The oldest trees often bear the sweetest fruit.

-German proverb

University of Alberta

The Contributions of Older Adults: Perspectives from Researcher and Stakeholder Groups

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Aging

Human Ecology

Fall 2010
Edmonton, Alberta

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Dedication

For Mom and Dad, in the end, this was for you.

Abstract

This study seeks to establish a working definition of contributions, related to older adults, from the perspective of stakeholder groups (elders, caregivers to elders, practitioners, and policy makers). A secondary content analysis was conducted on 4 group interviews of stakeholder groups. Findings supported the conceptual framework of the Welfare Diamond, whereby elders make contributions to various sectors that constitute society. Further, stakeholders identified invisible contributions, as well as the darker side of making contributions, as important elements of contribution. Findings help to establish an inclusive definition of contribution and to highlight where more research may be needed.

Acknowledgement

To my supervisor, Janet Fast, my committee members, Norah Keating and Maria Mayan, as well as my honourary committee member, Jacquie Eales - thank you for your time, guidance, and expertise on all facets of this project. I have learned a great deal about the research process, writing, theory, and of course, elders. Thank you.

Thanks to members of the executive and of the greater HCIC research team for conducting and allowing me to use the original data for this project.

Thanks to my peers in the Human Ecology department for their listening skills, understanding and advice, borrowed books and articles, and for the type of support that can only come from someone who's recently 'been there'.

Thank you to my friends for their encouragement, childcare, and frequent sanity check-ins.

And lastly, thanks to my family for their unwavering love and support.

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Introduction

A negative view of older adults exists due to a widespread belief that, upon retirement, older adults become dependent and non-contributing members of society. In order to illustrate this point, Katz (2005) writes that elders are "a burdensome and cumbersome behemoth that roves greedily across fiscal territories, demanding and consuming resources, and sacrificing the future prosperity of shrinking younger generations to the priorities of its own needs" (pg.13). He uses such dramatic imagery to demonstrate that older adults (individuals over the age of 65 years) are unfairly cast as a societal drain to the general population.

The proportion of senior citizens in Canada increases each year: the population is currently at 13% and is forecast to be 20% by the year 2026 (Northcott, 2005). The negative view of older adults paired with the greater proportion of elders in society translates to a perceived crisis or 'apocalyptic demography', whereby older adults' social, economic, and health resource usage is believed to outweigh their contributions (Gee & Gutman, 2000).

Paid work is the most widely accepted form of 'contribution' (Fast, Charchuk, Keating, Dosman, & Moran, 2006). As the majority of people over the age of 65 are not involved in the paid work force, it is a common belief that older adults are not contributing after retirement. Yet because older adults continue to use health and social services, and also receive their Old Age Security (OAS), Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) benefits, it might appear as though they are taking more out of the social system than they put in, thereby threatening the viability of social security systems.

While many believe that the consumption of public resources by older adults is much greater than their contributions, others argue that the problem does not lie with the consumption of older adults at all, but rather with the conception of the term 'contribution'. Involvement in the paid work force is not the singular way an individual can contribute. There has been a modest body of literature examining elders' unpaid work in the formal volunteer sector. Older adults spend more hours per week on volunteer work and stay with the organization longer than younger volunteers (Statistics Canada, 2001). Further research indicates that volunteer activity has important implications for individuals and a healthy and vibrant civil society, promotes cohesion within societies, and significantly contributes to national economies (Warburton, Paynter, & Petriwskyj, 2007). Additionally, without older adults' regular unpaid caregiving work, Canada's health and continuing care sectors would collapse (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Fuller 2000). Many researchers assert that the varied contributions older adults make to society, friends, and family are currently undervalued and deserve increased recognition (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006; Burr, Caro, & Moorhead, 2002; Ranijn, 2002). There is extensive knowledge about the varied contributions of older adults; however, the knowledge about the specific kinds of contributions older adults make is scattered across several separate bodies of literature.

Although there is a great deal of knowledge illustrating the extensive contributions of elders, researchers use their specialized language to discuss them. In 1990, Straus argued that scientific knowledge had grown so rapidly and become so specialized that integration of 'all relevant knowledge and all concerned points of view' (p. 13) has become an increasingly important task. More than a decade later, there has been a

significant amount of additional research produced which makes integration an even greater challenge. Current conceptions of ‘contribution’ represent a good example: they are based on the separate and specialized knowledge of researchers from different fields or areas of expertise. As Strauss advises that all relevant knowledge and points of view are important, it becomes pertinent to include the perceptions of those who have a stake in the issue, as well. Pairing the specialized knowledge of different researchers with the unique perspectives of stakeholders will help to establish triangulation of concepts and to ensure consistency in language.

The purpose of this study is to discover how stakeholders (older adults, caregivers to older adults, practitioners, and policy makers) understand contributions. The literature review will attempt to generalize—that is abstract, simplify, and synthesize—prior analysis of and knowledge about contributions in order to establish greater clarity among current concepts, and to demonstrate how different specialists contribute to our understanding of contributions. The study then moves beyond reviewing and synthesising existing research on the various kinds of contributions made by older adults to seek input about perceptions of contributions from stakeholder groups, in order to provide a comprehensive conceptualization of ‘contribution’.

A working definition of ‘contribution’ will aid researchers in furthering their work on older adults and their place in society. A re-conceptualization of contribution that includes elders’ work without pay for different societal sectors will enhance understanding of the role contributions play in older adults’ lives, as well as in our communities, economy, and society. A greater understanding of and focus on contributions may help challenge apocalyptic demography. Additionally, in academic

discourse, enhanced understanding of contribution may lead to challenging assumptions about the relationships between aging well, independence, and social inclusion/exclusion.

Conceptual Framework/Theory

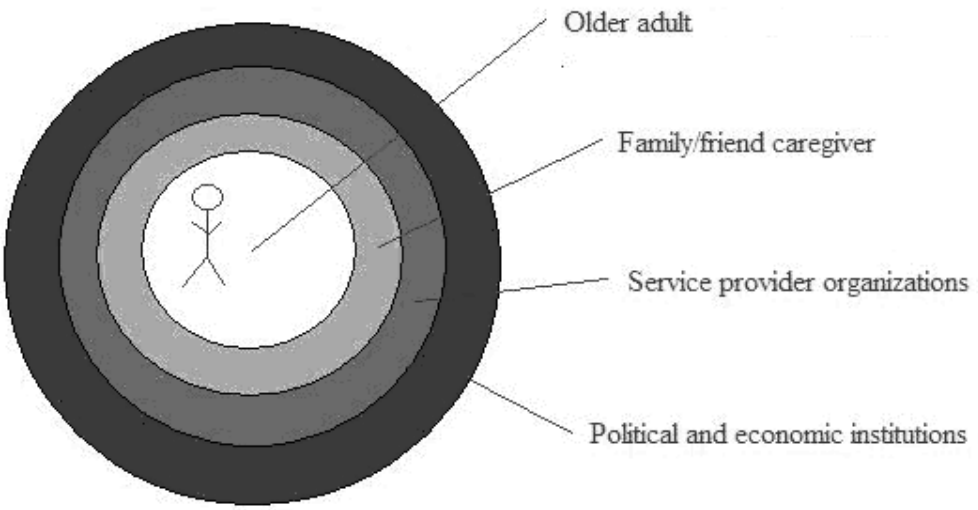
Based on the review of literature that follows that identifies tasks such as paid work, volunteering, and caregiving as contributions, I am working from the assumption that contributions are related to well-being. Further, as the research tends to stress an impact on others, I also presume that the contributions have an impact beyond the elder, and on the elder's surrounding environments, such as other individuals or greater society. Since environments and well-being are inherent concepts in the exploration of the contributions of older adults, the Human Ecology theory and the Welfare Diamond are fitting models to use to guide this research.

Human Ecology theory conceptualizes humans as both biological organisms and social beings in interaction with their environments (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). The model, based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, situates the older adult at the epicentre of a series of three concentric circles (see Figure 1). Each circle represents a different environment in reciprocal interaction with the older adult at the epicentre, as well as the other surrounding environments. As the purpose of this study is to examine how stakeholder groups understand the contributions of older adults, it is fitting that the stakeholder groups be selected as representatives from each of the four concentric circles of Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology model.

The older adult will sit at the epicentre of the surrounding environments. The microsphere (environment or circle closest to the older adult) includes any people or events that directly influence the elder, such as family and friend caregivers, who may be part of a larger network of family, friends, and/or neighbours. Moving one circle or environment outward is the exosphere. It consists of the settings, groups, and/or

organizations that might not contain the elder at all but that influence the elder through effects upon the people or places that directly impact the elder. This would include service provider organizations, which develop and deliver programs and services specific to the needs of older adults. The most outward environment or circle is the macrosphere. The macrosphere encompasses the societal or legislative forms of influence such as values, laws, conventions, customs, and resources, of a particular culture. It would include political and economic institutions such as governments, which set the social policies and older adults' entitlements to public benefits.

