

Better at Home – Port Alberni

Community Developer Final Report

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**Better
at Home**

United Way helping seniors
remain independent.

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Acknowledgements

A warm thank you to the *Community with a Heart!* Port Alberni's reputation of caring and creativity shone through this process. There is no doubt in our minds that Port Alberni will craft a Better at Home program that is unique and highly responsive. The evidence of this is sprinkled through the stories from seniors, from concerned family members and from service providers who are no strangers to the complexities of the social sector. Our belief is also grounded in the openness to collaborate, both by organizations that expressed interest in being lead agencies, as well as those that strongly expressed that this program cannot be implemented soon enough to address concrete needs that exist. We hope that this report helps guide the creative evolution of this service and fosters the spirit of working together for seniors in the community.

The United Way continues to be leaders in funding innovative processes and setting a new standard in what we hope will be a new method of funding allocation. Adding an authentic community development approach in the selection and distribution of Better at Home Program funds creates a systemic method of ensuring that program participants play an active role in program development and implementation.

Thank you to the United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island as well as the Provincial support team at the United Way of the Lower Mainland.

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Better at Home Program Introduction

Better at Home is a program that helps seniors with simple day-to-day tasks so that they can continue to live independently in their own homes and remain connected to their communities. The program is funded by the Government of British Columbia and managed by the United Way of the Lower Mainland, with services delivered by a local non-profit organization. The Better at Home program is designed to address the specific needs of local seniors, allowing communities to choose from the following basket of services:

Port Alberni has been identified as a potential Better at Home site. Tracy Smyth and Julie Rushton were contracted as community developers to assess community readiness, identify seniors' assets, needs and priorities in regards to the basket of services, and help identify a potential lead organization best suited in the community to deliver the Better at Home program.

This report reflects the findings of the community developers and will be used by the lead organization to design an appropriate local Better at Home program that meets community needs.



Local Community Development Approach & Findings

The information that follows was gleaned from local Port Alberni individuals and then further evidenced by recent research on healthy aging. The local community developers took an approach as learners, seeking out current research and hearing the story of the area in order to identify the local assets that would support a successful implementation of the Better at Home Program. The fusion of facts and stories set the stage for consensus-based decisions about the lead agency for the program and how the services might look unique for Port Alberni residents. The community development activities included:

- 21 interviews with seniors and service providers across the community. The list of interviewees emerged based on recommendations by local stakeholders as well as a targeted approach to include a range of voices and perspectives.
- One focus groups with seniors (5 individuals)
- A Community Forum with a total attendance of 18 people
- A focused stakeholder's meeting to discuss the lead agency (8 attendees).
- Documentary analysis of reports, project materials and information provided by stakeholder groups;
 - Age Friendly Focus Group Summaries, 2013
 - Best of Care Report: Getting it Right For Seniors in British Columbia by the Office of the Ombudsperson, 2012
 - City of Port Alberni Official Community Plan, 2007
 - Local Health Area Profile for Alberni (70) prepared by Vancouver Island Health Authority, 2011
 - Making Meaningful Connections: A Profile of Social Isolation Among Older Adults in Small Town & Small City, British Columbia, 2006
 - Seniors Services Survey Report, 2011
 - Statistics Canada, Census Reports
 - Sustainable Cities – Port Alberni Community Assessment, 2008
 - United Way of the Lower Mainland Seniors Vulnerability Report, 2011

In total, the process linked at least 20 community agencies to the Better at Home process (see Appendix for the list of organizations consulted).

Community Profile

It needs to be acknowledged that communities of aboriginal people have lived on these lands for over 8000 years. The Alberni Valley is a part of the traditional territory of the Tseshaht First Nation and the Hupacasath First Nation, both of whom are part of a group of 14 Nations that make up the Nuu-chah-nulth people of western Vancouver Island. In addition, the Huy-ay-aht First Nation reside in neighbouring Anacla with government offices in Port Alberni.

