

# PREFACE

## WHY IS THIS GUIDE IMPORTANT FOR ME?

**You will discover the possibilities for creating a better journey in later life.**

Most of us don't like to think about our own aging. We don't feel comfortable thinking about the fact that we might lose some of our physical or cognitive functioning due to changes in our physical or brain health. Yet, ironically, by facing our fears and understanding the key risks we may encounter, we can take early actions that actually reduce some of our risks. By being open to contemplating our aging journey, we can even expand our opportunities and options too. The combination of timely planning and decisions help to "get ahead of the curve," to create a smoother road for yourself and for those you care about.

Unfortunately, many people do not have an empowered and connected aging experience. **Why not?**

In short, it is because they are waiting until they are in a crisis to find a new place to live or to adapt their home after a major health setback or when discharged from hospital. This wait-and-see approach is high risk to everyone—seniors, their families, and/or caregivers. It means making important decisions in a crisis mode. This makes you even more vulnerable as you rush to make complicated decisions about where you will live or how to arrange home care. For example, you could be forced into moving to a retirement home that you cannot really afford, or a long-term care home in a location that you don't want. Or, you might not be able to find the type or quality of home care service that

you urgently need. These decisions take time, and you want to have options in making these choices.

None of us really wants to think about our vulnerabilities as we age. But isn't it wiser to take control and leadership of our future now? I think so. **Successful aging is a process that involves making several transitions.** We can choose to lead these transitions or wait until the transitions are overwhelming. By leading your own planning and transitions, you create opportunities and solutions that offset your key risks. Ultimately, you set yourself up for better experiences in later life.

This guide is designed to help you envision your aging options with a positive and informed mindset. Use the Five-Strategy Framework to learn key elements for transition planning, including creative use of all of your resources. You will also find that by exploring plans over a longer time horizon, you can broaden your options.

## Why read it now?

Our world changed dramatically during the global COVID-19 crisis. We realized what is essential to our daily life. We were reminded that our health and mental well-being are tied to our living situation, our behaviour choices, and our social relationships including with our neighbours. We directly experienced the link between how prepared and proactive we are as a society, and how this plays out in terms of our individual risks, and whether or not our own health (and life) is maintained. The COVID-19 pandemic showed us how early action, informed strategies, and preparation can reduce our risks and lead to better outcomes.

Heartbreakingly, we also witnessed the opposite of this when it came to seniors living in long-term care homes or retirement residences. The uneven standards of care, staffing levels, and outdated physical designs within many of these settings exposed a systemic lack of priority attention to the needs of older adults. This reflects our societal discrimination against people who are aging and/or have a disability. **Ageism is real.**

Since most of us do not want to live in an institutional setting, our worst fears were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, if we let our fears stop us from thinking about our own aging, we are actually discriminating against ourselves. Our avoidance contributes to a collective blind spot about the lack of appealing, affordable, universally accessible housing and quality home care that provide alternatives to institutional settings for seniors. And, if we continue with this shortage of suitable and inclusive models of housing and care, we will keep repeating the cycle of reliance on institutional models. Essentially, if we want to have more sustainable and appealing community-based options, each of us must take the lead and do our early planning.

## How can we do this?

We can start by making some fundamental changes as individuals. It comes back to you and me accepting that we are aging, and reflecting on what we would like our own aging journey to be. Use this guide and the Five-Strategy Framework to systematically explore your own vision for aging and consider the risks, benefits, and opportunities within your resources. This proactive approach will enable you to shape the options that you want for yourself and the people you care about.

Let's use our 60s and 70s to prepare for our 80s and 90s. In doing so, we open up the possibilities for creating the best experience in later life.



**Sue Lantz**, BA, MPA  
Managing Director  
Collaborative Aging

