Support Needs

As described above, to improve the outcomes during an emergency response those in need of additional support should be identified in advance of an emergency event. Additionally, coordinating with local organizations improves response outcomes. Specifically, healthcare providers play an important role and may be aware of older adults who would require additional support in the event of an emergency. Through the community engagement, it was identified there is concern for community members who are considered more vulnerable or isolated and may not be in contact with a service provider.

Moving forward, a local healthcare service provider who offers support to older adults, such as Vancouver Coastal Health, may consider the following opportunities:

- Implement and maintain a voluntary registry for older adults and their caregivers who may require additional assistance during emergencies; and
- Explore the ability to share the registry list with emergency responders as required during an emergency.

What We Heard:

Potential ideas to support isolated and vulnerable community members included a program to check on neighbours in a pre-planned pattern (e.g., to the left), placing a sticker on the door if help is needed, having a building or block captain, creating a registry to identify individuals with specific needs (e.g., wheelchair users, frail individuals), and ensuring that any registry information is sent to public health to maintain confidentiality.

Recovery

Understanding Older Adult Needs

Important considerations in recovery efforts are:

- **Older adults should be included in recovery planning.** Engaging older adults in community disaster recovery efforts can enhance their sense of purpose and social connectedness, contributing to their overall well-being.³²
- **Making sure older adults with medical needs have access to continuity of care.** It is essential to ensure older adults have uninterrupted access to essential medical services, medications and support for chronic conditions during the recovery phase. Promoting individual preparedness among older adults and facilitating their access to medical support can assist them in effectively navigating the challenges of recovery.³³

What We Heard:

Participants emphasized the need for the psychological well-being of older adults before, during and after emergencies. They discussed the importance of providing critical incident stress debriefing and mental health support.

³² Howard, A., Blakemore, T., & Bevis, M. (2015). Older People as Assets in Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery: Lessons from Regional Australia. *Ageing and Society*, 37(3), 517-536. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x15001270>

³³ Bell, S. A., Krienke, L., Dickey, S., & Vries, R. G. D. (2021). "Helping Fill That Gap:" A Qualitative Study of Aging In Place After Disaster Through The Lens of Home-Based Care Providers. *BMC Geriatrics*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-021-02159-0>

- **Restoration of older residents' homes should be a priority.** Housing that is built following a disaster needs to be suitable structurally and socially for older adults. This type of housing should be prioritized in recovery efforts.³⁴

Understanding the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices

Key aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program that are relevant to the 'recovery' phase of emergency preparedness are:

- **CEMP:** CEMP speaks to the importance of recovery and also includes detailed information on response and recovery costs.
- **Community Recovery Plan:** This provides a mechanism to identify and coordinate local recovery resources and match them with the recovery needs of people after an emergency. The scope of this plan focuses on the emotional and physical recovery of people after emergencies. It will be used when residents are displaced or impacted by an emergency and could benefit from community support to assist with their recovery.

While not specially prepared for Whistler, the **Canadian Red Cross' Psychological First Aid**³⁵ training could also be a useful resource for Whistler organizations, residents and visitors. This website provides a collection of tools for helping people to build resilience and cope with traumatic events.

Assessing the RMOW's Existing Plans, Resources and Practices

The following are the main observations about the key aspects of the Whistler Emergency Program relevant to the 'recovery' phase of emergency preparedness.

Recovery Plans

The RMOW demonstrates that it recognizes the importance of the recovery phase of emergencies. Considerations for recovery are strongly featured in the CEMP and are the focus of the Community Recovery Plan. While these two documents are designed to meet the needs of the entire community, including older adults, they do not specifically highlight particular needs of older adult community members in the recovery phase. However, the Community Recovery Plan does recognize that there are individuals with disabilities and people with specific healthcare needs. Of relevance to vulnerable populations, it also recognizes that some people affected by an emergency may not make an effort to seek assistance for reasons such as a sense of pride and self-sufficiency or that the recovery effort is not widely understood in a community.

