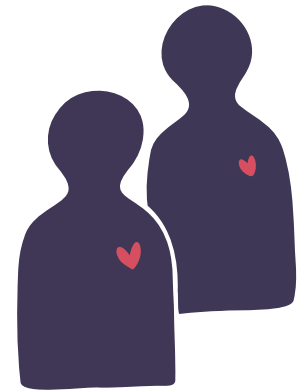


Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults

Older adults may face feelings of social isolation or loneliness that can have an impact on their mental or physical health. But this isn't an inevitable part of aging. Increasingly, staying connected is seen as vital for maintaining mental and physical health as we age. Working together, we can address the risk through building social connections.



How Do We Define Social Isolation and Loneliness?

- Social isolation can be understood as a measurable lack in the number of relationships a person has.
- Loneliness is more subjective and can be understood as the feeling we get when our social relationships are lacking in terms of quality or quantity compared with what we expect them to be.

What Are the Risks?

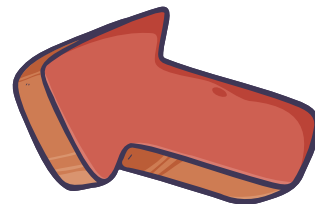
In Canada, we are facing growing rates of social isolation and loneliness. A 2019 Angus Reid poll found that more than a third of Canadians reported being often or always alone. As we age, we face routine life transitions that can contribute to the risk of becoming socially isolated or lonely. Some of us may face fewer family connections or the loss of a spouse, or fewer ways to connect with our communities. Transitional life events, such as retirement, the death of family or friends, or changes in living arrangements, may contribute to the risk of social isolation and loneliness among older adults. Other contributing factors can include poverty, lack of transportation, gender and sexual identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity.

According to the United States Centres for Disease Control, loneliness and social isolation are associated with an increased risk of death of 26 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. This increased mortality risk is similar to smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having an alcohol use disorder, according to one meta-analysis.

Measuring the Potential Impacts

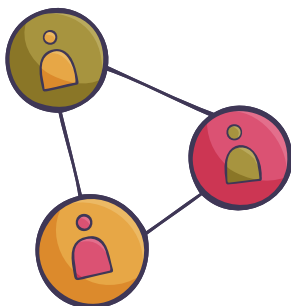
As we age, social isolation and loneliness can affect both our minds and bodies. Some of the possible risks of isolation and loneliness among adults over 50 years old include:

- **32%** increased risk of **stroke**
- **29%** increased risk of **coronary heart disease**
- **25%** increased risk of **cancer mortality**
- **50%** increased risk of developing **dementia**
- **45%** increased risk of **death**



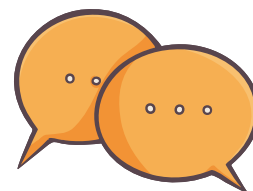
Source: *Understanding Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Canadians and How to Address It*

Check in and Stay Connected



Staying connected may mitigate these risks and contribute to better physical and mental health. And just as we may need to pay attention to how our bodies and minds age, we can also find opportunities to renew existing or find new relationships to boost our social health.

It's also important to know how the people we know— spouses, partners, friends, family, neighbours, community members, and professional care partners—may face these challenges.



The Social Isolation and Loneliness Project

As part of the CCSMH's Social Isolation and Loneliness Project, we are raising awareness of the risks facing older Canadians and the opportunities for all of us to address them. Specifically, we are developing guidelines for health and community practitioners working with older adults to assess and address social isolation and loneliness. We are also developing a toolkit to provide resources and information in support of the guidelines.



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