Figure 1. The Human Ecology Model



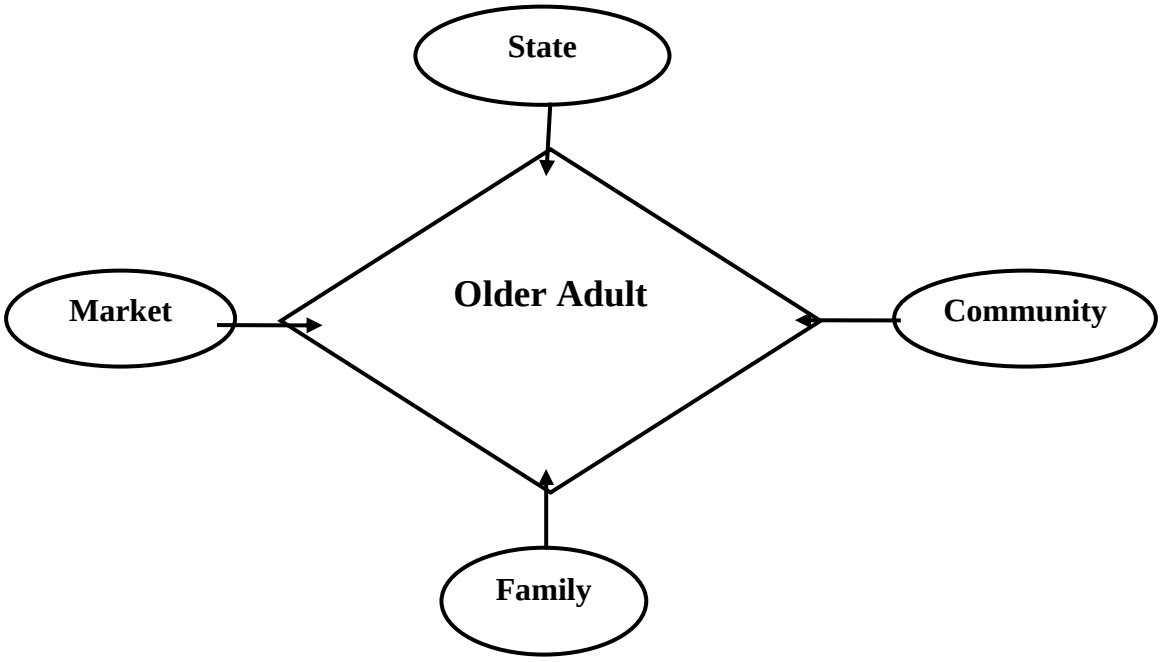
There are many predictors involved in individual and societal well-being. For example, Armstrong, Armstrong, and Fuller (2000) state that well-being comes from 'secure employment and decent incomes, from safe physical and social environments, from food, clothing, shelter, jobs and joy' (pg. 39). In 2004, Jane Jensen developed the

Welfare Diamond model to identify policy levers for maintaining and enhancing individual well-being and social welfare.

Jensen's Welfare Diamond identifies the main contexts that influence individual well-being (Fast, Charchuk, Keating, Dosman, & Moran, 2006). Jensen postulates that, in every society, there are four sources of well-being for citizens: *market* income, non-market care and support within the *family*, *state*-sponsored services and income transfers, and *community* services and supports. She identifies social architecture as the roles, responsibilities and relationships among a variety of sources of well-being. Well-being is achieved by obtaining a good balance of resources from the market, state, community, and family.

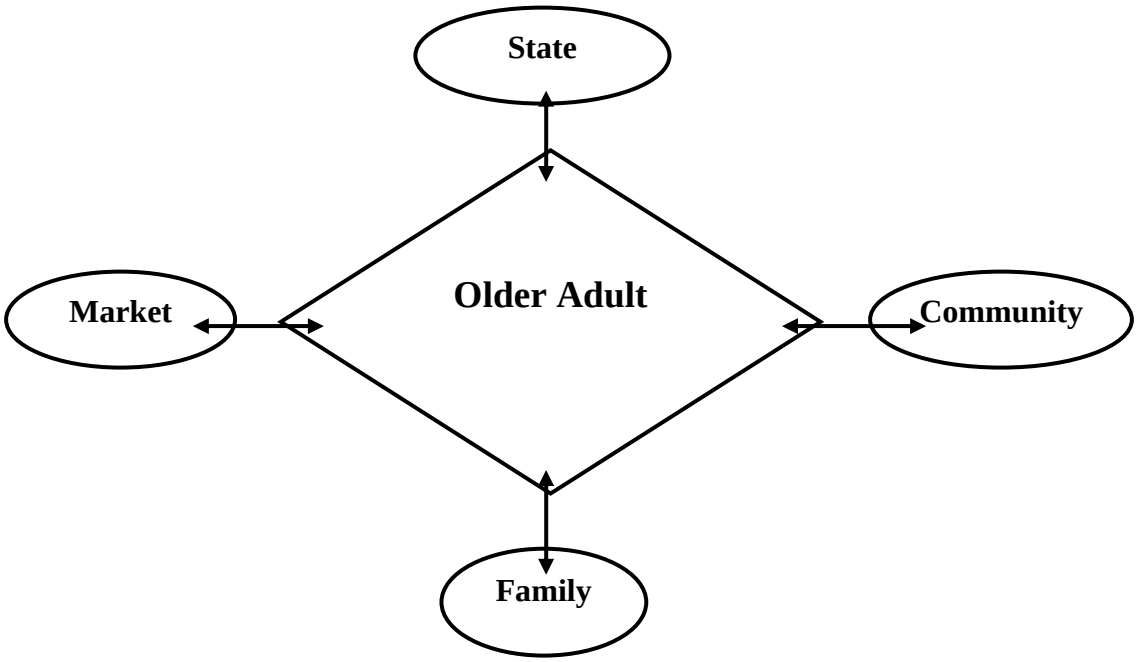
Jensen (2004) proposes that society can be broken down into four sectors and these are represented as the four corners of the Welfare Diamond, as seen in Figure 2. Jensen's Welfare Diamond model casts individuals at the centre of the diamond as *recipients* of resources.

Figure 2: Welfare Diamond



Fast et al. (2006) modified the Welfare Diamond model (see Figure 3), asserting that resources are exchanged and flow *both ways*, rather than uni-directionally. For example, without the individual at the centre of the diamond contributing to the community, there would be no community to relay support back to individuals. This is the model used to frame this research project, as elders are situated at the centre of the diamond and their contributions are shown to impact the pillars of society.

Figure 3: Modified Welfare Diamond (Fast et al. 2006)



The contexts that Jensen posits create well-being can be considered environments. With the adaptations by Fast et al (2006), the modified Welfare Diamond is similar to Human Ecology model. Both models have an individual situated at the centre of different environments that interact with individual well-being.

Human Ecology theory and the Welfare Diamond model work well together as both models explore the contexts that surround and impact, or are impacted by, older adults. Jensen (2004) identifies social architecture as the roles, responsibilities and relationships among a variety of sources of well-being. The Human Ecology model assumes that individuals are encircled by different contexts that also have an impact on welfare. The Human Ecology model was used to identify groups of people who represented different environments surrounding older adults. The Welfare Diamond will be used as a lens to organize the pre-existing literature and demonstrate how specifically elders provide

resources to their families, communities, market, and state, and thus, to society. Furthering this research with the perspective of stakeholder groups of how elders contribute will work towards providing a comprehensive definition and conceptual clarity of contribution.

Literature Review

In order to understand current knowledge about the varied contributions of older adults, several different bodies of literature were explored and many different search terms were utilized. The specialized knowledge of researchers about different aspects of older adults exists in different fields of expertise.

Some of the terms used in relation to contributions that have been established by varied specialists on aging are: formal and informal volunteering (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006; Choi, Burr, Mutchler, & Caro, 2007), social participation or engagement (Herzog, Ofstedal, & Wheeler, 2002; Bukov, Maas, & Lampert, 2002), productive engagement or activity (Herzog et al., 2002; Herzog, Kahn, Morgan, Jackson, & Antonucci, 1989; Glass, Seeman, Herzog, Kahn, & Berkman, 1995; Hinterlong, Morrow-Howell, & Rozario, 2007; Dosman, Fast, Chapman, & Keating, 2006), occupational engagement (Stevens-Ratchford, 2005), civic engagement or participation (Martinson & Minkler, 2006), and productive aging (Caro, Bass, & Chen, 1993; Ranzijn & Andrews, 1999). Although these terms are assigned to specific aspects of elders' time use or behaviour, the researchers all use the word 'contribution' to describe their research focus. Thus, it is arguable that all the terms listed above represent smaller pieces of a greater whole: the concept of 'contribution'.

There is an initial distinction made between formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering can be help provided through an organization (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005), unpaid work done for an established organization (Warburton & McLaughlin 2006), or unpaid work done in formal settings such as hospitals, religious organizations, schools, senior centres, Meals on Wheels programs, and other educational

and human service organizations (Choi et al., 2007). In contrast to formal volunteering, informal volunteering is described as help provided *directly* to family and friends. Informal volunteering is defined as reciprocal interactions embedded in family and community relationships (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005), including activities undertaken to benefit communities, neighbourhood, family, or friends (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006). Choi et al. add that some examples of informal volunteering include babysitting, caregiving, and helping out neighbours, friends, and relatives outside the household.

Bukov et al. (2002) define social participation as making contributions to social environments. Social environments are strengthened when individuals provide resources, and alternately, when social environments are strong, individuals can also draw from those environmental resources. This definition has been broken down into three categories: collective, productive, and political participation. The focus of this definition is on the social, or societal, contributions.

The subjects of productive activity and productive engagement have been identified as vast and inclusive of many of the potential contributions of older adults. Productive activity is defined as an activity that produces goods or services, whether paid or not, including activities such as housework, child care, volunteer work, and help to family and friends (Herzog et al., 1989). Dosman et al. (2006) share a very similar definition and list examples of paid work, unpaid household work, help provided to others, and volunteer work, yet explicitly state that these productive activities are a contribution to society. Productive engagement is engagement in the production of goods or services that the individual may or may not be paid for (Hinterlong et al., 2007). Thus, productive

engagement is participating in productive activity. Research on productive engagement demonstrated protective health benefits for older adults (Choi et al., 2007; Herzog et al., 2002; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005); as such, productive engagement is a contribution to the individual and to society.

