



# Snow Mole Report 2023: Really, How Safe is Winter Walking in Ottawa?

## Why Snow Moles?

Winter brings safety and accessibility issues related to snow, ice and infrastructure challenges. Therefore, our top priority is pedestrian safety and accessibility, especially for older adults, people with disabilities and those who use mobility aids. The goal of the Snow Mole Campaign has been to advocate for improved snow clearing policies and practices to improve the walkability and safety for pedestrians in winter in Ottawa.

## Snow Mole Campaign

Launched in 2017 by the Council on Aging of Ottawa (COA), following a successful all-season audit in several areas, it was named to identify with winter moles who burrow under the snow for safety as well as 'mole' agents who work undercover to collect information.

## 2023 Snow Mole Findings

Snow Mole data has contributed to positive changes in the City of Ottawa's urban and rural snow clearing practices, but work remains to be done. In 2023, Ottawa pedestrians continued to experience barriers and safety hazards while walking in winter.

## Demographics

Of **156** Snow Mole audits:

**67%** were over 65

**34%** used ice grips

**18%** used a mobility aid

**15%** used walking poles



"We want to make sure that older adults are able to go out in the wintertime to get their physical activity and not be seasonally isolated."

Mary Gick, Pedestrian Safety & Walkability Sub-Committee member quoted in *Ottawa's 'Snow Moles' ferret out winter hazards*, Bruce Deachman, *Ottawa Citizen*, January 22, 2023

Financial support received from





## The Good News

Safe walking surfaces reported:  
streets **78%**, sidewalks **85%**

**One** reported fall due to icy conditions  
**69%** were able to reach pedestrian crosswalk button  
**91%** were able to cross the street in the allotted time



## The Not So Good News

Unsafe walking surfaces reported:  
steps/stairs **35%**, ramps **41%**

**55%** reported high snowbanks made walking difficult  
**86%** reported walking on street because of too much snow on sidewalk  
**45%** noted curb and street were not clear enough at crosswalks  
**32%** noted benches available on their route  
**33%** noted benches clear of ice and snow  
While older adults were resourceful and used walking poles and ice grips, **66% reported fear of falling** sometimes keeps them from going out for a walk

## Recommendations

- 1. Prioritize** pedestrians first in city's snow clearing policies for sidewalks, paths and roads without sidewalks.
- 2. Ensure** ongoing awareness and safety training for sidewalk plow operators.
- 3. Plow** for complete pedestrian trips to connect sidewalks to transit stops, corners and curbs to pedestrian crossings, streets and roads and parks.
- 4. Increase** frequency of snow bank removal on residential streets.
- 5. Increase** frequency of applying salt, grit, and sand to roads and sidewalks.
- 6. Improve** sidewalk infrastructure for better plowing and to make walking safer for all.
- 7. Implement** solutions to address ice buildup problems.
- 8. Improve** data collection and reporting of outdoor winter falls, conditions, and fall related injuries.
- 9. Improve** safe winter access to parks and community amenities.
- 10. Support** a community-wide Adopt-a-Bench campaign to clear snow and ice from city benches to improve safety and accessibility for all.



coaottawa.ca



/coaottawa



/COA\_Ottawa



coa@coaottawa.ca