

Social Isolation *and* **Loneliness**

**A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT THE ISSUE
FACING SOME SENIORS IN FREDERICTON**



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IMAGINING AGEFRIENDLY COMMUNITIES IN COMMUNITIES WITH AGE FRIENDLY FREDERICTON**

Executive Summary

Overview

This study originated as a response to community discussions spearheaded by Age-Friendly Fredericton who, along side community organizations, identified social isolation and loneliness as an important issue for the city's population of older adults.

Literature review

We began with a literature review. The review found that social isolation is common among older Canadian adults, with up to 30% being at risk of isolation and up to 50% experiencing loneliness. Social isolation and loneliness are often used synonymously but they mean different things. Whether someone is defined as isolated has to do with the number of contacts they have where loneliness refers to the subjective feeling that may or may not occurs and takes into account the quality of these contacts which is difficult to measure. A wide range of interventions have been studied in both group and one-on-one contexts. Effective interventions tend to be those that draw on already existing resources, include all stakeholders in their development, and are productive rather than passive in nature.

Interviews

We then interviewed local seniors. A total of 14 men and women were interviewed. They were asked a series of 3 questions from the UCLA Loneliness scale. A score of 6 and above indicates loneliness, for which this group had an average score of 6. Participants explained that they had become isolated for a number of reasons, including the death of a spouse, living alone, lack of accessible transportation and support when going out. However, physical and mental illnesses were by far the most common reasons for becoming isolated. Participants described a variety of coping mechanisms, such as relying on skills they learned throughout their lives, calling on neighbors, owning pets and connecting through technology, from phones to online means.

Environmental Scan

We then completed an environmental scan to identify interventions that were being carried out internationally, nationally and even locally. A wide variety of promising programs were identified that could serve as sources of learning and inspiration here in Fredericton.



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INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this report was provided when Age-Friendly Fredericton gathered over 50 community group leaders together in late 2019 to explore how seniors in the city could be better supported. The issue of social isolation was raised repeatedly. Members of community groups realized they were not able to reach all seniors, and some were being left out. Who were they? What were their needs? How might they be better supported? What are other communities doing that might be adapted locally? This report seeks to provide partial answers to these questions. It provides a review of the recent research on social isolation, a look into the experience of local seniors who are experiencing varying degrees of isolation, and a short environmental scan of some of the interventions that have been implemented to address the problem. We hope this report supports further conversations and actions to address isolation in Fredericton and elsewhere.



Social isolation and loneliness

Both social isolation and loneliness have been described as a global epidemic (1). In Canada, it is estimated that 19-24% of community dwelling Canadians experience some form of isolation, over 30% are at risk of isolation and 10-50% feel lonely (2,3,4).

The term social isolation is used to describe the number of social contacts one has. It is more of an objective measure (5). Loneliness is more subjective. It is used to describe the subjective feeling one has about their social network. It is the negative feelings one has about their social contacts (6,7).

Both social isolation and loneliness are risk factors for poor health. They have been associated with an increased risk of dementia (8), of cardiovascular disease(9) and of mortality(10, 11, 12). Conversely, those with better social relationships in older age have a 50% increased chance of survival, are more likely to follow through on medical recommendations and have fewer hospitalizations (4).



Literature review

Risks leading to Social Isolation and Loneliness



There are many reasons why one might become socially isolated or lonely. They occur on many levels, such as:

Micro - this refers more to factors pertaining to an individual. For instance, poor body image, urinary incontinence, chronic illnesses or hearing may lead one to withdraw. Depression or cognitive decline may also be a factor(13,14).

Meso- this refers to issues in the local community. The status of one's neighborhood or availability of affordable transportation may vary from community to community (15).

Macro- most studies do not make the distinction between meso and macro issues, however it is nonetheless an important difference. Macro is used to describe social, cultural and economic matters, such as racial issues, government policies and income inequality (15, 16).

Identifying those at risk.



Everyone can play a part

It is important for all to be aware of social isolation and loneliness in order to identify those at risk and help them as necessary. Health care professionals are among the most qualified to do so, however it is not currently a standard of care (5, 14). It has been found that 60% of physicians in Canada screen for their patients' social needs, only 43% coordinate social services and 36% are not aware of what social services are available in their community (16). In New Brunswick, 50,000 residents do not have a physician (17). These residents are therefore missing an important point of contact. Interventions that rely on physician prescribing of social services are a big gap in this province.

When developing effective interventions, they need to:



Be adaptable

This means making them appropriate for the local environment, and changing them after evaluations of effectiveness. Taking advantage of local resources, as well as respecting the needs of the community results in a better intervention (18,19,20).



Have a community development approach

Listening to everyone that the intervention will impact means a more efficient, appropriate program will be produced. Building community resilience includes asking the very people for whom the interventions are meant to help, so it is important their input is sought out as well (18, 19, 20, 21).



Be activities that are meaningful

Adults benefit from pursuing activities that are productive such as gardening, a walking group, or meeting for tea. Activities that involve the older adult not participating actively, such as watching TV, or listening to radio, are examples of passive activities that are less effective at addressing social isolation and loneliness. It is important to note that productive activity can be done alone, not necessarily in a group (18. 22).

Community supports



Current research recognises the importance of multi-faceted community supports that are:

- low cost
- use existing resources
- founded in interventions that have been shown to be effective in improving well-being

Asset-based community development

This uses local businesses, among other resources, to develop its programs. Some older adults have indicated feeling a part of the community when attending events at venues that serve the community at large, rather than only attending events in community centers or churches.

The local businesses benefit from increased patronage from the participants. Increased word of mouth of their community contributions may result in greater public support as well (20).

TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS



Types of Interventions

Group vs one-on-one formats

Group activities are the most common. They are effective, create a sense of belonging and security in a group. They have been found to be most effective when they are educational, increase support and/or encourage social activities (14, 19,23, 24).

