



Positive Ageing in Whitehorse

Survey Report

Date: February 2024



**POSITIVE
AGEING**

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1. Executive Summary

In June 2023, Council committed to developing a Positive Ageing service, to ensure Council provides services and facilities that have been developed for residents as they age. Furthermore, it will support community development, enabling the community to connect, learn, volunteer, and participate. It will also offer support to residents to navigate systems, and will advocate for high quality, responsive and inclusive services. In establishing the Positive Ageing service, it was important for Council to conduct community engagement to seek feedback and input that reflected the opinion, needs, barriers and aspirations of the Whitehorse community as they age.

2. Background

The primary goal was to engage the community to share their ideas to help inform the strategic direction and planning of the new Positive Ageing service. These diverse perspectives will assist with the development of strategies that will respond to the changing needs and aspirations of our community.

Our core messages conveyed throughout the engagement process were as follows:

- We are in the process of expanding our Positive Ageing service and are eager to gather your feedback to ensure that the service effectively caters to the needs of our community.
- Our enhanced Positive Ageing service aims to:
 - Develop Council services and facilities with a focus on the priorities, interests, and requirements of residents.
 - Foster community development by enabling connections, learning opportunities, volunteerism, and active participation.
 - Assist residents in navigating existing systems and available support structures.
 - Advocate for the provision of high-quality, responsive, and inclusive services.

The survey was based on the World Health Organisations Age-friendly Cities Domains:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings
2. Transportation
3. Social participation (including isolation, social connection)
4. Community participation and employment
5. Community support and health services

3. Survey results

- Final survey results: **1052**
- Groups visited: **>30** seniors' groups across various sites, days and times
- Venues visited and survey distributed: a further **>20** sites
- Your Say online survey engagement
- Open written text feedback: **560** surveys required additional free text analysis, totalling 2150 individual text fields.

Survey demographics

- Location: 92% Whitehorse residents, 8% from other LGA
- Language other than English spoken at home: 15.7%
- Diversity: 22% living with a disability, 13% CALD background, 62% none
- Gender: female 70%, male 29%, non-binary or prefer to not say 1%
- Age representation: see table below

Age cohort (years)	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75 +
Number of respondents	82	151	313	490
% of total respondents	8 %	14 %	30 %	47 %

4. Survey analysis

Insights gathered from the surveys offer a genuine, firsthand glimpse into the ageing journey within our community. Their feedback has identified their needs, aspirations, and the challenges they face. Leveraging this valuable knowledge will enable us to craft and introduce services that authentically mirror the preferences of our ageing population. Ultimately, this initiative will play a pivotal role in fostering a more inclusive, responsive, and age-friendly community.

5. Key themes based on WHO Domains

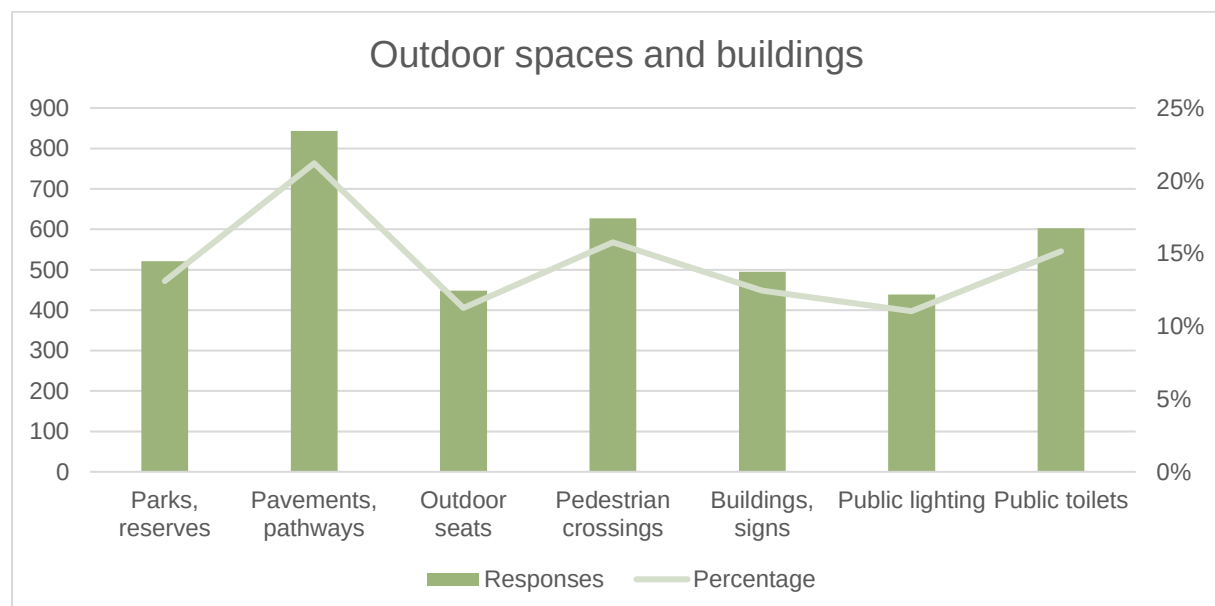
5.1. Outdoor spaces and buildings

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Age-friendly Cities framework outlines that “the external environment has a major impact on the mobility, independence and quality of life of older people as they go about their daily lives beyond the comfort of their homes.”

The survey question asked respondents, “Outdoor spaces and buildings: from the list below, please select what you think are the FOUR most important factors for you as you get older.”

A substantial 21% of responses identify the quality and accessibility of pavements and pathways, acknowledging their impact on both participation in community activities and ensuring safety.

