



CANADIAN CENTRE FOR
ELDER LAW

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A DIVISION OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA LAW INSTITUTE

OLDER WOMEN'S DIALOGUE PROJECT

BACKGROUND

The United Way Lower Mainland has provided the Canadian Centre of Elder Law (CCEL) with funding for a one-year project focused on older women. CCEL is collaborating with the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF) to move this project forward.

Why This Project?

Although in recent years there has been progress in addressing barriers to gender equality and the issues of particular concern to older people, the experiences of older women have not been adequately addressed. Recent pressure for reform to address the needs of older people has been fuelled by demographics. Our population is aging. But even based purely on a population analysis, women significantly outnumber men in the population of Canadians aged 55 and older.¹ The older the age group, the more pronounced this trend becomes, resulting in a largely female population of Canadians aged 80 and older.² Furthermore, the population of Canadians 55 and older, which is already high in BC, is only expected to increase in the next decade.³ For these reasons the overlap between issues of gender equality and aging is becoming increasingly relevant.

¹ 2011 Census, *Population by broad age groups and sex*, Online: Statistics Canada Website <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hltfst/as-sa/Pages/highlight.cfm?TabID=1&Lang=E&Asc=1&OrderBy=1&Sex=3&View=3&tableID=21&queryID=7&StartRow=1&MaxRows=20&PRCode=59>

² Ibid.

³ 2011 Census, *Population by broad age groups and sex, 2011 counts for both sexes, for Canada, provinces and territories*, Online: Statistics Canada Website <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hltfst/as-sa/Pages/highlight.cfm?TabID=1&Lang=E&Asc=1&OrderBy=1&Sex=1&View=1&tableID=21&queryID=7&StartRow=1&MaxRows=20&PRCode=59>

Many feminist scholars assert that the experiences and concerns of women are often very different from their male counterparts.⁴ Addressing the experience of women requires a different legal analysis in order to identify issues and uncover hidden gender-based impacts. This dynamic is true of our older population. However, the elder law and equality rights communities have remained remarkably separate. There is a need to support the growth of the practice of analyzing elder law issues through a lens that considers gendered impacts, and also to bring together these separate communities to develop a rich foundation of anti-ageist and age-sensitive feminist theory. This project aims to take steps toward meeting this need.

Purposes of the Project

The purposes of the Project are to:

- (1) Engage older women in law reform and public policy development;
- (2) Enhance the capacity of professionals and practitioners from diverse sectors to understand issues through a lens that considers the impact of aging, ageism, sex discrimination and the imbalance of power between men and women; and
- (3) Raise awareness of the major law and policy issues that must be addressed to improve the circumstances of older women.

The CCEL has committed to a three-phase project to accomplish the above goals:

- (1) Conduct a series of consultation events in the Vancouver Lower Mainland to offer older women the opportunity to identify key issues requiring law reform, social change or public policy development;
- (2) Develop a stream of the 2012 Elder Law Conference focused on women and aging (November 16-17, 2012), with a view to presenting early findings from the consultation events at the conference; and
- (3) Organize an International Women's Day event focused on and celebrating older women (around March 8, 2013).

This project is a form of community-engaged research, and a major goal of this project is to clarify older women's experiences of the law and legal practice. The consultation events will culminate in a report that identifies those legal and social policy issues that are most pressing to older women, and indicate where older women highlight a need for law reform.

The preliminary findings obtained through the consultation events will be presented at the 2012 Canadian Conference on Elder Law. Details of the conference, such as social events, keynote speakers, panelists and presenters can be viewed at:

⁴ Dayton, Kim. *A Feminist Perspective on Elder Law* in "Theories on Law and Aging" ed. Israel Doron (University of Haifa: Springer, 2009), p. 45-57

<http://ccel2012.wordpress.com/>. This website will be updated as conference planning progresses.

The specifics of the International Women's Day Event will be informed by the ideas generated and key issues identified throughout the first two phases of the conference and guided by input from our expert advisory committee.

Outcomes of the Project

We are aiming to achieve a number of short and longer term outcomes throughout the 3 phases of the project and beyond, including:

- ❖ Empowering older women in BC communities to be involved in creating more responsive law and social policy, and to inform legal and social change;
- ❖ Improving the understanding of key influencers and the elder law community in general with respect to older women's legal and social policy issues and enhancing their capacity to analyze these issues using a gender analysis;
- ❖ Developing collaborations between key influencers working in both seniors issues and in women's issues;
- ❖ Increasing public awareness of the key law reform and social policy issues impacting older women;
- ❖ Developing a resource for ongoing professional development of the elder law community through the publication of key conference presentations; and
- ❖ Greater recognition of the uniqueness and urgency of older women's issues as distinct from older adults issues or women's issues.

Project Advisory Committee

The project will be guided by an advisory committee of older women with a diverse array of experience and expertise on gender and aging issues and the intersection of these two fields. The Advisory Committee members are:

Hon. Justice Marion Allan
Shashi Assanand
Penny Bain
Anne Beveridge
Elsie Dean
Karen Hazelman

Jill Hightower
Linda Light
Glenys McMillain
Andrea Rolls
Carol Ross
Hon. Justice Lynn Smith

About CCEL & West Coast LEAF

The CCEL is a national, non-partisan, non-profit body dedicated to exploring the particular legal issues that affect older Canadians. Our parent body, the BC Law Institute, first began studying elder law issues in 1999, and formally established the CCEL in 2003. The CCEL's activities include legal research, law reform, public legal education and public outreach in relation to law and aging issues. For more information go to: <http://www.bcli.org/ccel/>.

LEAF is a non-profit BC organization which aims for greater equality by changing historic patterns of discrimination against women through BC based equality rights litigation, law reform, and public legal education. LEAF was formed in 1985 when the equality provision of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force. For more information go to <http://www.westcoastleaf.org/>.

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