



bernard betel centre



THE BERNARD BETEL CENTRE FOR CREATIVE LIVING

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2029

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About The Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living

In 1965, the National Council of Jewish Women, Toronto Section (NCJW) launched the Creative Living Program to give seniors the opportunity to plan and direct their own activities with the assistance of volunteers. After eight successful years, the program was renamed the Centre for Creative Living. In 1982, The Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living (The Centre) opened its doors at its present location at Bathurst St. and Steeles Ave.

New core programs soon followed. The Russian Golden Age Club began in 1983. Two years later, The Centre received Ministry of Health funding for its Health Promotion Department, which continues to offer fitness classes, and various health and wellness programs and events.

More than 60 years later, The Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living remains a vibrant, growing, active organization offering its approximately 2,000 members and other community clients from 53 countries more than 90 programs each week. Since our humble beginnings, tens of thousands of seniors have come to see The Centre as their home away from home.

The Centre isn't just about programs. It gives adults 55+ a valuable place to meet and socialize; a type of space that's often hard to find in today's world. Through courses, classes, concerts, coffees at the café, parties, cultural celebrations and so much more, The Centre is a focal point in the life of the community.

As times change, so do the needs of our members and community participants. Physically being present at The Centre isn't possible for everyone. As such, our staff and volunteers bring The Centre to them through online courses, Kosher meals on wheels, our Healthy@Home program and more.



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About Strategic Planning

As the saying goes, *the only thing that is constant is change*. It is important for every organization to look ahead. All non-profit organizations must understand their current community landscape to be able to reasonably predict how it will change.

Every organization must be attuned to the needs of their clients and the ways it must adapt to remain a source of strength and support.

This strategic plan aims to build upon The Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living's legacy by positioning it to thrive now, and long into the future.

As we look to the future, we will use this strategic plan as our North Star - a road map for the next three years.

Our goals remain steadfast and rooted in our vision, mission, and values.

VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES:



VISION

A community that enriches lives and connects adults 55+ to support healthy aging.



MISSION

We provide exemplary health, wellness, educational and cultural programs for adults 55+ in a safe and welcoming environment.



VALUES

We are driven by the Jewish values of community, compassion, creativity, dignity, responsibility, and respect.

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Our Community



Key 2021 Canadian Census Data for Toronto and the GTA

While the 2021 Canadian Census shows the total size of the Jewish population in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) has been stable over the past decade, the composition has changed considerably and is projected to evolve for the foreseeable future.

The number of Jewish seniors (65+) has increased by over 40% from 30,700 in 2011 to over 44,000 in 2021. Seniors in the Toronto CMA comprise 23% of its Jewish population. Just under 10% are over 75. Almost 30% of those 75+ are Holocaust survivors.

The relative size of the Toronto Jewish senior population differs significantly from Toronto overall senior population (15%). Looking ahead, the 45–64-year-old Jewish cohort comprises a further 23% for the Toronto CMA. This signals a continued growth in demand for The Centre's services.

The population profile doesn't tell the whole story. According to the 2021 Canadian Census, just under 4,000 individuals of the 65+ Jewish population were living below the poverty line.

The data also revealed that 36% of Jewish women and 15% of Jewish men 65+ were living alone. For seniors, living alone increases the risk of social isolation and decreased mental and physical wellness.



