



## Experts' perspectives on building sustainable rural age-friendly programming initiatives



**Elizabeth Russell, Ph.D.**, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology  
**Mark Skinner, Ph.D.**, Professor & Canada Research Chair, Acting Dean of Social Sciences  
Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

# Acknowledgements

SSHRC  CRSH



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# Rural age-friendly communities research

- Project background:
  - ▣ Rural municipal challenges
  - ▣ Volunteer over-reliance
  - ▣ Population decline increases programming need and challenges sustainability
- Project origins
- Aim of pilot study: Understand what factors limit and support AFC sustainability, and establish proof of method



# Method

- Pilot study site: Rural & small town Newfoundland and Labrador
- Participants:  $N = 10$  rural age-friendly program coordinators
- Procedure: Telephone interviews
- Materials: Interview protocol
- Data analysis: Qualitative thematic content analysis



# MUN Harris Centre to release population projection for Newfoundland

SaltWire Network

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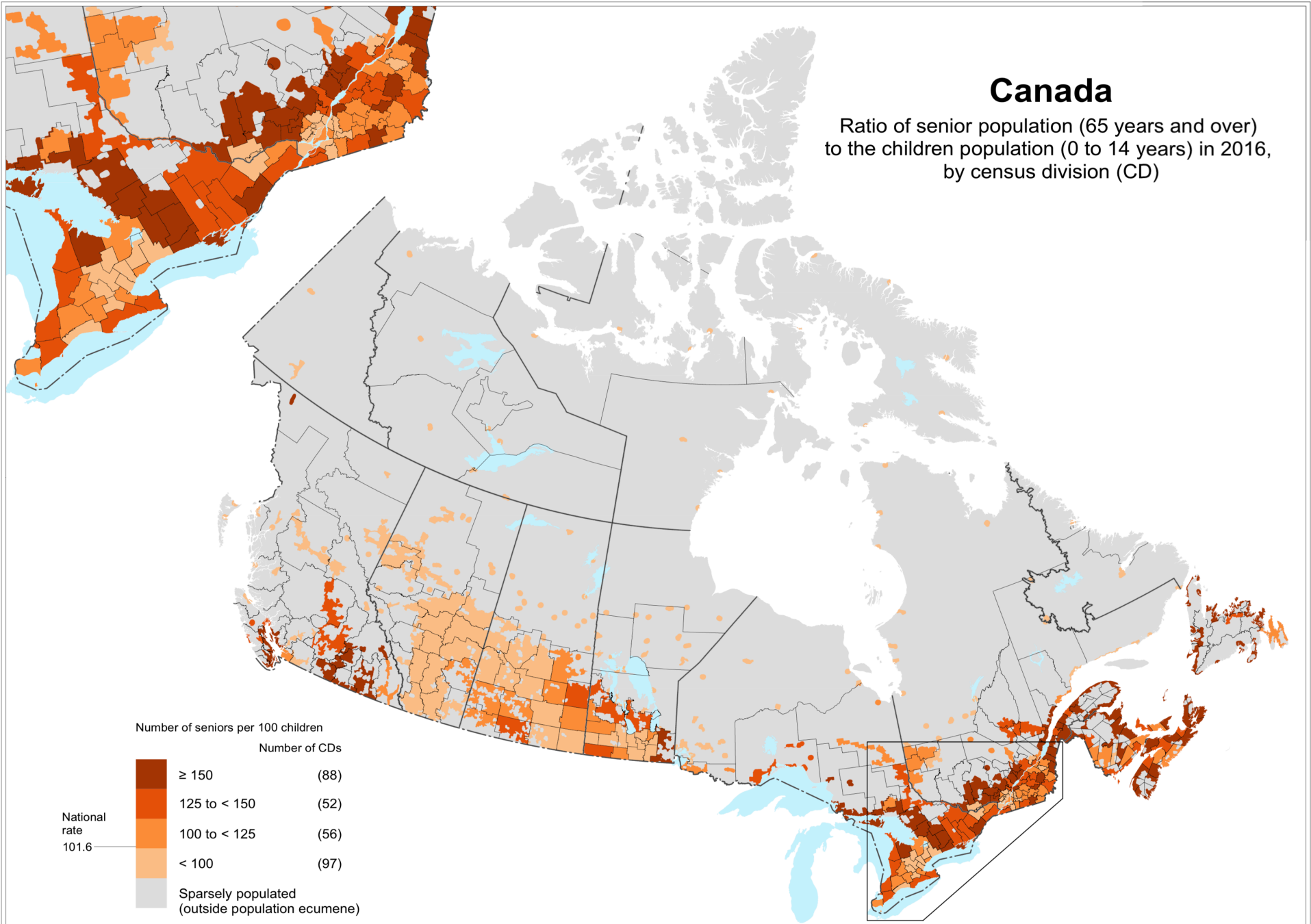