One-on-one activities allow more meaningful relationships to develop. They may include mentorship (where a volunteer leads the activity) and befriending (where the volunteer is more of an equal partner and a reciprocal relationship occurs). One type of befriending is peer support. This is where both persons are of the same age. This has been found to be highly effective (14, 18, 21, 25,26).

The following interventions can be carried out as a group or one-on-one format.



Types of Interventions

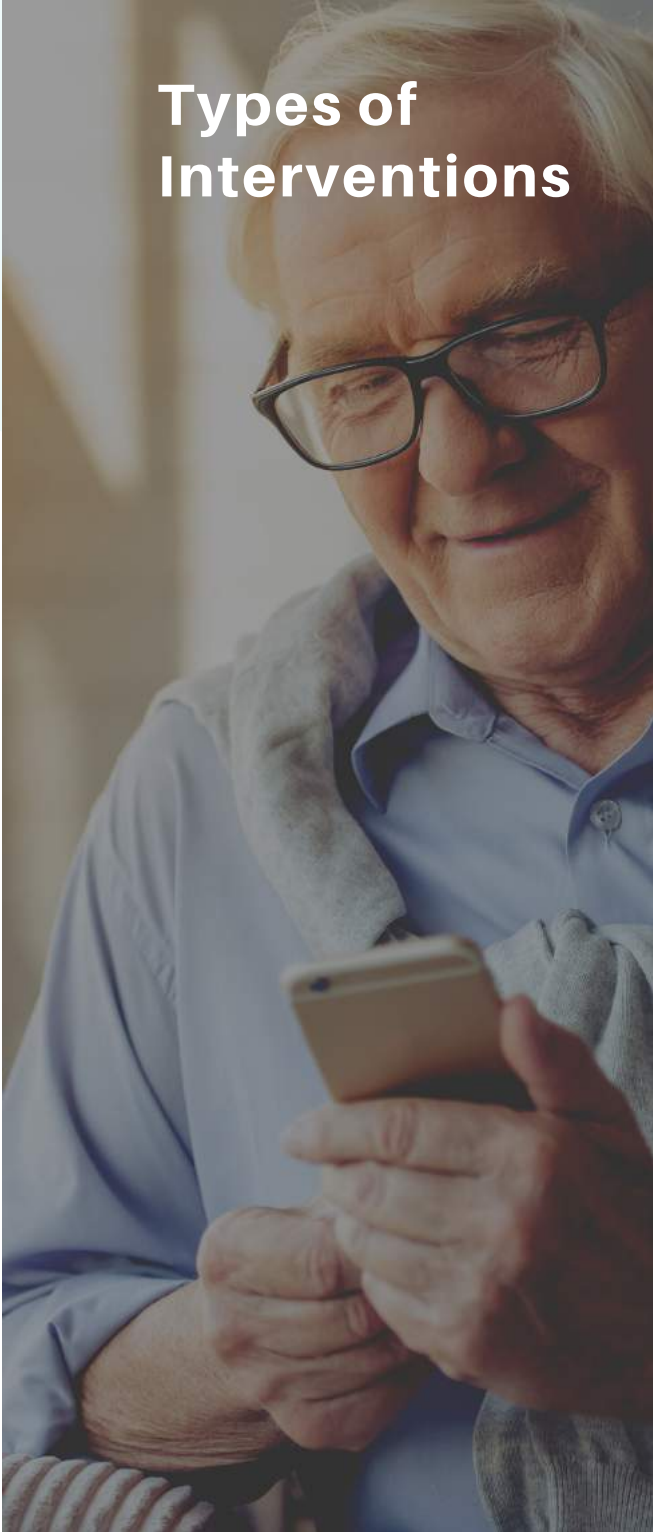


Leisure activities

Includes gardening, shopping, hobbies, or attending local theatre. Leisure activities can be pursued because of the friends one has, or maybe someone pursues a leisure activity and develops new friendships.

Having just one person encourage you to pursue a leisure activity makes you more likely to continue with it.

-Leisure activities have been shown to decrease both social isolation and loneliness and increase social connectedness. Older people may need more than an invitation to join, they may require repeated encouragement, follow up, or for someone to actively pick them up and bring them to the activity (6, 22, 23).

An elderly man with white hair and glasses is looking down at a smartphone he is holding in his hands. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and a grey sweater. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. The text 'Types of Interventions' is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Types of Interventions


Technology

This is a rapidly changing sector. There are a growing number of devices and applications that address isolation. For instance, increasing computer literacy among older adults; using social media; even interacting with a robot companion have all been shown as being beneficial in addressing social isolation and loneliness.

-Technology can increase social networks, connect with the outside world and increase confidence, resulting in decreased loneliness.

Research suggests effective interventions are those that have a facilitator, including same-age peers or intergenerational pairings, who provides training to the older adult on how to use that particular format.

-Need to be mindful: some studies have found if responses are not timely, or not as in depth as the older adult would like, it can result in increased isolation and loneliness (6, 19, 23, 27,28,29).



Types of Interventions

Telephone support

Telephone support has some advantages. Older adults typically have access to a phone, especially landlines, and may enjoy the anonymity of speaking on the phone.

One promising program involved patients recently discharged from the emergency department. They were identified as being at risk of social isolation and/or loneliness. A peer hospital volunteer phoned them weekly. The volunteer had received training prior to the phone calls to provide support. The older adults reported enjoying the support and were less lonely than at the beginning of the program (21,25, 36).



Types of Interventions

Intergenerational

Research has shown that intergenerational activities, that is activities that bring people of different ages together, are particularly effective in combating social isolation and loneliness. This can include activities such as older adults reading books to toddlers or school aged children. It can also include older adults being assisted by nursing students.