To enhance the relevance of RMOW recovery plans for older adults, the following opportunities may be considered:

- Include older adult groups such as MAC as members of the community recovery committee to reflect the best practice of involving older adults in recovery planning; and

³⁴ Powell, S., Plouffe, L., & Gorr, P. (2009). When Ageing and Disasters Collide: Lessons from 16 International Case Studies. *Radiation Protection Dosimetry*. 134(3-4), 202-206. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rpd/ncp082>

³⁵ Canadian Red Cross (accessed August 2, 2024). *Psychological First Aid*. <https://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/course-descriptions/psychological-first-aid>

- Adjust the recovery resource questionnaire to include needs that are more specific to older adults.

Supporting Mental Health

The CEMP and Community Recovery Plan both briefly acknowledge the mental health aspects of recovering from emergencies. In particular, the CEMP recognizes that long-term recovery efforts will likely include programs to support psycho-social and emotional support for evacuees or those affected. Older adults and mental health supports are not specifically addressed by either plan.

Going forward, the RMOW may give consideration to the following:

- Provide mental health first aid training to ESS Team members and/or to neighbourhood support groups; and
- Revise existing plans to include more robust information on mental health considerations in recovery efforts.

SECTION 4: AWARENESS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

As noted previously, one of the actions identified in the 2021 Whistler Age-friendly Assessment and Action Plan is to launch an awareness campaign to increase emergency preparedness among older adults in Whistler. The need for an awareness campaign was further reiterated during the community consultation for this project. In particular, the community consultation highlighted that older adult participants felt they lacked information about where to find further guidance on emergency preparedness, evacuation procedures and support during an emergency.

This proposed awareness campaign strategy offers a targeted and effective path forward by prioritizing the specific needs identified in the assessment. It proposes targeted community information and events that will empower the older adult population to take proactive steps toward their safety. By fostering a culture of preparedness and providing the tools and resources necessary for older adults to navigate emergencies, the campaign is aimed at reducing reliance on emergency services and promote a more resilient community overall.

There are several components of the proposed awareness campaign strategy. This section outlines these components by discussing the strategy's proposed objectives, target audience, key messages, slogan, best practice principles, proposed topics, marketing channels, indicators for evaluation, and approaches and actions to overcoming anticipated challenges.

Objectives

An awareness campaign derived from the project's needs assessment findings is based on the following objectives:

1. To increase the knowledge and awareness of older adults and their caregivers about the risks and possible complications of emergencies, including the use of clear and plain-

language information about the resources that can help them prepare, respond and recover with a goal of self-reliance;

2. To encourage the participation of older adults and their caregivers in the planning and management process to create resources that are appropriate and sensitive to the needs of older adults; and
3. To encourage collaboration, coordination and leverage existing strengths and resources among the RMOW, community partners and community members in addressing the emergency preparedness needs of older adults.

Target Audience

The target audience of the campaign should include the following groups:

- Older adults (aged 55 and over) living in Whistler, with a special focus on those who are more vulnerable or isolated, such as those who live alone, have low income, have disabilities or chronic conditions, or who have language or cultural barriers;
- Caregivers of older adults, such as family members, friends, neighbours or professionals, who provide assistance or support to older adults daily or during emergencies; and
- The wider community, such as other residents, businesses, organizations or media, who may interact with or influence the emergency preparedness of older adults.

Key Messages

The key messages of the campaign should be based on the following themes:

- Emergencies can happen anytime and anywhere and affect anyone, especially older adults with specific needs or health challenges;
- Older adults and their caregivers can take proactive steps to prepare for emergencies, such as making an emergency plan, building an emergency kit, staying informed and getting involved;
- Older adults and their caregivers are not alone in facing emergencies and can access various resources and supports from the municipality, its partners and the community; and
- Older adults and their caregivers have valuable skills and experiences that can contribute to the community's emergency preparedness and response, and they can also share their knowledge and feedback with others.

Slogan

Based on the feedback from consultation participants, the campaign message could be based on a slogan such as the one below (or similar):

“Ready Today, Safe Tomorrow: Helping Prepare Older Adults for Emergencies.”

