

Sustainable Living Action Pack

for

SENIORS HOMES

A guide for independent living and care facilities



January 2026 (updated May)



with support from



Welcome

Living in more sustainable ways is good for everyone – and seniors homes can play a powerful role.

Seniors homes are more than places of residence; they are communities that shape seniors' daily lives and wellbeing. Whether it's improving energy use, cutting food waste, choosing reusable materials, avoiding toxic substances, or supporting residents to lead and celebrate meaningful lives – sustainable living is a natural fit for these settings, rooted in care, connection and legacy.

What's in This Guide

This guide features six themed Action Packages with practical, flexible ways to bring sustainable living to life – through both operational improvements and resident engagement.

Each Action Package includes:

- Clear operational actions
- Creative resident engagement ideas
- Real-life examples and inspiration
- Tools and prompts to help you get started

You'll also find:

- An overview of the One Planet Living Principles and how they connect to the Action Packages
- A spotlight on the benefits of connecting with nature
- A resident-friendly handout
- Links to additional resources and references

Package 1: Living Spaces

Integrate sustainability into outdoor and indoor living spaces to boost wellbeing, build resilience and save money.

Package 2: On the Move

Support and promote healthy, low-impact transportation options for residents, staff and visitors to enhance mobility, reduce emissions and support active lifestyles.

Package 3: Good Stuff

Encourage reuse, sharing and mindful consumption to reduce waste, build community connections and make the most of existing resources.

Package 4: Next-Level Food

Offer healthier, planet-friendly meals to support residents' health and reduce waste.

Package 5: Life Changes

Support new routines and traditions that promote happiness and meaningful connections during transitions like aging, downsizing, honouring lost loved ones or moving in.

Package 6: Living Well

Enhance wellbeing for residents and staff through inclusive community building, and by providing healthy spaces and enriching connections with nature.

Is this guide for you?

This guide is for seniors homes, including care homes, independent living facilities and 55+ condo or strata buildings. You are the primary audience if you are in management or administration, a board member or on staff – such as an executive director, part of an operations or facilities team, a wellness or recreation coordinator, engagement staff, or a volunteer.

If you live in seniors housing– or have a loved one who does – and want to promote sustainable living, you can also use this guide to identify actions you can take, or share this guide with staff or management. Resident-led councils or green teams can also become champions for these initiatives.

Senior housing facilities and buildings vary widely, and this guide offers a range of opportunities adaptable for all types. We encourage you to tailor the suggestions to meet your local needs and priorities.

This is not a technical manual for retrofitting buildings. Instead, it focuses on creating a supportive context for sustainable everyday practices and choices that shape how we live and care for each other and the planet.

While the guide is especially useful in stable residential communities, the ideas can inspire action across a range of care environments, from affordable senior housing to long-term care facilities.

Contents

Welcome	2
What Is Sustainable Living.....	3
Benefits of Sustainable Living?	4
The One Planet Living Principles	5
Spotlight on Nature’s Power: Boosting Health and Leaving a Legacy.....	6
The 6 Action Packages	7
Package 1: Living Spaces	8
Package 2: On the Move	11
Package 3: Good Stuff	14
Package 4: Next-Level Food	17
Package 5: Life Changes	20
Package 6: Living Well	23
From Ideas to Action	27
Setting Priorities	28
Creating an Action Plan	29
Handout for Residents	31
Acknowledgements.....	32
Resources & References.....	33

What Is Sustainable Living?

Sustainable living means meeting our needs in ways that minimise our impact on the environment and supporting wellbeing and thriving lives for all.

This is about meaningful living.

Sustainability is about more than the environment – it's about creating healthier, more balanced lives for everyone. By making thoughtful choices that show care for the Earth and each other, we can focus more on what truly matters – including health and belonging – and shift away from wasteful activities that do not serve us well.

Every action counts.

When many people shift how they eat, move, buy, and live, the impact adds up. Seniors homes have a special role to play. By encouraging residents and staff to take part, small changes ripple outward, inspiring families, neighbours and future generations.

*This guide is full of **practical opportunities** for action across daily lifestyle options in seniors homes.*

This is also a society-wide effort.

We need support from our governments, businesses and communities to live sustainably. We can't place the burden only on individuals. Many of our choices are shaped by where we live and work, and by what is available.

*This guide highlights **key advocacy opportunities** that seniors homes can pursue to create the supportive systems for sustainable living.*



Benefits of Promoting Sustainable Living

Benefits for Seniors

Health and Wellness

- Boost physical health and wellness by taking walks, spending time in the garden, using a scooter or shuttle instead of driving, and adding more plant-based meals to your diet.

Purpose and Belonging

- Build purpose and connection through community gardening, teaching repair skills or volunteering for sustainability projects. These activities foster friendships, ease loneliness and strengthen intergenerational bonds.

Mental Wellbeing

- Promote mental wellbeing and keep minds sharp by learning and sharing skills like sewing and upcycling clothes, or trying new plant-based meals.
- Sustainable living also brings pride in leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

Financial Savings

- Save money by repairing instead of replacing; sharing and borrowing rather than buying new; and identifying energy efficiency opportunities.

(Sources: [National Library of Medicine \(2020\)](#), [National Library of Medicine \(2023\)](#), [National Seniors Council \(2016\)](#), [National Institute on Aging, Public Health Agency of Canada \(2022\)](#), [Rittenhouse Village, Times Colonist \(2023\)](#))



Benefits for Seniors Homes

Staff Wellbeing

- Foster healthy, enjoyable work environments and create positive connections with residents.
- This can strengthen teamwork, pride and job satisfaction.

Financial Savings

- Lower operating costs through efficient heating, cooling and lighting.
- Cut disposal fees by composting, recycling and reusing.
- Reduce expenses by partnering on bulk buying of eco-friendly products and services.