The term productive is also used in the concept of productive aging (Ranzijn, 2002; Caro et al., 1993; Ranzijn & Andrews, 1999; Burr et al., 2002). Productive aging is defined (in part) as having social value: value that accrues not only to the individual but also to the community and larger society.

And lastly, some other terms that have been associated with contributions in the aging literature are civic engagement or civic participation. Civic engagement is the process in which individuals are actively participating in the life of their communities through voting, joining community groups, and volunteering (Martinson & Minkler, 2006). This would include both political participation and civic volunteerism, such as being involved in political campaigns, participating in paid and unpaid community work, staying up to date on news and public affairs, and helping one's neighbour. Martinson and Minkler use the terms civic engagement and civic participation interchangeably. Burr et al. (2002) define civic participation in the same terms as the previous authors, yet their interest in the topic is to demonstrate that civic participation belongs under the productive activity umbrella. The authors feel civic participation is understudied by analysts interested in the broad topic of productive aging, yet it is a critical form of community and national development. It includes voting, contributing money to organizations, volunteering, attending community meetings, and even holding unelected and elected office.

Researchers interested in the contributions of older adults have done a great deal to uncover how elders make an impact on our lives and society. As elders are under scrutiny for supposedly being a drain on our social system, it becomes vital that all the pieces of different specialized knowledge come together to create the larger concept of contributions. A universal definition of 'contribution' that is inclusive of all the varied elements already identified by researchers will establish a comprehensive understanding of the roles elders play in all facets of society thus helping to ensure that no information or any pieces of the larger concept are missed or overlooked. A greater understanding and focus on contributions may help challenge apocalyptic demography.

What follows is an examination of the aging literature exploring the contributions of older adults. The literature will be organized around the four sources of social welfare depicted in the Welfare Diamond: market, state, community, and family. As contributing to one sector of the diamond often creates welfare in other sectors, there will be overlap among the welfare categories. In order to avoid repetition, if one action contributes to more than one domain, it will be discussed primarily in the domain to which it contributes directly, and identified again briefly as contributing indirectly to other domains.

Market

Elders contribute to the market by maintaining workforce involvement, and using their financial resources (net worth and income flows) to drive the consumer and labour market. Work done in the paid work force is a widely accepted form of contribution. In fact some claim that the main type of productive activity is labour force involvement,

which is limited to tangible goods or services that can be exchanged for money (Ranzijn, 2002). A common misconception is that elders are not involved in the paid work force after the age of 65. Turcotte and Schellenberg (2007) contend that about 300,000 Canadians aged 65 and older participated in the labour force in 2004 – 287,000 of them employed and another 9,000 actively looking for work. Altogether, this group accounted for 1.7% of the total labour force. Although age 65 is the institutionalized retirement age, many older adults continue to work for pay, or re-enter the work force after retirement, thereby contributing to the labour market via paid work, and through that paid work to the state and community via income taxes paid. Thus, paid work is conceptualized as creating welfare in multiple sectors of the Welfare Diamond.

Further, elders' role in the consumer market is also a contribution to the market sector. In Canada, the elderly have the second highest average net worth and private pension savings of all age groups (Statistics Canada, 2001). In 2005, people over the age of 65 had a collective net worth of $1.1 trillion (Sauve, 2008), which translates to income and savings to spend on goods and services for themselves and others. Consumer expenditures and confidence are key elements of the health of the Canadian economy (Fast et al., 2006). Elders' contributions to the consumer market are evidenced by the fact that marketers have recognized the relationship between age and wealth accumulation and now target elders as a key consumer market (Fast et al.).

It could be argued that the economy is about the movement of money goods and services. Elders contribute to the consumer market with the money they have earned, saved, and/or spent and thus, are involved in all facets of the movement of the Canadian economy. Elders' wealth and income flows help drive goods and services markets and the

manufacturing sector through their consumption. Additionally, many elders participate in the labour force, which supports a healthy economy by helping to sustain the labour market.

State

Researchers have identified voting, being actively involved in their communities, volunteering, caring for themselves and their homes, and developing social capital as contributions that elders make to the state sector of the Welfare Diamond.

Citizenship is generally defined as an individual's response to membership in a community. Older Canadians are more likely than younger Canadians to perceive voting as an essential or very important civic duty. In the 2000 Federal election, 83.3% of those over age 68 voted as compared to only 27.5% of those aged 21 to 24 years (Pammett & Leduc, 2003). This civic behaviour is a contribution to the state as voting helps to maintain the form and substance of democratic society (Burr et al., 2002).

Older adults create or maintain their citizenship through voting, but also engaging in community activism, donating money to organizations, attending community meetings, and staying informed on current events (Martinson & Minkler, 2006; Burr et al., 2002). Turcotte and Schellenberg (2007) report that interest in politics is strongly correlated with active political involvement. In 2003, 19% of elderly men and 13% of elderly women reported being highly interested in political and social issues (demonstrated by following the news on a daily basis and searching for information on a political issue). Of those seniors who were highly interested in politics, 78% took part in at least one type of non-

voting political behaviour, compared to 33% of those seniors who were less interested in politics.

Volunteer work is another civic behaviour that has many benefits. Many elders donate their time and expertise to volunteer and non-profit organizations (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2003). Brock (2001) claims that volunteerism is a contribution to the economic development of the country. In fact, it could cost the state over 5 billion dollars annually to replace older volunteers with employees (Robb et al., 1999). Volunteering also can result in physical and emotional benefits to the elder (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005), which translate to benefits to the state. Choi et al. (2007) claim that volunteerism enhances an elder's own self-esteem, sense of personal control, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Elders provide resources to the community, but at the same time benefit from better health and well-being themselves (Herzog et al., 2002), which in turn decreases potential health care and social service costs. Thus, volunteerism can be conceptualized as a contribution to the self, community, and state.

Older adults also minimize their potential burden on the state by taking care of themselves (Dosman et al., 2006; Morrongiello & Gottlieb, 2000), as demonstrated through lifestyle choices. Although older adults are not as active as younger adults, the differences are not great. In 2003, 27% of elderly men (aged 65-74) and 17% of elderly women (aged 65-74) were physically active in their leisure time, compared to men (26%) and women (22%) under the age of 65. In the same paper, Turcotte and Schellenberg (2007) report that 12% of men aged 65 to 74 and 3% of women the same age were considered heavy drinkers, compared to 32% of men and 11% of women aged 25 to 54. It

is possible that reverse causation could explain this difference. Yet, physically active elders, who make healthy lifestyle choices, are less susceptible to a number of chronic conditions and emotional problems (Turcotte & Schellenberg).

According to the 2001 Canadian census, 97% of people over age 65, and 68% of people over age 85, live in private households, thus maintaining continued health and independence in later life. Dosman et al. (2006) refer to the contributions elders make in their own homes (housework, shopping, and home and yard maintenance) as economically and socially valuable contributions to society. These activities help to keep elders active and independent and to preserve their homes so that they can stay living in them as long as possible. When elders care for their own homes, it ensures that others need not be enlisted to take on this role. Thus, caring for one's own household maintenance is a contribution to the state. Further, as these elders are able to maintain their homes and independence, they are not required to live within a care facility, which is an additional potential cost alleviated from the state purse.

The daily help and support exchanged *among* older people help them to remain living in the community, to be socially connected, and to avoid social isolation and loneliness. These actions, paired with involvement with community volunteerism, and other services provided to family, friends, and neighbours, create social capital: benefits and resources derived from relationships with other people and organizations (Okun, Pugliese, & Rook, 2007). Such benefits or resources can include (but are not limited to) bridges to services, help with housekeeping or home care, and personal care. When social capital is acquired, it can result in reduced service costs to the public sector, improved

population health, and lower crime rates because community members are working together and looking out for each other (Wilkenson & Bittman, 2002).

A recurring theme throughout the review of literature specific to older adults' contributions to the state is one of preservation: older adults preserve government and democracy, their own health and well-being, their homes and neighbourhoods, and state resources. Further, through elders' helping behaviours to family, friends, and neighbours, social capital is garnered. Social capital can further save the state cost and resources. Thus many of elders' actions can be deemed as doubly beneficial to the state.

Community

Community is strengthened by the many contributions elders make, such as: volunteerism, community involvement and helping neighbours, political involvement, and financial donations.

Many elders donate their time and expertise to volunteer and non-profit organizations (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2003). Volunteerism is a substantial contribution of one's time (Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998; Prouteau & Wolff, in press). Research indicates that older adults spend more hours per week on volunteer work and stay with the organization longer than younger volunteers (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Additionally, volunteer work is a substantial contribution to communities (Dosman et al, 2006), community living, and intergenerational harmony (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006). Older adults fill many volunteer roles that benefit the community, such as reading to children at elementary school, visiting the sick in the hospital,

fundraising, managing events for an organization, preparing, serving, and/or delivering meals, providing child care, and providing transportation for others (Bradley, 1999).

Other services that older adults provide to friends, family, and neighbours include telephoning friends who live alone, checking neighbours' mail when they are away, and befriending neighbours' children (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006). Many of these helping behaviours that are independent of a structured volunteer organization have a significant impact. In a study using data from the 1992 General Social Survey (GSS), researchers estimated that the replacement cost for elders' unpaid help was 5.1 billion dollars (Robb et al., 1999). Yet, some researchers caution that the services that older adults provide to their family, friends, and neighbours provide outcomes that cannot be easily quantified or measured, and simply valuing them in 'labour cost' terms would severely understate their value (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005).