Best Practice Principles

The campaign should be developed based on the following best practice principles:

- Using clear, simple, accessible language and design and avoiding jargon, acronyms or technical terms;
- Using infographics, symbols and simple text when explaining a process or a more complex topic;
- Using checklists and handouts to help encourage older adults to work through the information in a systematic way;
- Using positive and empowering tone and images while avoiding ageist media;
- Using credible, reliable and up-to-date sources of information and evidence and citing them appropriately;
- Using participatory, inclusive and culturally sensitive language and involving older adults and other stakeholders in the design and development process; and
- Using feedback, evaluation and improvement mechanisms, and collecting and analyzing data and comments from older adults, their caregivers and other stakeholders to measure the effectiveness and impact of the materials and activities.

Proposed Topics

The campaign should include information specific to caregivers and older adults. It should specifically include information on the following topics:

- Creating a neighbourhood resiliency plan, including roles and assets (e.g., checklists) to mobilize the plan during an emergency;
- Preparing pet owners for emergencies, including a summary of what to expect during an evacuation;
- Alerting authorities that the resident needs assistance;
- Supporting those who may have additional support needs in evacuation;
- Identifying transportation options available during evacuation, including public transit, designated pick-up points or buddy systems;
- Considering medical needs, including medication management and accessibility of assistive devices during evacuation; and
- Identifying the dangers of weather-related illness (e.g., heat stroke, psychological impacts, cardiovascular and respiratory distress), with tips on how to reduce risk.

Marketing Channels

The campaign should take a multi-channel marketing approach to promote the key messages and proposed topics. The channels could include:

- Having printed materials, such as posters, that provide “bite-sized” information and tips on emergency preparedness for older adults and their caregivers;
- Having information available at community events, such as workshops, seminars and fairs, that are intended for older adults and their caregivers;
- Identifying community champions, such as older adults, caregivers or community organizations (e.g., MAC, Whistler Public Library), who could be encouraged to distribute information about emergency preparedness among older adults;
- Providing service and healthcare providers with links to relevant RMOW materials;
- Having online materials, such as a dedicated page regarding older adult emergency preparedness, on the Public Safety section of the RMOW website as well as sharing information on RMOW’s social media channels; and
- Engaging local media (e.g., Pique Newsmagazine, local radio) to raise public awareness and interest in emergency preparedness issues and initiatives related to older adults.

Indicators for Evaluation

The campaign should be implemented, monitored and evaluated using the following quantitative and qualitative indicators and methods:

- **Reach:** the number and proportion of older adults and their caregivers who were exposed to or participated in the campaign materials and activities, and the demographic characteristics of the participants;
- **Impact:** the changes in the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and outcomes of older adults and their caregivers regarding emergency preparedness and the extent to which they met the objectives of the campaign;
- **Feedback:** the satisfaction, opinions and suggestions of older adults, their caregivers and other stakeholders on the quality, relevance and usefulness of the campaign materials and activities and the areas for improvement or enhancement; and
- **Outcomes:** the short-term and long-term effects and benefits of the campaign for older adults, their caregivers, the RMOW and the community.

Approaches to Overcoming Anticipated Challenges

The following table highlights some of the challenges to reaching older adults and the approaches that may be used to address these challenges:

Challenge	Approach
Reaching and engaging older adults who are more vulnerable or isolated, such as those who have limited access to technology, information or social networks	Using multiple and diverse channels and methods, and partnering with trusted and familiar sources and intermediaries, such as caregivers, peers or community organizations, to reach and engage older adults who are more vulnerable or isolated
Measuring and demonstrating the impact and outcomes of the campaign and attributing them to the campaign materials and activities	Using a mixed-methods and participatory approach, and establishing a baseline and a follow-up measurement, to measure and demonstrate the impact and outcomes of the campaign
Sustaining the campaign and ensuring its long-term relevance and effectiveness	<p>Using a collaborative and capacity-building approach and integrating the campaign into the existing plans and programs</p> <p>Developing and implementing a plan to regularly update the campaign, and securing the commitment and resources from the RMOW and its partners, to ensure the long-term relevance and effectiveness of the campaign</p>

APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WHAT WE HEARD SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes responses from community consultations in Whistler, collected as part of the Whistler Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Assessment and Awareness Campaign project. Cardea Health Consulting Inc. designed and delivered the consultations and prepared this summary report on behalf of the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW).