Additionally, 16% of respondents emphasise the importance of reliable pedestrian crossings, highlighting these as essential considerations for Council. Addressing these aspects not only supports active involvement, but also enhances the safety of all community members.



Access to public toilets emerges as another important aspect, with 15% of survey participants deeming it essential. This underscores the necessity for well-placed and well-maintained restroom facilities to support the comfort and convenience of the whole community.

The key community identified theme is **amenities in open spaces**. This includes sheltered areas, fitness equipment, drinking fountains, walking maps, picnic tables and seats (sheltered), rubbish bins, walking paths in parks (safe, separated walking and cycling/scooter paths). Note, because information about built environment, toilets and lighting was captured in the quantitative data, this input is in addition to those themes.

What next: by addressing these concerns, Whitehorse City Council can support environments that not only encourage active participation but also prioritise the safety and well-being of our community as they age. The Positive Ageing team will advocate with stakeholders for continual improvement for the identified priorities.

Community feedback

Note: all quotes are direct from survey respondents and have not been edited for spelling or grammar.

“Create community spaces where people can meet and chat, for example group of tables and benches, picnic facilities for elderly, outdoor fitness equipment applicable for elderly.”

“Foot paths shouldn't have trees or bushes hanging over them so you can walk safely along them without hitting them”.

“Public toilets, particularly around parks and sporting facilities, need to be OPEN during daylight hours.”

“Adequate seats for break taking in streets and parks. This helps older people stay mobile and be outside.”

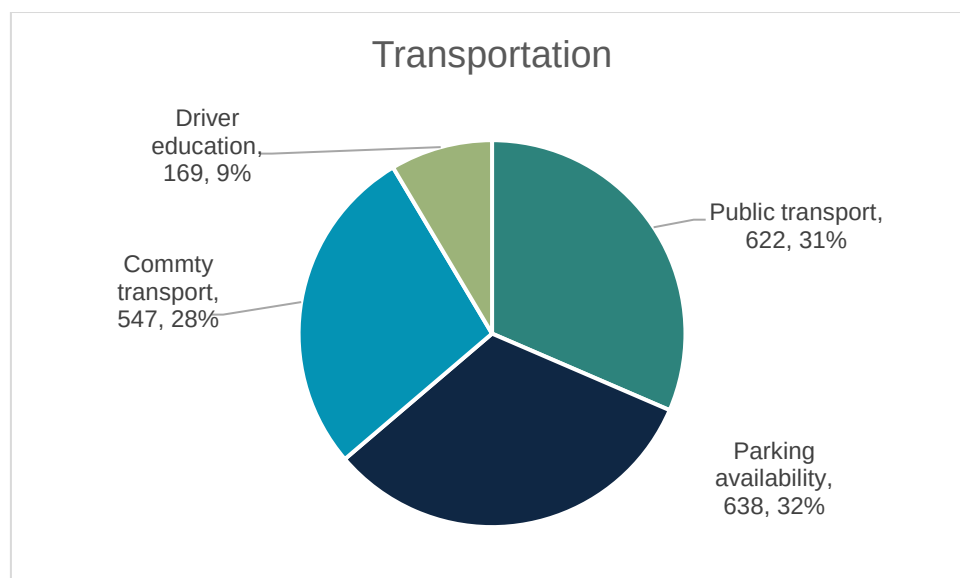
“I think sheltered outdoor seating and tables in parks are great for people to exercise and then connect with each other. Not everyone has money to go to a Cafe and some people like myself like to be outdoors connecting with others.”

5.2. Transportation

The survey findings are aligned with the WHO Age-friendly Cities focus on transportation, *“Accessible and affordable public transport is key to ensuring a city’s ... population is able to age actively and remain engaged with their community, with access to health and social facilities. Driving conditions and parking facilities in a city should also keep older drivers in mind.”*

The survey question asked respondents, “Transportation: from the list below, please select what you think are the TWO most important factors for you as you get older.”

These statistics reflect issues that respondents encounter, signalling areas where improvements are needed to create a more age-inclusive urban environment.



Parking availability emerges as the top concern, with 32% or 638 respondents expressing apprehensions about this aspect. Adequate parking facilities ensure accessibility to essential services and community activities.

The survey highlights that 31% experience issues with accessibility and utilisation of public transport, showing the need for programs to support independence and mobility among this demographic.

Furthermore, 28% of respondents indicate a lack of awareness or access to community transport services, emphasising the need for better communication, increased awareness and potential availability of community-based transportation options for residents who may not drive or have mobility challenges.

The key community identified themes are the availability of **dedicated seniors or accessible parking** and **logistical issues**, which can include awareness of eligibility for accessible parking permits (especially Double Time permits), mobility aids on public transport, legibility of timetables and signage. Note, because information about public transport and general parking availability was captured in the quantitative data, this input is in addition to those themes.

What next: consideration for transportation-related concerns has a significant impact on creating an inclusive environment where people are less isolated. Addressing these issues, with an emphasis on education about transport and parking options, will enhance the independence, participation, and overall well-being of community members as they age within the City of Whitehorse.

Community feedback

Note: all quotes are direct from survey respondents and have not been edited for spelling or grammar.

“With the ageing population I am finding it more and more difficult to find the disabled parking spots.”

“Convenient, safe, reliable and affordable options to driving are vital as we age, and our health starts to deteriorate.”

“Easy to access transport is important to minimise social isolation and loneliness in Whitehorse.”

“Keeping social connections is related to personal mobility and ability to use public transport.”

“Education on how to use public transport, some people, both young and old have no idea.”

“As people stop driving, they need alternatives or people who shouldn't be driving feel they have no choice but to continue.”