Boosts Reputation

- Boost reputation and build trust with families and donors by demonstrating leadership in sustainability.
- Access grants and partnerships by showcasing environmentally responsible practices.

Positive Societal Contributions

- Shrink ecological and carbon footprints by adopting sustainable practices that benefit both staff and residents.

(Sources: [AIB, ecertraining](#), [Stanton Chase \(2023\)](#))



The One Planet Living Principles

The One Planet Living Principles are a simple framework to guide our sustainability journey. They help us navigate to creating happy, healthy lives for all within the limits of the planet. Developed by **Bioregional UK**, they are now used worldwide by individuals, business and communities to chart a path to sustainable living. Each Action Package in this guide shows which key principles it supports.



Health and happiness: Encouraging active, sociable, meaningful lives to promote good health and wellbeing.



Equity and local economy: Creating bioregional economies that support equity and diverse local employment and international fair trade.



Culture and community: Respecting and reviving local identity, wisdom and culture; encouraging the involvement of people in shaping their community and creating a new culture of sustainability.



Land use and wildlife: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and creating new natural habitats through good land use and integration into the built environment.



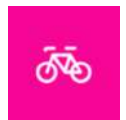
Sustainable water: Using water efficiently in buildings, farming and manufacturing. Designing to avoid local issues such as flooding, drought and watercourse pollution.



Local and sustainable food: Supporting sustainable and humane farming, promoting access to healthy, low impact, local, seasonal and organic diets and reducing food waste.



Sustainable materials: Using sustainable and healthy products, such as those with low embodied energy, sourced locally, made from renewable or waste resources.



Sustainable transport: Reducing the need to travel, and encouraging low and zero carbon modes of transport to reduce emissions.



Zero waste: Reducing waste, reusing where possible, and ultimately sending zero waste to landfill.



Zero carbon: Making buildings energy efficient and delivering all energy with renewable technologies.

Spotlight on Nature: Boosting Health and Leaving a Legacy

Health and Wellbeing Benefits

Spending time in nature, or simply viewing it from indoors, offers profound, well-documented benefits for seniors' health and wellbeing. Regular engagement lowers anxiety, depression and stress ([BC Parks Foundation](#)); reduces the risk of chronic illness like diabetes and cardiovascular disease; and improves mental clarity, memory and attention ([Park people](#)). These positive benefits are long-lasting and deeply restorative ([BC Parks Foundation](#)).

Everyday, Low-Cost Opportunities

These benefits do not require large programs or extensive resources. Simple, everyday experiences – tending to a plant, enjoying sunshine, watching birds, sitting under a tree, learning about nature or joining a community gardening group – can make a meaningful difference for emotional and physical wellness.

Bringing Nature Indoors

Biophilic design – incorporating plants, natural light, wooden textures, water features, nature sounds and nature-themed artwork – brings nature's restorative qualities inside. These elements can significantly reduce stress, lift mood, and support cognitive function ([Integriss Health](#)), benefiting both residents and staff.

Purpose, Legacy and Intergenerational Connections

Nature can inspire reflection on what matters most: our values, our legacy and what we leave behind. Planting native flowers, supporting green spaces and enjoying the outdoors across generations helps build meaningful connections and a sense of purpose ([Bridging Generations Through Nature, 2025](#)). These small actions can help create a future where people and nature thrive.

Practical Pathways

This guide offers more than a dozen ways to integrate nature into care homes: planting indoor and outdoor gardens, creating bird and pollinator habitats, starting nature-based hobbies and engaging in activities that foster ecological awareness. By supporting seniors' connection to nature, care homes can boost health and wellbeing while inspiring a legacy of care for future generations.

Deep Roots and Social Bonds

Many seniors already have lifelong ties to the natural world through gardening, birdwatching or marking seasonal changes. Honouring these connections can spark positive memories, strengthen social bonds and elevate self-esteem ([Lauwerijssen, 2021](#)).

Shared outdoor green spaces are especially powerful: they can serve as a strong force for healing and social interaction among residents. Research shows that frequent visits reduce loneliness in seniors at four times the rate of even having children ([Park People](#)).





The 6 Action Packages

Try one action from each package – or dive deep into one focus area. When you're ready, take on another!

• We're here to guide you on your journey. Share your experiences and get in touch anytime at info@oneearthliving.org.



Living Spaces

Integrate sustainability into outdoor and indoor living spaces to boost wellbeing, build resilience and save money.

While some sustainable living efforts involve daily decisions – like what to serve residents for dinner – others involve bigger infrequent choices with sustained, longer-term impacts. These include changes to heating and cooling systems and long-term infrastructure planning.

One Planet Principles



Equity and
local economy



Land and nature



Sustainable
water



Zero carbon
energy



Zero waste

Did you know?

- In Canada, almost 80% of the emissions from an average building come from heating and cooling. This is because most heating and cooling systems still run on fossil fuels.
- When you add up emissions from buildings across the country, heating and cooling of buildings accounts for nearly 20% of Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions.

(Source: Natural Resources Canada, 2024, [Green Buildings Strategy](#))

Take action!

Operational Actions

- Add wall insulation and insulate pipes, ducts and valves to minimize heat loss.
- Identify and seal air leaks in window frames and doors to prevent drafts and heat loss.
- Install shading devices – like external blinds, awnings or overhangs – to control solar heat gain in the summer and improve comfort and reduce reliance on air conditioning.
- Install smart thermostats that regularly schedule when heating/cooling comes on.
- Close all curtains when it gets dark in the winter months to keep the heat in – including in unoccupied rooms.
- Install electric heat pumps for efficient heating and cooling. Explore solar hot water and other renewable energy opportunities.
- Upgrade to higher-efficiency electric appliances.
- Retrofit toilets, faucets and showerheads with low-flow versions to reduce water usage without compromising comfort.
- Inspect for and repair leaks in plumbing, irrigation and appliances promptly.
- Install automatic shut-off faucets in shared washrooms to prevent taps being left on unintentionally.
- Use weather-based irrigation controllers and water-efficient landscaping to minimize outdoor water use.

