Age-Friendly Communities & The Importance of Social Connections

HomeShare International
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Presented by:

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Overview

- Data on Canada's older adult population
- Definition and dimensions of an Age-Friendly City/Community
- Social connections & impact on health and well-being
- Risk factors for isolation
- Protective factors that contribute to well-being
- Interventions and best practices
- Benefits of Homeshare and how it can protect against isolation and loneliness
- Conclusion

Canadian Statistics

- 7 million people aged 65 and older represent nearly 1 in 5 Canadians (19%). This exceeds the share of children under age 14 (15.6%) or just over 6 million

- By 2031, about 1 in 4 Canadians is expected to be 65 years of age or older

- In Ontario, the number of seniors aged 65 and over is projected to almost double from 2.7 million (18.1%) of population, in 2021 to 4.4 million, or 21.8 per cent, by 2046

Statistics Canada 2021 Census

Older Adults 85 +

- In Canada, the population aged 85 and older is one of the fastest-growing age groups, with a 12% increase from 2016. Currently, 2.3% of the population is aged 85 and older.

- Over the next 25 years (by 2046), the population aged 85 and older could triple to almost 2.5 million people

- Over 13,000 centenarians are now living in Canada representing 0.03% of the Canadian population

Statistics Canada 2021 Census

What is Age-Friendly?

An Age-Friendly City encourages and promotes active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age

World Health Organization

While there is a strong emphasis on health, including the successful prevention of disease, disability, frailty and the promotion of healthy lives and activities, the age-friendly movement has moved beyond this to include the natural and built environment, cultural attitudes, social capital, equity and inclusion

The Guardian – International Edition 2016

Age-Friendly is intended to embrace the needs of all ages

"**Design** for the young and you exclude the old. D**esign** for the old and you include everyone."

Bernard Isaacs, Gerontologist

Age-Friendly Communities…..

Recognize	Recognize the wide range of resources and capacities among older adults
Anticipate and respond	Anticipate and respond flexibly to aging
Protect	Protect those who are most vulnerable
Promote	Promote older adult inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life

Age-Friendly........

- Is throughout the life course

- What is good for older people is good for everyone...

Life Course…..

Accommodates changes across the "life course" recognizing the diversity of the aging experience, including changing abilities encountered at earlier life stages as well as the unique needs of individuals as they age

Age-Friendly Communities Foster:

- Active Aging

- Independence

- Lifelong learning

- Inclusive neighbourhoods with a sense of belonging

- Intergenerational relationships

- Safety and security

Dimensions of An Age-Friendly City

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings

2. Transportation

3. Housing

4. Social Participation

5. Respect and social inclusion

6. Civic participation and employment

7. Communication and information

8. Community support and health services

WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide 2007

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

- Outdoor safety is promoted by good street lighting, community education

- Special customer service arrangements are provided, such as separate queues or service counters for older people

- Buildings are well-signed outside and inside with sufficient seating and toilets, accessible elevators, ramps, railings and stairs, and non-slip floors

Transportation and Mobility

- Ability to move about and get to key destinations can influence one's quality of life and their social and civic participation in their community; access to medical care

- Transportation should be reliable and convenient to access

- Heavy reliance on automobiles

- What happens when one can no longer drive?

- Impact of no longer being able to drive can trigger negative outcomes including depression and social isolation

Housing

- Housing and supports in place that allow older people to age comfortably and safely within the community to which they belong

- Sufficient, affordable and accessible housing is available in areas that are safe and close to services and the rest of the community

- Affordable home maintenance and support services are available

- Interior spaces and level surfaces allow freedom of movement in all rooms and passageways – universal design principles

- Home modification options are available and affordable, and providers understand the needs of older people

- A variety of housing options be available to older adults

Respect and Social Inclusion

- Foster intergenerational interactions and relationships

- Educate and raise awareness about aging and associated issues early on

- Social engagement can contribute to older adults' self esteem

- Older adults are active participants in all parts of community life and decision-making processes. They are recognized and valued for their contributions

Ageism

- Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age

- In Canada, certain segments of its older population appear to be particularly at risk of ageism, including those born outside of Canada

- Ageism remains largely invisible despite its wide reach and negative impact on individuals and society