The municipality was named for Don Pedro Alberni, a Spanish captain who landed on the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1790. The City of Port Alberni is the 1967 amalgamation of Alberni (incorporated in 1913) and Port Alberni (incorporated in 1912). The neighbouring regional districts include Cherry Creek, Beaver Creek, Sproat Lake and Beaufort.

In 2008, the Sustainable Cities Community Assessment asked local residents what makes Port Alberni unique. Comments covered a range of responses about the area:

- a) The geographical aspects - a self-contained community surrounded by west coast rugged beauty in the mountains, rivers and pristine lakes
- b) The recreational aspects - fishing, boating, swimming and hiking (among others)
- c) The cultural aspects – high percentage of First Nations, logging history, strong arts community, hockey town
- d) The attitudinal aspects – a “can-do” attitude, a community with a heart.

Description of the local seniors' population

The economic health of a community affects all of its residents. It is reasonable to assume that population growth occurs concurrently with economic growth. The unstable resource sector resulted in a period of population decline in Port Alberni starting in the 1980's. Census information reveals that the population has been stable since 2006. The total population for Port Alberni was 31,704 in 2011.

In addition to influences from economic changes, any future population growth or general demographic change is expected to be influenced by a continued influx of new

retiree residents. Notwithstanding the beauty of the area, the housing costs are low compared to other communities on Vancouver Island, which is attractive to newcomers. Projections to the year 2030 see the total Port Alberni population remain the same at 31,704. Interesting to note, however, is the population 75 years and older is expected to increase 79.6% by 2030.

The following table and associated statistics highlight that the target population for the Better at Home program certainly exists in this area. The following includes population numbers for adults over the age of 65.

Table 1 – Population and Age Demographics in Port Alberni

	Total Population	Men	Women
Total (seniors)	5125	2500	2625
65-69 years	1670	865	805
70-74 years	1250	615	635
75-79 years	955	480	475
80-84 years	680	325	355
85 years and older	570	215	355

Statistics Canada, 2011

VIHA Local Health Area (70) Profile, 2011

A deeper look at the statistics for this area also indicates the following:

- Alberni had a lower percentage of low-income seniors (7.7%) than the rest of British Columbia (14.7%) and Vancouver Island (8.6%)
- As of 2006, 16.2% of Alberni residents identified as Aboriginal compared to 5.8% for Vancouver Island and 4.8% for British Columbia.
- 26% of seniors in Alberni live alone; over 60% of this group are women.

In 2011 a local Seniors Services Network facilitated a survey to ascertain how seniors are managing in their lives. The goal was to identify strengths and service gaps. Shortly after the survey was completed, funding support for the Senior Services Network

diminished and the results sat with no action. 70 senior citizens from the Alberni Valley region were surveyed with the following needs highlighted:

Housing

A significant need was expressed for low maintenance senior's housing. General house work and yard work were stated as barriers to seniors living in their own homes.

Transportation

Seniors reported that the limitations of HandyDART services prevented them from using this service as often as they needed to. Limitations were described as a lack of service on Sundays and evenings, and geographically among the Regional District communities. Seniors still able to drive independently described transportation barriers such as only driving in daylight hours and suffering the effects of long drives to out of town specialist appointments.

Meal support

There was an expressed concern in terms of mobility challenges to obtain groceries and prepare meals.

Community Support Groups

While seniors reported a familiarity with community support groups, only 25% of those surveyed knew how to access information about them. It was also stated that home visits would help diminish the loneliness experiences by shut-in seniors.

Financial Considerations

The majority of seniors surveyed were aware of financial supports they were entitled to such as Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan and Guaranteed Income Supplement. According to statistics, Alberni Valley has a lower percentage of low-income seniors in relation to the rest of the province, however those affected by poverty and fixed-incomes exist.

Summary of Community Assets

What services are currently **working well** to support seniors living independently?

