Older Worker Employment and Labour Force Participation

Phase 1: Setting the Stage

FINAL REPORT

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Nova Scotia Centre on Aging
Mount Saint Vincent University
Halifax, NS B3M 2J6

Introduction

Population aging in Canada has garnered considerable attention in recent years. One area of discussion is the labour force participation of older workers. Efforts to delay retirement and rehire those who have already retired, are seen as a means to address many of the potential negative impacts of population aging, for society and individuals.[1,2] These actions are not unreasonable, given recent trends in delaying retirement, the increasing proportion of Canadians 65 and older who are employed in Canada versus 15 years ago,[3] and the fact that many Canadians say they plan to continue working after retirement.[4]

Nova Scotia is at the leading edge of Canada's demographic shift. Between 2001 and 2014, the population aged 65 and older increased in all counties of the province.[5] In response, Nova Scotia launched *SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population* (2017) which includes a commitment to value older adults in the workplace.[6] Working with the Department of Seniors, the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging was tasked with examining the literature on older worker labour force participation, through a "Nova Scotia" lens. This Report synthesizes findings from a literature review of older worker employment, drawing on the authors' knowledge in this area as well as a systematic search of grey and academic literature published in English between 2007 and 2017 in Canada and internationally, and available in the public domain. The main search term used was "older worker". As a result, the majority of results were focused on older adults *already* engaged in work or recently retired; less focus was on job-seekers and bringing into employment older adults who were not previous labour force participants. Research specifically on older worker self-employment and entrepreneurship was beyond the scope of the search. The report highlights barriers and enablers to older worker employment, as well as promising practices, and critically assesses the findings with respect to their relevance for Nova Scotia, with particular focus on sector, rural/urban and gender factors. The term "older worker" is loosely defined in the literature, but is commonly applied to people 50 and older,[4,7,8] or 55 and older,[9] an age category that may need to be revisited given the increasing participation of those 65 and older in the labour force.

Background

Research and policy regarding older worker employment is of interest globally, but particularly to countries with rapidly aging populations, such as Canada, Australia and the United States. This interest is born out of concern for the economy and the potential negative impacts on economic growth and labour supply, while the interest in valuing older workers' contributions (and combatting ageist stereotypes around older workers) is often a secondary aim. For example, the federal Advisory Council on Economic Growth identifies older workers as one of four demographic groups for whom increasing labour market participation will help bolster national GDP.[10]

Broadly speaking, discussions on older worker labour force participation tend to focus on eliminating or increasing mandatory retirement ages, pension reform, and tax incentives as

means to promote delayed retirement, as well as on what employers and organizations can do to attract and retain older workers, the reasons why older adults choose to remain or exit the labour force, and the broader policy and societal contexts that may be at play. Meanwhile, many older Canadians are finding themselves in the position of *needing* or *wanting* to continue working past traditional retirement ages. A member poll conducted by CARP (formerly the Canadian Association for Retired Persons) found an equal split between those who stay in the workforce past age 65 because they want to and those that stay because they have to. The literature posits a variety of reasons older adults decide to remain in, or withdraw from, the labour force. These include financial considerations, such as inadequate savings or pensions, or pressure to support children or aging parents;[11,12] as well as technological advances (that have made many jobs less physically demanding); and better health.[13-15] Furthermore, many older adults choose to continue working for the social benefits,[11] or because they find work interesting.[16] Research shows older Canadians *are* working longer. In fact, a trend of delayed retirement among the 55 and older has been observed since the mid-late 1990s,[14] and according to the 2016 Census, the proportion of people aged 65 and older who are still working is at its highest level since 1981.[3] Projections suggest that age of retirement may reach as high as 67.5 years for males and 65 for females by 2031.[17, i]

Consequently, the term retirement has also become much harder to define than in the past. No longer necessarily a single event, retirement for many is now a process which may involve scaling down to part-time status, moving to a bridge job, taking on contract work, or self-employment. Canadian evidence suggests that many older workers are already engaging in some form of phased retirement.[18] Amongst organizations interested in engaging older workers, "rehirement" has become a common strategy.[7] This term describes the practice of rehiring one's retired workers or hiring workers who have retired from another organization.

Both governments (federal and provincial) and interest and sector groups[19,20] are grappling with the issues surrounding labour force participation of older adults in Canada. In 2007, Human Resources and Social Development Canada convened the *Expert Panel on Older Worker*s to respond to the economic challenge of an aging population, and the particular challenge of providing for older workers displaced by a changing economy. The Panel, drawing on sources including consultations with stakeholders and employers, reported that myths about retirement and the need to make room for younger workers are strong barriers to older worker labour force engagement. The consultations also identified strong interest in policies that support flexibility.[21]

In 2010, The Public Policy Forum, on behalf of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, brought together stakeholders at a national conference to explore challenges and opportunities for older worker labour force participation.[22] Conference speakers emphasized flexible work arrangements, phased retirement options, mentoring, technology (to improve workplace functionality and worker efficiency), positive workplace culture, and "providing meaningful work" as positive practices for recruitment and retention. This was followed by consultations with employers and older workers on the topic of older workers 50+, that took place through a series of cross country roundtables in 2011.[12] Closer to home, organizations including the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, have identified older

workers as one component of the under-represented workforce that may present an opportunity to contribute to economic growth in the region.[23]

Two important perspectives on the topic are that of the employer/organization and the worker. While there is ample descriptive and prescriptive literature on the topic, the following section discusses findings from the literature review from the perspectives of these key actors- worker and employer. It should be noted that much of this research is international, but source material is limited here to OECD countries, and highlights Canadian studies where possible. The differing pension systems, retirement ages and societal attitudes toward aging and retirement in these jurisdictions may impact their applicability to Nova Scotia. This list of enablers and barriers is not exhaustive, but rather are an attempt to define and describe what some employers and employees identify in the literature available for this review.