- Review cleaning practices to support staff and resident health while meeting infection-prevention requirements and reducing environmental impact where possible. (See tip box on next page.)
- Design gardens/landscapes for a changing climate (e.g., drought-tolerant native plants, permeable spaces allowing storm water drainage, cover crops).

Resident Engagement

- Share ‘impact stories’ of changes and outcomes (e.g., weekly report on energy savings through resident and staff efforts).
- Involve residents in spotting and reporting leaks or drips to maintenance staff.
- Place easy-to-read water saving tips in bathrooms and kitchens (e.g., turn off water while brushing teeth, shaving or doing dishes).
- Write letters to local council members or MLAs advocating for energy rebates.

Tip!

Saving Energy Safely: Seniors often go out of their way to save energy – but comfort and safety come first. In seniors homes, energy-smart habits can support wellbeing while keeping temperatures safe: aim for no more than 26°C in warm weather, and 21°C in winter (depending on activity levels). Within these ranges, residents can adopt simple habits like wearing layers, closing windows during peak heat, and adjusting blinds for passive heating and cooling. Visible indoor/outdoor temperature displays help guide safe decisions. Friendly energy-saving challenges can make these actions fun and community-building.

Examples

Twin Oaks Housing Co-op – Saanich, British Columbia, Canada

While not exclusively 55+, this 32-unit cooperative is retrofitted with air-to-water heat pumps and ductless split heat pumps, replacing baseboard heaters. These systems offer both heating and cooling, achieving much higher efficiency and adding cooling. The project received funding from the Federal Government and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities ([FCM, 2025](#)).

Haven Bay Care Centre – Kinsale, Ireland

A range of energy efficiency measures were adopted, including: installation of a smart temperature control system that predicts and adjusts the temperature in different parts of the building at different times of the day; installation of triple-glazed windows to save money on heating and cooling; and training of staff about the potential for energy efficiency through simple actions like closing doors and windows and turning off lights ([AIB, 2022](#)).



Esker Lodge – Cavan, Ireland

When expanding its facilities, the lodge significantly cut costs by optimizing its energy use by installing solar panels and air-to-water electric heat pumps. It also built thermal storage that enabled it to maximize its solar capability and store hot water ([AIB, 2022](#)).

Tip!

Choosing Cleaning Products: In seniors homes, keeping residents and staff safe always comes first. Cleaning and disinfection practices need to meet infection prevention and control (IPAC) standards. When reviewing products, it can be helpful to consider effectiveness, safety, ease of use, ventilation needs and environmental impact. Where appropriate and compliant, some facilities choose lower-impact or biodegradable options for everyday, non-critical cleaning tasks, while continuing to use required disinfectants where needed.



On the Move

Support and promote healthy, low-impact transportation options for residents, staff and visitors to enhance mobility, reduce emissions and support active lifestyles.

Transportation is one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions – but it can also be an opportunity to foster health, independence and social connection. Seniors homes can promote these positive outcomes and build a culture of sustainable transport by supporting active transport, shared rides and other low-emission transport options.

Did you know?

- Only 10% of Canadians used public transport to travel to work in 2023, and only 6% walked or biked.
- In Canada, passenger vehicles contribute more than 10% of total greenhouse gas emissions – and this doesn't even account for the emissions produced during fuel production!
- Vehicles running on gasoline and diesel are a major source of air pollution in Canada, leading to nearly 15,000 premature deaths each year due to respiratory and heart diseases.

(Sources: [Statistics Canada, 2023](#); [Transport Canada, \(2021\)](#); [Health Canada, \(2021\)](#))

One Planet Principles



Health
and happiness



Travel
and transport

Take action!

Operational Actions

- Share information about local public transportation routes (buses, trains) with visitors, staff and residents (e.g., provide printed maps, senior fare information, or ride schedules at reception or on bulletin boards).
- Create walking paths and trails.
- Collaborate with local medical practitioners to expand telehealth offerings, reducing residents' transportation needs to and from medical appointments.
- Encourage and support staff, residents and visitors to choose cycling more often by creating a secure bike storage area and infrastructure that supports personal electric transportation options like e-bikes and e-scooters (e.g., shower facilities and lockers for staff).
- Encourage staff to participate in a bike-to-work week.
- Host workshops for staff and residents on bike repair.
- Preferentially choose companies that offer and/or use electric vehicle options for resident trips, deliveries, etc.
- Transition facility or fleet vehicles to electric vehicles.
- Install electric vehicle chargers at the facility (you may be able to access support and credits for installing the charger).
- Advocate to your local government for improved transit, walking and cycling (including e-scooters and e-bikes) infrastructure in the surrounding neighbourhood.

- Create a carpool sign-up (e.g., via WhatsApp) or promote existing ridesharing programs (e.g., [CarpoolWorld](#)).
- Dedicate some priority parking spaces to those who carpool or drive electric/hybrid vehicles for staff and visitors.

