

SENIORS FACT SHEET

Enhancing Social Support for Seniors Living in BC

Although it is important for seniors to “age in place,” they must also be able to leave their homes, carry out daily activities, engage in their community and visit friends and family. Supportive services that prevent isolation are a key determinant of seniors’ quality of life, health and independence.

Social Support and Isolation

Lack of social support is as important to seniors’ health and mortality as other well-known risk factors like smoking, obesity and physical inactivity. Becoming isolated is linked to increased use of health care services and earlier entry into permanent residential care homes.

Seniors who are **more likely to be isolated** include:

- » Those who do not own their homes, are already in poor health, or have limited mobility;
- » Recent immigrants or people with language challenges;
- » Those who have just lost their job or retired, whose friend or spouse has died, or who cannot drive or access transportation;
- » Those who live alone: 36% of senior women and 17% of senior men in BC.

The best way to reduce isolation is to help seniors get out of their homes and into the community. This could include: group activities, shopping, time with friends and loved ones, and opportunities to build trusting relationships.

Neighbourhood houses, seniors and community centres, social service agencies, immigrant serving organizations and other non-profits are

The most successful approaches to combating social isolation help seniors get out of their homes and into the community.

well-positioned to deliver care because they understand the people they serve, particularly their language and cultural needs.

Success Stories

In Ontario, the provincial government subsidizes 260 seniors centres, reaching 160,000 seniors. A study of 26 of the centres found that:

- » Members of the centres access health promotion programs and a range of services, including foot care, sight and hearing clinics and fall prevention programs.
- » **Group dining, day trips and transportation are the most heavily used community services.**

In BC, the non-profit Seniors Transportation Access and Resources (STAR) gives financial and administrative support to agencies that provide transportation for seniors to community centres and social events, for grocery shopping, to pick up prescriptions, or attend appointments.

We want a province where our seniors can age with dignity and access public and community spaces as easily as the rest of the population. To achieve this vision, we have some work to do.

The provincial government should:

1 Invest in community-based organizations that provide social gathering spaces, outreach programs, communal meals and other social supports for seniors.

QUESTION FOR CANDIDATES Will your government establish a direct, low-barrier granting program that funds the operating costs of outreach and social programs for seniors?

2 Integrate health promotion and educational services (like fall prevention education and access to a public health nurse) into existing seniors and community centres.

QUESTION FOR CANDIDATES Will your government facilitate the integration of formal health care and other health promoting activities into existing seniors and community centres?

3 Ensure that a proportion of transportation spending is dedicated to tailored, affordable, accessible transportation options for seniors.

QUESTION FOR CANDIDATES What will your government do to ensure that transportation services appropriate to seniors needs are accessible across the province?

4 Increase access to home and community care services, especially home support.

QUESTION FOR CANDIDATES Will you increase access to non-medical home support services that help seniors to stay healthy and able to participate in their communities?



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