There are 37 houses under the hill in Bauline, a Northeast Avalon town of about 500 people that looks out over Conception Bay.

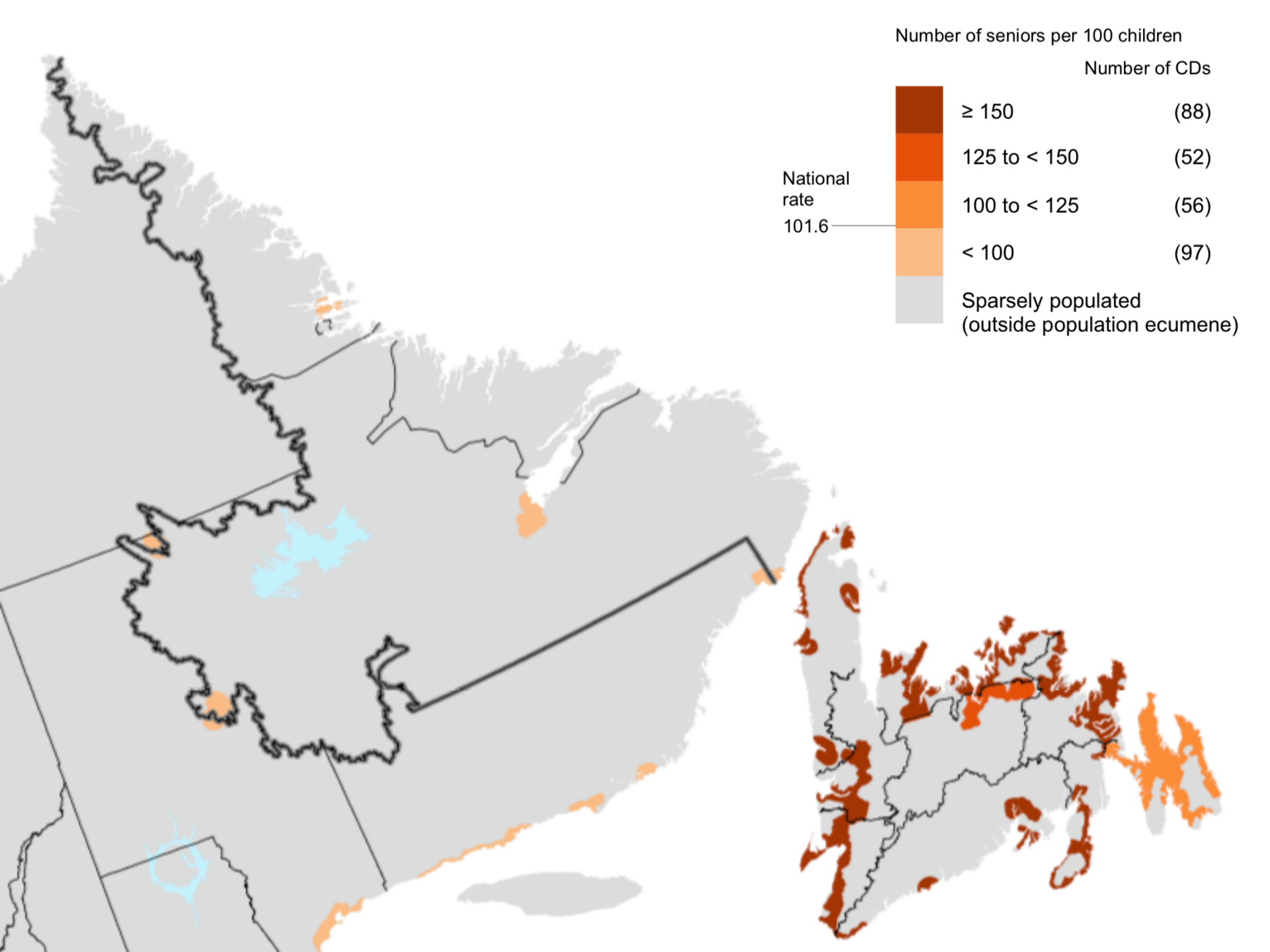
**Newfoundland's island population will experience "notable aging" in the next 20 years, Memorial's Harris Centre says, and in most areas, the number of residents will decline.**