“Community assets include both stakeholders (a person, group, and organizations with investments in senior’s health and wellbeing) and services (non-medical and medical support services and programs available for seniors that help them live longer in their own homes and remain engaged in the community).”

**Better at Home,
United Way of the Lower Mainland**

The following is a compilation of the services and organizations that were specifically noted as helpful in supporting seniors to live independently throughout the community development process.

Table 2 – Community Assets

VIHA Home & Community Care	Sunshine Club Activities	Sunshine Club Friendly Phoning	Private Care Providers	Ty Watson House
Grocery Stores that deliver	Parks & Rec	Rainbow Gardens	NTC	Port Alberni Lifeline
Assoc. for Community Living	Churches	Respite opportunities for partners	HandyDART	Library
Community Policing Office	Meals on Wheels	Fir Park Day Program	Port Alberni Shelter	Wheels for Wellness
Support Groups eg. Cancer & Alzheimer's	Service Group Membership eg. Lions, Eagles	Legion	Coffee Shops	Elder College

Factors of Vulnerability

The analysis of interview, focus group and community forum feedback suggests two significant themes of vulnerability for seniors in Port Alberni – social isolation and safety, both of which are validated by both provincial and national research on aging (Cloutier-Fisher et. al.; 2006; United Way, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2006).

Social Isolation

There are many factors that contribute to social isolation among seniors including physical environment, distance from family and friends, problems negotiating transportation and living alone. (Cloutier_Fisher et. al.) People participating in the Better at Home community development process identified the most common barrier to maintaining and growing social networks among seniors is lack of transportation. Stories were shared about having limited access to transportation (for a variety of reasons) reduced the ability to participate in social groups, to visit loved ones in hospital or facilities and created a disconnection from community social activities and events.

Safety

The concern for safety was a common thread through many stories shared during the Better at Home process. Island Health's Home and Community Care team works to provide services to seniors within their medical only mandate. They receive many calls from seniors and families requesting the non-medical supports that fall outside of their mandates but are critical in terms of creating a healthy and safe home. Without these non-medical supports, participants felt that safety risks were higher.

Personal safety was raised in many conversations. The issues ranged from fear of being taken advantage of by businesses and strangers. Examples include high costs for simple home repairs (\$60 to change a light bulb) to being sold a smart phone that was much more advanced and expensive than required, to situations in which seniors are vulnerable in their own homes, having many different individuals provide support throughout the day, being told to allow strangers in for service.

The following are three, local case studies that provide a lens of lived experience to the factors of vulnerability.

“We were stunned by the limitations of Home and Community Care services when it became time to find Mom additional supports. My siblings and I had planned that Mom would eventually require Home Care. When we found out that their services were strictly medical related it left us scrambling to find the non-medical supports she required to remain in her home. Mom didn’t need to be placed in a facility, she just needed support with every day tasks such as housekeeping, shopping, and being social. Our wish is that Home Care and the Better at Home program could work together to provide seamless supports.” *Family member*

A healthy woman in her early nineties expressed relief at the possibility of this program. Her wish is to continue to live at home but she recognizes that there are some things that she is starting to have difficulty with. This is the first year she has been unable to cut her own lawn and, while she is currently still driving, knows that the flexibility and freedom that comes with a car will end. She is an active volunteer in the community and is thankful that a purposeful connection with the Sunshine Club has helped keep her healthy.

“Many of our seniors are afraid to utilize the public transportation system for a variety of reasons. Having a friendly visitor support seniors to try the public transit system might allow seniors additional transportation freedom.” *Senior*

Seniors needs related to non-medical home support services

What **non-medical** home supports, from the Better at Home basket of services, are needed in this community?

“Better at Home is designed to assist seniors with simple day-to-day tasks, thereby helping seniors maintain their independence and stay connected with their community... Better at Home is designed to be adaptable to the characteristics of a community and will address specific needs of local seniors. Services will be chosen from the basket of services.”