Resident Engagement

- Organize and host group walks and/or wheelchair-accessible strolls around the facility or neighbourhood (e.g., trips to a local café or festival, theme days, events, nature walks like a wildflower or birding stroll, or intergenerational walk-and-talks with visitors and younger volunteers).
- Provide free walking sticks at reception for residents to borrow.
- Create 'walking maps' for residents that mark flat or shaded walking paths, nearby trails, benches, local shops/cafes, walking routes to other necessities and services (such as healthcare, libraries, book/art/exercise clubs and leisure), and safe crossing points.
- Share information with residents about the health benefits of walking.
- Encourage residents to write local council members or government representatives advocating for more pedestrian-friendly routes and spaces, biking routes, car-sharing and transit options.
- Before voting in municipal, provincial or federal elections, research candidates' stances on public bike lanes, bus systems, train systems and pedestrian access.

Examples

St. Peter's Residence at Chedoke – Ontario, Canada

Staff successfully advocated with their local municipality, the City of Hamilton, to have a bus shelter built outside their home to make taking the bus a more comfortable and appealing option for residents and staff alike ([St. Peter's Residence](#)).

Otterbein SeniorLife – Cridersville, Ohio, USA

This seniors community paved the roads within the property to make it easier for residents to walk and bike, thereby encouraging greater use of public transportation ([Otterbein SeniorLife](#)).





Good Stuff

Encourage reuse, sharing and mindful consumption to reduce waste, build community connections and make the most of existing resources.

In seniors homes, small choices around what we use – and reuse – can have a big impact. From reducing packaging and single-use items to sharing tools, crafts, and decor, these actions help lower waste and the negative environmental impacts (including carbon emissions) from producing new goods – while creating opportunities to create meaningful connections for residents and community members. Many residents bring lifelong habits of thrift and ‘making do’ that naturally align with the goal to ‘live lightly’.

Did you know?

- Extending a garment’s life by 9 months reduces its carbon footprint by 20%.
- Canada sends almost 1.1 million tonnes of clothing to landfill each year — nearly a quarter of which could be reused or downcycled.

(Sources: WRAP ([Waste & Resources Action Programme, UK](#)), [Environment and Climate Change Canada](#))

One Planet Principles



Culture and community



Materials and products



Zero waste

Take action!

Operational Actions

- Where possible, buy products in bulk to reduce packaging (e.g., toilet paper, syringes).
- Use reusable dishware and refillable products (e.g., soap, shampoo, cleaning products from your local refill store).
- Create systems for reuse and donation (furniture, linens, decor) (e.g., by hosting a donation day every month where staff bring in their own items and collect items from residents to donate).
- Reduce the use of disposable products where possible (e.g., switch to face flannels over plastic wipes).
- Instead of throwing out old furniture and items, consider upcycling or repurposing them (e.g., reupholstering an old couch instead of buying a new one).
- Buddy up with another care home to borrow, share and swap resources.
- Provide dedicated bins for paper, plastics, compost, glass and metals to ensure that residents and staff segregate waste properly.
- Provide residents with reusable containers, glasses, mugs and utensils to discourage waste.

- Build on residents' sustainable living skills by hosting a skill-share workshop (e.g., many residents have sewing, darning, crocheting, cooking or repair skills they could teach to other residents, staff or visitors).
- Run an upcycling or repair workshop encouraging residents to reuse or repair their things instead of disposing of them.
- Start a resident-led sharing club for books, magazines, tools, appliances, instruments, puzzles, games, and arts and crafts supplies.
- Host a regular story circle where residents can share their reuse tips and successes.
- Encourage residents to reduce their use of disposables for meals and personal health care by considering alternative products that can be laundered (e.g., replacing disposable bibs with old kitchen aprons and using reusable napkins or other products).

Resident Engagement

- Host a swap fair for residents and their families.
- Offer a tool library at the facility (sewing equipment, repair kits, etc.).



Examples

Carlton House of Oak Bay – Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

This seniors home encourages residents to downsize and give away items second-hand by sharing information about online auctions, Facebook Marketplace, Used Victoria, second-hand buyers, charities and thrift shops. It also suggests that schools may be in need of sewing supplies, costumes, tools and musical instruments ([Carlton House](#)).

The Gardens at Broadmoor Court – Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA

The home sends out weekly blogs with information for residents. In its blog post ‘3 ways seniors can help save the environment’, it encourages residents to reduce reliance on single-use items by carrying their own travel or tea mug for refills in common areas as well as using washable plates and straws in their apartments. The home encourages residents to participate in recycling programs and to gift or donate items instead of throwing them away. It recommends that when residents downsize or declutter, they should ask: “Is the item still in good condition and working? Would someone else appreciate the item or find a good use for it? If the answer is ‘yes’ to any of these questions, then gift or donate the item.” ([The Gardens at Broadmoor Court](#)).

TerraBella Community Living – multiple southern states, USA

These seniors homes run comprehensive recycling programs for residents. They provide clear information about what materials can be recycled and how to properly dispose of them, and place collection points conveniently throughout the community so that all residents, regardless of mobility, can use them. Bins are standardized to ensure proper use of the bins and reduce contamination. Regular workshops and Q+A sessions are offered to address any confusion ([Terrabella Senior Living](#)).





Next-Level Food

Offer healthier, planet-friendly meals to support residents' health and reduce waste.

Food is central to life at seniors homes – and how it's sourced and served can make a big difference for residents' health and the sustainability efforts of these facilities. Choosing local, plant-forward meals and reducing food waste supports health, lowers emissions and cuts costs.

One Planet Principles



Equity and local economy



Health and happiness



Culture and community



Local and sustainable food

Did you know?

- 60% of food waste happens at the household level.
- Food loss and waste generate up to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions – almost five times the total emissions of the aviation sector.

(Source: World Food Programme, 2024)

Take action!