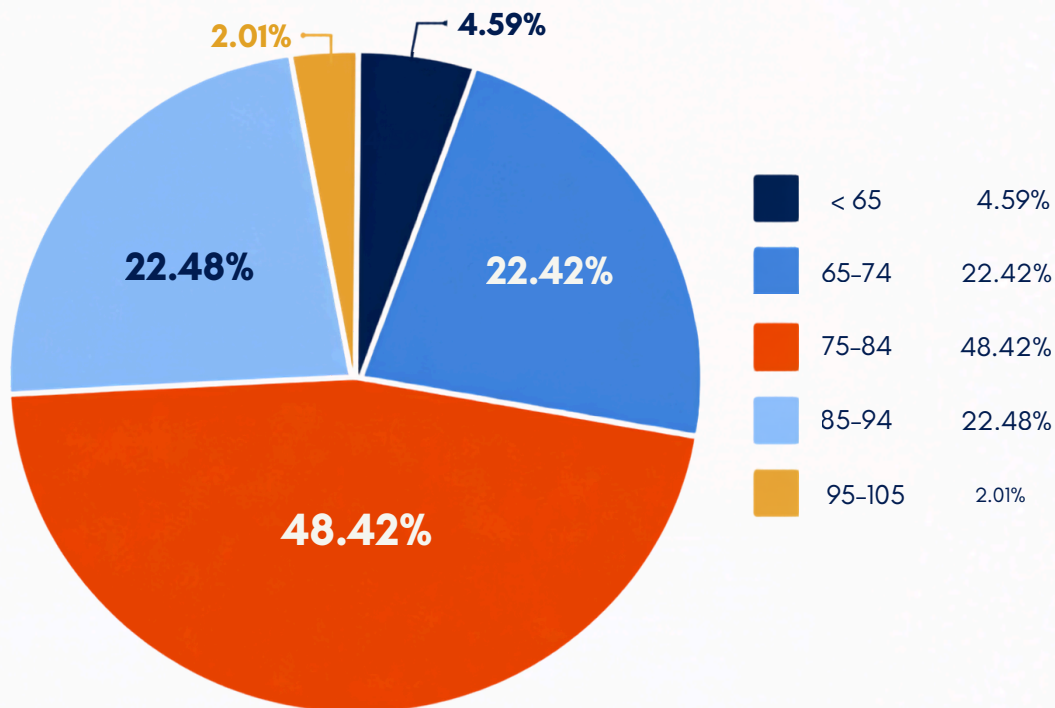


Our Membership

A look at our current membership provides further insight about The Centre's community. As of August 2025, The Centre had **1,935 members**:



Age Distribution



Of the members, **74%** are female and **26%** are male. About **50%** of our members are widowed/separated/divorced or single. We know that many come to The Centre not only to partake in programs or services, but to seek social interaction and friendship.

Along with continuing to serve our core members' (75-84) needs, a key challenge for this strategic plan is to understand the emerging needs/wants of Jewish adults between the ages of 45-64. This cohort represents the future membership/clients of The Centre and currently make up nearly a quarter of the Jewish population in the Toronto CMA.

The Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living's Foundation for Success

With 60 years of successful community service behind us, we understand that evolution is both constant and necessary. A brief look at our 2024-25 accomplishments tells an impressive story. Our programs served 4,000 participants through online and on-site programs. But as noted, The Centre is looked to for more than programs. When asked, 93% of participants see The Centre as important to their overall well-being. Ninety percent of members experienced an improvement in at least one key area of their life (physical, mental or social well-being).

Basic health requires food security. In 2024-25, we delivered over 116,000 meals with the support of 94 dedicated volunteers.

When transportation is a barrier for members, The Centre responds. Our Healthy@ Home program helped 1,400 participants across 12 sites. When surveyed, 88% of our Healthy@Home clients reported improved physical and mental health as a result of the personal outreach and commitment by staff and volunteers.

This is just a snapshot of our accomplishments. Health clinics, service navigation, cultural and educational programs are all key components of who we are and how we show up for our community.

Our staff are the lifeblood of The Centre. They make all members and clients feel at home by providing compassionate care every day. Our volunteers are essential partners in our success. Last year, 266 volunteers gave almost 20,000 hours of support.

Information Gathering and Stakeholder Consultations

October 7, 2023, deeply affected the entire Jewish community in the GTA. With rising antisemitism disrupting the community's daily lives, our members told us they craved a safe space where they could celebrate Jewish life and culture.

The Centre built this plan with input, support and guidance from our 'village'; its funders, members, staff and volunteers, all dedicated to the future success of The Centre.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

FOCUS GROUPS

with internal stakeholders of
The Centre

- Members
- Members' Council
- Healthy@Home clients
- Russian Golden Age Cultural Program
- Staff
- Volunteers
- Board members



INTERVIEWS

with external stakeholders
of The Centre

- Ontario Health (Toronto)
- North York Toronto Health Partners Ontario Health Team
- Jewish Russian Community Centre
- United Jewish Appeal of Greater Toronto
- United Way of Greater Toronto
- Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
- Other partners



Strategic Directions: Our Context

A strategic plan is NOT an operational plan for today. Its focus is tomorrow. It asks, where should the organization be in three, five or ten years? It addresses ways to get there. What needs to change over time? What are the organizational risks and opportunities?

The changing demographics tell us that the Jewish community we serve is continuing to evolve for the next several years and to expect some shifts in our geographic catchment area.

The next generation of older adults (currently 45 - 64) are our longer-term future. Do they need/want the same types of programs and services? Our current members are becoming frailer and may need more healthy living supports. What does that mean for our ongoing services and programs?