- A factor that can reduce the risk of perpetrating ageism against both younger and older people is more intergenerational contact and fostering relationships

- *Perspectives on Growing Older in Canada: 2022 NIA Ageing in Canada Survey*
- *Global Report on Ageism, World Health Organization 2021*

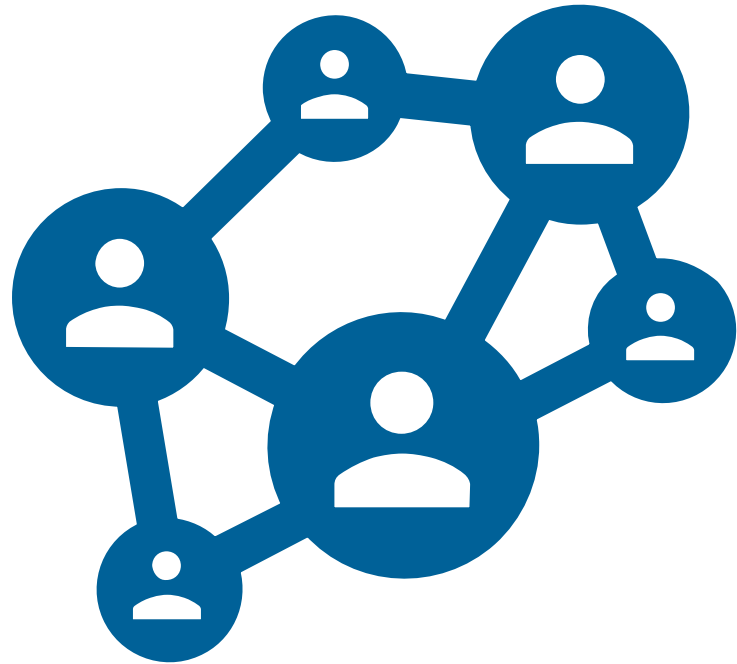# United Nations Decade of Healthy Aging 2021-2030
Four Action Areas:

Foster Age-Friendly Environments

Combat Ageism

Person Centred Integrated Care

Access to Long Term Care

The Importance of Social Connections and Impact on Health and Well-Being

Research tells us…

- The impact of social isolation and loneliness on health and well-being is recognized globally as a public health issue
- The older adult population is growing increasingly lonely and isolated
- As many as 1.4 million older Canadians report feeling lonely
- As spouses/partners, close friends die, and children grow and have their own lives to manage, many older Canadians are finding themselves lonely

Stats Canada 2020

Isolation and Loneliness
What is the Difference?

Social Isolation	Loneliness
■ An objective state ■ Lacking engagement with others ■ Minimal number of social contacts ■ Minimal number of fulfilling and quality relationships ■ Can lead to loneliness *Sheridan Centre for Elder Research 2018*	■ A negative subjective experience, how one perceives their social support, between desired vs. actual relationships ■ Can occur in response to social isolation , or in the absence of it ■ Dissatisfaction of quantity or quality of social relationship(s) ■ A normal human emotion that for most people varies across the lifespan ■ Can lead to isolation

Risk Factors

- Living alone
- Age 80 plus
- Being female
- Have no children or contact with family
- Major life transitions
- Compromised health status; both mental and physical health
- Mobility challenges
- Vision or hearing loss
- Being a caregiver
- Low income
- Language and cultural barriers
- 2SLGBTQ+ older adults
- Indigenous elders

Immigration and Newcomers to Canada: A Complex Life Transition

Transition(s) can include new living arrangements, new role, health changes and all associated losses