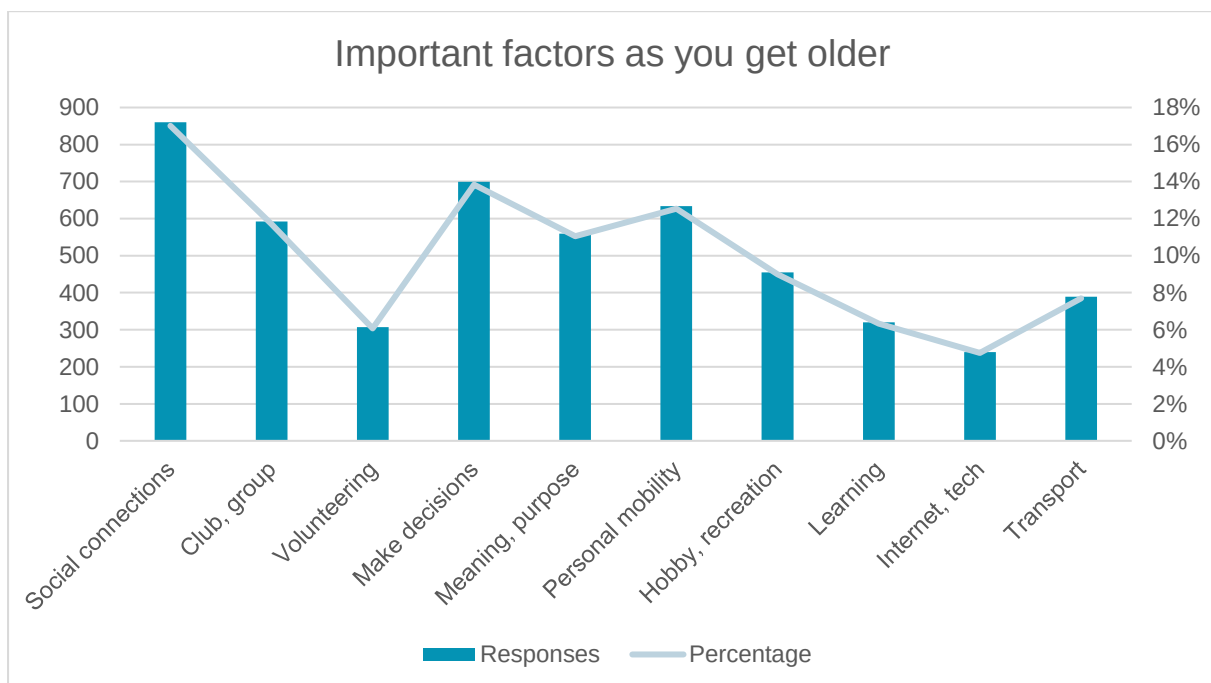
5.3. Social participation and connection

According to the WHO Age-friendly Cities framework, “*participating in leisure, social, cultural and spiritual activities in the community fosters continued integration with society and helps individuals stay engaged and informed.*”

Social well-being is a critical aspect of creating an inclusive and supportive community. In this context, survey results shed light on significant aspects related to social connections and feelings of loneliness among individuals in Whitehorse.

The survey questions asked respondents:

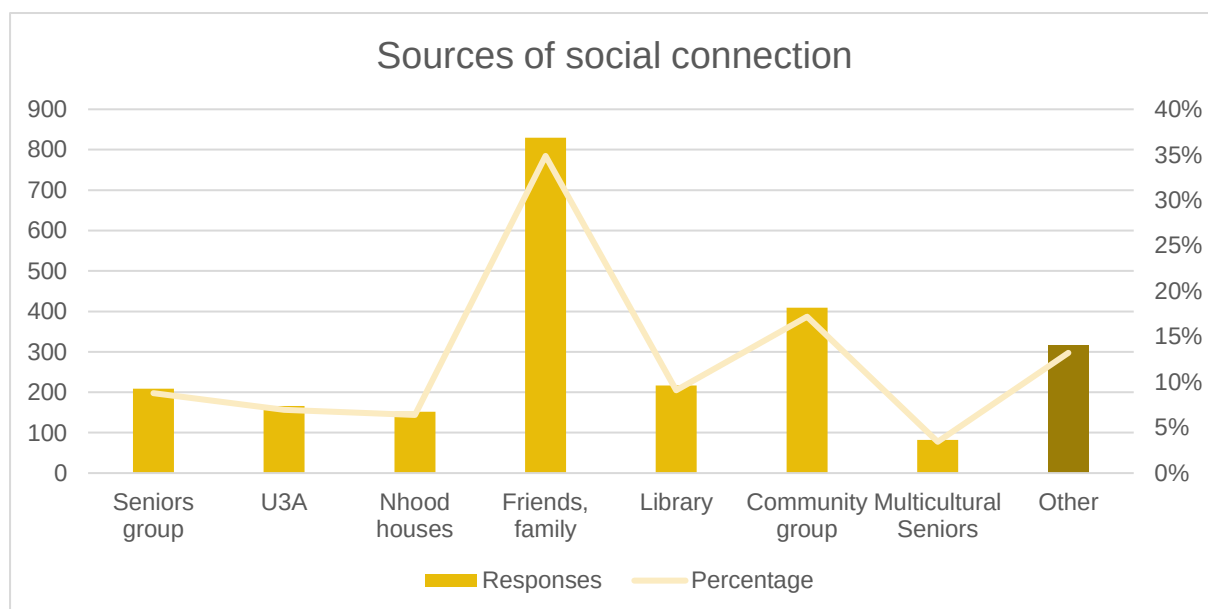
- *From the list below, please select what you think are the FIVE most important factors for you as you get older.*
- *Do you ever feel lonely or isolated?*
- *What are your main sources of social connection? Select all that apply.*
- *How often do you participate in social activities?*