Enablers and Barriers: What do Employers and Older Workers Identify?

Enablers

Employers and older workers identify several enablers to engaging adults in employment at a later age. Most enablers identified in this literature are at the workplace level and form components of what are generally seen as positive workplace cultures.

Organizational support/challenging work: Research on Ontario workers aged 50 and older in managerial and professional roles, including nursing,[24] US nurses in rural settings[25] and American workers in a variety of organizations in different regions (in workplaces ranging from small to large)[8] identifies the importance of organizational support in retention. Specifically, a sample of older Canadians (60-65) who were either retired, currently employed, or in a post-retirement job, revealed that in all three categories recognition and respect ranked as the primary HR practices for retention or return to work.[26] Key to fostering these perceptions of support are having supportive managers.[12,27] Closely connected is having interesting and challenging work, something that Canadian employers, surveyed by The Conference Board of Canada, identified as a retention strategy in 2008,[7] and Canadian older workers identify as an important factor in continuing to work.[12,28] It is therefore not surprising that a European study found that workers identify “low work quality” as factoring into their retirement intentions.[29]

Training: Training is often put forth as an important strategy to retain older workers, and has been a focal point of much Canadian discussion on the topic, including around the myths and misconceptions about the utility of training older workers.[30,31] A study of leading for-profit, non-profit and government organizations in Minnesota found that leading organizations include training and professional development for their older workers as a matter of course.[32] Research with key employees and stakeholders at 18 US companies in 13 states identifies “professional growth and development” as a successful retention strategy.[8] Canadian older workers, speaking at a series of roundtables, reported a desire to try “new and different kinds of work,” and indicated that opportunities for personal and

professional growth are motivators to their engagement in work.[12] However, data collected by Statistics Canada between 2007 and 2008 indicates that while the age gap is decreasing, workers aged 55 to 64 were still significantly less likely to receive job training.[33] Those who received training were more likely to be in white-collar occupations.[33]

Flexible workplace options: Arrangements that allow flexibility, in scheduling and hours[7,8,32] and roles and responsibilities,[8] and that extend to flexibility in transitioning to retirement,[8,32] are retention strategies noted by employers and older workers alike. However, the term "flexibility" may be used generally,[28] or to capture a variety of meanings.[12] Flex options are also found to be motivators for attracting Canadian retirees into post-retirement employment, based on a sample of 50-65 year olds in both the public and private sector.[34] The results of a CARP members poll (mostly retired) found that respondents ranked flexible work schedules (including "staged retirement, shorter hours, job-sharing or other variations on the full-time, 40 hour work week") as the number one way that organizations could accommodate and attract older workers.[35] Feedback from Canadian employers indicates that where flexible arrangements are available, they generally are available to all ages of workers.[12,7]

Benefits and rewards: A US study of 18 companies in 13 states, drawing on key informant interviews and site visits, identified that older workers value "enhanced 'traditional' benefits", including family support, wellness and counselling programs.[8] Enhanced "rewards packages" (including incentives such as promotions, higher compensation, and customizing of rewards) are also used in a number of Canadian organizations to engage older workers.[7] In terms of what older workers and retirees rank as beneficial, CARP members identify "extended health benefits after 65".[35] In Nova Scotia, employees mainly from the non-profit sector identified benefits as one of the incentives they need "to keep working beyond 55".[28] Some Canadian older workers have spoken about the importance of health benefits, although some employers have voiced their own concerns around the high costs of offering health benefits.[12]

Workplace accommodations: Nova Scotian employees, mainly in the non-profit sector, identify workplace accommodations, in the form of "physical changes, ergonomic chairs, larger fonts" as desirable to allowing them to work past age 55.[28] A US study drawing on several workplaces identifies examples of accommodations to address physical challenges. The authors noted that the practices discovered through their study mainly came from health care settings.[8] Examples included modifying schedules and responsibilities, implementing policies to prevent physical injury, and introducing equipment to minimize stress on the body.

Barriers

While much can be done by employers to promote older worker participation, several common barriers exist. This discussion begins with a focus on ageism, perhaps one of the most commonly identified barriers to the employment and active engagement of older adults in the labour force. While the list of barriers presented here is shorter than enablers, the absence of many of the enablers described above, such as benefits, flexibility and accommodations, may contribute to less "age-friendly" employment settings.

Ageism: The concept of ageism receives considerable attention in discussions of older workers. Broadly defined, "ageism" is the discrimination, prejudice or stereotyping of people based on their age,[36-38] and can be experienced by people of all ages. While ageism has both overt, legal aspects (i.e., discrimination that is against the law),[38] it often exists in a "subtle, elusive, and understated" form.[39] A recent international scoping review of the literature on ageism and work reported on studies that found negative attitudes around older workers' technological competence, physical and mental capacity, ability to be trained, and willingness to adapt and change.[36] Evidence suggests that the experience of ageism in the labour force domain is common and that it occurs for both those looking for work and those currently employed. For example, in a sample of 1000 labour force participants aged 45-65 in Poland, a third reported experiencing age discrimination, in the form of negative and stereotypical comments, or being passed up for a new job.[38] Older adults report experiencing ageism (in terms of negative attitudes towards older workers' competence) in job-seeking[40] and "stereotype threat"[ii] on the job.[41] In terms of impact on retirement decision making, a Danish study found that ageism (defined here as a "poor psychosocial work environment") was a significant predictor of retirement intention.[42] While a considerable volume of Canadian literature on ageism has been published in the last 10 years, it is almost exclusively focused on ageism in society and in healthcare, with only scant reference to older workers. However, a recent small study on perceptions of ageing in the workplace found that older Canadian workers mostly perceive their younger colleagues as viewing them positively. The authors hypothesize that this interesting finding may be the result of attempts by older workers to behave in ways that will buffer negative ageist stereotypes among their younger counterparts.[43]

