OA-INVOLVE
Older Adults' Active Involvement in Ageing & Technology Research and Development
AGE-WELL

Older Adults' Involvement in AGE-WELL Projects
A Survey – 2015-2016 Summary Report

INTRODUCTION

AGE-WELL projects strive to develop solutions that will help current and future generations of older adults and their caregivers to live quality lives and enjoy independence, improved security, safety and social connectedness as they age. This requires the involvement of older adults.

Engaging older adults in technology research and development projects has several benefits including addressing older adults needs (1), improved early adoption and diffusion of the products and increased functionality, usability and quality of the products (2), which have been recognized by the management and researchers affiliated with the AGE-WELL network. As such, older adult involvement is a cornerstone of the AGE-WELL network.

THE OA-INVOLVE PROJECT

OA-INVOLVE is an AGE-WELL Project and stands for Older Adults' Active Involvement in Aging and Technology Research and Development. The project focuses on understanding the ways in which older adults are involved in the technology research and development process, from research inception, proposal writing, right through to the development and commercialization of technology knowledge, products, policies and services. Guidelines will be developed to aid projects involving older adults in various roles, including as participants, advisors and co-producers (decision-makers) throughout the technology research and development process continuum.

AGE-WELL PROJECTS' SURVEY

OA-INVOLVE conducted an email survey inviting all AGE-WELL projects leads to describe basic aspects of engaging older adults in their work. The idea was to collect information on current practices before we move to more complex engagement descriptions and projects interviews. It was also intended to provide the AGE-WELL projects with a clear picture of current older adult engagement practices across the network. This is not an exhaustive analysis but rather a snapshot of current practices and future plans.

OA-INVOLVE surveyed fellow AGE-WELL investigators, research leads and managers about current practices and future plans for engaging older adults in their activities.

We intend to reproduce this survey annually to document change in older adults' engagement practices across the AGE-WELL network over time.

SURVEY PROCESS

The survey questions were emailed to AGE-WELL leads during the period of April – August 2016. We emailed 35 projects, including the leads or co-leads, the crosscutting activities leads (N=4) and the AGE-WELL Network management office (N=1). We received responses from all teams. Projects were followed up by email or phone when clarification was needed. (See survey questions on page 3).

WHERE IS AGE-WELL RESEARCH TAKING PLACE?

Research is taking place in a wide range of environments, such as First Nations communities, university laboratories, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, retirement facilities, libraries, community centers, malls, and research centers. Two projects are classified as virtual sites, as their research consists of phone/internet interviews with older adults.

The majority of the research activities involving older adults directly are taking place in Ontario (*Figure 1*). Thirteen projects are carrying out research activities in Toronto, 6 in Ottawa, and 3 in London and Waterloo.

Four projects report their research is taking place in the Vancouver area, British Columbia, and 3 in Montreal, Quebec. Thirteen other cities across Canada house research activities. At the time of the survey no research activities involving older adults were reported in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, PEI, Manitoba and the Territories.
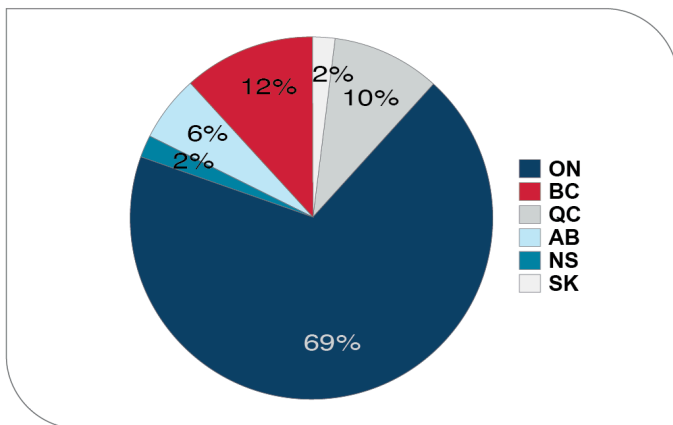

Figure 1. Percentage of research activities reported to take place per province.

INVOLVEMENT ROLES

Older adults are involved in AGE-WELL projects in all three roles: as participants, advisors or co-producers (decision-makers). Some projects will involve older adults in more than one role during the project's duration.

OLDER ADULTS ARE INVOLVED IN AGE-WELL NETWORK GOVERNANCE

AGE-WELL Network involves older adults in decision-maker roles in three different Governance Committees. Older adults also serve as advisors in network mentorship workshops.

ALMOST ALL AGE-WELL PROJECTS INVOLVE OLDER ADULTS IN A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT ROLE

Among the 39 AGE-WELL Projects/CCs, 36 either currently involve or plan to involve older adults. Of these, the majority indicates that they will involve older adults in a participant role. Involving older adults as advisors and co-producers (decision-makers) is not as frequently practiced (38% and 28%, respectively). Some Projects/CCs involve older adults in multiple roles. Twenty-one Projects/CCs (54%) intend to involve older adults as participants. Four Projects (10%) intend to involve older adults as participants and advisors and 10 Projects (26%) intend to involve older adults as participants, advisors and co-producers (*Figure 2*).