- Language barriers

- Transportation barriers

- Adjusting to a new culture

- Family obligations

- Potential dependency on family members

- Limited or no knowledge of available community supports

= Increased risk of social isolation and loneliness

Barriers that Contribute to Social Isolation
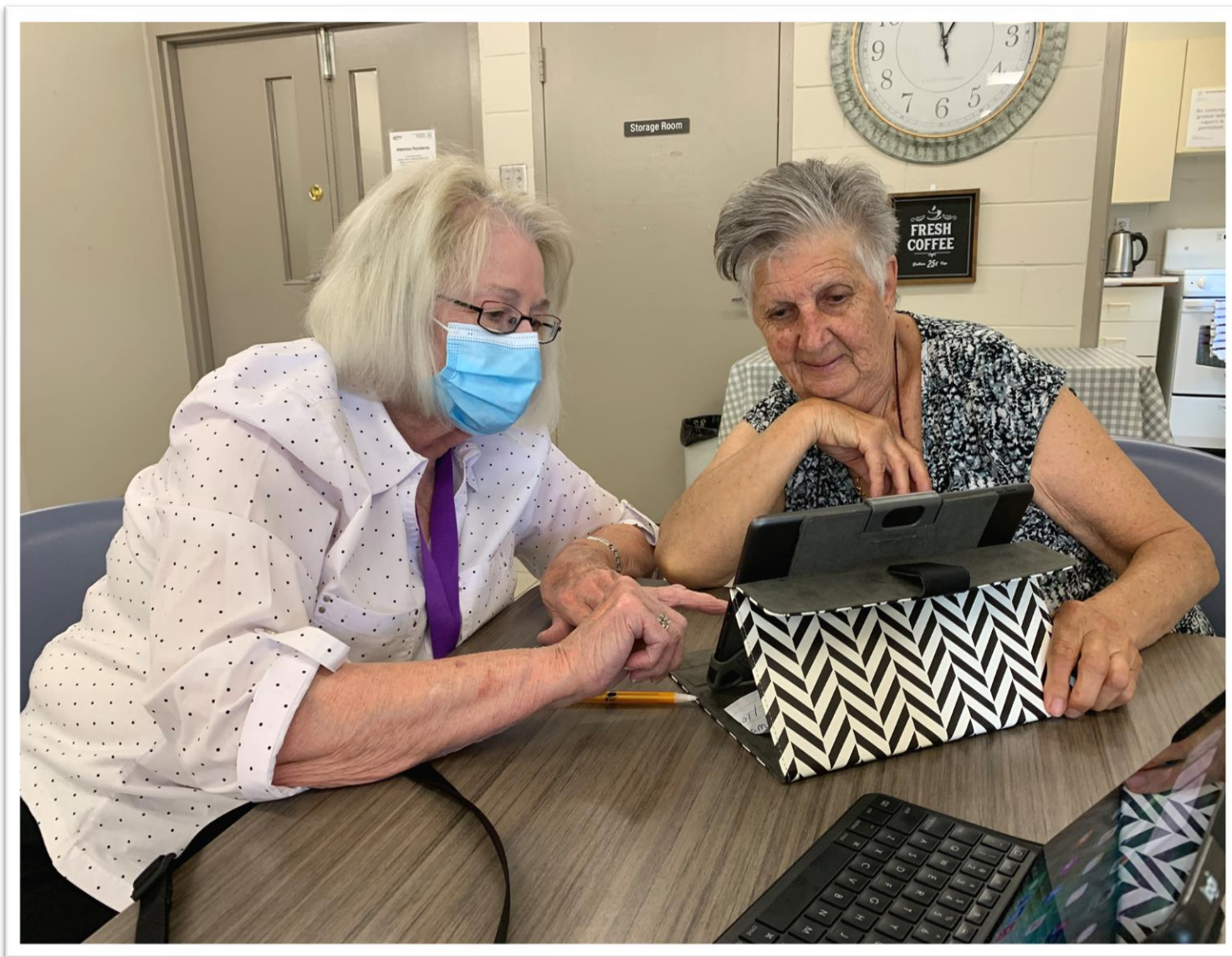
The built environment and neighbourhood design

Where older adults reside (rural vs. urban)