Operational Actions

- Explore whether offering plant-based meals more often would work with resident's needs and preferences (e.g., [Canada's Food Guide](#), [Greener by Default](#)).
- Pre-portion menu items to reduce waste during busy service times and to accommodate varying appetites.
- Review and track food that is left on residents' plates and note whether certain dishes or menu items are often wasted, and adjust accordingly.
- Review food ordering and inventory practices for potential savings, including identifying items that need to be used quickly to avoid spoilage.
- Ask suppliers if they can deliver materials in reusable or returnable packages.
- Explore opportunities for bulk purchase of food items to reduce packaging (e.g., flour).
- Devote an area of the kitchen or garden for growing vegetables and herbs.
- Participate in on-site composting of food waste or in a municipal food waste collection and composting program.

- Use and celebrate local ingredients on daily menus (e.g., 'strawberry cheesecake from locally grown strawberries').
- Run an awareness campaign on reducing uneaten food (e.g., by supporting preferred portions and sharing resident meal ideas).
- Establish a forum for residents to share their favourite recipes using plant-based or local ingredients (e.g., on a public noticeboard – or create a contest!).
- Invite residents to host cooking demos that highlight local or plant-based ingredients.
- Set up [Meatless Monday](#) challenges where residents can opt in for no-meat meal days.
- Encourage residents to write local council members and government representatives to advocate for better food security legislation, product labelling, and local agriculture support (including regenerative practices; see [Regeneration Canada](#)).

Resident Engagement

- Request plant-based food options – including dairy alternatives like almond, oat, or coconut milk, and alternatives to red meat (e.g., white meat, sustainable seafood, burgers made entirely or partially from mushrooms).

Tip!

In a seniors home setting, it's important to approach food-related initiatives with care and sensitivity. Residents may have varying appetites, medical needs, or dietary restrictions, and meals are often pre-portioned or pre-prepared. This action area is not about asking residents to 'clean their plates', but rather about sparking respectful dialogue between staff and residents to find creative ways to reduce food waste where possible. It's important to keep the discussion positive and inclusive, emphasizing dignity, choice and shared effort.

Examples

Queen's Institute of Community Care Homes – London, UK

At these care home facilities, 'community fridges' were set up so that any food not served to residents is chilled, plated and refrigerated for 24/7 access by staff, free of charge ([The Queen's Institute of Community Nursing](#)).

Fairview Lodge, Hillsdale Estates, Hillsdale Terraces, Lakeview Manor – Durham Region, Ontario, Canada

These four long-term care homes undertook a project to raise awareness of local food offerings among residents and to incorporate these foods into seasonal menus. The teams tested meals featuring local ingredients that fit the facilities' budgets and group purchasing contracts. Residents reported that supporting local food made them feel 'good', and they shared a desire to support local farmers; some recalled happy memories of home-grown or farm-grown food. Serving local food also had a positive effect on family members' perceptions of the quality of food offered at the homes ([Food and Farming Alliance, 2017](#)).





Life Changes

Support new routines and traditions that promote happiness and meaningful connection during transitions like aging, downsizing, moving or honouring lost loved ones.

In care homes, life changes are constant – residents may be navigating new routines, reflecting on past experiences, or moving towards end-of-life stages. These moments can also open the door to sustainable habits, legacy conversations and meaningful connection. Whether through gentle decluttering, eco-friendly memorials, or story-sharing, these actions support reduced consumption and waste, while affirming dignity, ease and community.

Did you know?

- As of 2022, around 8% of Canadians left a charitable gift in their will. It is estimated that another 5% of Canadians will include a charitable gift in their will by 2028.
- Balloons released during celebrations threaten wildlife, which may mistake fragments for food. Balloons are among the top ten types of debris found during coastal clean-ups.

(Sources: [Barrie_2025](#); [OCS_2025](#))

One Planet Principles



Culture and
community



Health
and happiness

Take action!

Operational Actions

- When new residents move in, support them and their families to donate or sell items they may no longer need by providing a list of helpful resources (e.g., local thrift stores, Facebook Marketplace).
- When residents pass away or move out, enable options to donate or repurpose items rather than throwing them away.
- When new residents move in, brief them on the facility's sustainable practices (e.g., sustainable transportation options, recycling, shared spaces and goods such as books, right-sized meal portions).
- Offer sustainable moving-in kits: welcome new residents with low-waste items like reusable water bottles, shopping bags and other containers; locally made snacks; a map and overview of walking and other sustainable transport options, and links to sharing and reuse opportunities.
- Support conversations around sustainable legacy giving, including how residents can leave charitable gifts to sustainability-focused or local community organizations.

Resident Engagement

- Facilitate a gentle decluttering project: support residents in organizing or letting go of belongings with dignity and donating or recycling those items responsibly.
- For celebrations like anniversaries, memorials, or birthdays, encourage residents to rent rather than buy specialty items and attire (e.g., extra chairs, decor).

- Encourage residents to give zero-waste or experiential gifts by providing a list of resources/ideas (e.g., local restaurants, cafes, spas and salons that offer gift cards).
- Encourage residents, their friends and families to use online sites (e.g., [SoKind Registry](#)) to coordinate celebrations and memorials and to create registries for non-material wishes or gifts.
- Provide family and residents information and resources about [green end-of-life practices](#) (e.g., green burials).
- Host workshops/activities that invite residents to share tips and stories of thrift, repair or 'old ways that still work' through journals, recordings or display boards.
- Encourage family members to co-create sustainable traditions with residents (e.g., sharing a passed-down recipe, creating a family photo collage with reused materials).
- Celebrate milestones with low-impact events by using music, time spent in nature, shared meals and natural/reusable decorations to mark birthdays, anniversaries or seasonal changes in a simple, celebratory way.
- Start an intergenerational exchange program that pairs residents with youth, volunteers or other community members to exchange stories, goods, services and skills enabling sustainable living.
- Create a space for residents to share gently used books, art, puzzles or decor as they downsize or transition.
- Run an activity for residents to make legacy journals or audio stories with a sustainable living theme. Residents can reflect on how they've lived simply or with care – for family, community or the planet.

