

Seniors aren't the problem

Pete Aarssen - March 2021

I came across an article of a similar title and thought I would draw some of the examples within it to give all of us a good reality check! In this current pandemic, the government and the media have continually framed older Canadians as frail and in most need of protection from Covid-19 – for good reason! The pandemic has hit older Canadians disproportionately hard. The resulting, sometimes brutal consequences have seen elders driven into strict lockdown measures for their own protection. This has created in all of us a keen cause for concern for the health of the aged. What's forgotten is that elders are not solely vulnerable; my sister and her husband, several cousins and some acquaintances of ours have had Covid-19, all under the age of 65, some of them elementary aged children. While it is clearly a more deadly illness when infecting the aged, we would all do well to remember that elders should not be seen only as victims of Covid-19 but also as a great part of the solution to helping us recover from it! It is no surprise to anyone that Canada's older adults are enjoying much greater longevity. The baby-boomers; now aged between 54-75, and their actions all demonstrate that they are committed, more than any older demographic in history, to living life well, to aging in place comfortably and to keeping active and healthy for as long as possible. Many of them still work and volunteer. And, many of the places where they work or volunteer hours of service really, really need them to continue to do so! The number of seniors working in Canada has more than doubled since 2000. In 2018, Stats Canada reported 28.4% of Canadian 60 and older reported working as their major activity. And among seniors with university degrees, the rate of them working past the age of 65, is even higher. With private pension plans reducing in popularity and availability, some seniors work because they cannot afford to retire, yet less than half of them report working because they needed to. Seniors not only work to earn a living during their golden years, they also give back a great degree of the money that they earn. In 2017, Canadian seniors provided 42% of all donations to charities while comprising just 20% of the population. Another way that seniors contribute to society is through caregiving. Almost 25% of all caregivers in Canada are over the age of 65. During the pandemic many seniors came out of retirement to fill roles as front-line workers, to help at local foodbanks, to deliver groceries and drive people to appointments. Research shows that when seniors give back in these kinds of ways, it doesn't just benefit our economy and society, it actually contributes to helping seniors remain personally satisfied and improves their overall health. Stats Canada reports that a person, aged 65 today, will see continued life expectancy ranging from between 19.5-22.2 years. In having reflected on just some of the ways that they contribute to society and our economy, that's a lot more years to see their assistance continue! I hope this information helps displace the view of older Canadians as only being frail and vulnerable. As we face the challenge of rebounding from Covid-19, I am glad that we have so many seniors among us and that they have, on average, so many years remaining to contribute of their giftedness and generous service to us all.