Low income

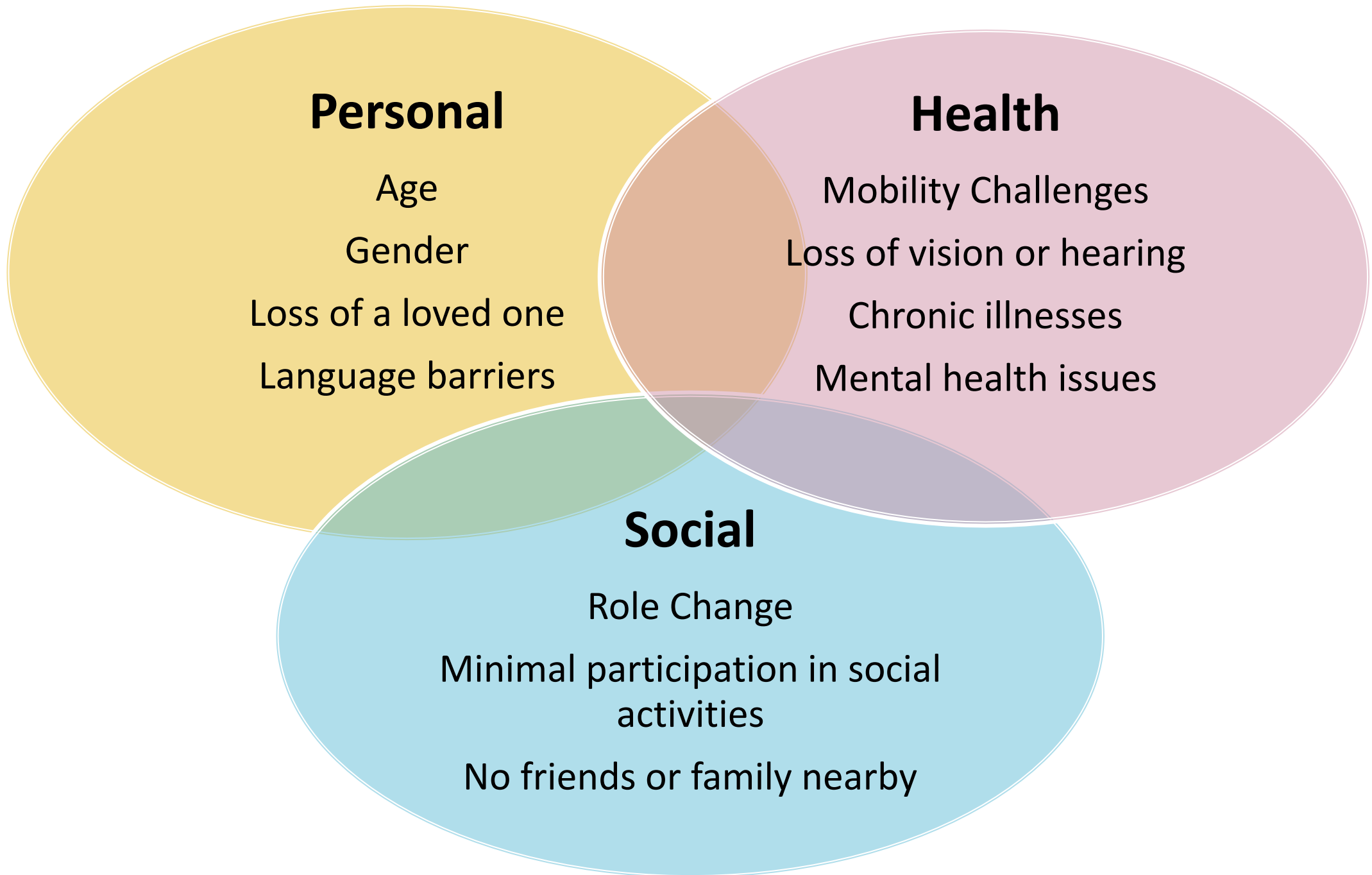Lack of affordable, accessible housing

Lack of awareness and access to community services and supports

Lack of access to transportation

Digital Divide

- Lack of access to technology
- Lack of understanding how to use technology
- Insufficient income to support technology
- Living in rural communities

Personal

Age

Gender

Loss of a loved one

Language barriers

Health

Mobility Challenges

Loss of vision or hearing

Chronic illnesses

Mental health issues

Social

Role Change

Minimal participation in social activities

No friends or family nearby

Health Outcomes and Impact on Well-being

- Loneliness has been found to be associated with a reduction of life span

- Lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day (*Holt Lunstad 2015*)

- Loneliness is associated with a greater risk of heart disease, depression, anxiety and dementia

- "It exceeds the risk of alcohol consumption, it exceeds the risk of physical inactivity, obesity, and it exceeds the risk of air pollution."

Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy (2018)

Older Adults Who Are Socially Isolated....