Tip!

In a care home setting, life changes often mean navigating profound transitions – such as retirement, moving into long-term care, facing reduced independence or approaching end-of-life. These can be emotional times, but also opportunities for reflection, ease and meaningful legacy. **When facilitating actions in this area, focus on dignity, connection and personal stories. Support gentle activities that help residents share memories, express values and shape traditions that reflect who they are.** Acknowledge grief and change while creating space for joy, autonomy and purpose in the present. Keep engagement flexible and person-centred.

Examples

Langdale Care Homes – nationwide, UK

This care home promotes storytelling as one of the most meaningful ways to bridge generational gaps and deepen connections. It actively encourages storytelling through group activities, one-on-one conversations, memory books and other creative projects. The staff organize sessions where residents can share their life experiences with peers, caregivers and visiting family members ([Langdale Care Homes](#)).

Forest Brow – Liss, UK

Staff celebrate seasonal changes to foster meaningful connections through zero-waste activities. In spring, they encourage staff to plant flowers and support residents to get involved in planting flowers, herbs and vegetables. They also organize nature walks and have built a sensory garden for residents to experience different textures, scents and sights ([Forest Brow Care Home](#)).





Living Well

Enhance wellbeing for residents and staff through inclusive community building, and by providing healthy spaces and enriching connections with nature.

Connecting to others and nature are key parts of environmental stewardship. Seniors homes can support the wellbeing of residents and staff by supporting intergenerational engagement, access to nature, and the sharing of diverse knowledge and perspectives.

Did you know?

- Around 19-24% of Canadians aged 65+ feel isolated from others and wish they could participate in more social activities.
- Seniors who spend time outdoors often experience lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, as exposure to nature can help reduce cortisol levels and promote a sense of calm and wellbeing.

(Sources: Statistics Canada, 2024; Salvation Army, 2024)

One Planet Principles



Equity and local economy



Health and happiness







Culture and community





Land and nature










Take action!

Operational Actions

-  Partner with local schools or community groups to encourage intergenerational and sustainable recreational activities (e.g., storytelling circles, birdwatching, gardening, sewing/mending workshops).
-  Integrate 'biophilic design' in the facility by including elements such as plants (indoor gardens, living walls, potted plants), water features (fountains, waterfalls, aquariums), natural materials (wood, stone), natural lighting (large windows and skylights) and views of nature through windows and openings. Biophilic design is an approach to architecture and interior design that aims to bring nature into the built environment to create a more connected and positive experience for occupants.
-  Design indoor/outdoor spaces for rest, movement and community (e.g., walking paths, a covered porch where residents can enjoy nature while staying protected from the elements).
-  Divest from unsustainable sectors (e.g., fossil fuels, weapons, deforestation-linked industries) and invest in more sustainable sectors (e.g., renewable energy).

Resident Engagement

-  Post 'sustainability tips and stories' on public noticeboards.
-  Host environmental education workshops for residents (e.g., information about the value of local species to the ecosystem).

-  Participate in shared-purpose initiatives like local advocacy and community gardening.
-  Create clubs based around sustainable activities (e.g., Gardening Club, Vegetarian Club, Repair Club).
-  Support residents to help local ecosystems thrive by planting and caring for native plants and creating habitat for birds, bats and bees (e.g., birdhouse-making workshop).
-  Host an invasive plant challenge wherein residents pull as many invasive plants as they can from a local garden or park (coordinate this activity with the local government, where required).
-  Offer guided nature walks or mindfulness activities to support residents' mental wellbeing.
-  Offer and support residents to run an exercise program of their choosing, like stretching, movement or yoga classes (e.g., retired PE teacher runs a weekly soccer game or low-impact strength training).
-  Host workshops to engage residents in sustainable hobbies (e.g., bring in a bird expert to discuss birdwatching).
-  Support residents to form a 'green team' that spearheads sustainable initiatives (e.g., provide a space for a weekly meeting, sustainability ideas, or logistical support to execute their proposed initiatives).
-  Connect residents to and share information about local, community sustainability efforts (e.g., park or beach clean-up, community garden, sustainable food movements).

- Host educational sessions about sustainable investments (e.g., invite a local financial advisor to explain what sustainable investing means, how to get started and what to ask).
- Encourage residents to discuss sustainable investing with family members and each other through resident-led groups that explore values-aligned investing and legacy planning.
- Consider joining advocacy calls for improving the sustainability of the Canada Pension Plan.

Tip!

Finding a local financial advisor for fossil-free or sustainable investing may be hard. If you're unable to find one, try creating a shared resource list with trusted information about sustainable investments and ethical, fossil-free funds for residents and their family members.



Examples

Sonida Senior Living Communities – nationwide, USA

To promote senior wellbeing, the communities offer a walking club, chair yoga, morning exercise classes, sports activities and a gardening club.

Carlton House at Oak Bay – Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

The home supports residents to give back to their community through charity work, leading a club, teaching others or serving in another ‘niche role’ ([Carlton House](#)).

Sunrise Senior Living – nationwide, Canada and USA

These homes focus on keeping residents’ bodies and minds healthy by offering low-impact fitness classes such as yoga and tai chi, as well as reflection and meditation. They also offer low-waste engaging activities like flower arranging, gardening, brain teasers (crossword puzzles, trivia, word searches) and games (mahjong, canasta, cribbage, bridge).



From Ideas to Action

Whether you're starting fresh or building on existing initiatives, these pages offer tips, tools and a simple action plan template to help bring your ideas to life.

