

Maintaining Mobility For Older Adults in Manitoba

As Manitobans continue to navigate the challenges and obstacles related to COVID-19 and especially as the frigid winter months approach, we as service providers, Government, Municipalities, businesses and community organizations need to consider who will be in our communities during these winter months? Winters can pose many challenges for older people in usual times, but there are additional challenges expected this winter. As of 2018, we now have over 211, 450 Manitobans over the age of 65 with a large percentage of those likely to be living independently and aging in place within their own community.

This past summer many communities saw an increase in the number of older adults walking, using trails and participating in a variety of active transportation modes like biking, e-bikes and a variety of mobility scooters. Walkable communities and the ability to access accessible sidewalks in all seasons is crucial for the health and well being of all Manitobans but especially older adults who are increasingly likely to become socially isolated when presented with barriers such as snowy and icy sidewalks and limited activity options during the winter months. It has been said that falls are the leading cause of injury for Older Canadians with 20-30% of older adults experiencing at least one fall a year. In 2018, there were over 8,984 injury hospitalizations in Manitoba, with the likelihood that many of those injuries would be linked to falls during winter months. For older Manitobans who may use mobility aids, wheelchairs or mobility scooters, snow packed and icy sidewalks can present even bigger obstacles and can be life altering especially if it means not being able to access groceries, health services or other essentials for daily living.

Many Older Manitobans for years have escaped the wintery climate by “snowbirding” to other provinces or to warmer climates which provided them the opportunity to continue being active in a season that many Manitobans dread and forces many indoors due to inclement weather, and risky roads/sidewalks. With so many travel restrictions and looming concerns around the growing number of COVID-19 cases, many older adults who normally “snowbird” are being faced with many challenges that they’ve been fortunate enough to avoid for years. As an organization we’re hearing more and more concern from community partners who are worried about older adults who will not be able to stay active outdoors and especially for those who are used to escaping during the winter months. With many indoor recreation facilities being limited by capacity or closed due to the pandemic, we need to start planning ahead on how we are going to keep **all** older adults including snow birds active and safe during the winter months?

With support from CNIB Manitoba, we have put together some considerations for winter sidewalk snow clearing and we strongly encourage you to share this amongst your community including; snow clearing workers, business owners, municipality leaders and individual home owners so we can ensure that everyone is taking an active role in keeping all Manitobans safe and active during these coming winter months.

Winter Sidewalk & Road Clearing Tips

- 1) Create a clear communication plan on where to place snow upon removal from sidewalks and roads. For those who navigate using mobility aids or those who are at higher risk of falling, they may find it increasingly challenging to navigate around snow banks and ice patches caused by snow accumulation. This can particularly true when negotiating between a sidewalk and a bus stop, or between a sidewalk and road.
- 2) Ensure adequate coordination between municipal and Provincial authorities to prioritize consistent, timely sidewalk snow clearing in Rural communities who may have mixed ownership over sidewalks and roads.
- 3) Fully clear snow windrows that block pedestrian crosswalks and driveways.
- 4) Ensure the use of salt or a high-quality ice melting product on all sidewalks and especially in high foot traffic areas.
- 5) Create clear paths to access pedestrian push buttons at intersections and cross walks. For those who use mobility aids and for those who are blind or visually impaired, having clear access pedestrian push buttons reduces the likelihood of falls caused by trying to climb snow banks in order to cross safely.
- 6) Gather input from the community on areas where they feel better snow clearing is required.
- 7) Create opportunities for inter-generational partnerships for private property snow clearing at your local schools, churches or other community groups.
- 8) Provide community members with access to resources for snow removal options in multiple formats including web, printed or by phone.
- 9) Consider the importance of timely snow clearing for routes or sidewalks that give Older Adults access to groceries and other essentials for daily living.

Transportation Options Network for Seniors (TONS) informs, educates, promotes and gives voice to the needs of transportation options that enhance quality of life for all Manitobans.

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