

What is social isolation?

Someone who is socially isolated does not have many social contacts and interactions with friends, family and others.¹ Many older adults report feeling socially excluded and a recent report indicated that 20% of Canadian seniors, pre-COVID-19 pandemic, did not have a single person to reach out to in case of emergency.²

Risk factors for social isolation in seniors³

Social isolation may result from a major event or a combination of small events, making it difficult for seniors to cope.¹ Factors include:



Health and disability: Having physical/mental health issues; multiple chronic health problems; age-related conditions; mental illnesses.



Knowledge and awareness: technology challenges; lack of information about available services; lack of awareness or access to community services or programs.



Life transitions: loss of a spouse; loss of sense of community; disruption of social networks; lack of family and friend supports; loss of driver's license; entry into care; living in a nursing home.



Social relationships: low quality of relationships; having no children or contact with family; living alone; not being married or common-lawed; loss of friends and social network.



Gender identity: Individual & environmental risk factors are linked to social isolation in LGBTQ+ seniors.



Ethnicity: Immigrant and refugee seniors are generally lonelier than older Canadians.²

Signs that someone might be socially isolated⁵

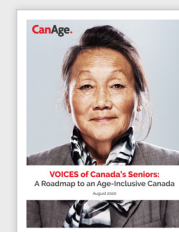
- Deep boredom, general lack of interest and withdrawal.
- Losing interest in personal hygiene.
- Poor eating and nutrition.
- Significant disrepair, clutter and hoarding in the home.

Mental health consequences

We need academic and community-based research to better understand how older adults' mental health presents, and differ from, that of younger people. Studies show that:

- A major consequence of social isolation is poor mental health.
- Social isolation is linked to increased levels of depression and suicide.⁴
- One quarter of seniors suffer from a mental health problem (i.e., depression, anxiety, dementia).⁴
- For adults 65 and older living in the community, 10-15% live with depression. For seniors living in retirement homes, this number is greater than 44%.⁴
- Over 50% of seniors over 80 identify as feeling lonely. ⁴

Seniors experience the highest degree of loneliness and social exclusion of any age group. Canada needs to confront its current epidemic of loneliness head-on. Investments need to be made. CanAge addresses this issue and makes recommendations in its **VOICES of Canada's Seniors: A Roadmap to an Age-Inclusive Canada.**



www.CanAge.ca/voices

References

1. Social isolation of seniors: a focus on new immigrant and refugee seniors of Canada. Employment and Social Development Canada. (2018)
2. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2018001/article/54977-eng.htm>
3. Wister, A. et al. Who's at risk and what can be done about it. A review of the literature on social isolation of different groups of seniors. National Seniors Council (2017).
4. Wister, A. et al. Report on the social isolation of seniors. National Seniors Council. (2013).
5. Frank, D. The danger of social isolation. AARP (2018) <https://www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2018/social-isolation-symptoms-danger.html>



Thank you to Rebecca Lau and Jasmine Wen of **Stay In Touch** for assisting with this material. www.stayintouchinitiative.com