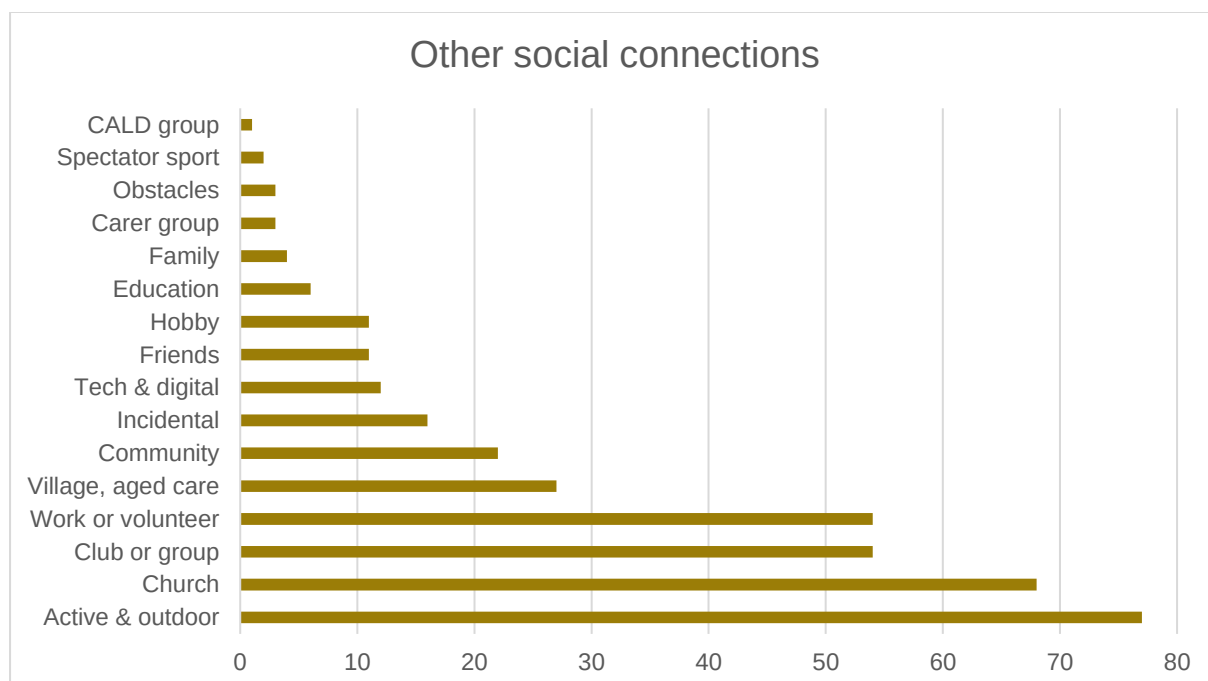
Findings reveal that 860 respondents identify “social connections and interactions with friends and/or family” as one of the most important factors as they age. This highlights the importance of these connections in positive ageing. Indeed, research supports a positive relationship between social connections, functional capacity, and longevity (Friedman et al. 2024).

Following social connections, other important factors for respondents are:

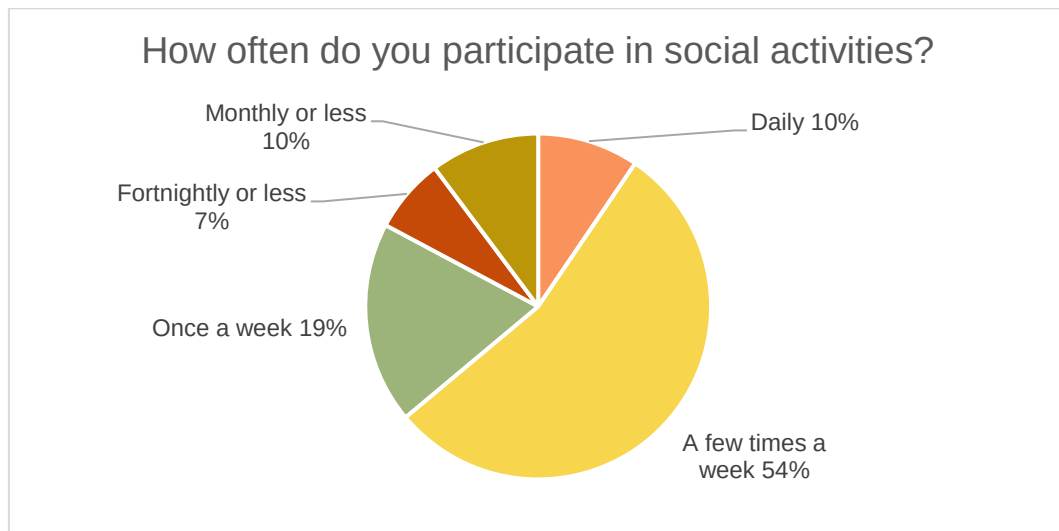
- being able to make decisions independently
- personal mobility
- participating in a club, group, activity or organisation
- having a meaning and purpose in life