Tips for Success

- **Start simple.** Choose one action from each package, or dive deeper into one area to begin. Consider your priorities (see next page for ideas).
- **Involve residents.** Ask what matters most to them and shape your actions around their interests.
- **Be transparent.** It's important to be clear and upfront with residents and their families as well as staff about the changes you are implementing.
- **Celebrate success.** Share milestones, recognize contributions and tell your stories.



Joining a Community of Action

If you're based in Greater Victoria, British Columbia, your seniors home or care facility can gain support for these efforts by joining One Planet Saanich and/or the Greater Victoria 2030 District.

One Planet Saanich is a community of organizations that are working together to advance sustainability in the region. They are supported with online and in-person meetups, and with help creating sustainability plans. There is no cost to join, and support is tailored to your organizations' needs. See: <https://oneplanetbc.com/one-planet-saanich>.

If you are outside of Greater Victoria and would like to see a network like this set up in your community, get in touch with OneEarth Living at dagmar@oneearthliving.org.

The Greater Victoria 2030 District provides expert support for buildings that are looking to reduce energy use and emissions. Participants commit to 2030 District targets and gain technical support and access to a peer network. See: 2030districts.org/greater-victoria. For more information, email greatervictoria@2030districts.org.

Setting Priorities

There are many actions you can begin today to make a positive difference.

A helpful way to decide where to start is to focus on the changes that most reduce your carbon and ecological footprint.

We only have one Earth, but globally we're acting as if we had several. The good news is that living 'lighter' often means living better – healthier, happier and more connected lives.



For biggest impact, start with actions that reduce your carbon and ecological footprint the most:

- ✓ **Reduce fossil fuel use**
 - Take more trips by walking, bike or scooter, or by transit/shuttle, car share or electric vehicles.
 - Switch buildings to renewable energy – electric heat pumps are a great option.
- ✓ **Boost efficiency: Use less energy overall.** Small shifts like lowering the thermostat in the winter or combining errands add up.
- ✓ **Consume less, choose better: Repair, borrow, and buy second-hand.** Investing in quality over quantity benefits both people and planet.
- ✓ **Rethink food:** Eat more plant-based meals, reduce food waste and grow food locally.
- ✓ **Create ripples:** Inspire change in your community, sports club or faith group.
- ✓ **Use your voice:** Contact local representatives about climate action, or hold businesses accountable for sustainability.

Creating an Action Plan

Look back through this guide and note the actions you'd like to try in your seniors home – write them down in the table below. **Start small and build over time.**

Ideas for this year	Ideas for next year (and beyond)

If you want to undertake a comprehensive action plan, see additional resources here: <https://oneplanetbc.com/take-action>



SPOTLIGHT

Berwick Royal Oak

Saanich, British Columbia, Canada



At Berwick Royal Oak, a 229-suite senior living community in Saanich, BC, climate action and sustainability are part of everyday life. Progress is powered by a strong partnership between residents and staff. From management and maintenance to food services and active living, staff have implemented a broad array of actions.

A resident-led Climate Action Committee, with more than 15 members, meets monthly, works closely with staff, and leads many initiatives to advance sustainability and climate action efforts.

Residents worked with staff to update signage and improve waste sorting and recycling. Food waste has been reduced through the addition of composting bins in the café. The team also encourages lower-carbon, vegetable-forward and vegetarian dining options.

Energy efficiency is supported through heat pumps and LED lighting in every suite. A chauffeur-driven car/bus service reduces the need for private vehicles.

Berwick fosters a culture of reuse, learning and engagement through bi-monthly swap meets that encourage sharing and the donation of clothing and household items. Educational events, including environmental speaker series and election candidate forums, draw large audiences to the on-site theatre.

A new intergenerational partnership with Claremont Secondary School deepens learning and dialogue. Residents also extend their impact beyond Berwick, engaging with municipal council on issues such as free transit for BC seniors.

Berwick demonstrates how communal living can reduce eco-impact while strengthening connections.

“Becoming a Berwick resident is de facto a ‘green action.’

We’ve given up our former individual homes in favour of communal meals, housekeeping, maintenance, caregiving, and transportation, thereby lowering our carbon footprint.”

*Terry Dance-Bennink, Chair,
Berwick Climate Action Committee*

Handout for Residents:

What actions can I take to live sustainably?

Are you an individual resident who wants to make a difference?
Here are some actions you can take by yourself or with others.

Living Spaces

- Conserve water, especially hot water.
- Close the curtains when it gets dark to help keep warmth inside.
- Wear cozy layers in cooler weather instead of turning up the heat.
- Keep windows closed during the hottest part of hot days to insulate from the warm air outside.
- Talk to staff if you notice a drafty window or a dripping tap.

On the Move

- Join group walks or nature strolls, or shared bus or vehicle tours.
- Use walking sticks or mobility aids to help stay active.
- Try a themed walk or tour: bird-spotting or flower-finding.
- Share stories about your favorite walking / public transit / rolling routes with other residents!

Good Stuff

- Consider options before buying something new – can you use what you have, do you have something similar, how often will you use it, can you borrow it or get it second-hand?
- Trade clothes, decor, books, or other items you no longer need with other residents, friends and family.
- Use your favorite reusable mug, plate, utensils and cloth napkin instead of disposables.
- Teach others your repair skills.

- Reuse items when possible: an old apron instead of a disposable bib, for example.
- Recycle your waste properly: use clearly marked bins and ask for help if needed.

Next-Level Food

- Try some new plant-based food options.
- Suggest to staff your favourite recipe using local ingredients.
- Let staff know your preferred portion sizes to help reduce food waste.
- If it's an option, put your food scraps in the compost bin instead of the trash.

Life Changes

- Donate your unused items.
- Celebrate birthdays and special occasions with simple, reusable decorations.
- Consider giving and asking for “experience” gifts like attending a music event or sharing a meal together.
- Talk with your family about green memorials, legacy giving, sustainable investing or shared values.