These programs have been shown to improve older adults' cognitive and physical well-being and improve children's perceptions and attitudes towards the elderly, thus building empathy and respect across generations (30,31,32,33,34,35).

Types of Interventions

Animal Therapy

In US, it has been found that over half of those 62 and older own a pet, most commonly a dog, and next most popular is a cat. Studies suggest pet ownership may increase social interactions and pets may serve as companions, decreasing feelings of loneliness and depression. Elderly pet owners have been found to have fewer hospital visits and decreased lengths of stay.

Pet ownership may provide the older adult with a sense of purpose and responsibility (37,38,39, 40).



Types of Interventions



Physical Activity

The issues that physical activity assist in social isolation and loneliness are complex. It can help by creating relationships with others who are doing the same activity, can remove barriers to social interactions and increase self-esteem. Biologically, it can increase serotonin (the "happy hormone"), reduce cortisol (the stress hormone) and activate gray matter, all contributing to a "feel good" effect.

The best physical activity interventions seem to be those delivered by a healthcare professional, in a group setting, with an educational component (6, 24, 41,42, 43).

Social Prescribing



Perhaps one way to bring together a variety of interventions would be through social prescribing. Social prescribing can create a more holistic approach to health care, moving from a system that treats the sick, to a system that supports the health and well-being of all people.

It uses navigators or facilitators who assess the individual's needs and connects them with appropriate local services to improve their health and well-being.

It has been used in the UK for quite some time and most recently has been trialed in Ontario. It has been found to be most effective when a centralized, local system is used for referrals, there is proper training for the coordinators and there is good communication between the physician, facilitator and participant (4, 14, 16, 44).

How best to develop a social prescribing program?

Researchers recommend evaluating programs, and such assessments should ask the following:

Why: Clarify goals and the evidence to meet these

Who: identify and ask for participation from all stakeholders

How: The study design should be carefully considered and biases should be accounted for (eliminated if possible).

What: This relates to what is being measured, for example, costs, attendances to programs, returns to GPs, etc.

When: timing is important. Are measures taken at the beginning and end? Is there a long follow-up?





Insights from interviews

WHAT WAS DONE

The current study took place between July and September of 2020. A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants were identified with the assistance of staff with Meals on Wheels Fredericton.

Each participant was asked questions from the UCLA loneliness scale. It is a 3 item scale that has a score ranging from 3 to 9. Questions are: how often do you feel you lack companionship, how often do you feel left out and how often do you feel isolated. Responses are:

hardly ever, most of the time or very often. A score of 3-5 indicates they are not lonely. A score of 6 and above indicates they are lonely. The average score for these participants was found to be 6.

All participants lived in Fredericton, and had done so for several years. There were equal numbers of men and women, as well as equal numbers living in homes or apartments. Only 3 lived with someone else (2 with a spouse, one with a son).

The following will highlight the most common responses from the participants.



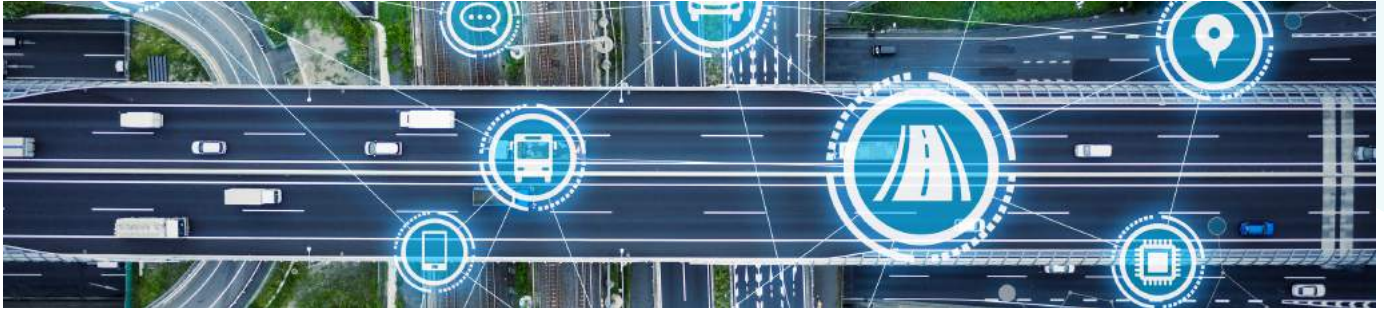


Physical challenges and illnesses

Seniors spoke of fluctuations in their health, which led to a lack of spontaneity and a challenge in planning activities. Participants indicated friends would stop calling on them, which only served to further isolate them.

Cora: I do, I hate sitting around. A lot of days I don't feel like doing anything but on the days I do, I'm just wandering around, wish I could go somewhere. See the other girls are all going because they're not sick and down. When you get down and can't do anything, you know, your friends they don't really leave you, but they do things. I don't expect them to wait for me because they can't take me everywhere that they can go, but it does make a difference.

Factors contributing to isolation or loneliness



Transportation

By far, transportation was discussed most often as a barrier, only second to health and physical challenges. They spoke of challenges getting to venues, going to appointments and even doing basics such as getting groceries due to lack of adequate transportation. For some participants, health issues made driving a car impossible, even if they owned a car. This meant they would need to rely on public transportation or someone else to get them where they needed to be. Furthermore, accessible transportation still did not fully meet their needs. For some, health issues could mean an activity might need to be cut short. However, being on the schedule of the accessibility transportation meant they felt stranded at times:

“There is such a thing as dial-a-bus but it hardly ever comes back when you want it to. If you’re really tired and having a problem that day, you may wait 2 hours for the dial a bus to bring you back.”(Fran)