Part of combatting ageism and negative norms around older workers rests with employers, including the managers who have direct responsibility for workers in their units.[44] It has been recommended that organizations develop "a common organizational identity," versus "age-based identities".[45] The authors of a study of HR representatives of small to mid-sized organizations in the US concluded that "organizations that value diversity generally are more inclined to engage in the targeted recruitment of older workers".[46]

Poor health: Health challenges may act as personal barriers to employment for some older adults. In fact, "health reasons" was identified by nurses in Australia as one of the factors leading to workforce exit.[47] A study of German baby boomers in their 40s and 50s found that those reporting health impairments had an increased probability of leaving the labour force within a year.[48] Research using Canadian data has found that having a chronic condition is associated with inability to remain working, and that the probability of not working is even greater for those with combinations of chronic conditions.[49] Anecdotal evidence provided by Canadian older workers at a series of roundtables indicated that these workers view their physical and mental health status as the primary condition that would allow them to continue working or not.[12] Those employed in trades, hospitality, and healthcare may be especially vulnerable, given the more physically demanding aspects of their jobs. Workers at these sessions indicated that the health and caregiving needs of their family members also affects their labour force participation.

Enablers & Barriers: Discussion

Enablers and barriers to older worker participation exist at several levels. Organizations successfully retaining and engaging older workers tend to share a workplace culture that is open and responsive. Their policies may be formal or informal, and tend to emphasize universality.[8,32] Literature from this field of study points to HR forecasting and identification of potential risks, flexibility, intrinsic rewards, training, benefits and motivating workplace culture practices as components of effective HR strategies for engaging older workers.[50,51]

At a systems level, certain policies may act as structural barriers to older workers' labour force participation. These include stipulations within public and private pension systems, tax policies, workers compensation, benefits plans, and collective agreements. For example, while it is now possible to delay receipt of CPP benefits until age 70, and to work until that age while putting CPP earnings towards post-retirement benefits, this age cap could act as a disincentive toward longer employment.[10] Regarding private pensions, many defined benefit pension plans in Canada have a low age (often 55) at which employees may be eligible to draw a pension, potentially providing a disincentive to working longer.[7] Age limits (typically varying from 65 to 70) are often imposed on the receipt of benefits including long-term disability and life insurance,[7] and health and dental benefits.[52] Within collective agreements, stipulations may prevent companies from easily rehiring retired employees.[7] These restrictions may include "limiting the length of employment permitted, instituting waiting periods before employees can be rehired, requiring employees to be hired through a third party, and requiring employees to be rehired into a different position".[7]

Interestingly, while much has been written on the tension between family/friend caregiving and employment,[53-55] and given that many Canadian caregivers would also be older workers, this issue did not come out strongly as a barrier in the literature review. One reason may be because much of this research in Canada relies on secondary data analysis of large datasets such as Statistics Canada's General Social Survey, whose focus is not specific to employment. However, some primary research on working and caregiving has been done in Canada with managers[56] and employed caregivers,[57] but the focus is not necessarily on those working caregivers who are 'older' (although many would tend to be). While most working caregivers are able to manage these dual responsibilities, the ability to remain in full-time employment and meet caregiving demands becomes less sustainable for "high intensity" caregivers- those caring for a high number of hours per week.[53,55,58] In these cases, workplace supports,[59] or flexible options such as part-time work,[60] may be beneficial, as research suggests that some older caregivers do voluntarily retire to provide care, but may have desired to remain in the labour force.[61] Working and caregiving is also highly gendered, as traditionally women have been most vulnerable to negative employment consequences.[62] This can create barriers to traditional "set-schedule" employment. "Caregiver-Friendly Workplace Policies" is an emerging focus of research[63,64] and practical tools for accommodating caregiving employees were identified in the *Report from the Employer Panel for Caregivers*, a federal initiative under the former Minister of State for Seniors.[65]

Lastly, the literature search yielded little mention of structural adjustment and resultant job loss in the empirical studies. Older workers may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of job loss and it has been noted that when older workers lose their jobs, they tend to remain unemployed for longer periods of time.[21] This may be particularly acute in rural and single

industry communities, which also tend to be home to higher proportions of older adults, when compared to urban centres. These workers may be challenged to obtain the education and training required of a new job, lack current knowledge of job search techniques, and face greater disincentives to moving for work.[21,22,66]

Summary

In attempting to better understand the major barriers and enablers to older worker employment, this literature review focused on studies which included employer/organization and/or older worker perspectives that were gathered primarily through surveys, interviews, or case study methods in Canada and internationally, as well as input from federal government led/initiated consultations. It should be cautioned that the latter sources, in particular, are not rigorous in their research methodology, but provide more anecdotal evidence of employer/worker perspectives. The rationale for this approach is that while many descriptive reports exist listing what workplaces can and should do to recruit and retain older workers, hearing the perspectives of those in workplaces should be insightful.

The literature search uncovered few evaluations of initiatives to provide insight into what types of strategies are successful[iii]. Other Canadian researchers have identified similar gaps. As noted elsewhere, "the effect of human resources management on the actual retention or attraction of older workers is not well documented in Canada".[13] Further research is needed to provide concrete evidence on the degree to which identified barriers and enablers are (or are not) playing out in practice, and how these may or may not vary across industries and occupations.

