



Keeping Connected When There's a Language Barrier

Because of language barriers, many Metro Vancouver seniors of minority backgrounds face social isolation, limited awareness and access to community services.

Language and cultural barriers that impact social connections:

Language proficiency

15% of seniors living in Metro Vancouver speak neither French or English. This lack of fluency may pose a challenge to completing everyday tasks most of us take for granted, like cooking, shopping and managing finances.

Many non-English-speaking seniors are unable to locate or access programs and services, and may find it daunting to even leave their homes.

Relying on friends and family for support and to translate the world around them can strain interpersonal relationships and cause further social isolation.

Financial dependence on children

Newcomer seniors, especially those not eligible for Canadian benefits, sometimes become solely reliant on their adult children for support.

They may be afraid to set boundaries with their children for fear of having their financial support cut off. This increases the risk of elder abuse.

Discrimination and lack of cultural exchange

Without English language capacity, newcomers tend to be more comfortable connecting with others of a similar cultural background or language.

Lowered cultural exchange can foster a lack of interest or confidence in engaging with those of other cultures. This can put newcomers at odds with members of more prevalent or "majority" cultures, who might perceive newcomers' behavior as antisocial and secretive.

It can be hard to feel at home in a place of such seeming animosity. Newcomers may retreat into their homes to avoid potential confrontations.

Separation from family

Leaving friends and extended family behind to live in a new country can cause grief.

Without community support, this grief can lead to depression and social isolation.



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Helping seniors maintain social connections:



Provide support

- Your involvement and support as a family member, friend or neighbour can make a big difference to an isolated senior.
- Find out about helpful resources in your community through your Community Seniors Resource Guide.
- Consider outreach programs like Meals on Wheels, which help support socially isolated seniors.
- Hone your listening skills. Find resources that can help you talk to loved ones and others affected by aging. Talking about aging is unlikely to make seniors upset. They will probably appreciate the chance to discuss their problems.
- Identify signs of potential isolation or risks to health.

Encourage regular participation

- Help older adults build their social network and create a sense of community.
- Check out your Community Seniors Guide for activities that may be of interest.
- Encourage them to take part in a walking program or seek a walking companion.
- Educate seniors, family, friends and clients about active living programs, seniors' centres and transportation options for older adults.

Help seniors feel connected and valued

- For transportation options in your community, check out your Community Seniors Guide.
- Help older adults find information, programs and services to help them feel included and to meet their basic social needs.
- Help seniors find meaningful social connections.

Encourage activities to improve and maintain cognition

- Stimulate older adults' interest in enjoyable mental activities like socializing, crossword puzzles, mahjong, reading, Sudoku and playing cards.
- Encourage older adults to accept cognitive aging as a normal part of getting older and to find ways to work around it (write lists, set timers for appointments, and leave reminder notes where they'll be sure to see them).
- Encourage seniors to talk about cognitive changes with others. Friends and family may have great suggestions for strategies that work.