Participants in the focus groups and interviews were provided a draft of this summary and given the opportunity to provide feedback; no comments were received from participants. It is also noted that this summary is a recounting of the input and this summary does not assess the feasibility or accuracy of participant input.

Context and Purpose

This project was funded by a BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) grant under the Age-Friendly Communities Program. It resulted from two recommended actions from the 2021 RMOW Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan. This action plan presented 30 strategies and 71 actions for the Whistler community within each of BC's eight age-friendly dimensions. The two actions that were addressed by this emergency preparedness project are:

1. Explore existing emergency preparedness plans and how they meet older adults' needs; and
2. Consider a campaign to bring awareness to older adults about current emergency preparedness plans.

This project will inform future updates to existing RMOW emergency preparedness plans to ensure they effectively meet the needs of a diverse range of older adults. Additionally, an Awareness Campaign Strategy will be developed aimed at enhancing the community's ability to proactively address the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by older adults during emergency events.

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

A key project objective was to consult the community in a meaningful and inclusive manner. The engagement process consisted of focus groups and interviews with older adults and service providers and a meeting with the RMOW's Accessibility and Inclusion Committee (AIC). An overview of the engagement activities is listed in the following table and the activities are then further described below.

Engagement Method	Format	Participants	Timing
Older Adults Focus Group	In-person	14 participants	May 30, 2024
Service Providers Focus Group	In-person	4 organizations; 4 participants	May 30, 2024
Interviews	Phone	1 older adult participant 1 service provider participant	June 6, 2024
AIC Meeting	In-person	AIC	June 5, 2024

Focus Groups and Interviews

To maximize participation and accommodate the needs of older adults and service providers, engagement opportunities were offered both in-person and virtually. Organizations and interested older adults who could not attend the focus group were offered an alternative interview at a day and time of their convenience.

Engagement activities aimed to encourage participation among a diversity of older adults. To seek participants in the Older Adults Focus Group, Cardea Health Consulting Inc. contacted the Whistler Community Services Society (WCSS) and the Whistler Mature Action Community (MAC), who then encouraged participation among their contacts. Additionally, the RMOW sought volunteers by advertising the focus group through Whistler This Week (the RMOW’s weekly newsletter) on May 16, 2024 and through the Pique Newsmagazine (the local newspaper) on May 24, 2024. A copy of the Pique Newsmagazine advertisement is attached as Schedule 3.

To contribute to providing an equity lens, engagement aimed to involve consultation with organizations that represent an array of older adults’ interests in Whistler. Service providers were invited to participate via email. The following organizations participated in either the Service Providers Focus Group or an interview: Vancouver Coastal Health (Community Services and Older Adult Mental Health and Addiction departments), Sea to Sky Better at Home, WCSS, and the RMOW Protective Services department. The complete list of organizations invited to participate in the focus group is listed below.

The focus groups included a brief presentation on the project purpose and context. This was followed by a series of open-ended questions. Questions were based on the Canadian Red Cross and National Institute on Ageing document titled Closing the Gaps: Advancing Emergency

Preparedness, Response and Recovery for Older Adults,³⁶ and were designed to understand the current state of preparedness in the community and to outline what additional information could help prepare Whistler’s older adults to be ready to respond safely to an emergency. Interview questions aligned with the focus group questions in order to collect consistent feedback. This summary document reflects the insights and perceptions of those who participated in the engagement process.