Note: Definitions of participants, advisors, and co-producers were not provided in the survey but were clarified upon request.
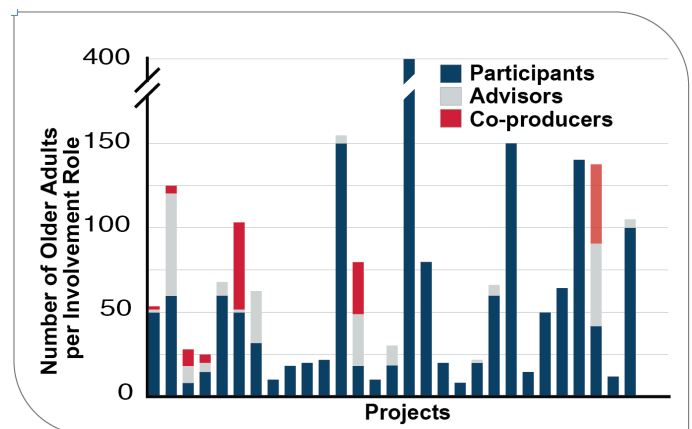

Figure 2. Number of older adults per involvement role - current and planned involvement combined. Some older adults can have multiple roles. Three of the Projects/CCs reported no plan to involve older adults, and 7 projects indicated that they involve older adults, but did not provide the numbers of older adults – these projects were not included in this chart.

The majority of AGE-WELL teams engage older adults in their projects. OA-INVOLVE will support research teams to move along the involvement continuum towards greater engagement of older adults in the advisory and decision-making roles.
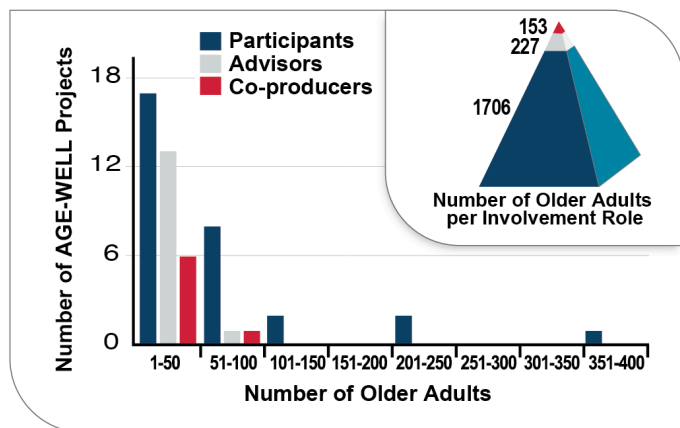
Figure 3. Number of projects involving older adults per enrolment size and role - current and planned involvement combined. Some older adults can have multiple roles. Quantitative data was not provided by 7 projects.
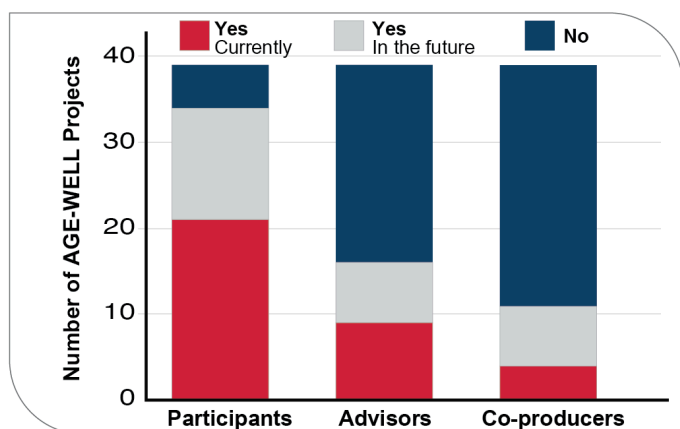

Figure 4. Number of projects involving older adults per involvement role - current and planned involvement. Some older adults can have multiple roles.

REFERENCES

1. Wherton J., Sugarhood P., Procter R., Hinder S., & Greenhalgh T. (2015). Implementation Science (10): 75, pp.1-10.
2. Shah S.G.S. & Robinson I. (2007). International Journal of Technology Assessment in Health Care (23): 1, pp. 131–137.

SEVEN OF THE PROJECTS INVOLVE OLDER ADULTS IN ALL 3 ROLES. THE MAJORITY OF THE PROJECTS WORK WITH LESS THAN 50 OLDER ADULTS

Current and planned older adults' involvement reported by the Projects/CCs included:
- 1706 (82%) - Participants
- 227 (11%) - Advisors
- 153 (7%) - Co-producers
- 2086 in total in the above roles (*Figure 3*).

Note: When response to number of older adults involved was a range; the maximum number of older adults indicated on the survey was used. This is an estimate as recruitment is ongoing and there may be multiple study sites or study phases.