Better at Home, United Way of the Lower Mainland

This was a consistent question asked across interviews and in the community forum. The responses sparked conversation that connected each basket of services with specific local need. Figure 1 shows a rough representation of the priority given to each basket of service. The large font represents the service area that more people indicated was needed in the community. The smallest fonts suggest that these services are less in demand.

Figure 1



Under these broad categories, seniors and senior serving organizations described the following services (in order of priority) which, currently, local needs are not well met:

1. Friendly visiting
 - A referral agency – one place to call to provide information about other community resources/opportunities. A bridge and connection to the many social supports that exist in the community
 - To address safety and trust issues felt by seniors needing help
 - To address loneliness, social isolation and depression
 - Volunteers to observe living conditions, risks and needs
 - Activities such as baking within a social activity
2. Transportation to appointments
 - More than just to appointments, for example also to social activities
 - Change of scenery, get out of the house
 - Stay with senior during the medical appointment
3. Grocery Shopping
 - Carrying groceries from car into home, putting items away
 - May include transportation support
4. Simple Home Repairs
 - Ability for volunteers to observe living conditions, risks and needs
 - Changing a light bulb (safety issues with task and with darkness)
 - Building ramps/wheelchair modifications
 - Addressing inadequate/unsafe home facilities
5. Light Housekeeping
 - Depression was connected to the inability to have a clean home because of mobility issues
 - Moving help and clutter removal
6. Light Yard Work & Snow Removal
 - Leaves piled outside become slippery when not removed
 - Unsafe walk ways due to ice and snow
7. Other
 - Meal prep (outside the scope of Better at Home)

- Personal care e.g. bathing (outside the scope of Better at Home)
- A coordination role when senior receives multiple services

Suggested Opportunities for service integration/coordination

Seamless services that provide greater continuity for seniors are possible through enhanced collaborations between organizations. The Better at Home community development process, itself, encouraged agencies, seniors and other stakeholders to dialogue on what is currently being offered to seniors, and how seniors' needs are being addressed. What was uncovered was the possibilities of collaboration, creative program development, and coordination of services in Port Alberni. Furthermore, by encouraging agencies of various expertise to work together, capacity is built among seniors' based agencies, thereby strengthening the potential for future programs and services in Port Alberni beyond the funding term.

Both seniors and service providers highlighted the desire to create a single access for seniors to be redirected to whatever they need. Currently several organizations receive these sorts of calls, some of whom are able to respond to these questions and others are not. There was a consistent request for the potential lead agency to be very well informed about all other programs and services for seniors and to act as a referral.



Community Readiness

Explanation of community readiness that reflects community consultations and meetings

Information obtained through the Community Development process demonstrated that Port Alberni is well positioned to begin delivery of the Better at Home basket of services.

Potential risks going forward

1. The increasing demographic projections suggest that service needs will continue to grow as the population grows and ages. At the same time, the number of younger people (either families and/or younger volunteers) will not grow in proportion.
2. To discover how to best support aboriginal seniors effectively and respectfully with the Better at Home Program, First Nations representatives require an opportunity to lend their voice in determining what this may look like.



Local Better at Home Program Details

Preferred Services and Preferred Service Approach

In summary, friendly visiting and transportation surface as the top two priorities from the Better at Home basket of services that most meet the support gaps currently faced by seniors in Port Alberni. Group discussion at the Community Forum validated both the community interviews and the previous senior survey results from 2011.

Key Qualities for Lead Agency Selection (agreed upon at community forum)

Figure 2



Selection Process

At the time of the scheduled Community Forum, two organizations came forward with an expression of interest in pursuing the role of lead agency for the Better at Home Program: Alberni Shelter Society and Alberni Valley Assisted Living Society.

The decision-making process was initiated following the Community Forum at the Stakeholders meeting, but concluded with the final decision being made between the two interested organizations a week later.

Proposed Lead Agency

After several productive conversations between the two interested agencies, reviews of recommendations from those present at the community forum, and internal consultation with each of the Boards of Directors on future plans, the Alberni Shelter Society withdrew their interest as lead agency.