Service Providers Focus Group: Invited Organizations

Vancouver Coastal Health
Sea to Sky Better at Home
Whistler Fire Rescue Service
Whistler Mature Action Community (MAC)
Whistler Community Services Society (WCSS)
Tourism Whistler
BC Ambulance (Whistler Paramedics)
Whistler RCMP

AIC Meeting

The AIC works collaboratively to assess and improve community accessibility and inclusion focusing on the experiences of people with disabilities but encompassing the whole community. The AIC membership consists of two members-at-large from the community and representatives from the following organizations:

- MAC;
- Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre;
- Tourism Whistler;
- Vail Resorts;
- Whistler Adaptive Sports Program;
- Whistler Chamber of Commerce;
- WCSS; and
- Whistler Hotel Association.

At the in-person meeting of the AIC on June 5, 2024 an overview of the project purpose, context and initial engagement findings from the focus groups and interviews were presented. AIC members then provided feedback on the presented information.

³⁶ Canadian Red Cross & National Institute on Ageing (2020). *Closing the Gaps: Advancing Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery for Older Adults*. crc_whitepaper_en.pdf (squarespace.com)

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW THEMES

The following subsections present the major themes from the two focus groups and interviews. The themes have been grouped by older adult/caregiver feedback and service provider feedback.

The major themes that emerged from the engagement with older adults/caregivers include wildfires, communication and information, transportation, community and preparedness, logistics, plans and preparations, and other concerns and comments.

The major themes that emerged from the engagement with service providers include planning for weather events versus wildfire evacuation, communication and dissemination of information, emergency preparedness and education, collaboration and community involvement, cultural and diversity considerations, psychological and mental health support, vulnerability and clients, resource sharing and confidentiality issues, self-sustainability and resilience, and specific needs during emergencies.

Each major theme emerging from the engagement is further described below.

Older Adult and Caregiver Feedback

Older adults and caregivers were asked the questions in Schedule 1. The major themes that emerged from the discussion are presented below.

Theme 1: Wildfires

Wildfires were, by far, the most pressing concern for consultation participants. Many felt the risk of flooding was neighbourhood-specific and the risk of earthquake was not as significant. Participants reported a sense of inevitability of a fire disaster and discussed thinking of “not if but when” they will face a major wildfire in Whistler. This discussion extended to topics such as:

- **Evacuation concerns:** Given the traffic volume and possible congestion during peak tourist season, a major concern was the ability to evacuate safely.
- **Communication needs:** Some residents expressed a desire for a wider distribution of wildfire preparedness information. They wanted to learn more about evacuation logistics and the municipality’s preparedness plans.
- **Home and family preparation:** Although many participants had started planning and preparing for a possible evacuation, many were also seeking advice on how to prepare their homes and families further.

Theme 2: Communication and Information

Participants expressed concerns about receiving clear communications and information during an emergency. Specific concerns included:

- **Clarification of the Whistler Alert system:** Although many participants were aware of Whistler Alert (the official emergency notification system used by the RMOW), some reported concern about public uncertainty about how to receive the emergency alerts.

- **Concerns about communication methods:** Participants worried about the breakdown in communications if phones were dead or not available and reaching those not using social media or following the news.
- **Reaching seasonal property owners:** Some respondents were concerned about how to communicate effectively to owners of properties who only live seasonally in the community.

Theme 3: Transportation

Participants discussed the importance of planning for transportation during an emergency. Their response included:

- **Planning transportation for evacuation:** Participants shared their strategies for: having a ready-to-go car with rain gear, sleeping bags and an emergency prep kit; having a backpack, good shoes and appropriate clothing for self-reliance; or considering carpooling with neighbours or even the use of the railways for evacuation.
- **Expectation of timely notice for evacuation:** Participants wanted to access clear information about how much time they would have to exit the community and what routes would be available.
- **Clarification of municipal plans:** Participants reported concern about how the municipal plan would work in case of emergency and whether it would accommodate pets and people with mobility issues.
- **Preference for personal evacuation:** Some participants indicated that they would rather evacuate on their own (e.g., using a bike) than rely on the municipal plan or go to a meeting center.