APPROXIMATELY A QUARTER OF PROJECTS PLAN TO INVOLVE MORE OLDER ADULTS IN THE FUTURE

The majority of projects currently involve older adults in a participant role (23), and only 4 projects indicated that they do not plan to increase numbers of participants. Older adult advisors are involved in 9 projects; an additional 6 projects reported on plans to recruit advisors. The involvement of older adults in the decision-making (co-producers) role is less frequent among AGE-WELL projects. At the time of survey, only 4 projects involved older adults as decision-makers, and 7 planned to recruit older adults into decision-making roles in the future (*Figure 4*).
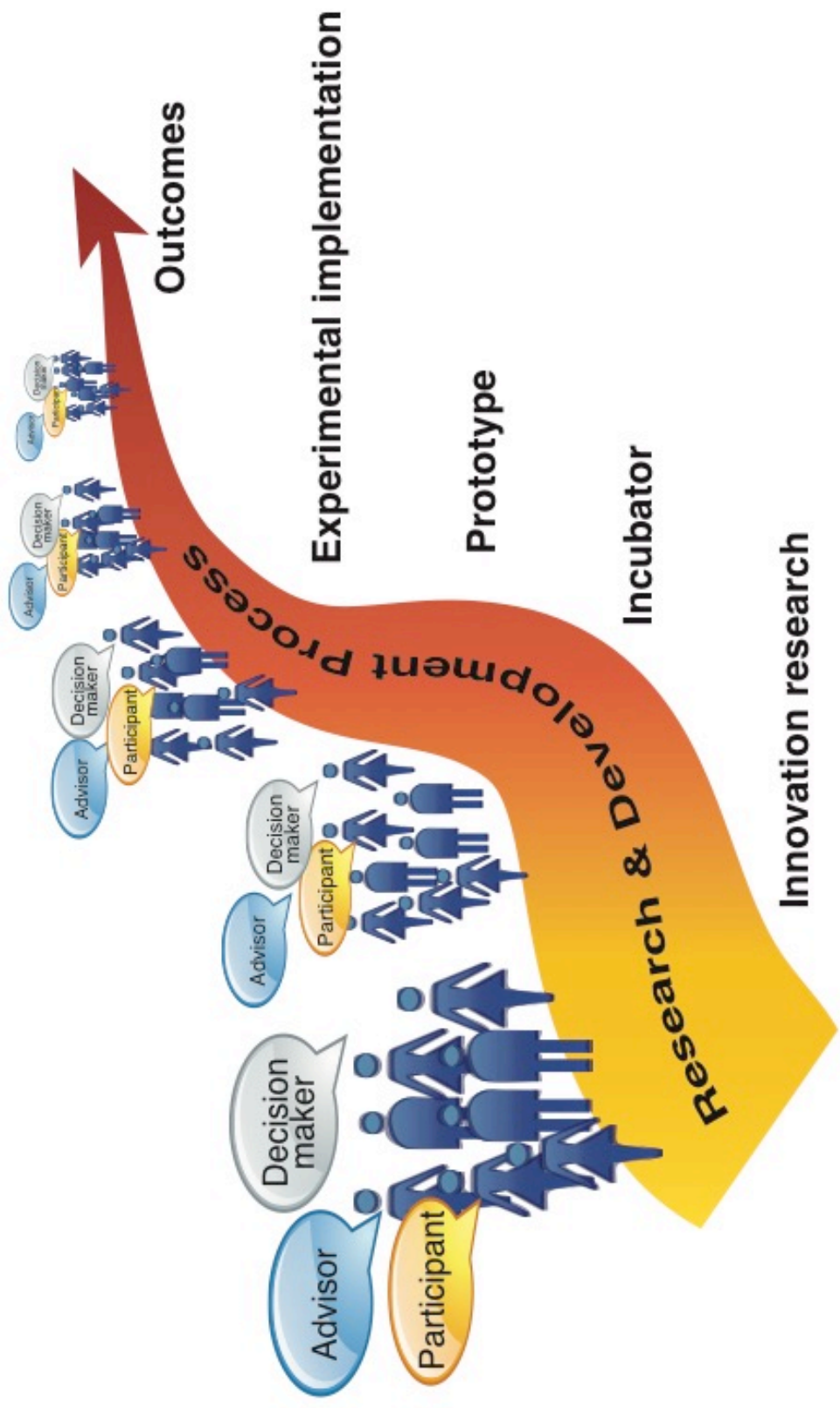
THE SURVEY QUESTIONS WERE AS FOLLOWS:
1. Where is your research taking place (specific sites)?
2. Do you currently involve older adults in any capacity?
   - As research participants?
   - As advisors in the research process?
   - As co-producers in the research process?
3. If so, how many older adults are involved in your project in the above capacities?
4. If you don't currently involve older adults, do you have plans to do so in the future? How many?

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AGEWEll
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Outcomes

Experimental implementation

Prototype

Incubator

Innovation research

Development Process

Research & Development

Advisor

Participant

Decision maker