Relevance to Nova Scotia

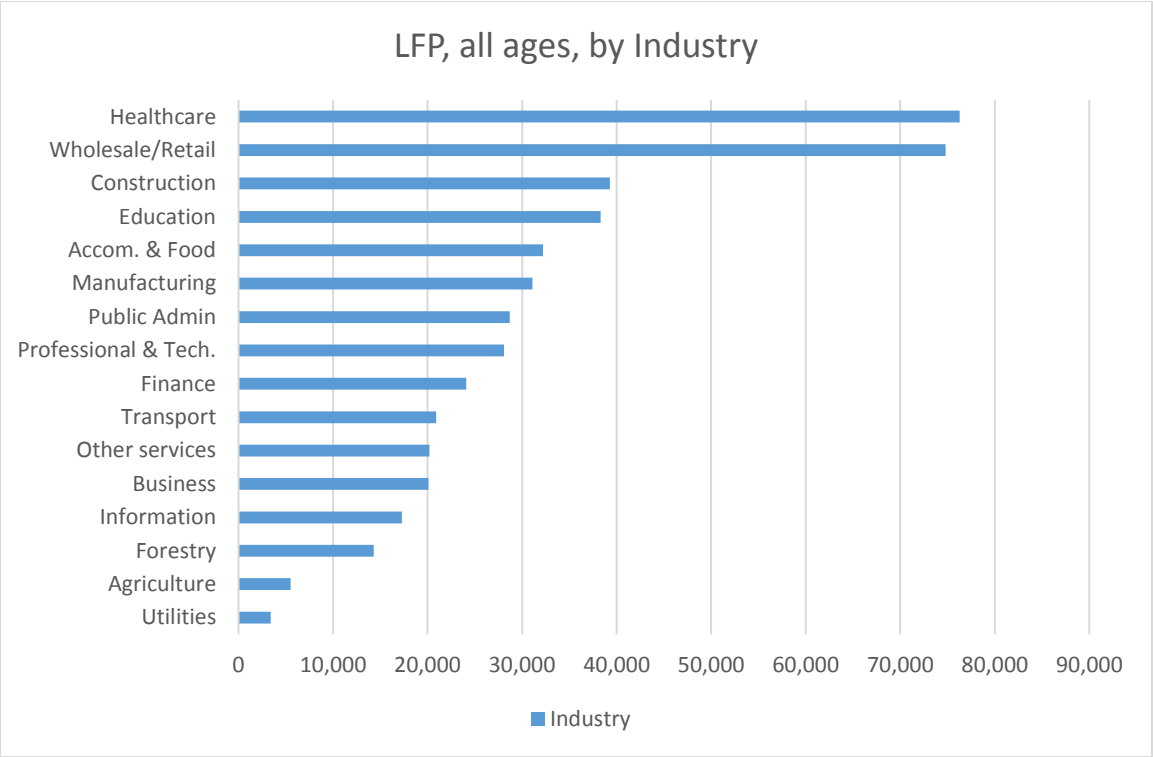
Provincial Labour Force Participation

Nova Scotia is a largely rural province, but is also home to the largest urban centre in Atlantic Canada: Halifax. As noted in the Ivany Report, Nova Scotia is a province of opportunity, which stems from its resources, people and lifestyle. Following periods of growth in manufacturing and industry, followed by farming, fishing and forestry, the province experienced a "government-led" economy during the period from the 1950s to the mid-1990s. Since then, public sector growth has slowed, and while the economy still relies heavily on government-generated employment, slow economic growth combined with an aging population has forced attention to the need to "turn the economy around".[67]

In 2016, 486,600 working age Nova Scotians made up the provincial labour force, with 111,000, or close to 23%, of them being 55 years of age and older.[68] Employment for this age group nearly doubled in the decade between 2003 and 2013.[69] Looking specifically at Nova Scotian workers 65 and older, data from the 2016 Census revealed that 5.2% of them worked full year, full time in 2015.[70] Meanwhile, labour force participation amongst all working age Nova Scotians has been decreasing over the last 10 years.[68]

In Figure 1, the total number of labour force participants of working age is presented by industry classification. This figure illustrates the strong presence of employment in health and social care and in wholesale and retail trade. As discussed in the next section, the picture is similar for the 55+, but with some notable differences.