Theme 4: Community and Preparedness

Participants discussed community issues. Feedback included:

- **Safety concerns about empty homes:** Participants noted that many homes in their neighbourhoods are vacant for most of the year and wondered how those properties would be protected or prepared for emergencies.
- **Desire to understand community evacuation plans:** Participants expressed interest in learning more about the community evacuation plans and how they would be communicated and executed.

Theme 5: Logistics

Participants expressed concerns about logistics. Their response included:

- **Questions about the inclusion of pets in group evacuations:** Participants raised concerns about the fate of their pets during a group evacuation and whether properties with pets would be identified in an emergency.
- **Communicating and evacuating people who may need help and haven't previously been identified:** Participants shared concerns about how the municipality would identify and assist

people who may be isolated, vulnerable or have special needs during an emergency and whether there was a system to register or flag those individuals.

Theme 6: Plans and Preparations

Participants were asked about their current plans for emergency and preparedness efforts. Responses about how they prepared and what was in their plan included:

- Keeping a packed “blue box” with a list of essential items to collect quickly. This was considered especially useful if there was advanced notice to evacuate.
- Storing a portable bag with essentials (including 72 hours worth of food for pets), which they saw as useful if they could not use a car. Some participants have also packed a larger suitcase for longer-term needs.
- Keeping important documents in a fireproof bag while ensuring everything is backed up digitally.
- Ensuring that their car always had at least half a tank of gas and was stocked with emergency supplies like food, water, a snow shovel, sleeping bags and tea lights. Participants also talked about being mindful of wildlife attractants when storing food in vehicles.
- Keeping computer and phone charged and having a portable charger.
- Keeping bikes and supplies ready near the car, and ensuring e-bike batteries are charged.
- Keeping weather-appropriate clothes and shoes by the door and bed.
- Having flashlights, a crank radio and 72 hours of food and water.
- Planning how to contact family and friends during an emergency.
- Practicing earthquake drills regularly.
- Keeping a 5-6 week supply of medications on hand if possible (with a list) and ensuring the pharmacy can access records for an emergency supply if needed.
- Keeping other essentials on hand, like cash, earplugs and extra batteries for hearing aids.

Participants were asked about how they went about developing their plans. Responses included:

- From emergency preparedness information that is already available within the community.
- From learnings for other events like the Maui and Fort McMurray fires.
- From the FireSmart program, which they reported has been helpful and regularly implemented.
- From children growing up in the community who received school preparedness education, which was brought home and shared across generations; there is also ongoing collaboration between the municipality and schools to discuss and promote emergency preparedness.
- From the news, which emphasizes disaster risks’ immediate and real nature, shifting the perception from a future possibility to an imminent threat.

- From personal experience, as some community members have firsthand experience or have witnessed others going through such emergencies.

The participants present at the consultation considered themselves proactive about their preparedness, while they worried about community members who may be unprepared for an emergency.

Other Concerns and Comments

Participants also shared the following other concerns and comments during the focus group discussion:

- **Waste concerns associated with updating supplies:** Participants noted that updating public supplies regularly creates waste and expressed interest in a program to reduce or reuse the items.
- **Tourist reaction/support:** Participants wondered how tourists would react to or be supported during an emergency and whether they would follow the local protocols.
- **Caregivers' responsibilities for those who are difficult to move:** Participants raised the issue of how caregivers would handle the evacuation of those who have differing mobility and support needs and whether they would have priority access to transportation or medical services.
- **Communication in general:** Participants stressed the importance of clear, timely and consistent communication from the municipality and other authorities during an emergency and suggested ways to improve the current communication channels.
- **Alternatives for sheltering in place:** Participants discussed the possibility of sheltering in place during an emergency and what resources and precautions they would need to do so safely.
- **Strong interest in involvement in the development of tailored resources:** Participants expressed their willingness and enthusiasm to be involved in the development of emergency preparedness resources that are tailored to the needs and preferences of older adults in Whistler.

Service Provider Feedback

Service providers were asked the questions in Schedule 2. The service provider consultation provided a different perspective on preparedness for older adults in Whistler. The major themes that emerged are presented below.