Volunteering or providing unpaid help to people in the elders' lives can fulfill the need to be altruistic, and also provide an opportunity to enjoy the social aspects of involvement. In fact, many elders volunteer with friends or family members on a regular basis. The aforementioned types of community involvement work toward creating social capital, which is a contribution that provides societal benefits such as trust, reciprocity, and cooperation within the community (Warburton & McLaughlin, 2005; Warburton & McLaughlin, 2006).

A strong relationship exists between political activity (particularly attending community meetings) and enhanced neighbourhood ties (Turcotte & Schellenberg, 2007). As noted in the 'state' section of this literature review, older adults engage in community activism, donate money to organizations, attend community meetings, and keep informed

on current events (Martinson & Minkler, 2006; Burr et al., 2002). Besides the tangible services they provide to the community through volunteerism and other services, they also provide a good example of citizenship for other community members, and thus, create a greater sense of community. Older adults contribute to both community life and the nation through their leadership or service (Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2000).

Another way that elders give to their community is financially. Older adults donate money to charity or other non-profit organizations. In 2004, the average person over age 75 made charitable donations in the amount of $646 whereas younger adults donated an average of $395 (Turcotte & Schellenberg, 2007).

Elders make many efforts to enhance their community through helping behaviours. In this corner of the Welfare Diamond, giving is synonymous with contributions. Elders offer their time, money, expertise, attention, friendship, or services to enhance many facets of their surrounding communities.

Family

Research indicates that elders make substantial contributions to their families through caregiving, and providing help or financial support to their children and/or grandchildren regularly or in times of crisis.

Increasingly, researchers argue that unpaid care given to others is a contribution (Dosman et al., 2006; Neysmith & Reitsma-Street, 2000; Dobbs, Eales, Swindle, Keating, and Keefe, 2005). Older adults provide support and assistance to other adults, to children, and long-term care for family members of friends who are frail, chronically ill, or have a disability (Dosman et al.). In fact, older adults are even more likely than younger adults

to provide care, and spend more time caring for adults with long-term health problems (Keating, Fast, Frederick, Cranswick, & Perrier, 1999). In 1998, Canadian older adults' caregiving work was estimated to be valued at $4.7B (Research on Aging, Policies and Practice, 2004).

The value of elders' caregiving work is high, but can also come at a cost to the elder. Fast, Williamson, and Keating (1999) report that caregivers can suffer resentment, psychological stress, guilt, anxiety, burden, depression, and dissatisfaction with life. Caregivers cite physical strain, decreased health, and sleep problems as a cost of caring. In the same report, caregivers are also shown to experience negative impact on social lives, as well. In addition to these non-economic costs, Fast et al. also highlight the unpaid work caregivers do, lost productivity in their paid positions or missed opportunity for advancement. These invisible costs are in addition to the out-of-pocket expenses it costs to give care that include purchasing items, increased cost of living from supporting another person, and purchasing services to assist with the task of caregiving. Many elders recognized that caregiving was having a negative impact on their own health, but felt they could not step back from their caregiving duties, as the person they were caring for had nobody else to turn to (Research on Aging, Policies and Practice, 2009). Although elders who give care offer a significant contribution by means of reduced potential health and service costs, they may, in fact, be putting themselves at risk.

In addition to caregiving work, elders are supportive to their families in other ways. Twelve percent of elders see at least one of their adult children daily, a further 31% see a child at least weekly, and an additional one-quarter see their children once a month (Rosenthal, 2000). When elders live near their children, or when they visit, they provide

adult children with transportation, housekeeping, cooking, and cleaning (Krause & Havercamp, 1996). Long after their children are launched, elders continue to help them, providing them with both instrumental and emotional support (Krause & Havercamp). One in five older adults report caring for a grandchild at least once a week (Maclachlan, 2000). Similarly, Rosenthal and Gladstone (2000) report that 22% of Canadian women and 14% of Canadian men aged 65 and over provided childcare to their grandchildren at least once a month or more often. Providing care for grandchildren ensures that parents are able engage in the paid work force or pursue and education.

In addition to providing childcare to their grandchildren, grandparents also bestow gifts, provide recreation by playing games and telling stories, pass down history, traditions, family and social values, and act as confidants, role models, validators, and sources of information about the outside world (Rosenthal & Gladstone, 2000). These contributions help to socialize children, teach them how families function, and give the children confidence.

Elders can provide financial, housing, or other support to their family members in times of crisis. They represent stability and continuity to their grandchildren, thereby easing the adjustment of grandchildren following death, marriage dissolution, or incarceration of their parent(s) (Rosenthal & Gladstone, 2000).

Grandparents continue to contribute to their grandchildren as their grandchildren grow older, as well. Grandparents reported that the most common types of help they gave to their adult (aged 18+) grandchildren were financial (23% of grandfathers, 22% of grandmothers), advice (20% and 18%), and emotional support (20% and 16%) (Brussoni & Boon, 1998). In the same study, grandchildren were asked to think about how their

grandparents had influenced their personal values or beliefs. Grandchildren most commonly reported that their grandparents had influenced their family ideals, moral beliefs, and the work ethic. When asked about the benefits they received from their relationship with their grandparent, the most frequently cited benefit was a sense of family history, followed by unconditional acceptance, insight into the aging process, helpful advice and wisdom, and help in understanding parents (Brussoni & Boon).

Many aging parents use their greater financial security to pass on financial benefits to their adult children. Whereas children born before World War II might have expected to enter into their inheritance, if there was one, in their middle-age if not earlier, they now might themselves be over 65 and retired before inheriting. However, income transfers, as opposed to inheritances, from elders to both the "middle generation" and to their grandchildren are common (Jensen, 2004). Thus, elders are contributing to the financial well-being of their family members.

Literature on the older adults' contributions to the family sector of the Welfare Diamond reveals a common theme: insurance. Older adults can be relied upon by their families and friends in times of need or crisis. Elders can be turned to for long-term or short-term care and/or support. This care or support can be physical, financial, emotional, or instrumental. Older adults are available as a safety net in the event of unexpected challenges for their loved ones, and further by 'just being there' may act as mediators of or deterrents to family disruption. Their presence may help provide a sense of family continuity (Rosenthal & Gladstone, 2000).

Stakeholders' Voices

Researchers clearly demonstrate that elders provide societal contributions. However, to represent stakeholder groups identified using the Human Ecological model, stakeholder voices are needed. Stakeholder groups have been identified as elders, caregivers to elders, practitioners, and policy makers.

Warburton and McLaughlin (2005; 2006) interviewed older adults to explore the contributions they made to their families and communities. The elders claimed that they helped their children and grandchildren routinely or in times of crisis. These elders were caring for parents, partners, and/or siblings. They felt that they improved intergenerational relations, as they had time to listen to younger people and to pass on cultural knowledge. They took care of other elders and offered mutual support and friendship (2005). An additional study focussing solely on older women (2006) reported that older women felt that helping other people gave their own lives meaning, but also confided that sometimes the things they did for others were more obligatory than voluntary.

Non-government organizations (NGO), such as the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (CNPEA), the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and the International Federation of Ageing (IFA) represent the perspective of practitioners. According to website information, these practitioners cast elders in roles such as leaders, counsellors, community developers, and public educators. They also contend that elders act as supporters to one another via peer support and peer advocacy. According to these practitioners, elders contribute to others through the many roles they play (CNPEA). AARP highlights elders as activists raising money for health research on

disease that impacts their family, organizing and inciting others to join in and make a difference. Further, the AARP website has a page called Create The Good. Here, elders are encouraged to make a small contribution that can have a large impact on different areas of society. They recognize that one action can have a significant impact. And lastly, the IFA taps into the collective knowledge of the elderly regarding the past and how our past relates to our future. They contend that elders have a bank of information to offer regarding our current environmental crisis.

Although there is a mass of information on caregiving and caregivers, the voice of caregivers to older adults with regard to the contributions of those older adults is not documented. Similarly, there is policy regarding older adults, but no known documentation of actual policy makers and their conceptualization of contribution with regard to elders.

Summary

In order to establish triangulation of the concept of contribution, integration of knowledge is important (Strauss, 1990). Otherwise, knowledge is built up and exists within its own silo. Gathering related knowledge from differing areas or perspectives allows for triangulation of data, which can ensure a better clarity and understanding of the concept. In order to better understand conceptualizations of the contributions of older adults, stakeholder groups' unique perspectives need to be identified and brought together. This information, paired with researchers' specialized knowledge, can help to identify a comprehensive working definition of contribution.

Research identified in this literature review illustrates that older adults do make a significant impact to the four domains of social welfare reflected in the Welfare Diamond. Researchers often use results of social surveys, or other indicators of how elders spend their time, which can be translated into how elders make contributions. Missing are the actual voices of those who have a stake in the issue. The Human Ecology model was used to identify stakeholder groups. Each group was selected as being representative of the differing environments that surround elders: older adults, caregivers to older adults, practitioners, and policy makers.

The specialized knowledge of researchers, brought together, creates a broad view of what it means to make a contribution. This study attempts to bring stakeholder voices together to join those of researchers in order to create a comprehensive definition of contribution.

Methodology

The purpose of this project is to discover how stakeholder groups (older adults, caregivers to older adults, policy makers, and practitioners) conceptualize older adults' contributions, in order to develop a comprehensive definition of contribution. In order to ascertain how stakeholders conceptualize contributions, focus group transcripts from a study conducted between March and July of 2004 as a component of the Hidden Costs, Invisible Contributions (HCIC) research program will be analyzed. HCIC is a research team seeking to create a deeper understanding of the place in society of 'dependent' adults, specifically older adults and adults with chronic illness or disability. The study on contributions was designed to explore the relationship between aging well/living independently and the contributions of older adults and adults with disability/chronic illness from the perspective of a range of stakeholders. Stakeholders were brought together to explore the relationship between aging well/living independently and the productive contributions of older adults and adults with disability/chronic illness. The transcripts provide a rich source of data on the topic of perceived contributions of older adults.