Factors contributing to isolation or loneliness

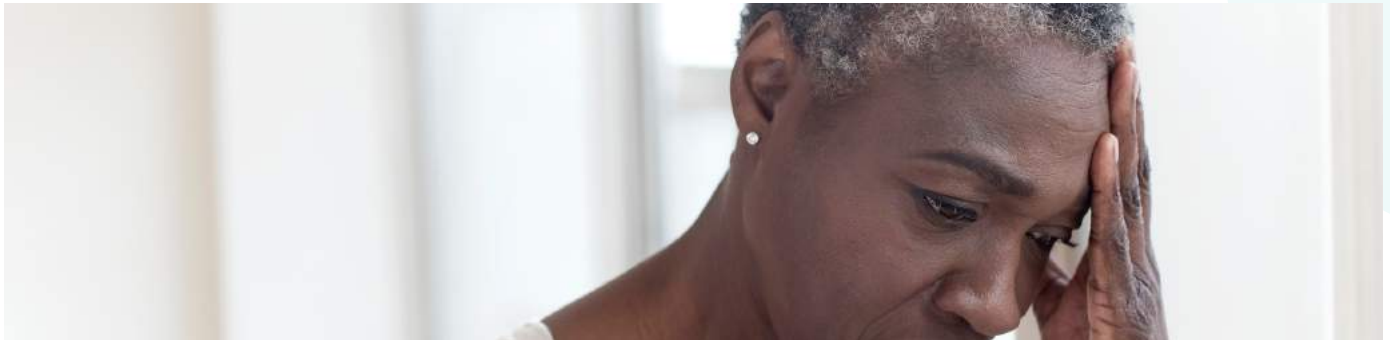


Living arrangement

As many lived alone, they indicated being alone in the home led to loneliness or isolation, but also lack of support to *leave* the home led to further challenges. They indicated having support to either assist with things like walkers, or with leaving a venue when they needed to would lead to being able to leave their home more often. The idea of having support or even motivation to leave the home with the encouragement of another was also something many seniors indicated they needed but often lacked. As Fran describes:

"I don't want to go alone, see. I have no interest in going alone. Because if something happened, that would be a long time for me to sit in the car, with my cell phone. And what if I had to go to the bathroom. If I have somebody with me, I'm completely calm because I know they're there and they'll say look, everything is going to be ok."

Factors contributing to isolation or loneliness



Mental Health

As the literature indicates, isolation and loneliness can contribute to depression and anxiety, however some seniors indicated they already had experienced mental health challenges, either long-standing, or as a result of the loss of a spouse or other life event. This created a feedback loop, withdrawing them from community involvement even further:

"Think of an elderly person who would feel [loneliness, isolation and lack of connections], and then add mental illness with that and then add physical illnesses with that- like that's me." (Emilia)

Factors contributing to isolation or loneliness



Mental Health challenges + lack of support = decreased motivation

All of the above could be seen to contribute to something many seniors indicated they needed assistance in creating, and that was a desire and motivation to get out and participate. For some, however, leaving the home would be done incrementally. They preferred to develop a more meaningful comradery in the safety of their home, where they knew their surroundings, and had no fears of falling or issues accessing washrooms. Developing that friendship and level of support could then lead to venturing out of the home.

As Fran said: *"So I have to prepare so much to go that it's hard on me. It's very stressful. And that's why I suggest that after you get to know somebody and they come into your home, you have a chat and everything, I'm sure that would go and you would feel more like going out with the person."*

Factors contributing to isolation or loneliness



Finances

Interestingly, when asked if finances were an issue, these seniors did not say they worried about money:

Well, I was a depression child so we only did what we could afford. Not like today, people buy what they want instead of what they need. (Owen)

The fragility of tight budgets meant seniors needed to make sacrifices: home repairs, new glasses or dentures or even pet bills. The fragility of tight budgets led to difficult decisions:

I didn't anticipate all that so now I'm just waiting for my pension to come in at the end of the month so I can buy groceries. I'm not starving mind you. I use canned milk. (Phil).

They did not always have money for social activities which were sometimes represented as "extra".

Things that could improve isolation and loneliness



The small things matter

Some spoke of a longing to do the small things that they otherwise used to do without thinking. Many had friends, family or care workers who helped them with vital tasks, such as getting prescriptions or groceries, or attending medical appointments, but doing the small things they used to do was something they missed. When asked if there was some activity she could do if given the opportunity, anything the city might create, Brenda felt she just wanted to go out to a fast food place for take out. She was happy to have help getting her essentials, and felt she didn't want to burden anyone with what she felt was such a simple, but perhaps unnecessary, task.

Equally, Beatrice indicated it doesn't take much for someone to make her feel as though someone was thinking of her and looking to make her smile:

Like with [a pharmacy], little things they do. Like [an employee at the pharmacy], she'll send me over a happy face and say 'that's you today'. Just little things mean a lot to me. And I feel I'm not left out. Just a chocolate bar or a, just some people want a lot in life. I don't.

Things that could improve isolation and loneliness



Romantic relationships

Romantic companionship was discussed by both men and women without being asked directly. Some spoke of the loss of a spouse, whom they had loved dearly, but still were looking for that type of companionship. Phil spoke of the challenges of "dating" as a senior, but when asked if he would prefer a male buddy or friend over a woman as a companion, he replied:

Well I'd rather have a companion as a woman, a woman has a different point of view about things and I found that interesting when you have a conversation.

Beatrice also spoke fondly of a relationship she had developed late in life. He had unfortunately passed in the last couple of years, however she was still very happy to have been able to have him in her life.

Yeah, that was a good thing for me. I know now that I've got those memories. Those memories, in the last years, have kept me going... I'm at peace right now with myself because of that friendship...It changed me to feel better about myself. And he made me feel I was worthy, someone that loves me.

Coping with isolation and loneliness

Safety/comfort in home

Staying in their home was important to some seniors. As indicated previously, some felt a sense of safety there. For others, it was an integral part of their identity and independence. The words "safe", "secure" and "peaceful" were used. Indeed, when asked if the community could create any programs, Alan indicated:

Some thoughts should be given to entertainment in the home more. I don't know if the city would have any involvement or not but you know TV is not exciting to old people now.