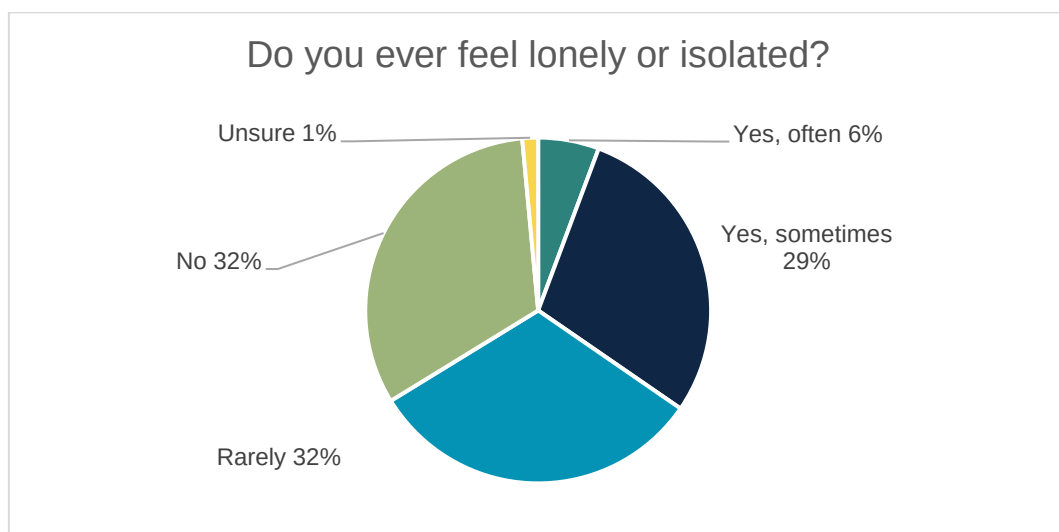
Furthermore, 830 survey respondents rely on family and friends as their primary source of social connection, underscoring the pivotal role of these relationships.



Further sources of social connection respondents found significant were “community group, seniors’ group or clubs” and other interactions. Analysis of the free text responses included under ‘Other’ show significant levels of connection through active or outdoor pursuits (21%) followed by church (18%), with many respondents also connecting through work or volunteering (combined 18%).



A substantial majority of respondents participated in social activities at least once a week (83%) with 54% participating a few times a week.



Despite these connections, results indicate that 35% of respondents sometimes or often feel lonely. This statistic indicates a gap between social connections and feelings of loneliness among community members.

The key community identified theme is the availability of **services and resources** to enable or enhance social participation and connection. As many currently exist this indicates that a key area of focus should be on information and awareness, along with capacity building, of these services and resources.

What next: to address these needs to foster a more socially inclusive environment, the Whitehorse Positive Ageing team will identify existing programs to promote and enhance awareness, identify new initiatives and opportunities, with a key focus on community awareness.

Promote and enhance community programs and activities tailored to the interests and needs of this demographic, including social clubs, sports, hobby groups, or classes aimed at encouraging social interaction and reducing isolation.

By prioritising initiatives that encourage social engagement, and address feelings of loneliness, we can contribute to creating a more supportive and socially connected environment for residents within the community.

Community feedback

"I think loneliness can be a big factor in the elderly. Getting them out once a week or fortnight, either for a meet up with others for coffee or lunch, healthy outlook on life creates healthy wellbeing."

"People who are lonely need help to access the services available. Communication is vital, do not expect the elderly to go on the internet."

"U3A has been a life changer for me. I dread the day I am not capable of attending the choice of so many interesting and varied activities."

"I would like to see more outdoor activities (covid-free) being run by the council like tai-chi, outdoor book club, gardening, community repair market, crafting."

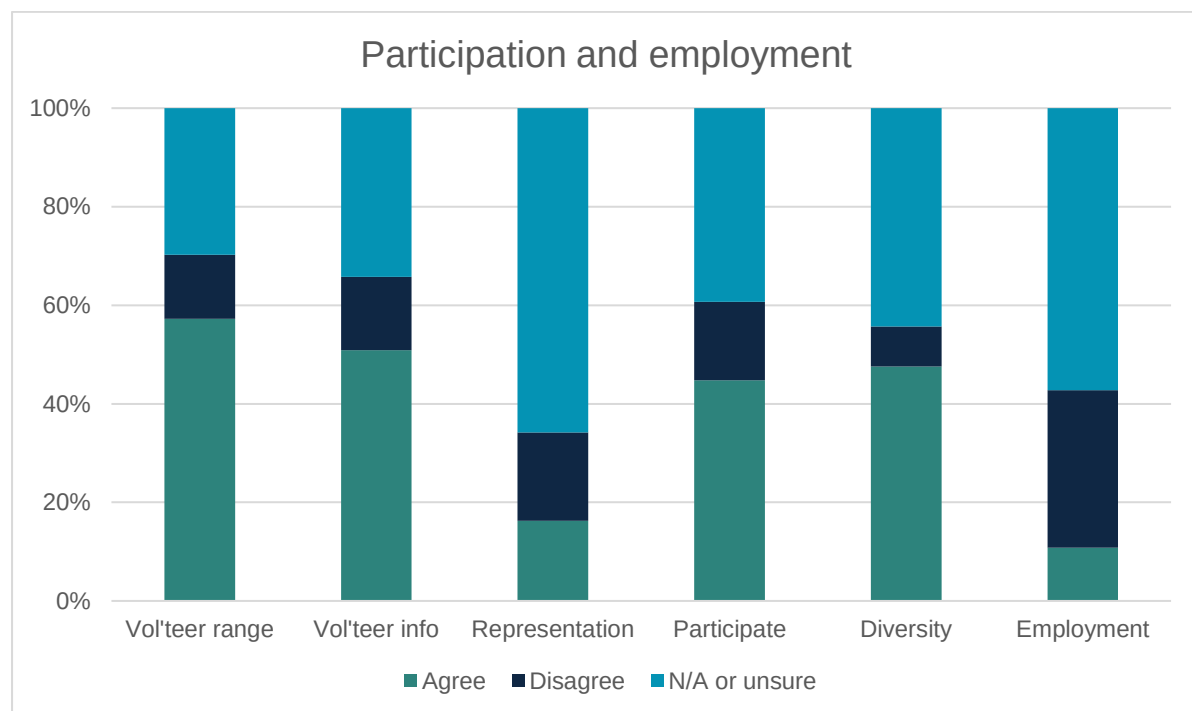
"I want to recreate with a whole variety of people, young to old, working and retired, and from many ethnic groups."