Data Collection

Focus groups draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and experiences, as well as reactions to research questions. This method of data collection provides an excellent opportunity to listen to and learn from participants (Morgan, Krueger, & King, 1998), in addition to creating lines of communication between respondents and the moderator and among respondents themselves. The study focused on two overarching

themes (1) understanding contributions and, (2) the link between productive engagement and aging well/living independently. The guiding questions (see Appendix A) were developed to elicit participants' beliefs regarding the 'contributions' of older adults.

Sample

Focus group interviews were conducted with four stakeholder groups: older adults, caregivers of older adults, practitioners (which included service providers, advocates, and other non-government organizations), and policy makers. Each group is distinct in their collaborative experiences with older adults and their contributions, giving each a unique understanding of what it means for older adults to contribute.

Focus groups comprised between 8 and 11 individuals. This group size has been deemed appropriate to stimulate a rich discussion without provoking competition among participants for time to talk and express their opinions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Participants were 18 years of age or older, possessed knowledge relevant to the issue being discussed from the perspective of a particular stakeholder group being targeted, and were able to articulate their experiences in English.

As seen in Table 1, there were more than twice as many female participants than male, but fairly equal stakeholder group sizes. It is noteworthy that many stakeholder group members identified as belonging to more than one group. Most commonly, caregivers to older adults also identified as older adults.

Table 1. Focus group participants

Focus Group	Male Participants	Female Participants	Total Participants
Older Adults	3	7	10
Caregivers to Older Adults	3	5	8
Policy Makers	2	6	8
Practitioners	2	6	8
Total	10	24	34

Data Analysis

Content analysis is used to extrapolate implicit beliefs and make them visible, problematize them, and open them up for further investigation (pg 105, Rothe, 2000). As such, content analysis was used to identify each group's understanding of the contributions of older adults. Transcripts from each focus group were content analyzed and, as necessitated in focus groups, when reading through the transcripts particular attention was paid to the interactions that occurred between participants during the discussion. Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data (pg 94, Mayan, 2009).

The first step of coding was to read and reread the transcripts (Mayan, 2009). Upon the second reading, sections of the text that seemed striking were highlighted and commented on within the margins of the transcripts using Microsoft Word. Each

comment indicated why the passage was striking, and included overall impressions, points of interest, or plans to work with the data. When this initial stage of coding was done, data were categorized.

At this point, it is important to note that, initially, a deductive approach was used to analyse existing literature for the literature review. Contributions were organized according to how they could fit within the Welfare Diamond. However, an inductive approach was used to explore the transcripts to decipher how stakeholder groups perceived the contributions of older adults.

Categorizing consisted of gathering all the highlighted portions of text and grouping them into categories. Categories presented themselves upon analysis of the data: they were recurring ideas or topics occurring within the group interview. Mayan (2009) advises researchers to restrict the number of categories to twelve or less, so the data will remain 'meaningful yet manageable' (pg 95). Some passages were double-coded—that is, included in two or more categories.

When the organizing of the excerpts was complete, all the passages inserted under each category were reviewed to ensure they were a good fit with the category. After examining all the information, it was sometimes necessary to 'move excerpts around, re-label or dissolve categories, or develop subcategories' (Mayan, 2009, pg 95). Once this step was complete, a summary was written up for each category and subcategory.

At this point, internal homogeneity was double-checked. All passages from each category were reread to ensure they accurately reflected the category. The data were then double-checked for external homogeneity to ensure all the categories were distinct and separate from one another in a clear and obvious way.

Finally, the data were themed. ‘Themes are thoughts or processes that weave throughout and tie the categories together. Theming is the process of determining the thread(s) that integrate and anchor all of the categories’ (Mayan, 2009, pg 97). The themes that emerged from the focus group transcripts provided an accurate sense of how each group defines contributions of older adults.

The content analysis process was conducted for each focus group interview. After each had been analyzed individually, an analysis across the focus groups was conducted to further abstract the data, determining similarities and/or differences in conceptualizations of stakeholder groups. To accomplish this, categories that emerged from each group were compared with the other groups’ categories to identify any recurring ideas or topics. Likewise, if there were ideas that were at odds with, or contradicted, one another, they were also identified and discussed.

Findings

The findings indicated that stakeholder groups conceptualized contributions in many of the same ways that researchers did. There were, however, some differences between groups in how stakeholders described contributions. Three themes emerged from the data: (1) contributions benefit others, (2) contributions are often invisible, and (3) contributions can have a dark side. Results are reported according to themes, with similarities and differences between stakeholder groups' conceptualizations of contributions reported within each theme.

(1) A contribution benefits others.

The four stakeholder groups conceptualized contributions as creating a positive outcome by helping other people directly or indirectly, or creating betterment in their environments. Even though the contribution might sometimes be indirect, there was still a definite sense of action and outcome.

Elders doing something for the sake of another fell into 4 categories: helping, volunteering, caregiving, and finance.

Helping

Elders used the word 'help' in relation to contribution, but were not specific as to how or who they were helping. They were just adamant that helping was necessary and should be expected of human beings in society, stating that you should help others because you would want to be helped if you needed it.

> …I think we all have some sense of obligation. I don't know if it's innate or whether it's something to do with our upbringing, but we feel some, that we ought to help out if we can. (Older Adult)

Caregivers to older adults revealed how the parents or spouses for whom they were caring had contributed to the lives of neighbours, family, friends, and other community members through their helping behaviours. They were members of the community who cared for each other and did what they could to ensure everyone was looked after.

> …at sort of the age of 95, she was still the one who would go over and take a neighbour who had a heart problem for a walk to make sure that she got her exercise. And she, at a very late stage in life, learned how to use a computer and used e-mail and kept in contact with a lot of people and she gave a lot of support to friends that she formed over the years at a distance with e-mail. (Caregiver)

Practitioners also identified helping as a contribution. The act of helping assists the person whom the elder is helping, but that behaviour can also impact several individuals simultaneously, or help systems to run smoothly. In the following example, an elderly woman works through angina pain to help in the dining room of her care facility each day. This is a contribution to other residents, as well as the facility prep and clean up staff.

> I have one lady who has never been asked, but she takes it upon herself to go through the dining room and make sure there is a clean and fresh and folded bib for every resident who comes in. And she takes it upon herself after the meal to gather them all up and put them in the soiled laundry. (Practitioner)

The participants in the policy maker focus group also identified helping as an important piece of contributions, however, policy makers focussed more on the reciprocal nature of helping activities. They posit that if communities of elders were formed in such a way that they could easily support one another, they could help with each others' needs using their strengths to compensate for others' weakness, and vice versa.

> …people worked in a residence, perfectly independent, but there were several residents, several elderly people … living together in a complex. They helped each other. If they were living in different houses spread all over the city, they wouldn't be in this situation where they could perform that kind of contributions… (Policy maker)

Thus, the seemingly minor contribution of helping actually benefits individuals, groups (such as communities or staff workers), systems, and also works toward creating social capital.

Volunteering

Older adults associated the idea of contributions with volunteering. Their contributions to volunteer organizations benefitted whoever the organization was set up to help (homeless people, new mothers, persons with disabilities, cancer patients, etc.).

> I think our group contributed a great deal to those people when they saw someone well and a survivor, it just made them – what they were facing – a lot easier. And I also worked in the breast clinic at the Cross and I would see a lot of patients there and I think a lot of them felt that our contribution was very important to them. (Caregiver, Older adult)

Practitioners identified volunteerism as a significant contribution that benefits organizations. If elders were not making themselves available to do this unpaid work, organizations would not be able to thrive.

> …it's a multi-, multi-, multi-million dollar contribution that people make. We value ours at $10 an hour and it's a ¼ of a million dollars a year easy. (Practitioner)

Caregiving

Many of the participants of the caregivers to older adults group also identified as older adults themselves. Not surprisingly, they discussed their own caregiving activities as contributions. Several of the participants stated that if it weren't for their contribution as a caregiver, their care recipient (usually a spouse or parent) would have to move to a care facility. Thus, they are helping the care recipient directly through cooking, cleaning, feeding, toileting, etc., but they are also ensuring that the individuals receiving care are able to remain living in their homes as long as possible. This also has a downstream benefit to the community and the state, as elders who live in their own homes are not reliant on the community or the state for care or support.

Caregiving can also take place in care facilities. One caregiver would spend his days in his wife's facility being a caregiver to her (feeding her, changing her bed, helping her on the toilet, etc). He claimed that even though she currently lived in a care facility, he could still be a caregiver to her and in doing that he was assisting the staff members and other patients, as well.

> They've got so many patients that need really severe care – well my wife is one of them, but with me being there, that lessens the load on some of these people so they can give more care to somebody else. (Caregiver)

Another caregiver does all the tasks of daily living for her husband. She alludes to what it costs for an individual to live in a care facility, and considers caregiving contributions to be economic, as she is saving taxpayer dollars.

> As for myself, I'm very thankful for my good health and being able to look after him because if I was to become ill, he would be put into a nursing home – I feel that I'm contributing economically. And that's hard. And I'm 78, almost 79 in July and thank goodness for my good health and hopefully I'll be able to continue looking after him. (Caregiver)

Finance

Money is a widely accepted form of contribution, yet stakeholder groups considered it very distinct from the other contributions they identified. In fact, many of the focus groups participants asked for clarification of what types of contributions facilitators wanted to discuss before they came forward with their ideas.