Living Well

- Garden outside or look after indoor plants.
- Join a ‘green team’ or group working on sustainability.
- Share your own sustainability stories or offer tips from your past.
- Host a fitness activity (e.g., stretching or group walk) for other residents.



Acknowledgements

This guide was produced by OneEarth Living, with support from the District of Saanich.

OneEarth Living co-authors are Cora Hallsworth, Kate O'Connor and Dagmar Timmer.

Keiko Lee-Hem, Erica Priggen Wright (Creative Director) and Edna Catumbela led the design, formatting, and user experience for this guide, creating a clear and engaging layout that supports practical action. Images are sourced from Canva.

We thank the team at District of Saanich for their insights and collaboration throughout the process, particularly Rebecca Newlove, Glenys Verhulst and Melissa Hauzer. Review and contributions by Glenys Verhulst (District of Saanich), Trevor Hancock (Conversations for a One Planet Region), Jana Cranch and Dr. Angela Eykelbosh (Island Health) and additional members of the OneEarth Living team including Vanessa Timmer, Lisa Mastny, Ryan Mackie, Edna Catumbela and Erica Priggen Wright.

We are grateful for the many real-world innovations and examples that continue to inform and motivate this work. Please reach out to us to let us know how this guide inspires action in your seniors home at info@oneearthliving.org.

OneEarth Living is a nonprofit 'think-and-do tank' advancing sustainable everyday living around the world. Find out more: [OneEarthLiving.org](https://www.oneearthliving.org)

Citation

OneEarth Living (2026). *Sustainable Living Action Pack for Seniors Homes: A guide for independent living and care facilities*. Vancouver, Canada: OneEarth Living.



Resources:

Groups that bring seniors together for larger change

CASCADES

Supports Canada's healthcare community in transitioning towards high-quality, low-carbon, climate-resilient care.

Climate Legacy

Climate Legacy is a project to engage and mobilize older Canadians in climate action through their voice, their skills and their money. Our vision is that Canada move steadily and effectively towards a zero net carbon economy in the next decade through actions at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Seniors comprise a significant force in combating climate change and are often overlooked in current mobilizing efforts. This is why we are establishing a climate action platform and resource dedicated to older Canadians.

Courtenay Fish and Game Club

The club has a large senior membership. They undertake programs that benefit Comox Valley communities and the local economy through protecting and enhancing fish and game resources and their habitats. Some of these programs include, "Planning of a cold water Coho Hatchery on our property in partnership with DFO to re-stock the Trent River, Assistance to the Ministry of Land, Forests and Natural Resource Operations to monitor fish stocks in local lakes and habitat restoration projects in local streams, including Arden and Morrison Creek."

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC)

Many longtime donors and volunteers are seniors with a background in hunting, farming or land stewardship. DUC focuses on wetland preservation, restoration of migratory bird habitat and work with private landowners. They emphasize to donors and their members that they can "Leave a legacy: You have the power to give future generations the opportunity to experience nature, wildlife and a healthy environment".

Eco-Elders for Climate Action

This node of the Calgary Climate Hub represents a group of Calgarians gathering elder voices to advocate for meaningful action by government to ensure a carbon-neutral future for all generations. They are Calgary-based, Alberta-focused elders, including grandparents, great aunts and uncles, who care about the future of all children and a sustainable planet for all life. They see their roles to "Engage, help inform, and increase awareness among our contemporaries; and where possible garner interest, energy and enthusiasm into action" and to "Enable individuals and groups of elders to develop a sense of agency over what we can do, moving from complacency or despair to empowerment and action."

For Our Grandchildren

This group of seniors is working in Peterborough City and County with an overall objective of fighting climate change through running community activities and educational programs.

Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet (GASP)

GASP is a grassroots non-partisan community group committed to climate action and advocacy based in Ontario. They are committed to social and climate justice, and to achieve their goals they: advocate at all levels of government; educate themselves and key stakeholders; write letters, op-eds, briefs and make deputations in person; join community activists in rallies, petitions and meetings with politicians; and unite with youth/Indigenous peoples in support of climate and social justice.

The Hotel Association of Canada

This group is committed to empowering hotels to adopt sustainable practices and to play a pivotal role in building a more sustainable future. It endorses [Green Key Global](#), “North America’s trusted sustainability certification for the hospitality industry”.

The Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care

The coalition aims to build capabilities and capacity in individuals and organizations to enable the development of an environmentally sustainable, net-zero and climate-resilient health system – “paving the way for an ideal green community”.

Seniors for Climate

As seniors deeply alarmed by the climate crisis, their goal is to build a Canada-wide community of seniors to create a liveable future. They believe seniors have a major role to play and have motive, commitment and opportunity to take action. In September 2025, Seniors for Climate organized a full climate day of action in 100 different locations.

Seniors for Climate Action Now!

SCAN! was founded in 2021 and continues to attract members to their seniors’ climate action group. It is a community which values each other’s knowledge, experience and views, and informs and mobilizes seniors in an effort to prevent more climate catastrophes.

SPEC Elders (from the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation)

The SPEC Elders Circle is dedicated to empowering Elders by providing a supportive space where they can forge meaningful roles within society and share their legacies.

Suzuki Elders: Elders Taking Wise Action

The Suzuki Elders are a voluntary association of self-identified elders working with and through the David Suzuki Foundation. They contribute their experience, energy and wisdom to address environmental issues and seek to mentor, support and collaborate with younger generations. They bring their voices, experiences and memories to mentor, motivate and support other elders and younger generations in dialogue and action on environmental issues. Suzuki Elders listen, learn, share and act through educating, communicating, connecting and non-partisan advocacy.

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