"Making it easier for older people to be able to communicate - not everyone is computer savvy."

5.4. Community (civic) participation and employment

As described in the WHO Age-friendly Cities domains, “Older people are an asset to the community, and they continue contributing to their communities after retirement. An age-friendly city and community provides ample opportunities for older people to do so, be it through voluntary or paid employment, and keeps them engaged in the political process.”

The survey specifically targeted aspects related to community participation and employment concerning individuals as they age in Whitehorse. It centred on evaluating awareness, access, and engagement with volunteering roles across our community. This section of the survey asked respondents if they Agree, Disagree or are Unsure about six statements.



Regarding the high level of “N/A or unsure” responses, many respondents noted in their qualitative responses that due to their age they were not seeking employment or volunteering opportunities.

Awareness, access, and engagement in volunteering: these questions inquired about the awareness levels regarding volunteering opportunities within the community. The results indicated 57% agreed there is a range of interesting volunteer opportunities and 50% knew where to go for information about volunteering.

Representation in local committees: this aspect aimed to assess the extent to which respondents are actively engaged in leadership roles within the community at a board or committee level. The response to this question indicated a low awareness or perception with only 16.27% of respondents agreeing with the statement.

Participation: a majority of close to 50% of respondents agreed that “older people are encouraged to participate and are engaged in their community.”

Diversity and employment opportunities: this section sought to understand perceptions about employment prospects. A low response only 10.8% of respondents agreed there is a range of paid employment options for residents as they age.

The key community identified theme is the availability of **information** about civic participation and employment, for those seeking opportunities. A secondary underlying theme is **Ageism**, though often not identified with this specific term. Local government has been active and will need to continue working towards overcoming Ageism - a form of discrimination we all stand to face with age.

What next: in addressing the perceptions and uncertainties regarding employment opportunities for mature individuals within the community, Whitehorse has an opportunity to play a role through community awareness initiatives.

The Positive ageing team can investigate the feasibility of continuing existing Ageism awareness campaigns and broaden the scope to incorporate changing perceptions about older workers' capabilities and highlighting their valuable contributions to the workforce. These campaigns could focus on challenging stereotypes, showcasing success stories of mature employees, and promoting the benefits of a diverse, multi-generational society.

Community feedback

“Retired people can be very valuable as volunteers and in turn gives the volunteer a sense of worth.”

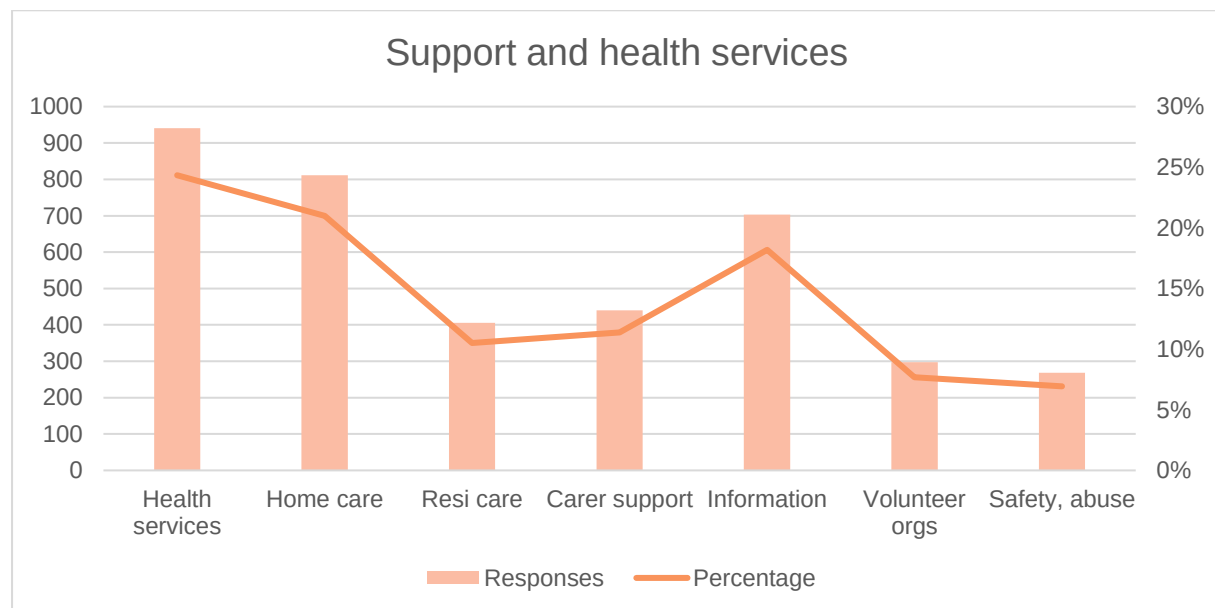
“I think that there is a lot of prejudice against older people in the workforce. Anything that can be done to encourage employers to ignore age in their hiring decisions is to be applauded.”