> …when we say contribution it's such a broad term: is it monetary, is it invisible …or only the visible kinds? (Older adult)
>
> …what are you defining as contribution … it's not entirely clear to me. You know some of us talk about economic and some of us talk about social… (Policy maker)

One type of financial contribution that interview participants were quick to point out was paying taxes. Even though taxes are mandatory, they are still a contribution that benefits our country.

> …everybody pays taxes and that looks after a lot of things… (Older adult)
>
> Maybe you paid more taxes and that's why you're contributing. (Practitioner)

Further ways that elders can contribute economically are through charitable donations. They donate money to various organizations that raise money for people in need, for research, or for awareness, and their money further benefits the organization itself. In some cases, they may be donating money to help a loved one raise funds for such a cause.

> …these kids organized a school team for the breast cancer run last fall and $35,000 they raised. They got about 300 kids out there; of course the grandparents are signing all of the [cheques]. (Older adult)

(2) Contributions are often invisible.

Stakeholder groups indicated the importance of highlighting a set of contributions that would otherwise go unnoticed: invisible contributions. These actions make a positive impact on individuals or environments, although the impact might have been indirect or even unintentional. Practitioner and policy maker participants expressed concern that pulling apart the actions of elders to label some as 'contributory' and others as 'not contributory' could result in contributions being missed, or devalued.

> … what kind of measures do you use to measure smiles … you have 3.5 units of impact on this person's life. How do you…? … there's a certain level of

> humanity that is just assumed. I mean, we live in this society. … we got to this level because of cooperation … we all worked together. (Practitioner)
>
> …it's very rare that somebody has absolutely no contribution to their children or their extended family, just by still being part of that family. [There are] contributions that everybody makes that maybe we don't … separate out and identify as a contribution. (Policy maker)

Elders' invisible contributions included: individuality, history, and self-care.

Individuality

Each person is unique and many of the contributions that arise are a result of individuals simply being themselves. One practitioner recalls a volunteer at her organization who has a fantastic memory for faces and names, sings more than he talks, and lacks voice regulation. She believes that he has increased membership because of his individual qualities. Yet beyond that, the volunteer also impacts her, as a person.

> … his contribution, which is smiling and saying [her name], changes my way of realizing value in the job that I do. He makes me feel important, but it's not his job. … so I think it's really hard to figure what his contribution – I know when I value it, I know when I appreciate it, I know what it feels like when somebody does something and contributes something personally for me. (Practitioner)

Elders can share a piece of themselves with family members or greater society in the way they live their lives. One woman (a caregiver) quit her job to care for her mother. Part of what she did as a caregiver was to help her mother engage in the things she always had, one of which was volunteering. As a result of helping her mother continue

volunteering, the caregiver herself also learned the value of volunteering. Elders can learn this value through their elders, as well.

> …my grandmother lived to 100 and she was the person who always, you know, went to help with the elections and all these kinds of things. And I sort of find myself copying her – "Oh yeah, I guess she did that and I guess I want to do that now too." (Older adult)

Another older adult shared a story about her mother-in-law, who was bedridden and couldn't speak or walk, but who was able to comfort her terrified granddaughter by holding her in her arms while she cried. In this case, the grandmother was not aware of why the teenaged girl was crying, but was able to console her the only way she was physically able. The older adult telling the story realized that even though the woman was very dependent, her contribution was invaluable to the family. The participant was thankful for the experience of being able to care for her mother-in-law because the mother-in-law's presence and dependence gave a gift to her family.

> …it was very difficult, I'd never dreamt it would be so hard, but our children say "oh I'm so glad we did it" because they – she really gave them something, even if just a chance to do something good for somebody else. (Older adult)

History

Elders who share their history are making a type of invisible contribution as well. Elders who share their stories are giving the unique perspective on their experiences. Their history can be both informative and influential.

A caregiver recounted her elderly neighbour's stories of the war that he shared with her, even though he normally would not talk about it. She said that she learned a great deal about World War II because her neighbour was a prisoner of war that Russia did not release after the war was over. Further, a practitioner tells a story in the group interview about an older veteran who went into a school to speak about her experiences in the war. The woman kept the attention of a room full of teenaged students while she went on to discuss some of the reasons she had volunteered to serve in the war. Although the students were not interviewed afterward and there was never a measurement of the impact this individual made by volunteering to speak to these particular students, the practitioner is certain that this veteran made the students think about options available to women in the past, feminism, the sacrifices that were made by veterans, and the value of elders.

> She had so much to give to these young people to see that these weren't just people wanting everybody to give to them. So I think they give a lot. (Practitioner)

Self-care

Caregivers to older adults were the only stakeholder group who identified caring for oneself as a contribution to others. Perhaps this is because it is the caregivers who know all too well that if self-care is not performed, someone else must take on those caregiving responsibilities.

> …the contributions … that my mother made staying in her own home is to be independent. And not be a burden to others. If they didn't make that effort, then

> society would have to devote more to caring for them. So there really is, even if they're not doing things for others, indirectly they're doing things by not asking others to do as much more. So there's a real invisible contribution that they're making. (Caregiver)

Elders benefit from contributing

An additional invisible type of contribution is the benefit that is extended back to the contributor. Although elders work to make things better for those around them, three of the four stakeholder groups (older adults, caregivers to older adults, and practitioners) acknowledged that it can also be self-serving for elders to make their contribution to others. Each of the groups, however, had a different perspective as to why it was beneficial. Elders reported that they experienced joy from helping others. Many times they are simply doing things that they enjoy, and that often results in a contribution to others. Elders say that they like the social aspect, the fellowship, and/or the actual tasks they were performing when making a contribution (where it's something they've always enjoyed doing).

Caregivers stressed that it was in the best interests of the elders for whom they were caring to continue to contribute to the best of their abilities. Caregivers felt that elders identified with the contributions they made, that it gave their life purpose, and that the inability to make those former contributions had a very negative impact on the lives of the elders. In many cases, caregivers believed that elders conceptualized making contributions as giving life meaning.

> She feels like she's not contributing very much anymore and she says, 'you know, I think St. Peter's forgotten me'. (Caregiver)

Practitioners shared this line of thinking. They also felt that elders who were able to help those around them were noticeably healthier people, as a result of their contributions.

> …it benefits them creatively … from when they first start, the way they interact in a social environment, indicators of self confidence and things like that – they improve drastically. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that they feel that they're educating people and that they're giving people the opportunity to learn more – they feel that they're actually improving the society. (Practitioner)

None of the stakeholder groups conceptualized an action done to benefit only oneself as a contribution.

(3) Contributions can have a dark side

There are many reasons why elders make contributions to their families or greater society, but it may not be by choice, or it may come at a cost. Stakeholder groups spent a great deal of time discussing the various ways that contributions came about, or how it impacted the elder who made the contribution. These types of contributions may seem as though they do not fit within the criteria of being a contribution; however, the outcome of the action benefits others so they do fit into the established conceptual definition of contribution.

Detrimental contributions

Many of the caregivers to older adults also identified as older adults, themselves. Some of these caregivers revealed that their own contribution of caring for loved ones (usually a parent or spouse) were exhausting and all-encompassing. Caregiving took a great deal away from these people. One woman said that she was completely wrapped up in caring for her husband.

> …what I am saying is that when you are with the person all the time as the main caregiver, you have no family … We are just a shadow of and we have no life. (Caregiver)

Another caregiver added that, in addition to being worn down and needing unavailable respite, there was also the worry that there would be nobody to care for the caregivers when they could no longer take care of themselves.

> …when you're looking after your husband, you don't have the time or energy to form your own network. So now when you're going to need that network, it's not going to exist for you because you didn't have the time to create it. (Caregiver)

Coerced contributions

There was a sense that people willing to volunteer within an organization needed to set boundaries early on because those organizations are very dependent on their volunteers and always seem to need more from them. It seems as though when you identify yourself as a person willing to give, organizations (or people within those organizations) preyed on your kindness.

> …if you have that desire to mentor other people or that desire to contribute or that desire to – and you have to also know your limitations because once you start volunteering you're going to start saying "well she can do it. So and so can do it, because they're always doing it." (Practitioner)

Two caregivers agreed that the contributions they made to volunteer groups could be overwhelming, and sometimes they did not seem voluntary any longer.

> I always found in any of the volunteer activities that I did is that the organization just sort of could suck you in because there weren't enough people volunteering and so they… a lot of organizations go through people at a rapid rate because they demand so much for a short time and you're giving to that volunteer organization and you just wear out. And you sort of say "okay" (Caregiver 1)

> And you feel under-appreciated. The longer you're there, the more it's… (Caregiver 2)

> It's expected. (Caregiver 1)

In addition to the ways that volunteer activity can become more coerced than actually voluntary, financial contributions could take the same form. One woman shares that her mother has a giving nature and organizations would keep calling.

> …they took advantage of her inability to say no – i.e. monetary. I mean she was writing cheques to everybody: the deaf/blind winter games on horse back. (Caregiver)

This caregiver argues that elders are making financial contributions in lieu of the physical contributions they were once able to make. Yet, organizations did still take advantage of his willingness to give, and his bad memory.

> I looked at the things that he had contributed to, sometimes the same organization 3 times a year because he had forgotten that he had already written a cheque to them… (Caregiver)

Discussion

What is a Contribution?

There were several terms in existing literature related to how older adults make contributions. The terms included formal volunteering (unpaid work done for an organization), informal volunteering (help provided directly to family and friends), social participation (contributing to social environments), productive activity or engagement (a paid or unpaid activity producing a good or service), productive aging (increasing value of self or community or larger society), and civic engagement or participation (participating in the life of communities through voting, joining community groups, or volunteering).

