



**Senior Artists' Research Project**  
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## **SENIOR ARTISTS IN CANADA SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2006, a group of artists' associations and individuals came together in response to the growing awareness of the serious challenges facing Canada's senior professional artists. With the intention of developing programs and services to respond to these, they launched the Senior Artists Research Project (SARP) in 2009 to investigate the circumstances, situation, needs and interests of senior artists. There were three components of the research:

- Kelly Hill of Hill Strategies Research Inc. was engaged to conduct a quantitative electronic and paper survey of senior artists, and to organize focus groups meetings across Canada.
- Kelly Hill studied relevant international models.
- Joysanne Sidimus, SARP Project Director and Celine Marks, Project Administrator, undertook research about what services currently exist for senior artists in Canada.

### **ARTISTS' SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS**

The Report examines the circumstances of senior professional artists in the areas of Finance, Career, Housing and Health/Isolation. While SARP considers senior artists to be 65 years of age or older, the research included 55 years of age or older, since they may require support in the coming years.

The survey generated a good return, representing reasonably well the demographic, geographic, language and sectoral breakdown of the country's professional artists. Respondents work in a variety of disciplines, including film, television, other recorded media, theatre, visual and media arts, literary arts / writing, music, dance, interdisciplinary arts, storytelling, teaching, mime, puppetry and performance poetry.

However, as with any voluntary survey, those in the most difficult circumstances (and therefore the strongest need) are least likely to respond. The responses came disproportionately from artists affiliated with unions and guilds, which collaborated in the distribution effort. The situation of the underrepresented independent artists is likely to be less favourable overall.

#### **SARP Steering Committee:**

The Actors' Fund of Canada - ACTRA - Actra Fraternal Benefit Society - American Federation of Musicians, Canada - Canadian Actors' Equity Association - Canadian Artists' Representation (CARFAC) - Canadian Music Centre - Cultural Careers Council Ontario - Dancer Transition Resource Centre - Directors Guild of Canada - PAL Canada Foundation - Royal Canadian Academy of Arts - Union des artistes - Writers Guild of Canada - The Writers' Union of Canada - Carol Anderson

Joysanne Sidimus, Project Director - Celine Marks, Administrator - Garry Neil, Consultant

## Senior artists at risk

Using the survey data, an assessment of the risk factors of senior artists found that:

- 61 percent of senior artists are at moderate or high **financial** risk.
- 73 percent are at moderate or high **health** risk.
- 19 percent are at moderate or high **housing** risk.
- 28 percent are at moderate or high risk of **isolation**.
- 42 percent are at moderate or high risk with regards to their **artistic career or legacy**.

## Finances

Finances for some are at a crisis point: 23 percent of senior artists reported having “financial difficulties” in the past year. This number included four percent who didn’t pay their full heating, electricity or telephone bill, 16 percent who didn’t see a dentist or doctor because of financial concerns, and two percent who did not have enough food.

While 86 percent of senior artists have a savings, investment or pension plan, 54 percent of all senior artists report that the total value of their retirement savings is less than \$100,000. Forty-six percent of senior artists have no life insurance.

Thirty-five percent of senior artists have annual income from all sources that is less than \$20,000, including 16 percent of senior artists who have less than \$10,000. Seven percent of senior artists have total household income less than \$10,000. Income includes all government entitlements.

The median senior artist has income of roughly \$30,000 from all sources, which is the same as the median individual income of all Canadians between 55 and 64 years of age. However, it is much lower than the \$45,700 median individual income of university-educated Canadians in that age range, which is a more appropriate comparison since 57 percent of senior artists have a university degree.

Senior artists are extremely well educated. In addition to those with a university degree, seven percent graduated from a conservatory or professional school, eight percent have a college diploma, five percent have another certificate, five percent studied with a mentor or private teacher, and 18 percent have some college or university.

## Career

The overwhelming majority of artists do not retire. Only five percent of respondents reported they are “no longer working on their art;” 76 percent expect they will never stop working and a further 12 percent expect they will only stop after they reach the age of 80.

Senior artists are very active in their careers: 41 percent spend 30 hours per week or more on their art. But, median earnings from their art are about \$5,000 for artists who are 65 years of age or older and \$10,000 for those between 55 and 64.

Most senior artists also have concrete career goals: 57 percent of artists over the age of 65 reported that they are striving to “achieve higher levels of artistic expression or achievement.” But many also discussed the difficulties of finding work in their field at their age.

In relation to their careers, the Report found:

- 34 percent of senior artists feel they have been discriminated against because of their age
- 37 percent want to acquire computer skills
- 26 percent need specific training in technology related to their art form
- 74 percent report feeling satisfied with their overall artistic career to date (six or more on a ten point scale).

Many senior artists brought up the need to be recognized for the depth and breadth of their knowledge and experience as well as the valuable contributions they have made to the arts in Canada. A number of senior artists indicated that they have reached a level of experience and expertise that enables them to do the best work of their lives today. Most want to continue to contribute.

### **Housing**

The number of senior artists who live alone is 32 percent, higher than the 27 percent of all Canadian seniors who do. The number of senior artists who own a mortgage-free home is 23 percent, which is much lower than the 44 percent of all Canadians.

Many senior artists reported difficulties in finding suitable, affordable housing and studio space. A number of respondents indicated they value the sense of community that artists' housing can provide and expressed the desire to see more subsidized artists' housing all over the country. The wait time for an available unit at PAL Toronto is five years.

### **Health/Isolation**

Not surprising for respondents who are 55 years of age and older, 59 percent of senior artists reported they have some health problems.

In total, 46 percent have had health care needs not covered by public health plans in the past year and 38 percent do not have extended health coverage.

