

Social Isolation & Loneliness in Older Adults: Guidelines Project

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The Challenge

The Health Impacts of Social Isolation and Loneliness on Older Adults

- An Angus Reid survey found that 48% of Canadians reported themselves as being socially isolated, lonely, or both (Reid, 2019)¹
- Loneliness and social isolation are associated with an increased risk of death (26% and 29%, respectively) (CDC, 2021)²
- Social isolation among older adults is associated with increased chance of premature death; depression; dementia; disability from chronic diseases; poor mental health; increased use of health and support services; reduced quality of life; poor general health; and an increased number of falls (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020)³



The Opportunity

Leveraging the Relationship between Older Adults and Health Care Providers

- "Family physicians and other primary care providers might be the only point of social contact for many older patients. It has been suggested that, just as physicians screen for other risk factors, there might be a role for primary care physicians to identify patients who are isolated, lonely, or socially vulnerable and to recommend evidence-based interventions that could strengthen social connection" (Freedman and Nicolle, 2020)⁴
- "... increased social engagement has been associated with decreased disability and lower mortality" (Statistics Canada, 2020)⁵



Project Deliverables

Engaging with a diversity of stakeholders to develop evidence-based guidelines that present a stepped approach to levels of interventions including:

- Literature review
- Pan Canadian guidelines working group with expert reviewers
- Stakeholder engagement - 2 national surveys with
 - Health and social service providers
 - Older adults & caregivers with lived experience
- Guidelines dissemination, tool kits & knowledge translation
- Awareness raising of the issues
- Network strengthening



Insights from Providers

Survey of health and social service providers, winter 2023

- A large majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they were **knowledgeable** about the physical health issues (95%), mental health issues (95%) and social issues (96%) that contribute to social isolation and loneliness in older adults
- Nearly one quarter of respondents agreed the **absence of guidelines** very much (6%) or extremely (18%) impacts their ability to address social isolation and loneliness in older adults
- Three quarters of respondents agreed that a **lack of community resources** very much (32%) or extremely (43%) impacts their ability to address social isolation and loneliness in older adults
- The top strategies for addressing social isolation and loneliness included **befriending interventions, physical activity interventions** and providing **age-friendly health care**

Defining Social Isolation & Loneliness... It's Complex

Social Isolation⁶

A measurable deficiency in the number of social relationships that a person has.

An objective deficit in connection to family, friends or the community.

Loneliness⁶

An internal subjective experience; it is an unpleasant sensation felt when a person's social relationships are lacking in quality and/or quantity compared to what they desire.

A "subjective" assessment that social relationships are lacking.



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References

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2. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Loneliness and social isolation linked to serious health conditions.
3. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System.
4. Freedman, A. & Nicolle, J. (2020). Social isolation and loneliness: The new geriatric giants: Approach for primary care. *Canadian Family Physician*, 66(3), 176-182.
5. Statistics Canada. (June 2020). Social isolation and mortality among older Canadians.
6. National Institute on Ageing. (June 2022). Understanding social isolation and loneliness in older Canadians and how to address it.

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