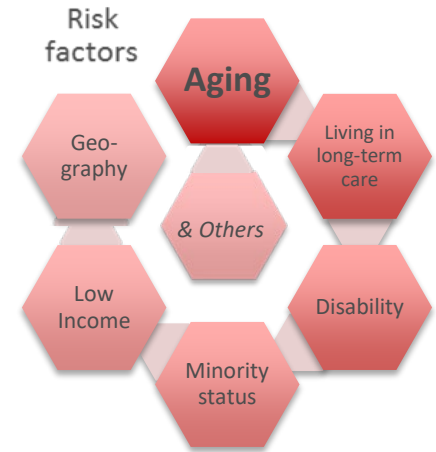


There is no “one size fits all” definition of SOCIAL ISOLATION

- ◊ Infrequent participation in social activities
- ◊ Having few social contacts
- ◊ Feeling lonely
- ◊ Feeling as though you don’t belong to any particular groups
- ◊ Lack of satisfaction with the quality of the relationships you possess

Defining social isolation by any single measure oversimplifies the condition. It is possible to have only a few social contacts, yet experience social connectedness or conversely feel quite lonely despite having dozens of friends! To fully appreciate that people present with any number and constellation of these symptoms in varying degrees of severity, social isolation is defined by the combination of these factors. It is necessary to also consider unique individual differences that impact how these symptoms are experienced, and how particular risk factors or their combination shape its expression. Examples might be a person with early dementia, living in a rural setting, who experiences the loss of a partner, or a person with a disfiguring disability with no local friends or family.



Older adults are disproportionately affected by social isolation due to significant life changes associated with **AGING**. These changes include but are not limited to reduced health or mobility, age related cognitive decline, moving into assisted or long-term care housing, retirement/reliance on fixed incomes, loss of spouse and friends, or barriers to access resources and technologies.

SOCIAL ISOLATION among older adults in Canada

- 16%** Feel socially isolated
- 17.3%** Feel excluded
- 5-8%** Indicate never or rarely having someone to listen to them or receive advice from
- 6%** Report never or rarely participating in enjoyable activities with friends or family

Global estimates of social isolation in older adults range from 5-39% across Europe, 7-17% in Australia, to 22-28% in the USA

Together, a rapidly aging population (doubling by 2025) and indications that social isolation is rising (i.e. increase in single dwelling households, smaller social networks as you age) suggest a looming crisis given the health consequences of the condition

SOCIAL ISOLATION is detrimental to health and quality of life

Predicts all cause mortality rates ON PAR with the effects of smoking, obesity, or high blood pressure as a consequence of

- Elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol
- Reduced immune system response to infection
- Poor quality of sleep
- Increased risk for heart attack
- Compromised cognitive function
- Increased susceptibility to dementia
- Increased risk for depression and suicide
- Greater risk for falls and emergency room visits

There is no “one size fits all” solution to the *wicked* problem of SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social isolation is a *wicked* problem because the outcomes often perpetuate the problem itself, people are difficult to (or do not want to) be accessed, and it is likely underreported because of the stigma associated with being lonely or isolated. Therefore, solutions must be multifaceted; consider the individual but also the environment, policy, and other factors that may reduce the risk of social isolation for vulnerable populations like older adults. Technologies such as the internet, social media sites, video conferencing, digital gaming, robotics, virtual reality, telehealth, innovative policies, modifications to city’s built environment, and assistive devices may all help reduce social isolation. Solution must be designed in the context of the final users such as its usefulness, ease of use, affordability etc.

Some Tips on Designing Solutions for SOCIAL ISOLATION for older adults

- Consult and involve older adults when identifying the problem(s), need(s), and possible solution(s)
- Leverage community resources already in place
- Collaborate with stakeholders to co-create technology, policy and service solutions
- Consider social, economic & cultural barriers to adoption
- Rely on input and support from health care professionals
- Consider multiple, targeted interventions
- Think about how already adopted technologies might be repurposed
- Training & support can make or break technology adoption in older adult populations

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