Figure 1: Nova Scotia LFP by Industry, both sexes, ages 15 and older, 2016



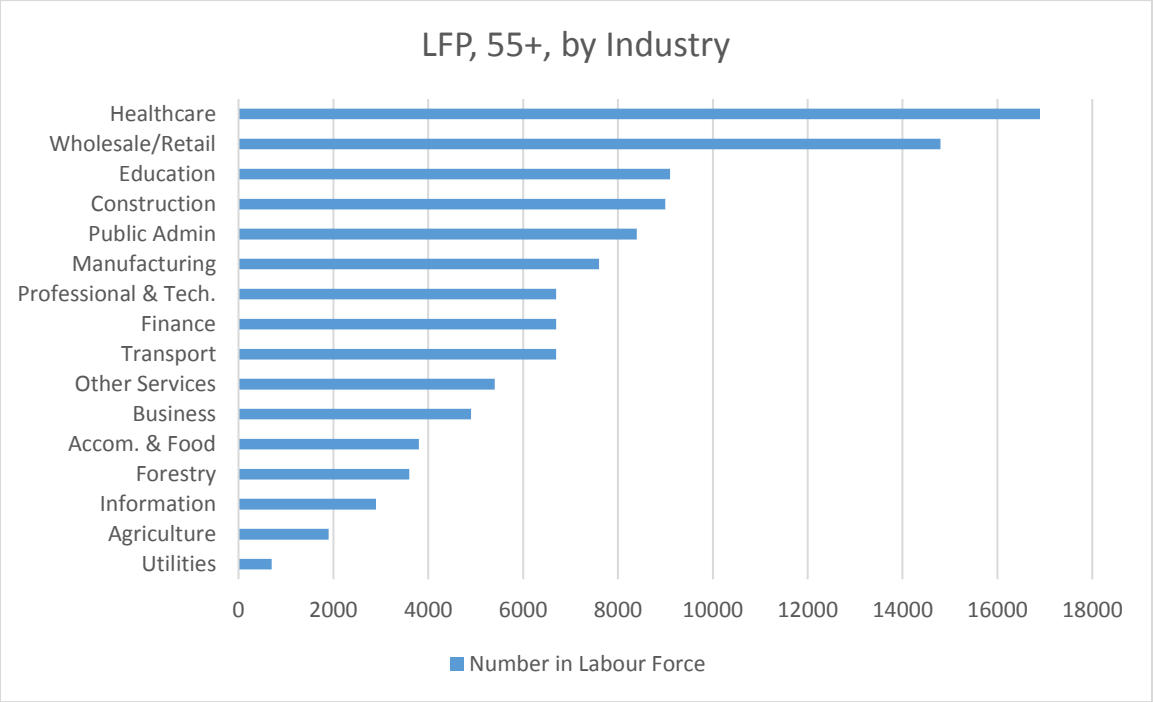
Source: Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0008 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), sex and age group, annual (persons unless otherwise noted),* CANSIM (database). Retrieved October 31, 2017, from http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a47. Presents number of civilian, non-institutionalized persons 15 years of age and over who, during the reference week, were employed or unemployed. Estimates in thousands, rounded to the nearest hundred. These data are stratified by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) categories: Agriculture; Utilities; Construction; Forestry, Fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas; Manufacturing; Wholesale and retail trade; Transportation and warehousing; Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing; Professional, scientific and technical services; Business, building and other support services; Educational services; Health care and social assistance; Information, culture and recreation; Accommodation and food services; Other services (except public administration); Public Administration.

Labour Force Participation- Older Workers

The presence of older workers in the economy across Atlantic Canada as a whole has grown steadily over the past 25 years, reflective of larger national trends of population change,

more women in the workforce, trends towards delaying retirement, financial pressures including decreasing pension coverage, and overall higher education levels obtained by the baby boomers.[71] As seen in Figure 2, primary industries employing Nova Scotians 55[iv] and older in 2016 were health and social care, and retail/whole sale trade.[72] Employing a smaller number of older workers, were education, construction, public administration and manufacturing.

Figure 2: Nova Scotia LFP by Industry, both sexes, ages 55+, 2016



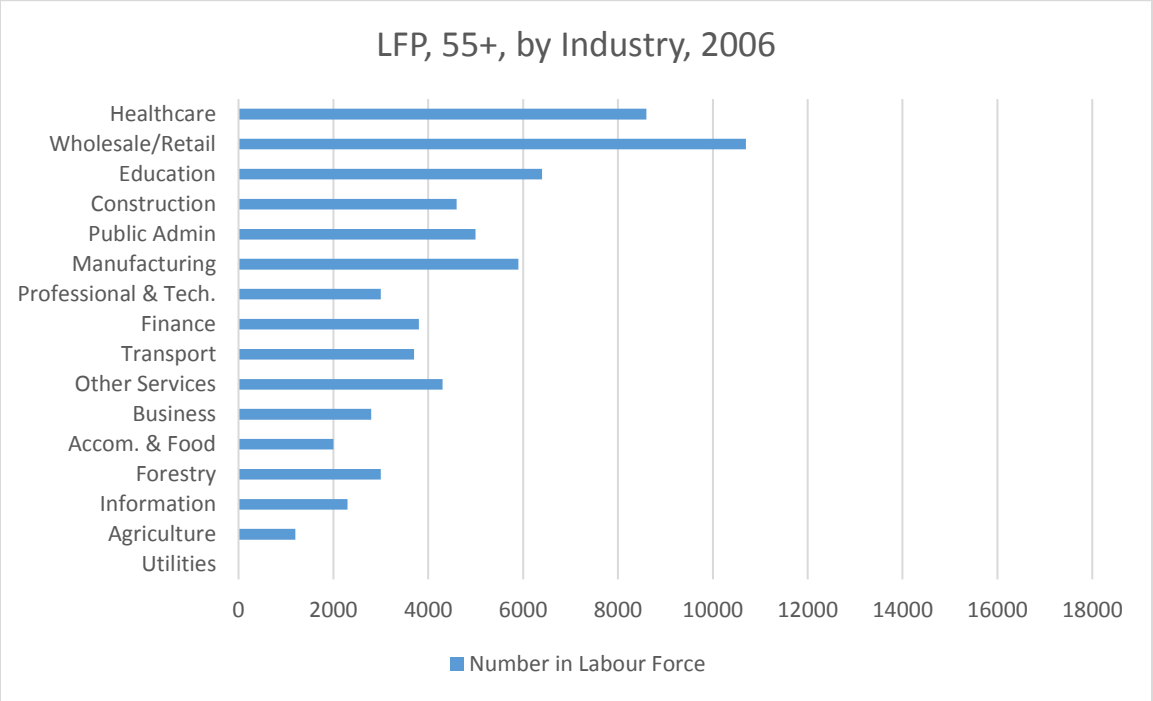
Source: Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0008 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), sex and age group, annual (persons unless otherwise noted),* CANSIM (database). Retrieved October 31, 2017, from http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a47. Presents number of civilian, non-institutionalized persons 55 years of age and over who, during the reference week, were employed or unemployed. Estimates in thousands, rounded to the nearest hundred. These data are stratified by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) categories: Agriculture; Utilities; Construction; Forestry, Fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas; Manufacturing; Wholesale and retail trade; Transportation and warehousing; Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing; Professional, scientific and technical services; Business, building and other support services; Educational services; Health care and social assistance; Information, culture and recreation; Accommodation and food services; Other services (except public administration); Public Administration.