Coping with isolation and loneliness

Past circumstances

For many, having time alone was described as a strategy they had long developed. Some women spoke of difficult relationships they had been involved in, and had developed the need for being alone as a means of ensuring comfort. For some men, they had had careers that required much travel and alone time and continued to enjoy it into their later years in life. Having said that, the desire to be alone constantly was not their goal. As Colton said:

Put it this way I need people desperately but then I also like to be alone.

Coping with isolation and loneliness

Attitude

Having a positive attitude was demonstrated by many. Seniors felt grateful for the things they had and they indicated they realized many were worse off. Most insightfully, Colton compared his situation with what most had now come to experience because of the pandemic:

It can destroy others because they can't stand to be alone, they can't stand themselves. But for those who can handle it, you find that you are so satisfied that you can exist without being angry or frustrated about being isolated. So, in my case, I can handle the isolation because I basically have everything I need. I have my meals, I have my apartment, and I have enough funds to live adequately. So in that case I'm not overly, how can we say it, I'm not depressed. I'm an optimist.



Coping with isolation and loneliness

The topic of religion was not a direct question, however many spoke of taking comfort in faith in a higher power, whether it was in the form of organized religion, or a personal belief. They spoke of being grateful and thanking this higher power for the positive things they did have in their lives. It also provided support in the form of church members checking on them and church groups to attend. Having a form of faith was important for many, even if expressed as an academic interest.

Faith



John: I'm not an agnostic but I enjoy studying all the different religions. There's 477 different religions and I love reading about them all. Some of them I don't agree with, some of them I do.

Coping with isolation and loneliness

Neighbors

Many had lived in their homes for decades, some almost their entire lives, and that connection with their home and surrounding network was valuable. Participants spoke of a range of interactions, from enjoyable, leisurely, small talk conversations, to neighbors who truly acted like an extended family, bringing meals, taking participants to appointments and acting as a regular monitoring system for the elderly respondents.

Alan: I think the biggest part of old people of survival, of surviving, is your neighborhood because once what we have, we're in an area where it's all mostly people on old age pension at least and we look out for each other you know. Now if we overslept in the morning or something happened and the neighbors didn't know we were going to be away they'd be checking to see if anything is wrong. That type of thing. So we don't feel isolated in any way.



Coping with isolation and loneliness

Pets



Pets brought much comfort and companionship for many seniors. For many, they currently had pets that at times ensured they remained in contact with others, as one gentleman regularly walked his dog and as such, remained in touch with his neighbors. For others, it was a supportive being in their home. Some seniors even indicated they were reluctant to leave/move from their current homes, despite challenges staying there, as it would mean giving up that companionship.

The depth of this bond is best stated by Brenda:

He's therapeutic. That's the word I would use for him, as well as: all in all, that's how I manage him. In return, he gives me love and affection which I miss from getting from my children of course and my husband. So either way he's just like a therapeutic pill.

Coping with isolation and loneliness

Telephone and internet

The telephone is a familiar tool for this group of seniors, and many used it regularly to stay in touch with friends and family. Most also indicated they had access to the internet and a computer. Some technology was at times overwhelming for some, making them reluctant to try it. Those who used technology found they could stay in touch in a better format, such as through Zoom and attending groups or using WhatsApp to play scrabble with a family member in another country. One gentleman in a higher age category, used an app daily on his phone to remind him to take his medications and was happy to also use it to remain in touch with others.



Coping with isolation and loneliness

Hobbies and volunteering

A wide variety of hobbies were mentioned as a means of passing the time, either past or present. Included were woodworking, photography, knitting, line dancing, golfing and cooking (the last was mentioned quite often by men).

Many seniors also spoke of either currently volunteering, or wanting to volunteer. This is in keeping with the literature where activities that are productive are more meaningful.

Yup, so I can do anything to help inspire, whatever they want to call it, I'll do it. Oh dear. So I told the people at Meals on Wheels, I don't mind talking to these ladies today since that makes me feel like I'm helping them. I always had liked to try and go around and deliver some meals like they do, that would be great. (Cora)



