

Assessment for Social Isolation and Loneliness



CCSMH
Canadian Coalition for
Seniors' Mental Health

A thorough clinical assessment with a patient/client who is socially isolated and/or lonely should aim to explore the possible causes and identify any underlying health conditions that may be contributing factors. Other causes that may be contributing should also be identified by adopting a biopsychosocial approach. A comprehensive assessment can guide the development of an appropriate management plan. The assessment may vary according to the health care and social service professional's scope of practice. These recommendations are from the *Canadian Clinical Guidelines on Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults*.

Physical Health



This should include ongoing illnesses that may be impacting the person's ability to communicate, travel and function independently.

Problems with hearing or vision should be identified. Chronic health conditions may impact a person's ability to socialize or engage in activities.

Social History



A social history should be taken to understand the patient's/client's cultural background, previous social exclusion and social support network, including family, friends, and community involvement.

It would also include an understanding of the person's hobbies and interests.

Mental Health



This would include an assessment of current symptoms of anxiety, depression or psychosis. It is also important to obtain a past history of mood, anxiety or other mental disorders. If the person is currently depressed, a suicide risk assessment should be included. It is also advisable to consider the person's personality style.

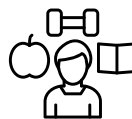
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Recent Life Events



Significant life changes, e.g., the loss of family members or friends, retirement or recent moves should be evaluated.

Lifestyle Factors



Lifestyle including lack of physical activity/ exercise, poor diet and sleep can also contribute to loneliness and social isolation.

Substance Use



Substance use disorders and misuse can contribute to loneliness and social isolation.

Environment and Finances



It is important to understand the person's living situation including access to transportation and the physical accessibility of their home.

Health care and social service professionals should assess the ability of the patient/client to afford basic necessities.

Evaluating Cognition



Health care and social service professionals should evaluate the person's cognitive functioning and the impact of any impairment.

This could include activities of daily living, as well as the ability to initiate social interactions, plan and problem-solve.

Insight and Motivation to Change



It is important to understand the degree to which the person sees their isolation and/or loneliness as a problem.

It is also important to discuss options for intervention with the person and to assess whether they are motivated to follow the recommendations.

Many factors can contribute to social isolation and loneliness. We therefore recommend a comprehensive assessment when possible, recognizing that scope of practice is wide-ranging.

For more information and additional tools and resources, visit our [web page for health care and social service professionals](#).