Theme 1: Planning for Weather Events versus Wildfire Evacuation

Service providers noted that they tend to focus more on the health impact of weather events like heat, cold and smoke than on evacuation scenarios and suggested that they would appreciate information about ways to increase their awareness and readiness for other types of emergencies.

Theme 2: Communication and Dissemination of Information

Service providers emphasized the need for effective communication strategies to reach older adults with emergency information and resources. They mentioned using different methods, such as mailing lists, social media and direct outreach, and tailoring the information to the recipients' needs, considering factors like visual impairments, language barriers and technological proficiency. Additional ideas included checking on neighbours in a pre-planned pattern (e.g., to the left), placing a sticker on the door if help is needed, having a building or block captain, creating a registry to flag individuals with specific needs (e.g., wheelchair users, frail individuals), and ensuring that information is sent to public health to maintain confidentiality.

Theme 3: Emergency Preparedness and Education

Participants highlighted the importance of preparing older adults for emergencies through education and resource provision. They shared their efforts, such as patient education materials, seasonal readiness programs, and creating care plans tailored to emergency scenarios.

Theme 4: Collaboration and Community Involvement

Service providers stressed the necessity of collaboration between organizations for effective emergency response. They mentioned leveraging local resources and building relationships with neighboring communities, including First Nations, as important for comprehensive preparedness and response.

Theme 5: Cultural and Diversity Considerations

Participants recognized the need for multilingual services and culturally appropriate communication to reach diverse populations. They also acknowledged the importance of understanding and incorporating the needs of neurodivergent individuals and people with substance use disorders into emergency planning.

Theme 6: Psychological and Mental Health Support

The participating service providers emphasized the need for the psychological well-being of older adults before, during and after emergencies. During the discussion, they also talked about the importance of providing critical incident stress debriefing and mental health support. Participants were not aware of any existing service or plan specifically designed to support the mental health of older adults during or after an emergency. One suggestion was to offer mental health first aid training for neighbourhood captains as a potential form of support.

Theme 7: Vulnerability and Clients

Significant concern was expressed for community members who were considered more vulnerable or isolated. Participants also talked about the challenge of identifying those who are vulnerable, given that many of them would not see themselves this way. There is a further challenge in that community members who might need additional support are typically only identified by service providers if they receive direct support.

Theme 8: Resource Sharing and Confidentiality Issues

Service providers discussed the challenge of sharing information and resources between organizations while preserving confidentiality. They highlighted the necessity for a coordinated approach to distributing resources and planning for emergencies. A recommendation was put forward to establish a committee for strategic emergency planning intended to outline responsibilities and understand the capabilities of each group clearly.

Theme 9: Self-Sustainability and Resilience

Service providers advocated for encouraging self-sustainability and resilience in older adults but noted that this requires clear communication and planning.

Theme 10: Specific Needs During Emergencies

Participants discussed the specific needs of older adults, such as health conditions and medication requirements that must be considered during emergencies. They also mentioned prioritizing preparing for extreme weather events like heat, cold and smoke, with initiatives like air conditioning programs and water bottle distribution.

Excerpt from AIC Minutes

After the overview presentation, the AIC provided the following information, which has been extracted from the draft AIC minutes:³⁷

1. Paper handouts help individuals prepare, but they are not convenient during emergencies as they are not timely.
2. Whistler Alert is the official notification system during emergencies, but it is uncertain how many people are aware of its existence. An effort should be made to redirect people towards this tool. Some people rely on social media, but the information is sometimes not up to date.
3. If cellphone towers go down, the information will not reach certain people. Landlines are another option to spread alerts. A recorded message on a local information line which updates constantly could be considered.
4. Through its website, Tourism Whistler encourages businesses and visitors to sign up for alerts.
5. Creating a registry of all available resources with information related to emergency preparedness could be considered.
6. Using school buses for evacuation transportation will not work for everyone. They are not accessible for wheelchair users for instance.

³⁷ These minutes are noted as being draft as they were not considered for adoption by Council before the project was completed in September 2024. AIC members were provided the opportunity to review this excerpt before it was included in the report.