# Canada

Ratio of senior population (65 years and over) to the children population (0 to 14 years) in 2016, by census division (CD)



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.



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# Materials: Interview topics

1. Challenges & successes of planning & implementation
2. Key ingredients of developing sustainable AFCs
3. Community-specific factors: Rurality, transportation, weather, sense of community
4. Marginalized populations
5. Lessons learned
6. And, what motivates you to keep doing this work?



# Results: Key themes

- Challenges to sustainability:
  - ▣ Volunteer burnout
  - ▣ Limited funding
- Factors strengthening sustainability:
  - ▣ Municipal collaboration
  - ▣ Generating community support
  - ▣ Targeted volunteer recruitment
  - ▣ Community champions



# Challenges: Volunteer burnout



“The people that you see here in volunteer roles, they aren’t only involved in one committee; they’re involved in *all* of them. Its getting to the point now, like some people have said, next year is our 50th anniversary, that will be my last year. **We’ve been at it since we were 18 years old. And we are 70.**”

# Challenges: Limited funds



“With the community support and funding that we can get from other agencies, a small amount of funding, we can sustain the program, the whole thing.

**However, we need a coordinator.** We cannot do it without a paid coordinator, so that is our biggest challenge right now.”

## Strengths: Municipal collaboration



“One of the greatest steps that can be taken on this age-friendly journey is **to get buy-in from the municipality**. It's an ongoing challenge; we had everybody all geared up, every council member was onside. **And then we had an election**, and some of the old council members disappeared, and then it became a case of reacquainting and getting buy-in from the new councillors.”

# Strengths: Generating community support



“Well it’s a matter of **just talking to people**, and getting them engaged. Fostering the idea that this is community, community matters, we all live here, we all have family that, in some way, shape, or form, is connected to living in the community, and we all have older people in our lives.”

## Strengths: Targeted volunteer recruitment

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“We’re constantly recruiting good people at the table. We had a retired nursing manager [...], she was able to bring her expertise and leadership in health care issues relevant to age-friendly transportation. So, that kind of expertise you really need, and you can only get at that when you have **good people around the table**. And, you know, **people like to be invited to share in a successful program.**”

## Strengths: Community champions



“What it’s all about is finding local champions. You know, people who’s **got the expertise, got the time...** I’ve always said, the success of any organization is **having the right people around the table** that can bring their **expertise and leadership** to any idea that you might be proposing. You need local champions of a cause.”



# Project implications and discussion

- Key finding: Limits to age-friendly sustainability = **implementation gap** between early stages and long-term viability
  - ▣ Limited funding scope
  - ▣ Volunteers relied upon to create systemic change
  - ▣ Limited capacity & burnout = short-term projects; limited sustainability
- Setting an agenda for *rural* age-friendly initiatives?
- Bridging the implementation gap:
  1. Champions
  2. Collaborations
  3. Municipal involvement
- Pilot project conclusion



# Next steps in the Russell & Skinner collaboration

- Pilot study insights
- SSHRC Insight Development Grant (2017-19): Does this sustainability gap emerge in other regions and implementation trajectories?
  - ▣ Ontario case study: 5 rural communities
- Goal: Testing implementation gap framework at national (Canadian) level



For further information, please get in touch – thank you!



**Elizabeth Russell:** [elizabethrussell@trentu.ca](mailto:elizabethrussell@trentu.ca)

**Mark Skinner:** [markskinner@trentu.ca](mailto:markskinner@trentu.ca)