The definition of contributions that came out of this research was: to create a positive outcome by helping others (directly or indirectly), or by creating betterment in the environment. The definition is wide and inclusive of all the specialized research terms indicated in the literature review and above, and includes the invisible or often immeasurable things that elders do for others. It even includes the contributions elders make that that might be coerced from or detrimental to the elder.

Findings in context

The research initially collected as part of the literature review on the contributions of older adults was found using many search terms and examining various bodies of literature. There was no formal definition of contribution that researchers identified and used prior to this research; however, many of their specialized research terms were used

in conjunction with contributions. The research term that fit the most closely with how stakeholder groups conceptualized contributions was productive activity, which appears to be inclusive of the other research terms associated with contribution that were discussed in the literature review. Productive activity is defined as an activity that produces goods or services, whether paid or not, including activities such as housework, child care, volunteer work, and help to family and friends (Herzog et al., 1989). As such, formal and informal volunteering would be included under its umbrella. Dosman et al. (2006) further add to this definition specifying that these actions are contributions to society, which would then also include social participation and productive aging as both of these terms focus on increasing social value. And although there is no specific mention of civic engagement or participation in productive activity, the identified activities of civic engagement certainly fit under the umbrella of productive activity.

The definition of contribution-- creating a positive outcome by helping others (directly or indirectly), or by creating betterment in the environment--explicitly states that there is an impact produced to benefit individuals or environments, yet does not indicate that there would be an actual good or service produced. Thus, contributions would include a good or service if they created a benefit, but also would include the types of actions elders perform that may remain invisible without closer investigation.

Stakeholder groups (older adults, caregivers to older adults, practitioners, and policy makers) were identified as being representative of the different environments described in Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Human Ecological model, as they relate to older adults. Thus, the stakeholder groups can be expected to be functionally different from one another, yet share a common interest. The uniqueness of this research is the consensus

across stakeholder groups that had different perspectives, yet shared many of the same ideas about what constitutes a contribution.

Further, stakeholder conceptualizations of contributions support the Fast et al. (2006) modification of the Welfare Diamond, whereby elders placed at the centre of the diamond are cast as providers of resources to the family, community, market, and state. The contributions stakeholders identified fit into the Welfare Diamond, demonstrating that individuals at the centre of the diamond do impact sources of overall societal well-being. Further, the four main themes of contributions that emerged from the focus groups were: helping, volunteering, caregiving, and finance. Stakeholder groups identified helping as a specific contribution. Helping fits nicely into the community point of the Welfare Diamond as participants stated that helping others was what being a member of a community meant. The second theme stemming from stakeholder interviews was volunteering. Volunteering is representative of the state portion of the diamond, as volunteering saves the state a great deal of money that would otherwise be used to pay employees for the work that elders do for free. The third theme was caregiving. Caregiving is representative of the family corner of the Welfare Diamond as care given is most often to family members. Often, due to the caregiving work of family members, the person requiring care is able to maintain some sense of independence. The fourth and last theme of contributions identified from the focus group transcripts was finance. Stakeholders discussed finance in terms of how elders' finances impacted others. Although the specific examples given in focus groups spoke more to the community and state sectors of the Welfare Diamond, shared finances do help to drive the market, thus finance demonstrate the market portion of the diamond. Themes coming out of the data:

helping, volunteering, caregiving, and finance dovetail with the sectors of the Welfare Diamond: community, state, family, and market.

In research, triangulation is a "method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003). As these three different sources of data (existing literature from many sources, the Welfare Diamond as a conceptual framework, and the Human Ecological model to ensure all appropriate stakeholder groups were represented) were applied to the research question and returned comparable results, this research offers triangulation of the research question.

Differences between groups

Although there was agreement among stakeholder groups as to the breadth of the definition of contribution, there were some differences in what elements of contribution each groups focussed on in their discussion. This could suggest a difference in wider conceptualizations of contributions.

The recurring theme coming out of the group interview for elders was that people should all just care for one another, regardless of the circumstance. Elders were not concerned with counting their contributions (or anyone else's); there was a resounding sense that part of being a human being was to look after others. If a person could not make a contribution, it was all the more reason to look after them.

Caregivers to older adults also felt that everyone should be looked after. Their focus, however, was slightly different than elders. They talked about caring for staff members and residents other than their spouse or family member in a long-term care

facility. They observed that staff in facilities were overworked, and also revealed that they themselves needed help and caring.

Practitioners spent a lot of their interview time discussing the ways in which it benefitted elders to make contributions, and offering solutions to potential barriers to making contributions. Similarly, practitioners spent the majority of their group interview discussing practical ways to ensure elders were able to make their contributions. The practitioners group discussed things like transportation, TTY machines (telephones for the hearing impaired), accessibility, and job-sharing, whereas the policy makers wanted to create communities that would foster the types of contributions where elders cared for one another. There was a sense of awareness that elders wanted to care for each other and others, but there were barriers. In smaller communities, like buildings, elders could group the skills they had to compensate for the things they could no longer do. For example, one woman might drive but cannot walk very well whereas the other was physically strong but had poor eyesight. The two women could accompany one another to do grocery shopping together so as to benefit from the other's strengths and compensate for the other's weaknesses in order to meet their own needs. Policy makers identified these possibilities that are not regularly utilized because people are not all in the same community.

Fluidity of contributions

The contributions stakeholder groups identified were fluid: they gained momentum, transformed, or changed direction. Their benefits moved freely between the individual making the contribution and the surrounding environments or contexts of the Welfare

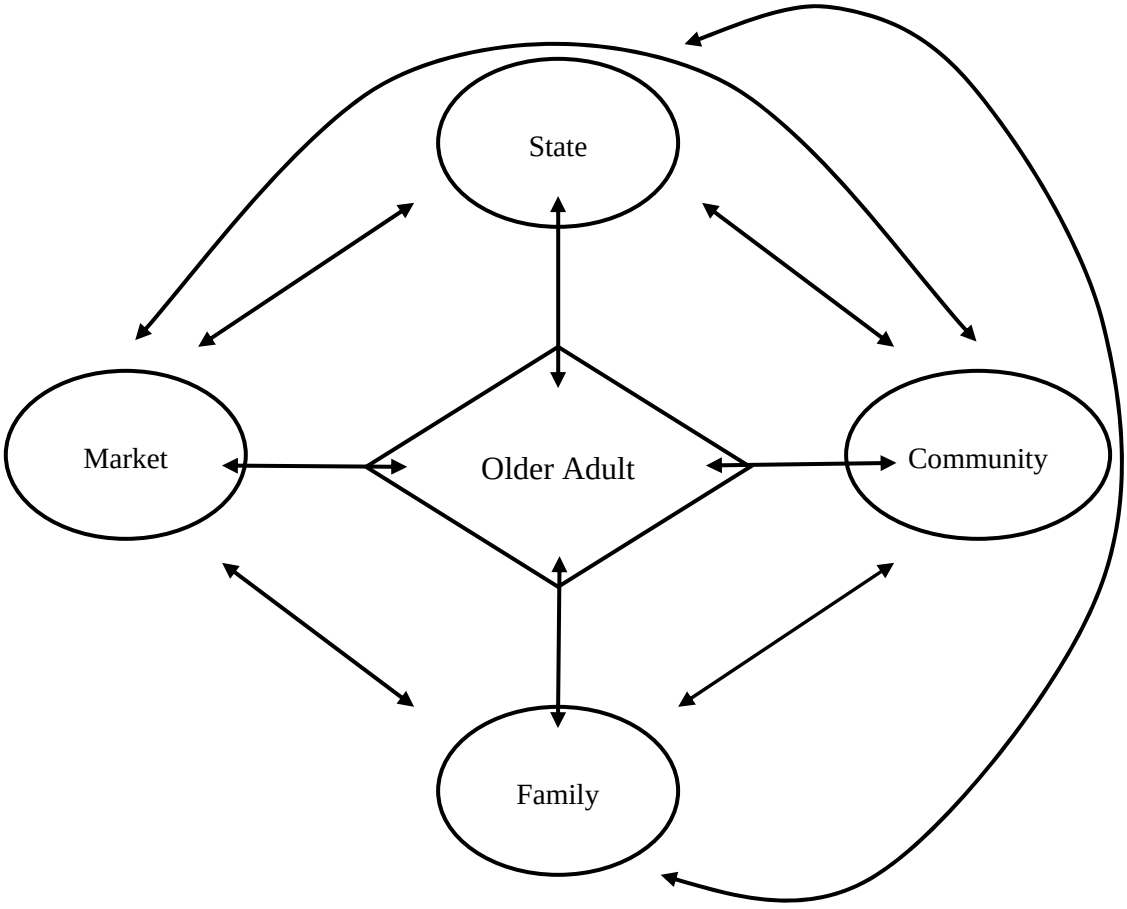
Diamond. An example of how a contribution can move through multiple domains of the Welfare Diamond follows. A man gives care to his wife (family) in a facility, which creates benefits to other facility residents as well as care staff (community). Perhaps because the care staff have been assisted in some way, it prevents the necessity of hiring a new care employee (state). The man's contribution does not impact directly the state or community, but indirectly through his contribution to his family.

It is arguable that many contributions unfold in this manner. Social capital, which is garnered through elders helping others, actually carries forward to help individuals (because initially others are helped, then the help is reciprocated to the helper), the state (as elders are caring for one another so the state does not need to take responsibility for caregiving), the family (both from helping the family and the family returning help, and also because elders may be receiving help from others so that the family is not required to provide as much assistance), and also the community (when elders help one another, they create stronger communities). The same argument can be made for volunteering or self-care. Volunteering impacts multiple domains of the Welfare Diamond: individual, family, community, and state. Elders that care for themselves provide benefits to themselves, the community, family, and state.