As presented in Figures 1 and 2, there are some key differences in the labour force participation of workers 55 and older in Nova Scotia, when compared to their younger counterparts. Specifically, they are more likely to be employed in public administration, and

less likely to be employed in the accommodations and food services sector, when compared to the working age population (15 and older). However, older workers continue to be present in higher numbers in health and social care and in wholesale and retail trade, consistent with the larger picture of labour force participation in the province.

The profile of older workers by industry has also changed among the 55 and older over the last 10 years (see Figure 3- 2006). The presence of workers aged 55 and older employed in health and social care nearly doubled over the decade 2006 to 2016, from 8,600 in 2006 (see Figure 3) to 16,900 in 2016 (see Figure 2). Moreover, while the rank order based on number of workers reversed for health and social care and retail/wholesale trade in 2016 from 2006, the latter sector also saw an increase in older workers, of approximately 4,000. In fact, the presence of older workers in all industries increased between 2006 and 2016, in line with the growth of this age group in the province.

Figure 3: Nova Scotia LFP by Industry, both sexes, ages 55+, 2006



While data on key occupations of older Nova Scotians was not available for this report, the Census of Population, 2016, revealed differences in the work older Canadians are performing. Among those 65 and older, women are more likely to be employed in office support work and men as managers in agriculture and retail/whole sale trade, among other occupations. Compared to their younger counterparts, Canadians aged 65 and older are more likely to work in management.[3]

Analysis by Key Lenses

While the literature collected here presents a general understanding of factors for consideration in the employment of older workers, to be useful, it must also be assessed with a critical eye towards its relevance to Nova Scotia. What follows is an assessment by key criteria, including sector and industry, geography (with emphasis on rural NS), and gender as well as consideration of some other factors that may be relevant to NS (i.e., small business, and vulnerable workers).

Sector and Industry

The public sector continues to employ a large number of Nova Scotians, of all ages, through careers with the provincial and federal governments.[67] While the proportion of these public sector workers who are older is not known for NS, public sector organizations in Canada generally have higher proportions of older workers than do private sector organizations.[7] Given what is known from the literature on older worker employment in the public sector, attention to training and development, and flexible work options to attract retirees, may be worthwhile for those employing older Nova Scotians in this sector. However, the rehiring of retired employees may not be feasible in some organizations that have restrictions on this practice as a result of collective agreements.[7]

More specific information on older workers in NS is known for the non-profit sector. In 2010, this sector employed 35,000 full time employees, most of whom were women. Most significantly though, almost half of these employees were projected to retire within 20 years of the study.[28] Older workers in this sector cite flexible work arrangements, benefits, and workplace accommodations as among the supports that will allow them to continue working. However, employers in this sector are often limited in the financial resources available to commit to HR policies and programs. While pensions and benefits are not common in this sector and the lack thereof may be a barrier, ensuring that employers put focus on providing less costly enablers that older workers in this sector want- such as interesting and challenging work- may be more attractive. It has also been noted that funding from government for training older workers in the NS non-profit sector could be beneficial.[28]

Across Atlantic Canada, a shift away from goods-producing and towards service-producing work is occurring.[23] As noted earlier, older worker employment in Nova Scotia is diversified across several industries, with health and social care; retail/wholesale trade; educational services; construction; public administration and manufacturing representing the most common industries (in order of most to least) employing people 55 and older in 2016. Research that found older nurses consider respect, feedback and “having a voice” in their decisions around continued workforce engagement[25] suggests that employers in the health and social care sector may want to pay attention to workplace culture in efforts to retain older workers. The authors of a small study of healthcare workers in a variety of occupations in rural Australia suggest that strategies that are bundled (i.e., focus on more than one area) and that pay attention to the specific enablers and barriers experienced by older workers should be prioritized.[73]

Industries other than healthcare are even less explored in the literature. While a Canadian survey found that “employers in the retail and services sector are the most active in recruiting mature workers[7]”, and Canadian data shows that workers over 65 are found in

higher proportions in this sector than are workers 25 to 54,[3,16] there is a lack of identified enablers, barriers, and best practices for older workers in this sector.

Geography

Nova Scotia is largely a rural province, with Halifax a notable exception and regional urban hub. Most rural regions of the province are experiencing declining populations, while at the same time, the 65+ population is increasing in all counties.[5] As noted in the Ivany Report, rural communities are facing the most serious challenges as a result of an aging and shrinking population. This situation contributes to a greater challenge in terms of providing viable employment in these areas. This is reflected in a rural unemployment rate, for all workers, that is approximately 4% higher than the urban rate.[71] According to the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, unemployed rural workers in the region are more likely older (defined as those 55 to 64).[23] However, the 2016 Census revealed that individuals 65 and older in rural areas across the country are more likely to be working than their urban counterparts.[3] This finding has potential implications for small communities, given the important role the 65 and older population is known to play in volunteering.

Understanding the particular issues of older workers in rural contexts is a significant gap in the research. Older workers can be concentrated in occupations and industries that are in relative decline (as a share of total employment), especially in primary industries, which are often located in small towns and rural areas.[21] However, throughout the mid-1990s, Nova Scotia's employment landscape changed, with the loss of several large employers who often were the source of "better paying and often unionized" jobs.[67] Today, many of Nova Scotia's rural communities "will continue to rely heavily on sectors like tourism, forestry, fisheries and agriculture",[67] which have a significant seasonal component. Furthermore, data indicate that employment in the service sector has increased steadily over the past couple of decades, with shifts towards this sector most pronounced for Cape Breton and the North Shore region.[69] The precariousness of seasonal employment means that employees in these jobs are less likely to have access to benefits, training, and other enablers to prolonging work. The lack of research into the perspectives of older workers and employers in these sectors and in rural contexts generally, makes it difficult to conclude what practices may be considered "best", and how specific enablers and barriers may play into efforts to engage older workers. However, initiatives to address labour force participation of older rural workers must take into consideration the lower levels of formal education, and the higher propensity of unemployment, extant in these areas.