Coping with isolation and loneliness

Meals on Wheels

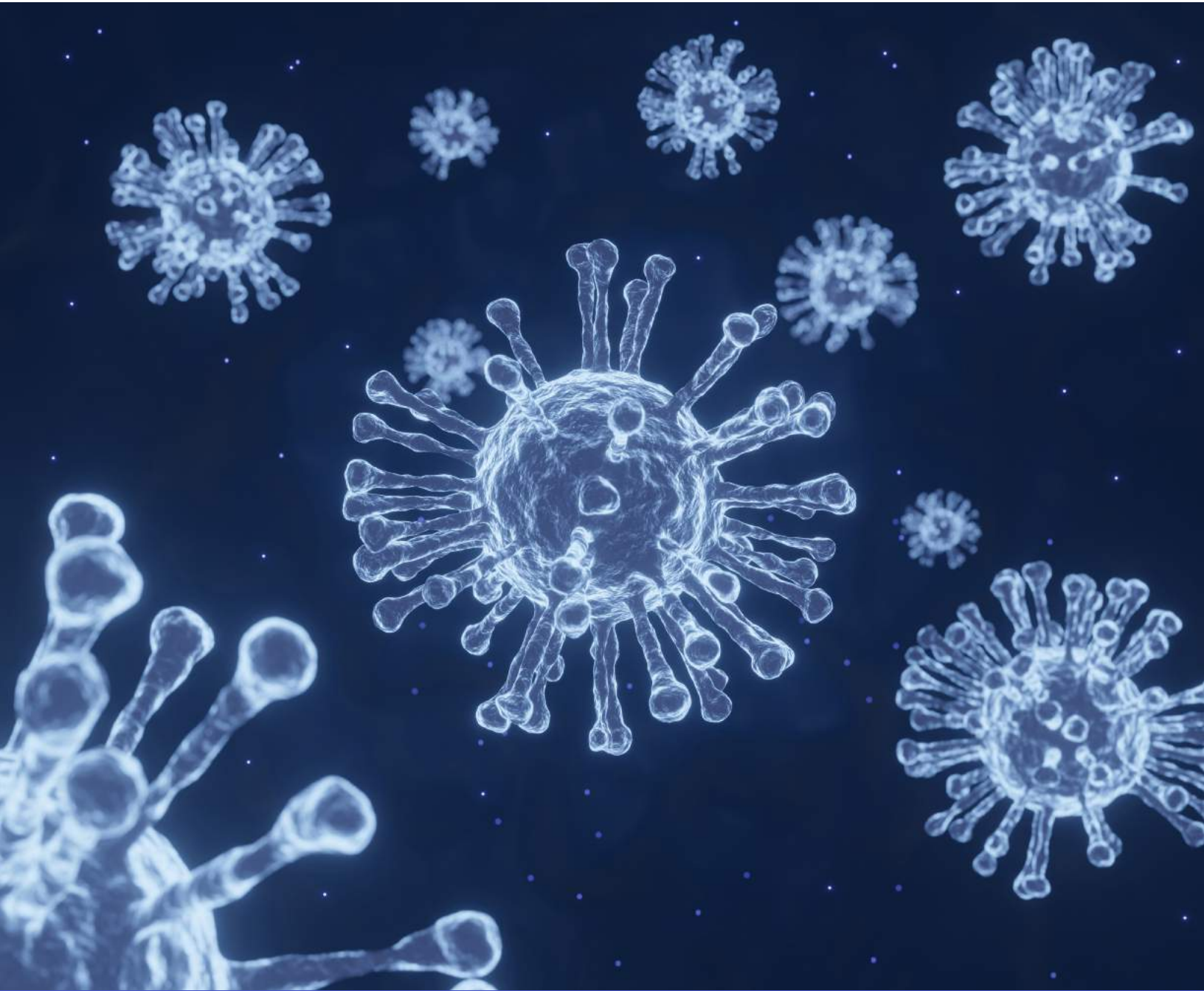


Most participants were current recipients of meals as provided by Meals on Wheels. The discussion would then often turn to the importance of this organization. Participants indicated they were pleased with the quality of food and with the recent addition of a dietician but most of all, talked about the importance of the contact with those who delivered the meals. Given the pandemic, as well as how busy these volunteers are, participants indicated the interactions were not always lengthy, but they were of utmost importance. Some described it almost like Christmas, waiting for their meal to be delivered:

Cora: we're like 2 little kids, even though you have a plan here, you know what's coming, it's kind of a treat to see what "oh I wonder what we're having today" (in excited voice).

For others, it was their lifeline when they were dealing with depression and anxiety:

I'll tell you, having the Meals on Wheels people coming, and a lot will stand at the door until you open it. That used to irritate the piss out of me, but it's really nice. (Emilia)



PRESENCE OF COVID

DID THINGS CHANGE?

Subtle changes

All participants were asked if covid and the pandemic had impacted them, and if so, how. Many indicated there were fewer groups and activities to attend, fewer people were visiting them and there were fewer outings to visit others. Even subtle changes were noted, such as apartment hallways being eerily quiet.

No changes

Perhaps most telling, however, was how many described that their lives had not changed much at all. As best described by Colton:

It hasn't really affected me at all... Because this is a selfish thing to say, but it's an equalizer.... Well, I'm already living a life that they now have to live. In other words, I'm in my apartment, I don't really go out. People now have to isolate. Though it's fine for me, I've learned to adapt to it. But it's hard for the rest of the population because they've never experienced it before.



CONCERNED TO GO OUT?

Some concerns

Some expressed having concerns in currently going out, or if potential new activities were to be developed. One participant was immunosuppressed due to cancer medications and a couple indicated going out was somewhat stressful, having to ensure wearing a mask and washing hands properly.

Not really concerned

However, a majority of participants said they were not overly concerned:

No, I get a mask and I put it on. No, I'm not scared of it. We're gonna go some day, I've lived quite a while now. I don't want to die with that, no one wants to die, but I find if people help each other [we'll be ok].

(Beatrice).

Well I don't really worry about it because in my mind I kind of sense that I've already lived more than half my life so if I did get it and I died it would not be a great loss. In the sense that I've already lived more than half my life so I don't worry about dying with the covid but the inconvenience has bothered me.

(Brenda)



IMPACT?

Especially difficult for this age group

Seniors recognized the importance of staying safe and healthy in these times, but were also keenly aware of the sacrifices they had to make, including a loss of independence at times:

No, I don't worry about things like that. I've survived 5 bouts of cancer. I take the precautions and do what you're supposed to do and whatever happens after that. But we're forced into it at this point. (Alan)

For those with loved ones in nursing homes, the impact was especially challenging. Luke's wife has been in a nursing home for several years due to dementia, and he had not seen her for 5 months. She is unable to speak and rarely opens her eyes. Having window or phone visits are not effective. He was especially at a loss and frustrated:

Every family in New Brunswick has been given their right to get together, to hug, to eat together whatever and even family members from another province can come over and hug and whatever and nursing home residents are never mentioned. We are families too. How come nursing home residents and their families can't get together and hug like anybody else, like other families.





Environmental Scan



Interventions around the world

An environmental scan was undertaken, looking at interventions that are currently, or have in the past, been employed around the world as a means of alleviating social isolation and loneliness among seniors. In keeping with the literature, interventions that are found to be successful are those that are adaptable (adapted to local context), developed with all relevant stakeholders involved and are those that are productive. The following will describe several for different categories and is by no means an exhaustive list. Many, many more resources are available and could be used in one's community if deemed to be appropriate for that location.