We have spent considerable time and effort considering these questions. While many of our current offerings will need to continue, enhancements to our health and wellness services will need to expand. Changes in operating hours have been made to accommodate working members, and the impact of these efforts needs to be evaluated.

Models of Care

The manner in which health and social services are delivered is changing and this impacts our future.

The Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA) recently completed a report called, “Transforming Seniors’ Care: A Roadmap for Creating Healthy Ageing Community Hubs in Ontario.” It describes the hubs as offering “a promising solution to these challenges by integrating healthcare and social services within communities to support ageing in place.” It is worth noting that our agency currently incorporates several aspects of the hub model described.

The United Way of Greater Toronto also embraces the Hub approach. Its 10-year strategic plan sees this approach continuing to grow. It calls for its expansion to York Region (and elsewhere).

The Centre also utilizes the hub approach in several programs and services such as Healthy@Home.



Emerging Issues and Themes

Our funders and partners have been overwhelmingly positive in their feedback about our accomplishments. We heard from our members, participants, staff and volunteers that The Centre is providing excellent programs and services. However, we also heard that the demands for more services is outpacing our ability to respond. Demographics further forecast that for at least the next decade, the growing Jewish senior population will likely create additional demands.



Funding:



At present, The Centre has several core funders with various criteria relating to specific programs, geography, and demography. Funding from Ontario Health - Toronto and City of Toronto are focused on its municipal boundaries. Our United Way of Greater Toronto and UJA funding are GTA based. Other funding is culturally based e.g., Russian seniors or program based e.g., Meals on Wheels. Our member and client base span both geographies and many cultures.

Physical Capacity:



We own our building, but it sits on property leased from the City of Toronto. We have been fortunate to have completed several significant renovations over the past few years through various grants. While the structure is in good shape, our space utilization is almost at capacity. Limited options exist for modest expansion, but the reality is that additional program space will require new opportunities to expand outside our physical footprint.

Emerging Issues and Themes

Funder/Partner Expectations:

Ontario Health -Toronto, our largest funder, has indicated its expectation that all its funded agencies seek out partnership opportunities that maximize resource impact. The United Way of Greater Toronto's 10-year strategic plan looks to build on its successful hub model and to build physical space for its funded agencies to lease.

Our participation in the North York Toronto Health Partners Ontario Health Team is designed to leverage our combined expertise to improve the health of residents in its designated catchment area.

The Centre is already a part of many partnerships and continues to seek out new ones. Not all partnerships are created equal, and each one has its own resource requirements that impact on our staff and finances.

Partnerships can also take several forms from informal to contractual to strategic alliances that require individual evaluation.



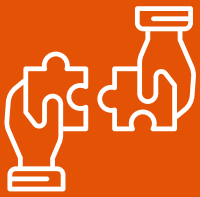
Demographics:

The Bernard Betel Centre for Creative Living is an older adult centre serving those 55+. Over the last several years, the average age of our members has edged down slightly. As we look ahead, new members will need to be encouraged to join by offering a range of programs and services that meet their specific needs and interests.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought renewed attention to the significant number of Jewish seniors living in poverty. Although this challenge is not new, the community has responded over the years through initiatives such as the Door-to-Door Poverty in the Jewish Community program, Healthy@Home and, more recently, the expansion of Kosher Meals on Wheels.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2026-2029



1

1. Build Strategic Partnerships to Extend Our Reach and Capacity

The needs of adults 55+ vary along continuums of age, physical health and socioeconomic status. To meet these needs, we will:

- Evaluate the need and opportunity to expand health and wellness services
- Secure additional financial resources from existing and new funders when and where needed

Activities:

- Continually monitor research to understand the needs of our target populations
- Engage with health and wellness partners (e.g. NYTHP) to expand our programs in the community
- Through partnerships, expand funding opportunities (e.g. Senior Active Living Program, City of Toronto, York Region)



2

2. Develop a Hub and Spoke Community Presence

Building on the identified need to expand our reach, we will maintain the existing building as the hub for all programs and activities and expand into satellite locations (spokes) for programming and outreach activities to serve more adults 55+ and increase membership.

- Offer in-person programming in satellite locations through expansion into areas where our target demographic lives, such as York Region, downtown and mid-town Toronto.
- Maintain and expand online and virtual programs that are essential to reach members, and potential members, across a wider geography.