Gender

Employment of older workers must also consider gender dimensions. While the labour force participation of older females has been increasing since the 1970s[16] there are historical differences in the representation of males and females across sectors and industries. Across Atlantic Canada, the construction industry is the largest employment sector for older male workers (11%) followed by manufacturing, retail and primary industries. Health care and social services jobs employ one quarter of older women workers followed by employment in the retail sector, public administration and education.[71] Differences also exist between men and women with respect to their employment status. For example, while more Nova Scotian males than females 65 and older are employed,[68] more females than males 65 to 69 are in part-time work. While part-time work may offer women the flexibility to

balance work with interests or demands such as caregiving (which women tend to provide more intensively), this employment status may be precarious, as discussed. In turn, this may contribute to a need to remain attached to the labour force past age 65.

Nova Scotia data on workers 55 and older for 2016 indicate an especially high presence of males, compared to females, in construction and transportation. Much higher numbers of females, compared to males, are found in health care and social assistance. The split between men and women is close to even in the wholesale and retail trade sector, and in finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing.[72]

Some research on older workers from a gender perspective is found on the topic of flexible work options. One study, drawing on interviews with HR managers regarding older women workers, concludes that flexible work options must be meaningful. Simply having these options available is not enough.[74] Others call for more critical assessment of flexible work options in the discussion of working longer.[75] Non-standard and precarious employment may offer flexibility, but it often comes with less pay and fewer to no benefits and may not necessarily be the first choice of older adults, female or male.[21]

Other factors

Small business: Due to their small size and limited resources, small businesses and organizations may be challenged to provide many of the incentives that older workers identify as enablers to their engagement.[22,23] This is particularly relevant to Nova Scotia, where approximately 37% of all workers are employed in workplaces with fewer than 50 employees.[76] Because many of these businesses employ less than 5 employees, it may not be possible for them to offer health and dental benefits to employees, let alone other offerings, such as Employee Assistance Programs. Furthermore, implementing training may be too costly, or simply not feasible with a small workforce. Flexible policies may also be challenging for smaller workplaces to adopt,[8] but research from the US reveals that innovative smaller employers are responsive to employee needs and institute informal policies to address these needs.[32]

Vulnerable and displaced workers: Older workers are often imagined as one group, but those who are displaced,[66] in precarious employment,[77] or are otherwise vulnerable, may require specific attention. The National Seniors Council drew attention to “older workers at risk” in its report of the same name.[66] According to the Council, certain groups of older workers are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and labour force withdrawal, including displaced older workers, those with chronic disease or disability, low skilled workers, those with caregiving responsibilities, and those who are recent immigrants or are Aboriginal. According to the Public Policy Forum, interventions to support reemployment of displaced workers include: training to update skills, job search assistance, and financial support (e.g., for training).[22]

Summary

The enablers and barriers noted in the literature reviewed for this report drew mainly from the public sector, including healthcare, with some examples from private sector business. The type of work performed is not always known, and details on the workplaces are scarce. While many of the barriers and enablers can be considered relevant to those employed in

healthcare and public administration, their relevance for the large number of older Nova Scotians employed in wholesale and retail trades is much more difficult to establish, given the lack of sources that surveyed employers or employees in this sector. While enablers such as “positive work environments” can safely be assumed to be attractive motivators for all workers in a general sense, the lack of attention in the literature to specific challenges and opportunities of older worker employment in specific sectors and occupations, and by gender and geography, is a significant gap.

Promising Practices

Although there are numerous resources listing “best” or “promising” practices and strategies for older worker labour force participation,[7,30,50] learning from what employers are actually doing may be particularly insightful. A survey of mid to large-sized Canadian employers undertaken by the Conference Board of Canada concluded that companies with HR policies customized to focus on older workers (as opposed to age-neutral recruitment and retention strategies) are the most successful at attracting and retaining this cohort.[7] The examples presented below focus specifically on older workers and were initiated in response to organization-level concerns of retention and talent loss. It should be noted that while employment programs initiated by government, such as the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) and the New Opportunities for Work (NOW) program, through the Centre for Employment Innovation at St. Francis Xavier University, present one type of approach, the examples presented in Table 1 are employer/organization initiated, and focus more on engagement and return to work post-retirement, in line with the scope of this review. Furthermore, these examples come from secondary sources and reflect information available at the time the source documents were published. The examples come from Canadian organizations with medium to large-sized workplaces. Further discussion of promising practices would benefit from small business examples, as smaller employers may not have the resources to implement special programs, and would seldom have HR expertise on staff to develop and implement them.

