



# **SOCIAL ISOLATION & LONELINESS: WHAT WE HEARD FROM OLDER ADULTS**

In the spring of 2023, the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health conducted a nationwide survey of adults 65 years and older, asking them about their knowledge and attitudes towards social isolation & loneliness, and their engagement with health and social service providers (HSSPs). More than 2,000 responded.

The results will help inform our work in developing the first clinical guidelines for social isolation and loneliness among older adults. Here are some of the key insights we learned through the survey:

## **01**

### **Older adults say they are *knowledgeable* about social isolation & loneliness**



Ninety-four percent of older adults said they are very (64%) or somewhat (29%) aware that **social isolation & loneliness can negatively impact physical health.** (For example: increased heart disease, stroke and falls.)

Ninety-six percent of older adults said they are very (78%) or somewhat (18%) aware that **social isolation & loneliness can negatively impact mental health.** (For example: increased risk of developing depression, anxiety and dementia.)

## 02

### Many older adults say they are *comfortable* talking about social isolation & loneliness with HSSPs



More than half of respondents said they were very comfortable (30%) or somewhat comfortable (23%) **talking to their health or social service provider** about feeling socially isolated or lonely

## 03

### But not everyone is comfortable talking with their care provider about social isolation & loneliness

About one in five respondents said they were somewhat uncomfortable (12%) or not comfortable (8.8%) talking to their provider

We asked respondents who were not comfortable talking to their provider about social isolation and loneliness to identify their main reasons from a list.

These were the top five reasons respondents chose:

- I would be **embarrassed**: 44%
- My provider **does not have enough time**: 39%
- I am only allowed **one issue per appointment**: 27%
- I do not think it is their **role**: 20%
- It is **not important enough** to concern me: 18%



# 04

## Older adults identified a number of options that care providers could use to make them more comfortable



From a list, respondents identified these top three options care providers could offer to help make respondents **more comfortable** talking to them about social isolation & loneliness:

- Provide me with some **resources**: 57%
- Connect me to community **programs or supports**: 51%
- Suggest **activities** that might help: 44%

# 05

## Older adults participate in a range of activities that help if they feel socially isolated or lonely

From a list of activities or actions they do or could do if they were feeling socially isolated or lonely, these were respondents' top choices:

- Spending **time in person with friends and family**: 79%
- **Exercising** or taking part in exercise classes: 62%
- Using **technology** to connect with friends and family: 58%
- Spending time in **nature**: 55%



# 06

## One in six older adults said they would talk with their provider if they were feeling isolated or lonely



From the same list of activities, about one in six (17%) respondents said they would talk to their **family doctor** or **nurse practitioner** as something they would do to help if they felt socially isolated or lonely

### Who responded to the survey?

#### Age Category % of Respondents

65-70 years	28%
71-79 years	48%
80-89 years	21%
90+ years	2.5%
Prefer not to answer	0.5%

#### Gender % of Respondents

Woman	76.5%
Man	22.4%
Prefer not to answer	1%

#### Living Situation % of Respondents

Live alone	42%
Live with spouse/partner	46%
Live with family member	6%
Live with friend/roommate	2%
Assisted living/LTC	1%
Other	2%
Prefer not to answer	1%

#### Primary Residence

Primary Residence	% of Respondents
Alberta	4%
British Columbia	6%
Manitoba	9%
New Brunswick	1%
Newfoundland and Labrador	0%
Northwest Territories	0%
Nova Scotia	4%
Nunavut	0%
Ontario	63%
Prince Edward Island	0%
Quebec	12%
Saskatchewan	1%
Yukon	0%
Prefer not to answer	1%

**Note:** The number of respondents varied by question, with the highest number for one question at 2,117. Demographic questions received approximately 1,800 responses.

The Social Isolation & Loneliness in Older Adults project is meant to lead in the development and distribution of Canadian clinical guidelines that can be used by health and social service providers to support their patients and clients. The project will also create a variety of tools and resources to support action across health and social professional fields.