All stakeholders were in agreement that Alberni Valley Assisted Living Society offers a strong, responsive and creative organization capable of offering the Better at Home program.

An initial advisory group was identified that will support this partnership with representation from the City of Port Alberni, the Port Alberni Sunshine Club, Rainbow Gardens, Alberni Community and Women's Services Society and local citizens (seniors and family members).

Alberni Valley Assisted Living Society (AVALS) has been supporting the community since 2005. The founding members of the society are representatives from the Alberni-Clayoquot continuing Care Society, the Alberni Valley Senior Citizen's Home Society and the Abbeyfield Houses Alberni Valley society. AVALS holds title to Heritage Place, a 26 unit assisted living residence operating since 2007.

While the primary role of AVALS is to oversee the operation of the housing and services for residents of Heritage Place, the Society supports other non-profit organizations and groups in the community who provide social and health benefits to seniors by:

- offering a venue and amenities for community events and activities
- sponsoring or hosting social or educational events for seniors in the community;
- collaborating and partnering with these groups to create additional services and activities that enhance the lives of all seniors in the Alberni Valley, both those living at Heritage Place and those residing in their own homes.

Recommendations for Next Steps

1. Alberni Valley Assisted Living Society to submit funding application to United Way as lead agency.
2. Engage the identified organizations and individuals to formalize a Better at Home Advisory Committee for Port Alberni area.
3. Continue to learn from the age friendly initiative survey results.
4. Connect specifically with Volunteer Alberni regarding the potential of their partnership in this endeavour.
5. Integrate the following advice given by community forum participants to build an effective program implementation plan;
 - Please do not rely on institutional models for the basis of this organization. It needs to serve the community from a grass roots model. The Coordinator needs to be familiar with seniors, the whole community and flexible and wise!
 - Make all services known and all residents in various ways. Make services more available.
 - The lead agency needs to be very approachable- meaning friendly, listening, knowledgeable, available, and accessible. This needs to be a place where people get answers- useable information that actual solves their current problem.
 - I would really like to see all the available senior care coordinated and advertised so it is easily available to the community. Thank you
 - Well organized, not afraid to ask for help, ability to work together
 - Don't reinvent the wheel... Be inclusive of all resources possible in the community
 - Please keep in mind that needs are varied: those living in condos and apartments have no need to find someone to do yard work and snow removal like those living in a house. Thus, priorities vary.
 - Keep a strong community connections with partnering agencies
 - Personable and approachable to organizing and working with seniors and services

- #1 concern is to care about seniors and have a true desire to help them as needed and provide them with the referrals and or service/help needed
- I would think to call Assisted living before the Shelter for support in my home. Assisted Living reminds me of the services that used to be offered by Home and Community Care. I wonder if Assisted Living could offer the program with the shelter being a strong partner advocating for low-income seniors.
- Making sure that all members of the community are aware of the programs and what the program stands for.
- Do some kind of coordination of all different organizations that involve seniors- SIMPLIFY

Appendix

Consultation Summary

Met or consulted with representatives from the following agencies, organizations and businesses:

1. Age Friendly Alberni Project
2. Alberni Clayoquot Regional Health Network
3. Alberni Community and Women's Services
4. Alberni Valley Assisted Living Society
5. Alberni Valley United Church
6. Canadian Red Cross
7. City of Port Alberni – Parks and Recreation
8. Ditidaht First Nation
9. Fir Park Village/Echo Village
10. Huu-ayat First Nation
11. Island Health (VIHA)- Home and Continuing Care
12. Island Health (VIHA)- Integrated Health Network
13. Literacy Alberni Society
14. Loving Hands Senior & Community Care
15. NTC
16. Port Alberni Association for Community Living
17. Port Alberni Shelter Society
18. Port Alberni Sunshine Club
19. Rainbow Gardens
20. Ucluelet First Nation

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