- Are more at risk of negative health behaviours including drinking, smoking, being sedentary and not eating well; have a higher likelihood of falls, leading to greater risk of hospitalization

- May experience a reduction of social skills

- Are at a greater risk of elder abuse

- Are at higher risk of developing mental health issues, having an impact on the person's self-esteem and confidence, decreasing their connection with community

Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors, National Seniors Council 2014

Impact of COVID-19

- Older Canadians have experienced high rates of social isolation during the pandemic

- Social isolation has been linked to negative outcomes for older adults such as depression, sleep problems, and anxiety

- Pandemic restrictions have also been associated with increased sedentary behaviour

- COVID-19 has seen an increase in reported incidents of elder abuse. Calls to the Seniors Safety Line in Ontario increased 250% last year *(CanAge)*

Social Isolation Among Older Adults During the Pandemic 2021 (Government of Canada)

Signs That Someone May Be Socially Isolated

- Physical health changes such as bruising, weight loss and weakness, which can be a result of declining health or possibly a sign of elder abuse

- Mental or emotional health changes such as fear or confusion

- General lack of interest and acting withdrawn

- Changes in personal hygiene or appearance

- Changes in eating and nutritional status

- Behaviour or personality changes

- Poor living conditions, disrepair, clutter and hoarding

Protective Factors That Contribute to Well-being

Being in good health
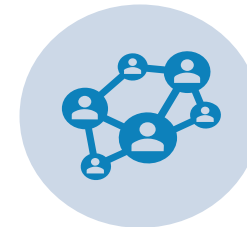
Adequate income and housing

Residing in a neighbourhood where one feels safe

Communication skills and resources to find & obtain needed services

Satisfying personal relationships & having social support network

Feeling connected to and valued by others

RISE-Reaching Isolated Seniors Everywhere

Reducing Isolation

Four themes emerged from a systematic review of a number of Studies - McMaster University

Perspectives from older adults:

1. Negative emotions

2. The loss of meaningful interpersonal relationships

3. Self perceptions

4. Coping strategies

An older adult's social network can positively influence good health behaviours, such as remaining active.

Social connections can help to reduce anxiety and depression, help regulate our emotions, lead to higher self-esteem and empathy, and improve our immune systems

Canadian Mental Health Association

Interventions to Reduce Social Isolation

Suggested Measures from the Canadian National Seniors Council

- Raise public awareness of social isolation of older adults
- Promote improved access to information, services and programs for older adults
- Build the collective capacity of organizations to address the social isolation of older adults
- Support research to better understand the issues of social isolation

Global Best Practices

Examples:

- The United Kingdom established a ***Campaign to End Loneliness*** and in 2018, appointed a Minister for Loneliness - social isolation is considered a health priority

- In 2021 Japan appointed a Minister of Loneliness

- Men's Shed movement

- Dutch grocery store introduces a unique **"Chat Checkout"** to help fight loneliness. They offer an ***All Together Coffee Corner***, run by two older adults

- Social prescribing

Intervention Practices

The **Men's Shed** movement :

Aim of bringing men together to help improve their health and boost social inclusion

Social Prescribing

- Social prescribing, also sometimes known as community referral, is **a means of enabling health care providers to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services**, including community and social services

- Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing is part of a global movement of people bringing community capacity and healthcare services closer together by directly addressing the social determinants of health, from loneliness and social isolation to racism and ageism to income and housing and much more.

Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing

Housing Options – Aging in the Right Place

- Need a variety of housing options for all people

- Supporting older Canadians to age in the right place requires developing innovative housing models and infrastructure that support their independence, safety, health and social well-being. Some of the innovative models that have been piloted across Canada include Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) programs, HomeSharing and co-housing

- Although there are few studies in the Canadian context, social isolation and loneliness have been determined to be key predictors of LTC home admissions

National Institute on Ageing. Ageing in the Right Place (2022)

Ageing at Home

The Halton HomeShare Program is on the World Health Organization's database of Age-Friendly practices

Benefits of HomeShare and Companionship

- Research suggests that HomeShare provides a variety of positive impacts falling under the grouping of well-being: majority of home providers (55 +) stated an increased sense of well-being, and reduced loneliness. Their sleep improved, along with a reduction in anxiety and increased interest to engage in activities outside the home resulting from companionship