### **Needs/Interests:**

- 73 percent of senior artists report having career-related needs, such as professional development, marketing or promotion, computer skills, finding work, legal assistance, etc.
- 37 percent have finance-related needs, including financial advice or planning, insurance, etc.
- 28 percent have needs in the area of social networks and connections with other artists
- 22 percent have health-related needs
- 10 percent have housing needs.

One of the most pressing needs reported was the need for information itself. Many senior artists feel out of the loop and unaware of what services currently exist; numerous participants suggested that a central source for information would be very welcome. If made available in English and French through a website and telephone helpline, such information would benefit senior artists across the country.

## **COMMUNITY RESPONSES**

There are a number of groups in the arts and cultural community in Canada whose work supports professional artists. The Report surveys existing services that are either directed at or support senior artists. Some examples include:

1. Several mentorship programs, which provide an opportunity for senior artists to utilize their skills and promote intergenerational dialogue. Existing programs tend to be very specialized or geographically limited.
2. The Actors Fund of Canada provides emergency financial aid to professionals throughout Canada in the entertainment industry who may suffer a financial blow as a result of injury, illness or other misfortune.
3. The professional associations, unions and guilds all sponsor insurance programs for their members, some sponsor Registered Retirement Savings Plans and the AFM has a pension plan. These may be funded by individual contributions and/or premiums paid by the engagers of artists under the various collective agreements. Many of these groups are also involved in collecting and distributing various payments and copyright fees to their members, including senior artists.
4. The Actra Fraternal Benefit Society was launched by ACTRA and continues to service the insurance, retirement and fraternal needs of ACTRA and the Writers Guild of Canada. It has also begun to offer, to other professional artists, insurance programs that are designed specifically to meet their needs and working circumstances, with premiums paid by the artist.
5. Performing Arts Lodges (PAL) is an organization that works to provide affordable housing for senior professionals in the performing arts. There are homes for senior artists in Toronto and Vancouver, active Chapters in other centres and plans to expand into other communities in the coming years.
6. PAL also pioneered a volunteer assistance program called Supporting Cast which provides companionship, personal care and health assistance to individual colleagues in the centres where PAL has Chapters.
7. The Al and Malka Green Artists' Health Centre is located at the Toronto Western Hospital. The Centre offers both medical and complementary care to professional creative and performing artists. The Centre has an extensive outreach and education program. The knowledge acquired through the Artists' Health Centre will benefit artists across Canada and internationally through e-health communications and research. The Joysanne Sidimus Subsidy Fund provides subsidies for low income artists for services of the Centre not covered by the public health system. Several clinics in other centres specialize in musicians.

### **INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES**

The Report also examines programs, services and associations that support senior artists in 14 countries. From this work and other recent reports, these are highlights of some best practices.

- In Denmark, 275 senior artists receive lifelong grants, in Ireland 233 artists are honoured in a similar manner. The Nordic funding model, in which grants may be given to an individual artist

without reference to a specific outcome, is used in other Nordic countries to supplement public pensions which artists receive.

- Social benefits programs in France and Belgium can provide a full range of benefits, including pensions and income maintenance, to various categories of artists. These artists are “assimilated” into the public programs on the basis of being presumed to be “employees.” Premiums are paid by the artists and their engagers: governments also assist.
- Specific social benefits programs for artists exist in several countries, with contributions coming from the artists themselves, and sometimes from their engagers and the government.

The largest of these is the German artists’ social fund (“Künstlersozialkasse”) which started operations in 1983 as a national scheme to provide income protection for artists via pensions, health insurance and long-term care insurance. It now provides 157,000 freelance artists with pension, health and long-term care programs and receives contributions from all three sources.

In Switzerland, a new program, “Réseau prévoyance culture” will support artists via retirement, disability and death benefits. The program, which came into effect on May 1, 2009, is a “second pillar” of support, complementing the general state pension program (the first pillar). Very few artists have the resources to invest in private pension or insurance schemes (the third pillar).

- (U.S.) Actors Fund has significant housing offerings in New York. The (California) Motion Picture and Television Country House and Hospital is a retirement community, with individual cottages, and an acute-care hospital on the west coast, which is available to all professionals in the industry on a “pay as you can” basis. A wide variety of health services for senior artists are made available by MPTC throughout Southern California.
- There are two retirement-type homes for artists in France. Poland has housing for senior artists through the actors’ union.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Hill Strategies prepared a survey for senior artists; this was circulated widely between September 16 and November 30, 2009. A total of 1,860 online and paper surveys were returned and analyzed by Hill Strategies. Of these, 1,512 came from “professional” artists, as defined in the 1986 Canadian Artists’ Code, and these were used to compile the data. This represents four percent of the 2006 Census estimate of all artists 55 years or older. The data can be considered accurate within 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

In addition, Kelly Hill met with senior artists and others in 17 discussion groups held in 14 cities from coast to coast in Canada. One hundred and sixty senior artists participated in these discussion groups, and ten other individuals were interviewed in the process.

Kelly Hill also undertook the international research. In addition to Internet research, Mr. Hill travelled to New York, Zurich, Bonn, Paris, Brussels, Copenhagen, Dublin and London where he interviewed 33 people, including representatives of artists’ associations and unions, program managers, researchers, and senior artists.

### **SARP FUNDING**

As evidence of the commitment of the community to supporting senior artists, private donors contributed \$114,025. The Trillium Foundation awarded the project \$87,000 over its three year life; artists' associations and unions contributed \$47,250; the Canada Council for the Arts awarded \$20,000 for travel expenses; a fundraiser brought in \$17,000 and; the McLean Foundation has given \$5,000.