Activities:

- Partner with community and other Jewish organizations to establish a physical presence in a wider range of geographic areas
- Expand online and virtual programming to extend our reach



3

3. Engage a Younger Population 55+

With sustainability in mind, we will engage people at the younger end of our target demographic. This means we must understand and adapt to the diverse needs of this cohort, which includes rethinking how we communicate and market our programs and offerings.

Activities:

- Based on research of the needs and program preferences, design more services and programs for younger members
- Expand volunteer opportunities and other ways of engaging younger segments of the population
- Modernize operational processes to meet the needs of younger members
- Rethink branding and marketing efforts with younger members of the population in mind



4

4. Modernize the Organization's Engagement and Visibility

Without the right tools, we won't reach our goals. That means we need to modernize The Centre to meet the needs of members, potential members, staff and volunteers.

- Develop infrastructure to support programs, services and operations
- Automate and increase online engagement for both younger and older segments of the population
- Make greater use of digital outreach and analytics for improved marketing and fundraising
- Nurture culture of innovation to enhance programming and engagement

Activities:

- Enhance the way we interact with members and potential members, and the public through:
 - digitization
 - data management
 - online registration
- Modernizing fundraising efforts



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Next Steps - Areas To Explore and Evaluate

As we launch this new strategic plan, additional information is needed to fully operationalize the strategic directions. These are the first steps involved in moving forward with our new strategies. The following actions will be the focus of our exploratory work, through designated working groups or board /staff discussions:

1

Identity & Brand

- Clarify The Centre's organizational identity and Jewish purpose
 - Optimize the brand and consider a multi-brand or sub-brand approach, options:
 - a. sub-brand for targeting younger segments
 - b. naming opportunities for programs that could result in sub-branding
 - c. using variations on Betel name to drive new branding
-

3

Better Understanding of Target Populations and Their Needs

- Develop a better understanding of the evolving senior population in Toronto
 - Determine the target populations The Centre will prioritize
 - Develop distinct approaches to serving active vs. vulnerable seniors
-

2

Funding Strategy

- Develop a funding strategy aligned with our identity and priorities
 - Develop a funding strategy for key programs including: Kosher Meals on Wheels (KMOW); health & wellness programming; Healthy@Home
 - Build a long-term financial sustainability plan
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4

Space

- Evaluate space, infrastructure, and geographic expansion
 - Develop a better understanding about optimal locations for satellite programming and outreach
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Appendix

The following focus groups were held to engage our internal stakeholder groups:

Internal to The Centre:

- Healthy@Home Focus Group (York Region, Russian speaking)
- Healthy@Home Focus Group (Toronto, English/Russian)
- Russian Golden Age Cultural Program Focus Group
- Management Focus Group
- Staff Focus Group
- Members' Council Focus Group
- Members Focus Groups
- Volunteer Focus Group
- Board Members Focus Group

External interviews were held with:

- United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Federation of Greater Toronto
- United Way Greater Toronto
- Ontario Health, Toronto
- Ontario Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
- Jewish Russian Community Centre
- North York Toronto Health Partners Ontario Health Team

Key Themes Arising from Focus Groups:

Comments in Common

- The Centre received high praise from all focus groups for its staff and programs
- The issue is not to stop doing some programs but to do more
- Those who attend programs at The Centre are very satisfied
- The Centre is seen as a home away from home
- The Centre provides a place to socialize, meet new and old friends
- A place that helps keep you active and engaged
- The Centre is a lifeline for Healthy@Home and Kosher Meals on Wheels clients
- The members at The Centre and at home need more health supports
- Cultural and linguistic programming are a key factor for many members/clients
- Space - in The Centre, elsewhere



Appendix

Thematic Differences

- There is a tendency amongst staff and Board to refer to The Centre as an adult community centre that primarily serves the Jewish community (rooted in Jewish values / a Jewish Community Centre)
- The Russian community sees the Jewish focus and content as extremely important and wants more
- Many members spoke to The Centre as a place to express their Jewish identity given the level of antisemitism
- An opportunity for more clinics; health, legal, tax, service navigation
- The at-home clients want more health care focus
- Many Healthy@Home clients talked about cost of membership and programs

Perspective from Our Funders

- Ontario Health - Toronto: partnership & service coordination; broad definition of primary care & community engagement; Data, trends and keeping OH informed
- United Way: very supportive of programming and targeting of cultural programming; very supportive of focus on vulnerability; supportive of partnerships
- UJA: concerned about the tsunami of seniors current and on the near horizon; undertaking research about the Jewish seniors' community and looking at successful models elsewhere

