

The 2018 AGM: The Harris Centre reports on its NL Population project

The 2018 AGM provided a bridge for MUNPA's impending move to the Battery. Front and centre was our future neighbor, the Harris Centre, its Population Project and the challenges that an aging population presents.

Rob Greenwood, Director of the Harris Centre as well as Public Engagement at Memorial, led off with an overview of the Harris Centre and its work, its Population Project, and the centrality of public engagement at Memorial. Next up was Population Project director, Keith Storey (Geography) on the changing demography of the province. Concluding, Alvin Simms (Geography) talked about what an aging and declining population means for the Labrador Grenfell Health Authority.

Whether showing net population trends (in-migration vs. out-migration, births and deaths) or population projections, the message was very much the same: All regions except the Northeast Avalon will not only age but also decline. Migration from other areas will result in 15% growth in the Northeast Avalon - St. John's and its environs - but the age profile of those moving means that that population will be expensive to maintain. One projection is telling: in 2016, the average age of the Newfoundland population was 43. In 2036 it is expected to be 48.

Knowing that a population is aging and declining is one thing and understanding what it means for the viability of regions and the ability of governments to provide the services that people expect is another. Each of the presenters drove their arguments home in different ways. Introducing the session, Rob Greenwood referenced to the weakness of civil engagement in the

province, alluding to the centralization of decision-making despite the number of councils as well as the paucity of candidates for seats on local councils.



Providing an overview of trends across province, Keith Storey grounded his portrait by indicating what population decline would mean to "the cat in back row" - his grandson at a birthday party and his counterparts - unable earn enough to sustain the services required by an aging and declining population. Businesses would be difficult to pass on to a new generation because there was little business to pass on and few people to pass them on to if there were. Focusing on the challenges that a Health Authority whose resources were already stretched thin would face, Alvin Simms providing an overview of the services that the Labrador Grenfell Health Authority was delivering and the personal and specializations that would be needed in future decades: family pract

Understanding the scope of the problem is one thing, taking steps to deal with it another. No panaceas were prescribed. Instead, Rob Greenwood argued population decline was like climate change -something we could not reverse but could mitigate and manage if we acted sooner rather than later. Reiterating his concern for the cat in back row, Keith Storey argued that doing nothing was not an option. Instead, we needed to act strategically. Doing so, however, was "politically demanding". It is hard for this political scientist to disagree. Asked about the uptake among politicians and civil servants, they indicated that some of the latter understood the problem. Whether others will remains to be

seen.itioners would need greater expertise in geriatrics, orthopaedics and chronic diseases, specializations that are difficult to attract. Nor would home care be easy to deliver ... there there would be fewer family members or paid workers to provide it. Nor would there be many volunteers to fill the gap.

You can find more about the Population Project at: <https://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/PopulationProject/>

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