Transportation

The seniors in Fredericton identified transportation as a barrier to attending social activities, or even life-saving medical appointments. Many communities have attempted to address this issue, including rural communities here in New Brunswick.

Type: Volunteer Drive Program

Description: Thanks to our volunteers, we are able to provide low cost transportation. This makes it possible for residents to travel to needed doctor visits, shop for food, complete errands and access education and employment opportunities.

Organization: Charlotte Dial-a-ride

Link: <https://charlottedial-a-ride.com/>

Undertaking a complete review of a community's transportation's resources is not an easy endeavour. Alberta has undertaken such a pursuit with the aim of assessing the needs of seniors and those with disabilities. This effort has been ongoing in New Brunswick as well.

Type: Provincial Transportation Needs Assessment

Description: Report on available transportation, as well as suggestions in moving forward

Organization: University of Alberta, Medically at Risk Driver Center (MARD).

Link: <https://www.ualberta.ca/medically-at-risk-driver-centre/media-library/transportation-needs-assessments/alberta-provincial-transportation-needs-assessment---alberta-2018.pdf>

Name: Dr. Trevor Hanson, University of New Brunswick

Description: Several publications looking at volunteer driver programs in rural New Brunswick

Link: <https://scholar.google.ca/citations?user=B6W35fQAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao>

Hobbies

Discussions included many, many hobbies that seniors had either had in the past, currently enjoyed, or saw themselves enjoying in the future. There are numerous resources present to assist in

developing relevant groups or individual hobbies that any senior can participate in, in the comfort of their home or in the presence of others in a group setting.

Type: Men's sheds

Description: Men's sheds were first developed in Australia and many publications have studied the proper development of such a program, which now exist all over the world.

Organization: Men's sheds

Link: <https://mensshed.org/>

Type: Variety of hobbies

Description: there is a plethora of websites with lists of hobbies that might be relevant for seniors.

Organization: various

Link: <https://www.telecare24.co.uk/blog/7-hobbies-try-retire/>

<https://sixtyandme.com/list-of-hobbies-for-women-over-50/>

<https://www.55places.com/blog/the-ultimate-hobby-guide-50-hobbies-for-seniors>

Intergenerational programs

Intergenerational programs have been found to be beneficial for both parties involved. The seniors in this project indicated they were open to getting to know people of different ages. These programs can include seniors and school aged children being pen pals, or university aged students tutoring seniors on the use of technology, among others.

Type: Nursing Homes Without Walls

Description: A student has created a group of university students who provide companionship and assist with small errands to a group of seniors in Port Elgin, NB

Organization: Mount Allison student/partner with homes without walls

Link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/seniors-students-port-elgin-rural-hannah-crouse-brenda-trafford-1.5729334>

Type: Intergenerational living

Description: The Ville In Fredericton has piloted a program to assist with matching university students to live with seniors.

Organization: The Ville

Link: <https://www.theville.ca/igennb>

Type: Intergenerational education program

Description: A grade 6 class has moved their classroom full time into a long-term care home.

Organization: iGen program, Saskatchewan

Link: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/saskatoon-care-home-students-seniors-1.4171294>

Pets/animal therapy

The seniors often spoke fondly of the pets they currently had, or of pets they had in the past. Some had indicated they had moved to apartments and were no longer able to have pets, or that they would never consider moving to an apartment for fear of losing their pet. They spoke of the bond they had, of the companionship these pets provided, giving them a sense of purpose and responsibility.

type: Meal assistance program for pets

Description: This program provides food for the senior's pets, which in turn they feel offloads an economic stress on many seniors. Some seniors go without food in order to feed their pets.

Organization: Animeals

Link: <https://thebark.com/content/animeals-wheels>

The following are resources that show the importance of pets for seniors and how to support them in this care.

Type: Assistance for seniors with pets, or pets of a senior age

Description: Elderdog is a national charitable organization. It assists seniors with pets, ageing pets, supports the human-animal bond and supports research on furthering these pursuits.

Organization: Elderdog

Link: <http://www.elderdog.ca/>

Technology

Most seniors spoke of having access to the internet and some form of technological device they used to stay in touch with others, however some did indicate they found some elements of technology intimidating. The following includes some courses seniors can take to increase their technology literacy, advocates for seniors and technology, as well as use technology to gain new knowledge in general.

Type: Tutorials, either in groups or one-on-one, to increase seniors ease with technology. These tutorials are available to all Canadians.

Description: Connected Canadians uses a customized, hands-on learning centred approach. Volunteers with a high comfort level in technology are paired with senior clients. Working side-by-side, either one-on-one or in group workshops, they tackle clients' various technology challenges, frequently learning together in real time.

Organization: Connected Canadians

Link: <https://www.connectedcanadians.ca/mission>

Type: online educational courses for seniors

Description: U3A Online is an individual, independent and autonomous U3A. U3A Online offers many other useful resources for older people, especially those who are geographically, physically or socially isolated.

Organization: University of Third Age

Link: <https://www.u3aonline.org.au/home>

Volunteering

Many seniors spoke of how they had volunteered in the past, or hoped to volunteer in the future. They also spoke of having participated in activities in the past that were run by volunteers, which at times had led to long-lasting relationships.

Type: Getting seniors to volunteer

Description: "Volunteer Canada has developed a variety of tools and resources that explore the opportunities and barriers to effectively engage older adults. We are in a very fortunate position, as there now exists a large and highly talented group able to contribute to their communities and nurture the spirit of civic engagement in Canada."