7. Caregivers or relatives who live outside Whistler can sign up for Whistler Alert for a person with special needs.
8. For those who cannot be helped by family, neighbours can come together to help each other and plan and coordinate evacuation together. A registry could be considered, with a small group of people assigned to help those on the registry. With a registry, there are concerns about confidentiality and keeping it up to date.
9. Ease of firefighter access to some areas should be considered.
10. There is a lot of information available and a list of resources could be created.
11. Now, the priority is to communicate the sense of urgency. Education is considered the most important piece. Whistler's population often lives in the moment, and many will likely not have a plan when an emergency emerges, which makes it harder to provide people with information.
12. The Hotel Association of Whistler is reflecting on logistics to evacuate guests and staff. As there are not enough vehicles, people with cars will need to be convinced to take others. The majority of staff are not prepared for an emergency, and the individual hotels in the association are creating or refining plans that include an educational aspect. Vail Resorts is faced with the same challenges, and it is also hard to track the number of guests. Vail Resorts considers itself responsible for guests even after the guests have reached the valley.
13. It is uncertain what condition Whistler's hotels will be in after an emergency event.
14. Traffic management is another element that should be assessed. Some people are considering using electric bikes to avoid the congestion or to go North instead of South.
15. There is a misconception that because Whistler is considered the jewel of BC, no one will let it burn.

SCHEDULE 1: COMMUNITY MEMBER CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. General:

- Can you tell me about your current plan for an emergency situation (e.g. wildfire evacuation)? What have you included in your plan (e.g., a list of medications and health issues, registering with response agencies, 30 days of medications)?
- How did you go about developing your plan?
- If you are a caregiver of another person, what plans have you made to assist them during an emergency?

2. Information and Resources:

- Where would you look for information to develop a plan for emergencies or natural disasters?
- What information is currently available in your community?

3. Logistics:

- Have you registered with a response agency or as a caregiver? Have you registered anyone in your care?
- Have you planned for an alternative power source or spoken to BC Hydro about alternatives during an extended power outage?
- What is your current plan for extended sheltering in place?
- What is your current transportation plan if you needed to be evacuated from your community?

4. Education:

- Would you attend an education session on emergency preparedness if it were offered?
- Are there any specific topics you would like included in that training?
- Would you be interested in being part of developing the educational materials?

SCHEDULE 2: SERVICE PROVIDER CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Current Efforts & Challenges:

- What steps does your organization currently take to prepare older adults you serve for emergencies?
- What resources or information does your organization provide to older adults about emergency preparedness?
- Does your organization have (or provide) training on how best to assist older adults and their unpaid caregivers before, during and after emergencies?
- Does your organization have a plan in place (or do you know of one in the community) to assess the psychological well-being of older adults in an emergency?
- Does your organization have a plan in place (or do you know of one in the community) to provide care and support for older adults with different cultural and religious backgrounds before, during and after an emergency?
- What are the biggest challenges your organization faces in ensuring the preparedness of older adults?


2. Strengths & Opportunities:

- What are the strengths of your organization's current approach to emergency preparedness for older adults?
- What additional resources or training would be helpful for your organization in better supporting older adults in emergencies?
- What opportunities exist to collaborate with other organizations to enhance community emergency preparedness for older adults?

3. What did we miss?

- What questions did we miss, or what else do we need to know about emergency preparedness efforts from your perspective?

SCHEDULE 3: PIQUE NEWSMAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENT



Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults

Focus Group

Seeking older adults (55+) and their caregivers

The Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) is seeking volunteers to participate in a focus group as part of Whistler's Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults Assessment and Awareness Campaign.

Date: Thursday, May 30, 2024
Time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Location: Delta Hotel, Room Raven A – 4308 Main Street, Whistler

This session will be facilitated by Kate Milne, of Cardea Health Consulting Inc, on behalf of the RMOW. Light refreshments will be served.

RSVP: To participate, please email kate@cardeahealthconsulting.com

Resort Municipality of Whistler
whistler.ca