“Employers are 'ageist'. There's definitely age discrimination in employment.”

5.5. Community support and health services

The survey explored aspects regarding the health and support needs and priorities of residents as they age within the community. “Accessible and affordable community and health services are crucial in keeping seniors healthy, independent and active,” WHO Age-friendly Cities framework.

The survey question asked respondents, “Community support and health services: from the list below, please select what you think are the FOUR most important factors for you as you get older.”



Highlighted by over 900 respondents, access to a range of health and community support services (such as doctors, podiatrists, dentists etc.) is their foremost priority.

Following closely, over 800 responses identified the importance of access to home care services, recognising the vital role these services play in an individual's capacity to age in place.

Also, 20% of respondents showed that access to health information is important. This emphasises the value placed on easily accessible and reliable health-related resources that empower informed decision-making about well-being.

Both residential care services and carer support received equal importance. These findings give recognition of the role played by residential care facilities in providing specialised care when living at home is no longer viable, as well as acknowledging the significance of support for carers.

The key community identified theme strongly highlights a need for information about and assistance navigating My Aged Care (MAC), this is in addition to themes around information and home care, which were captured in the quantitative data.

What next: survey findings serve as a guide for the Connect and Support service within the Positive Ageing team. Fundamentally, this informs the role Council will play in supporting local service providers to ensure accessible, inclusive, and comprehensive support and health services are available to individuals within our community.

Community feedback

“It is vital to have a range of good Health and Community Services that are easily accessible and readily available for all in the Community, especially people who have English as a second language and Seniors!”

“Home care services become more important with age.”

“I have no wish to move, and I would like to have services that will help keep me at home as I age.”

“What is important is maintaining independence and living at home as long as possible.”

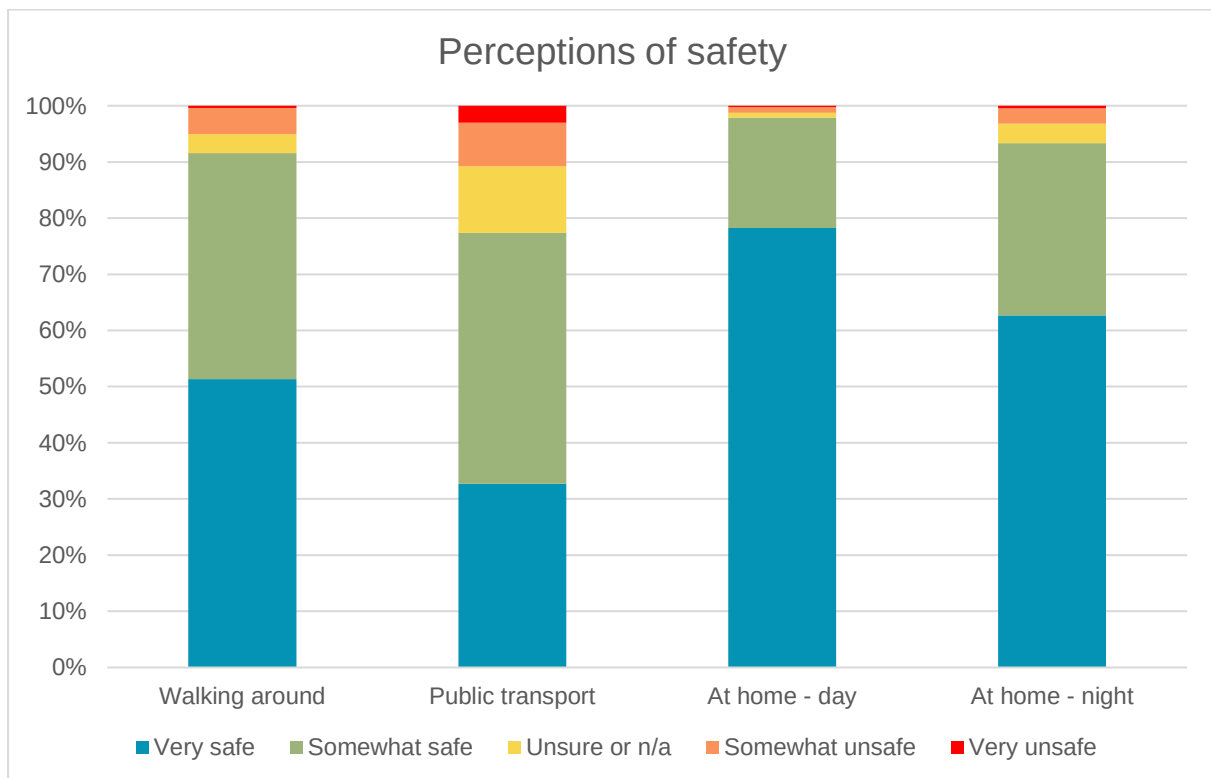
“Communication to the community to show what services are available, not internet. Seniors do not like internet, prefer hands on.”

“As people age, there are many different issues that arise, and being able to access health and community support services easily is key!”

5.6. Perception of safety

All aspects of participation are influenced by perceptions of safety. The survey question asked respondents to rate, “How safe do you feel in the following situations?” in four different situations.

Generally, most responses indicate high levels confidence, with feeling very or somewhat safe, in all situations except while using public transport where levels of confidence were lower.



6. Recommendations

The insights and feedback gathered from the Positive Ageing in Whitehorse survey will be assist in shaping the Positive Ageing objectives included in the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025 – 2029*.

Incorporating priorities: in conjunction with evidence-based research, internal stakeholder engagement, community focus and project groups, these results will contribute to the development of Positive Ageing initiatives.