As an elder's (or any individual's) contribution can have multiple impacts, a modification to the Welfare Diamond is prompted. Fast et al (2006) demonstrated that elders can impact each point of the Welfare Diamond, thus creating societal well-being. This modification will demonstrate the fluidity of contributions, and that each of the sectors initially identified by Jensen (2004) is actually permeable. An impact made on one sector of the Welfare Diamond can move through that sector to create further benefit

to any other sector, or even bounce back to the elder to move on to create welfare in another domain. Figure 5 builds on the modifications put forth by Fast et al. to demonstrate that contributions not only move from individual to contexts and back, but also move freely among other contexts. Note the bidirectional arrows connecting each point on the modified Welfare Diamond.

Figure 5: Dunlop modification of the Welfare Diamond



Limitations

There are a few potential issues with the research worth noting. As this was a secondary analysis project done on a project examining how contributions and entitlement were related, the group interviews did focus on contributions but the question of 'what is a contribution?' was never explicitly asked by group moderators. As such, it is possible that if the question were asked by moderators, the conversation might have unfolded in a different manner, thus potentially exposing more intricate subtleties between stakeholders as to how they define or conceptualize contributions. However, several of the research participants did ask the question themselves, thus bringing the question to mind for other participants. Further, it was not necessarily disagreement where there were not similarities between groups, but rather subjects may not have come up organically within group interviews.

Further, research participants were recruited from groups who were deemed as representative of the contexts of the Human Ecological model. However, many of the participants identified themselves as belonging to more than one context or stakeholder group (ex. a practitioner who was a caregiver, a caregiver who was a senior). The latter example was the most prominent. Comments made by caregivers regarding their relation to the person they were caring for and that person's age, or caregivers alluding to themselves as seniors, or even explicitly saying that their age was greater than 65 years indicate that many of the caregivers were elders. In some ways, this could augment the research as it further exemplified the contributions of elders as caregivers. Alternately, as caregivers spent the majority of their time discussing their own caregiving contributions, the contributions of elders who require care may have been underdeveloped.

Implications

The implications of this research range from the theoretical to the more practical. As already established, there are many researchers interested in different aspects of the contributions of elders. Yet, these researchers focus their attention on different pieces of the larger whole. If researchers were interested in expanding their view to the full set of contributions that elders make to society, a working definition of contributions will help guide researchers to include the full spectrum of contributions. Further, having the definition of contribution allows for its measurement. Awareness and inclusion of the broad spectrum of contributions of older adults in academic discourse can bring the definition of contribution to the forefront and impact mainstream conceptualizations of how elders impact society.

Many of the public view elders as being a drain on the social system (Gee & Gutman, 2000), yet those presumptions are based on the premise that contributions are solely economic (Fast et al., 2006). Stakeholder group participants were selected based on their proximity to the social environments of elders. As such, it can be argued that these are specialists on elders and know more about their contributions and outcomes than the general public. Agreement between disparate stakeholder groups regarding the breadth of the definition of contribution indicates that the general public needs to widen their views on the contributions of older adults. As such, public education is vital.

In order to transfer the information regarding the contributions of older adults to the attention of the wider public, dissemination is necessary. When the working definition of contributions is offered, individuals may reconsider (or perhaps consider for the first

time) ‘what are the contributions of elders’? This type of awareness could lead to a shift in public perception. An alternate, or perhaps additional, method of creating awareness or even transferring knowledge is to teach school-aged children these concepts in their classes. Teachers educate children about racism: what about ageism? Children understand the idea of what is fair, and keeping track of good deeds and helping. Thus, planting an early seed of consideration of different perspectives and values may create a more socially aware society when those children become adults.

Further, knowing now that many elders have an affinity for making contributions, the idea of clustering the independent homes of elders is worth exploring. As the practitioner group pointed out in their group interview, when an individual identifies as part of a community, they are more apt to become involved with that community, and to make contributions to or with that community. Creating small physical communities of independent or semi-independent elders would cultivate the opportunity for elders to enhance one of the contributions they are already known to make: helping each other. In a small community environment, elders can make the most of each other’s abilities and compensate for each other’s disabilities. Hence, elders would be maintaining their own independence as well as fostering other elders’ independence, as well. This type of community would then translate to a significant impact on all sectors of the Welfare Diamond. Of course, the decision to move from a family home is always a difficult one, thus elders must come to this decision on their own and choose whether the benefits of living in a supportive community environment outweigh the benefits of their current home and community.

Additionally, many stakeholders felt it was either not important, nor possible, to quantify the contributions of elders. As such, although this type of community would foster contributions, some believe actual measurement of those contributions may prove detrimental to the program because many of the contributions of older adults are subtle or even invisible. Thus, if measurement is to be undertaken, it is essential to recognize invisible contributions and the fluid impacts discussed above.

It is also worth further exploring the idea of contributions that are detrimental or coerced. Research on the cost of contribution exists within the literature (Research on Aging, Policies and Practice, 2009; Fast et al., 1999), yet stakeholder groups did not offer much information on the subject. This could be due to the fact that the conversation did not sway in that direction, or stakeholders were perhaps not feeling the costs of contributions. However, it is more likely that it is a taboo subject. Further investigation into the types of contributions that are more extracted than volunteered, as well as contributions that come at a physical, mental, emotional, or financial cost to the contributor, can be explored from the perspective of stakeholders. However, for this exploration, a group interview focussing on the costs of contributions would be necessary in order to make participants comfortable divulging said information. Alternately, individual interviews could also be used. Although this is a darker side of contributions, each facet is worth exploration in order to facilitate a full understanding of the concept.

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Appendix A

1. Please tell us your name and *[the organization you represent, who you provide care to, etc.]* (The second part of the question will be customized to suit the stakeholder group.)

2. When you hear the phrase “doing things for others”, what comes to mind?

3. What is your impression of people who do things for others?

4. What about people who do not do things for others?

5. a) Is it important for people to do things for others or for their community/society?

   b) Why is it important? *(Probe) How might it affect them?*

6. a) Do you think people are treated differently if they are seen by others as doing more to help people in their community/society?

   b) *(Probe) Do you think this applies to older adults and adults with disabilities?*

7. a) Do you think people who are doing more deserve more help from others and from society?

   b) *(Probe) How do you think this would work?*

8. a) Could governments or communities do more to help older adults and adults with disabilities to do things for others?

   b) *(Probe) Should they do more?*

   c) *(Probe) What might they do?*

Appendix B

Partner Organizations that Assisted with Participant Recruitment

Stakeholder group	**Partner Organizations**	**Date Held (2004)**
Pilot group	• Alberta Association for Community Living • Alberta Caregivers Association • Good Samaritan Society • Handicapped Housing Society of Alberta (HHSA) • SKILLS Society	February 6
Older adults	• Alberta Life Care Housing Foundation • Canadian Association for Community Care • Good Samaritan Society • Greater Edmonton Foundation	March 15
Caregivers to Older Adults	• Alberta Caregivers Association • Canadian Association of Community Care • Canadian Caregivers Coalition • Good Samaritan Society	March 30

Practitioners	• Alberta Association for Community Living • Calgary Region Community Board, Persons with Developmental Disabilities • Canadian Association of Community Care • Canadian Association of Independent Living CAIL/ILRC • Good Samaritan Society • PLAN Edmonton • SKILLS Society • The Steadward Centre • VON Canada	March 29
Policy Makers	• Capital Health Authority, Edmonton • Conference Board of Canada • Health Canada • Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) • National Advisory Council on Aging (NACA) • Statistics Canada • Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)	July 12

Appendix C

Sample Oral/Written Text for Participant Recruitment

Sample text for organizations soliciting their membership for participation:

My name is _____ from _____ (name of Partner Organization, listed Appendix B. I obtained your name from our (contact/email/mail list). Our organization is working with researchers at University of Alberta who are doing a study that will help us better understand the things that older adults and adults with disabilities do for others, their communities and society. We are helping them find people to take part in a group discussion about this issue, because we feel it is important and relevant to our members.

For oral requests: If you agree that we may pass your name on to the research team, they will first give you more detail about the study, and then will ask if you are willing to participate. Would you mind if we passed on your name?

YES Thank you! The name of the researcher who will be contacting you is _____. If you would like to contact them first you may call _____.

NO That's fine, thank you for talking to me. If you change you mind, you still are welcome to contact the research team for more information or a chance

to participate. Please call _____ (research team member) at _____.

For written requests: We would like to pass your name on to the research team so that they can first provided you with more information and then ask if you are willing to participate. (Please note that agreeing to be contacted does not commit you to take part in the study). Please contact me as soon as possible if you are willing for us to pass on your name. You may also contact the researchers directly by calling: _____ at _____.

Sample text for organizations soliciting one of their staff members to participate on the organization's behalf:

Our organization is working with researchers at University of Alberta who are doing a study that will help us better understand the things that older adults and adults with disabilities do for others, their communities and society. We are helping them find people to take part in a group discussion about this issue, because we feel it is important and relevant to our members.

We have offered to send a representative of our organization to take part in the group discussion involving *[policy makers or practitioners]* because we feel that we would be able to contribute information on relevant *[policy or practice]* issues and because we feel

that information obtained from this study could help us with our work. The proposed date of the group discussion is _____. Please let me know by _____ if you would be willing to have one of the researchers contact you, first to provide you with more details about the study and then to ask if you are willing to participate. You may also contact the researchers directly by calling _____ at _____.