- Home providers aged 70 and older were significantly more likely to report positive changes in domains of well-being (including feeling safer and liking living in their homes more), health (eating better), and social activities closely) as a result of homesharing

Martinez, L., Mirza, R., Austin., Hsieh, J., Klinger, C.A., Kuah, M., … Sheikh, I. (2020). *More than just a room: a scoping review of the impact of homesharing for older adults. The Gerontological Society of America Vol.4 (*no.2 1-12*).* doi:10.1093/geroni/igaa011

Fostering Safety

- Older adults often experience being fearful – a victim of a crime

- This is associated with negative effects on overall health and well being

- Research studies have included numerous interventions targeting the built environment, some promising but not conclusive

- Programs to relocate residents to "safer" neighbourhoods were not effective – negatively affected people's social networks, increasing their sense of isolation

McMaster University (2018) Macmaster Optimal Aging Portal

Name of Initiative	Arts	Social Interaction	Technology	Education	Physical Activity
Activation At-Home Kits	✓				
Adopt a Grandparent		✓			
Adult Recreation Therapy Centre	✓	✓		✓	✓
Better At Home		✓			
Buddy Services for Seniors		✓			
Buzz Me		✓			
Connected Canadians			✓	✓	
Coping with Loneliness: A resource for Older Adults				✓	
COVID-19 Seniors Support Task Force		✓			
CSARN Mentorship Program	✓	✓		✓	
CSARN Video resources and seminars	✓			✓	
Cyber Seniors		✓	✓	✓	
ENRICHES Engagement		✓			
Facebook Group - Do You Know Your Neighbour		✓			
Friendly Neighbour Hotline					
Friendly Voice		✓			
Gluu Essentials			✓	✓	
Good Neighbour Printable Note Card		✓			
Home Share		✓			
Immigrant Seniors go Digital			✓	✓	
Inclusive Programs with Sunshine Centres for Seniors		✓			✓
Life Enrichment Programming	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Links 2 Care		✓			
Meals on Wheels					
Mentoring Plus		✓			
ParticipACTION				✓	
Phone Buddy		✓			
Rx: Community Social Prescribing		✓	✓	✓	
SAFE ZONE Brant				✓	✓
Safety Webinars			✓		
Seniors Can Connect			✓	✓	
Seniors' Centre Without Walls		✓		✓	
Seniors Quality of Life Outreach	✓				✓
Spark Ontario	✓	✓	✓		✓
Student-Senior Isolation Prevention Project		✓	✓	✓	
Sunshine Call Project		✓			
TelePALS		✓	✓	✓	
The Bright Spot	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Village C.A.R.E.S. Initiative					
Timiskaming Connections Volunteer Line					
Virtual Social Recreation		✓	✓	✓	✓
Virtual Visits Toolkit		✓			
Virtual YMCA				✓	
Volunteer Grandparents		✓			
Youth Teaching Adults			✓	✓	

Building Connections: Promising Practices to Reduce Older Adult Social Isolation for Age-Friendly Community Initiatives. The Ontario Age-Friendly Communities Outreach Program 2021.

Puxty, J., Webster S., Brancaccio, L., & Punjwani, A.,(2021)

Promising Practices in Reducing Isolation

Befriending Programs

Telephone Outreach and Information Lines

Health Promotion and Wellness Programs

Practical Assistance Programs

Technology Education Programs

Senior Centre Without Walls

Social Isolation Among Older Adults During the Pandemic 2021 (Government of Canada)

Working Together to Create a Sense of Belonging

Foster….. a sense of belonging and connectedness

Be….. welcoming and inclusive

Improve….. access to information, services and programs for seniors

Engage….. city planners, encourage inclusive neighbourhoods & universal design

Improve….. transportation - accessible and affordable

Improve….. housing – accessible and affordable

Need….. to raise awareness of the issues of older adult isolation

Need….. for continued research in the area of isolation and loneliness

Social Isolation Among Older Adults During the Pandemic 2021 (Government of Canada)

Final Thoughts…

"Being connected to others socially is widely considered a fundamental human need, crucial to both well-being and survival.

We need to take collective action in tackling loneliness as a public health threat, from emphasizing social skills training for children at school to adding social connectedness as an item on your doctor's health checkup list."

Julianne Holt-Lunstad – Brigham Young University

Thank you!

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