Community engagement and partnerships: the Positive Ageing Partnership and Participation team will identify and initiate community engagement and partnerships with relevant stakeholders. The team will seek ongoing collaboration with service providers, community groups and organisations to ensure ongoing feedback, active involvement, capacity building and co-creation of initiatives.

Addressing service provider challenges: insights from the survey, regarding changes in service provision will guide the Positive Ageing Connect and Support service to develop strategies to aid in responding to individual requests. Furthermore, harnessing the feedback will identify opportunities for Council to champion sector development.

7. Conclusion

The survey data and qualitative feedback emphasise the value of future initiatives centred on enhancing social connectivity. It highlights the importance of increasing awareness of available programs and activities, thereby fostering a sense of community and reducing social isolation.

Additionally, the survey findings advocate for transport education programs to improve accessibility for seniors. Survey results underscore the importance of improving amenities. This aligns with the need to create age-friendly outdoor spaces that facilitate mobility and promote an active lifestyle among residents as they age.

Whitehorse City Council will ensure the Connect and Support service will empower individuals by facilitating access to support services while simultaneously linking them to local opportunities that contribute to their independence, health and wellbeing.

The Positive Ageing in Whitehorse survey results, in combination with current evidence-based knowledge, will assist in the development of the Positive Ageing objectives in the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2025-2029)*.

This plan will be instrumental in ensuring that the specific needs, concerns, and aspirations of our ageing population are not only acknowledged but effectively addressed, fostering an age-friendly, supportive, and inclusive environment within the Whitehorse community.

8. Appendices

Groups engaged

All at Positive Ageing Expo
All at Whitehorse Spring Festival
All at The Round Midweek Matinée
Blackburn Bowls club
Box Hill Rotary
Chinese Women's Assc. of Vic
Circolo Pensionati Italiani
Clota Cottage
Community of Cypriots
Greek Seniors of Nunawading
Hungarian Seniors
Inala Village
Indo Chinese Elderly Assoc
Jing Song Senior Chinese Mens Inc
John Flynn Retirement Village
Kerrimuir Probus group
Louise Multicultural Centre
Migrant Information Centre
Multicultural Seniors' Mental Health Conf.
Neighbourhood house network
Southern Cross Care
St Andrews Greek Orthodox Seniors
Strathdon House & Orchard Precinct
Sunset Senior Community Choir
U3A Box Hill and Nunawading
Umbrella Dementia Café Blackburn
Vermont South Ladies Probus Club
Vermont South Neighbourhood House
Whitehorse Activities Club
Whitehorse Churches Care

Information distributed

Whitehorse service centres x 3
Requests via Cr McNeill
The Hub
Sportslink
Aqualink Box Hill
Aqualink Nunawading
Nunawading & Orcas Swim clubs
Gardiners Creek parkrun
Mullum Mullum parkrun
Blackburn Library
Box Hill Library
Nunawading Library
Vermont South Library
HealthAbility
Community support centres
Health clinics
Churches x 12
Sikh Temple
Interfaith Network

Neighbourhood Houses:

Avenue @ Eley
Bennettswood
Blackburn Nth
Box Hill South
Burwood
Clota Cottage
Kerrimuir
Louise Multicultural Centre
Mitcham Community House
Vermont South

8.1. Respondent demographic profile

N/C = field not completed, there were no mandatory fields in the survey.

COMPLETED BY	For myself	Assisting another	For senior friend	N/C
Number of respondents	946	35	50	21
% of total respondents	90%	3%	5%	2%

AGE (years)	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75 +	N/C
Number of respondents	82	151	313	490	16
% of total respondents	8%	14%	30%	47%	2%

GENDER	Male	Female	Non-binary	Not say	N/C
Number of respondents	302	731	1	7	11
% of total respondents	29%	70%	0%	1%	1%

DIVERSITY	Disability	Aboriginal	CALD	Not say	None	N/C
Number of respondents	224	2	139	33	640	14
% of total respondents	21%	0%	13%	3%	61%	1%

COUNTRY of birth	Number	Percentage
Australia	672	64%
China	51	5%
Greece	10	1%
Hong Kong	26	2%
India	18	2%
Malaysia	26	2%
New Zealand	13	1%
Philippines	4	0%
Sri Lanka	12	1%
Vietnam	15	1%
United Kingdom	71	7%
Other	106	10%
Not completed	28	3%

LANGUAGE spoken at home	Number	Percentage
English	874	83%
Cantonese	52	5%
Hindi	5	0%
Mandarin	34	3%
Sinhalese	5	0%
Greek	14	1%
Italian	6	1%
Vietnamese	3	0%
Punjabi	1	0%
Other	37	4%
Not completed	21	2%

SUBURB	Number	Percentage
Blackburn North	32	3%
Blackburn South	66	6%
Blackburn	108	10%
Box Hill North	46	4%
Box Hill South	31	3%
Box Hill	55	5%
Burwood East	60	6%
Burwood	38	4%
Forest Hill	74	7%
Mitcham North	6	1%
Mitcham	100	10%
Mont Albert North	26	2%
Mont Albert	25	2%
Nunawading	76	7%
Surrey Hills	18	2%
Vermont South	70	7%
Vermont	46	4%
Other LGA	77	7%
Not completed	98	9%

8.2. Bibliography

Whitehorse City Council. 2023. *Positive Ageing in Whitehorse Questionnaire*

Friedman E, Franks M, Teas E, Thomas PA. *Social connectedness, functional capacity, and longevity: A focus on positive relations with others*. Soc Sci Med. 2024 Jan;340:116419. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.116419. Epub 2023 Nov 15. PMID: 37992615.