Organization: Volunteer Canada

Link: <https://volunteer.ca/index.php?MenuItemID=342>

Type: directory of volunteer programs for seniors in Canada

Description: Charity Village is an updated directory of volunteer programs available for seniors, some virtual, some in person

Organization: Charity Village

Link: https://charityvillage.com/search/#results/601abe00f3f055790f22f9e1?kw=&page_num=1

Telephone

The telephone was something all seniors were very familiar with and used regularly to stay in touch with others. Many programs that were identified as useful were either as befriending services that called on seniors, or were described as programs "without walls". At times these included group chats on a variety of topics, or a way for seniors to access resources.

Type: telephone support network in New Brunswick

Description: 211 connects people with the appropriate information and services to enhance Canada's social infrastructure and enable people to fully engage in their communities. 211 is confidential. You will not have to give your name or personal details.

Organization: United Way

Link: <https://211.ca/>

Type: Without walls program

Description: This is a phone in program that allows participants to join in on calls on health and wellness, educational lectures, musical performances, among others. It works just the same as attending a class or a lecture at the centre, but instead it is facilitated over the telephone.

Organization: The Good Companions

Link: <https://thegoodcompanions.ca/programs-services/seniors-centre-without-walls/>

Groups for women and men

The participants certainly had a lot of similarities between genders, but also some differences. It seems there is an importance for both to interact, and at times for them to have time with those of the gender they identify with. Below are some groups created for each.

For women:

Type: Group for women in Ontario

Description: a formal group of women aged 55 and over. They discuss and support a variety of women's issues such as older women in the workforce and combatting ageism and sexism in the media and governmental programs.

Organization: Older Women's Network of Ontario

Link: <http://olderwomensnetwork.org/whoweare/history>

For Men:

Type: cooking group for men

Description: This is a group funded by AgeUK and brings together men in a supportive environment to learn to cook and eat wholesome food

Organization: Kitchen Kings

Link: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/healthy-eating/kitchen-kings/>

Social prescribing

PATIENT NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

As discussed in the literature review, social prescribing is based more from a medical perspective, with generally a physician writing a prescription to a senior who is either isolated, lonely or at risk of such things. They are then, ideally, directed to a navigator who interviews them, directs them to relevant community resources, and reassesses to make sure that intervention was the correct course of action.

Type: Social prescribing program in Ontario

Description: Ontario is the first to formally develop a social prescribing program in Canada. In the spring of 2020, they released the results of their pilot project and next steps.

Organization: Alliance for Healthier Communities

Link: <https://www.socialprescribingnetwork.com/>

MD: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Community-led groups

Addressing social isolation and loneliness is most definitely something which can be assisted by the involvement and championing by local community groups. They are those local representatives who are most educated on the issues their community members face, and have an indepth working knowledge of the resources that are available. Many, many communities have become the champions for those in need.

Type: Community-led coordination of seniors' services

Description: The city of Hamilton developed a Hamilton Seniors Isolation Impact Plan (HSIIP). The goal of this program is to measurably reduce isolation among seniors and build the community's capacity to "identify, reach and connect isolated seniors-preventing isolation in the future.

Organization: Hamilton Seniors Isolation Impact Plan

Link: <https://socialisolation.ca/>

Community-led initiatives can be supported by national programs whose goals in reducing isolation and loneliness are similar.

Type: National organization aimed at helping seniors live with dignity

Description: "The HelpAge Canada Mission is to work in partnership with others to improve and maintain the quality of life of vulnerable older persons and their communities in Canada and around the world.

Organization: Help Age Canada

Link: <https://helpagecanada.ca/>

General Resources

Addressing isolation among seniors can also serve to address isolation among vulnerable groups in general. Below are some resources that can be used to decrease isolation in general

Type: a form of "psychological first aid" for the general public

Description: This is a course developed by Red Cross aimed at increasing techniques to help Canadians better identify and address issues related to stress and mental health for themselves and others around them.

Organization: Red Cross

Link: <https://www.redcross.ca/blog/2020/8/how-canadians-have-benefitted-from-taking-psychological-first-aid>



How Canadians have benefitted from taking Psychological First Aid

For a lot of us, this pandemic has changed how we experience day-to-day stress. People from across the country have been using our online Psychological Fir...

General Resources

Addressing isolation among seniors can also serve to address isolation among vulnerable groups in general. Below are some resources that can be used to decrease isolation in general

Given the pandemic resulted in lockdowns, meaning the need to stay away from friends and family for many in Canada and around the world, the experience of being lonely and isolated from others is now something many can relate to. That experience of being isolated is being shared in order to build empathy and understanding for all.

Type: discussion on loneliness

Description: a website where people can share their experiences. It is a place to gain support and reduce the stigma related to being lonely.

Organization: The loneliness project

Link: <https://thelonelinessproject.org/>



Videos

Finally, these are a collection of videos that serve to bring to light the human experience of being isolated and lonely, as well as interventions that have been employed to assist in alleviating this matter.

Type: Grocery bus

Description: A free bus is organized to pick up and drop off seniors with volunteers joining them on the bus and helping them shop at a local grocery store

Organization: The Good Companions

Link: <https://thegoodcompanions.ca/community-support-services/grocery-buses/>

Video: <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/features/regional-contact/regional-contact-archive?clipId=1633213>



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Videos

This video is a great summary of how, if a community works together, employing a variety of interventions in a coordinated effort, a real change can be felt by the individuals and the community at large.

Type: Community coordinated effort in addressing isolation and loneliness

Description: A town in the UK made it its mission to identify and connect isolated seniors by coordinating their efforts, mostly led by a physician.

Organization: Community in UK

Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-43704181>



The town with a plan to end loneliness

How one community works together to stop people feeling isolated

 BBC News / Apr 10, 2018

The issue of seniors's social isolation is complex. There are many social, economic, cultural and individual causes that contribute to a person's isolation. Solutions need to be adapted to the community and organization. They also need to be tailored to meet different individual preferences and needs. Efforts should be made to create programs that have many paths that can be customized for each person. We will all gain by helping seniors remain connected to their communities.

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