Table 1: Promising Practices: Snapshots from Canadian Employers

Workplace	Sector or Industry	Strategic areas	Background
City of Calgary	Public-municipal	Rehirement	Former City employees who have been retired for at least 90 days may choose to add their names to a pool that managers can use to fill limited and seasonal positions without needing to go to a competitive hiring process.[78] Non-unionized employees may return to work for up to one year, immediately upon retirement.[7]
Bethany Care Society, AB	Non-profit; community services	Flexible work arrangements, enhanced benefits, training and mentoring	Employees were offered flexible work arrangements and benefits that included more sick days, vacation time and leave/flex days. Experienced workers were given mentoring roles and training was to be rolled out.[30]
AltaGas Limited, AB & BC	Private; Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	Flexible work arrangements, benefits, rehirement	The company's benefits program was expanded to include workers past age 65. A Retiree Resource Pool allows retirees to share their skills and knowledge on a project basis.[30]
Coast Mountain Bus Company, BC	Transportation	Flexible work arrangements, training, rehirement	Age-friendly practices include training for longtime employees and rehirement into positions that may be less demanding and include a more flexible schedule.[21]
Seven Oaks General Hospital, MB	Health care	Leave of absence	The Retention of Older Workers project, launched in 2008, identified barriers and enablers to retention of health-care professionals and piloted strategies. Strategies included: Older Worker Leave (a deferred salary leave option for workers 50 and older); presentations and sessions on retirement planning and work-life balance; a compressed work-week pilot; and a Nurse Mentorship Program.[79]

Discussion

In each of these examples, an employer identified a challenge presented by its aging workforce and recognized a need to address it, either through innovative rehirement policies, or strategies specifically designed to recruit and retain older workers. In at least some of the organizations, the leadership consulted with employees as part of the process

of developing these age-friendly practices (e.g., City of Calgary, Bethany Care Society, and Seven Oaks General Hospital). This is important to ensure that policies put in place are actually desired, and will be used by, eligible employees. For example, a flexible work option may sound attractive, but some older adults may wish to maintain full time hours to ensure continued access to full pay and benefits that may be contingent on full-time status.

While source documents for these practices offer limited information, Bethany Care Society reported that its strategy increased retention of workers 50 and older and resulted in more new hires of older workers.[30] The Retention of Older Workers project at Seven Oaks General Hospital was evaluated and the different initiatives under this project received positive feedback from participants and managers.

For the most part, the strategies presented in Table 1 specifically targeted older workers, with the definition of 'older worker' being consistent with what is used in the majority of the literature (defined as those in their 50s and older). However, the fact that these strategies chose to address older workers, specifically, is more interesting. Conclusions drawn from some research on older workers suggests that universal[8] or "age-neutral" policies[32] are favourable, while the examples presented above suggest that in reality, workplaces may need to "single-out" their older workers in order to design policies and programs that will be most beneficial.

Going Forward

This paper has provided a synthesis of the current thinking about older worker labour force participation to inform decisions for a Nova Scotia-specific project on older worker employment. In particular, this paper highlights several enablers and barriers that emerged in the literature. For example, access to benefits, flexibility with scheduling, and opportunities for personal growth and development are identified as enabling factors in the retention and recruitment of older workers. Barriers included individual level circumstances such as health and competing responsibilities such as caregiving, and broader concerns about negative attitudes towards older workers' competence. While these findings are not surprising, they do affirm where attention is being given and energy applied with respect to changes in workplace practice.

Key messages from this work include:

- There are few Canadian-based studies that offer empirical evidence about the organizational experience of employing older workers and the individual experience of being an older worker.
- While employers are implementing strategies thought to retain/recruit older workers, there is minimal information on the effectiveness of these strategies in achieving their goals or any cost-benefit analysis associated with these enhanced practices.
- It appears that more attention is being given to those coming up to retirement (i.e., 50-55 age) and how to retain them as opposed to individuals who have retired from their workplace and employers interested in recruiting them. This is problematic

given data that indicates workers of traditional retirement age and older work differently (e.g., those 65 to 69 are more likely to be part-time or self-employed than those under 55),[16] and more men and women are now working at age 70 and beyond.[3]

- There is little attention to the value that older workers can offer the workplace.
- There are noticeable gaps in the literature with respect to older immigrant workers and older rural workers.
- Older workers are commonly viewed as a homogeneous group when many factors may distinguish them (e.g., stage of life, responsibilities, motivation for employment, education and training).
- While Nova Scotia-specific data on older workers exists from the Labour Force Survey and the 2016 Census of Population, there are some limitations to fully understanding the engagement of older workers in the province. Specifically, the Labour Force Survey provides information on the industries in which the 55 and older are employed or looking for work, but a finer analysis of Nova Scotia by specific age groups (e.g., 65+; 70+), or geography was not possible. In contrast, while the Census data on employment can be examined by age groups 65-69, 70-74, and 75 years and older, and is available at provincial and Census agglomeration level, it is not available by industry at the provincial level by older worker population.

SHIFT: Nova Scotia's Action Plan for an Aging Population has as one of its strategic goals valuing the participation of older workers in the labour force. To do so, attention to creating working environments that are welcoming, inclusive and supportive of older adults is needed. This review offers insights into specific targeted initiatives aimed at older workers. At the same time, it raises the concern about initiatives aimed at bolstering employment of older adults in a way that doesn't promote ageism. Several articles suggest that while special attention may be needed to engage/re-engage older adults, strategies that work to achieve a workplace culture of inclusivity, regardless of age (or other distinguishing characteristics), would be best to mitigate potential unintended consequences.

Nova Scotia's action plan is one of few Canadian-based aging strategies with a focus on older workers. Given the limited evidence and gaps in knowledge that this paper has uncovered, through this project Nova Scotia has the opportunity to be positioned as a leader in advancing knowledge and practice in this area.

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[i] For a discussion of the shortcomings of traditional methods of calculating average age of retirement, and why a cohort-based approach is more effective, see Carrière & Galarneau (2011).
[ii] Defined as "the belief that one may be the target of demeaning stereotypes".
[iii] Government-initiated evaluations of programs like the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers have been undertaken and indicate success. However, this program's focus on unemployed job seekers is outside the direct scope of this work. An example is given in the "Promising Practices" section of a hospital-based HR program for older workers that has been evaluated (see: Dziadekwich, R., Andrushko, K., Ecol, B.H., & Klassen, K., 2012).
[iv] Further employment breakdowns by age groups above 55+ at industry level are not possible due to data suppression.