



Connecting Seniors: Exploring Risk Factors



Family
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NORTH SHORE
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FUNDED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S NEW HORIZONS FOR SENIORS PROGRAM. 



This booklet provides an overview of six risk factors for social isolation in seniors. Each section includes space for personal reflection on how risk factors might be displayed as well as actions you might take.

Allies in Aging collaborates to connect seniors across Metro Vancouver through leadership, outreach, transportation, training and advocacy. Four projects with over 25 partners are designed to connect seniors with people and services to reduce isolation.

Volunteer Impact project partners are working together to share their knowledge and expertise, develop a training curriculum, host training events, and hold a major conference. We believe effective training can help volunteers and service providers better identify seniors who are isolated, understand their needs and connect them with appropriate services and resources.

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Physical Health



- 42.5% of Canadians aged 75+ live with a **disability**.
- **Chronic pain** can be debilitating, stressful, exhausting and incredibly isolating.
- **Personal mobility** - Almost half of older adults report some type of difficulty with mobility.
- **Brain Injury or stroke** may cause changes in cognition and behaviour, posing significant challenges for families. Difficulties with social skills may result in avoidance of social contact.
- **Incontinence** can lead to embarrassment and social isolation.
- **Vision and/or hearing loss** – 40 to 50% of older adults experience poor eyesight and 46% have hearing loss.

What cues might you notice?

What actions may be helpful?

Mental Health



- **Depression** leads to reduced social skills and discomfort around others. 44% of seniors in residential care are diagnosed with, or show symptoms of depression.
- 5 to 13% of seniors perceive themselves to be living with ‘**a lot of stress**’ and **anxiety**.
- The highest rates of **hospitalization for anxiety** disorders in general hospitals are among those aged 65+.
- Being socially isolated from society can take a toll on mental health and lead a person to become depressed and consider **suicide**.
- Men 80+ have the highest suicide rate of all age groups.
- **Prescriptions** – almost half of BC seniors regularly take 3 to 6 medications daily.
- **Emergency room** visits for seniors can be greatly reduced with a multi-disciplinary team, and with education and support to better manage their chronic health challenges.

What cues might you notice?

What actions may be helpful?

Low Income



- 50% of seniors in Canada are living on **less than \$23,700 per year**, with the majority living alone.
- In BC over 52,000 seniors live on **\$16,300 per year or less**
- **Pensions** have not kept up with the costs.
- The **Guaranteed Income Supplement** has been unchanged since 1991.
- Many seniors are **house rich** and **cash poor**.
- **Housing** availability is at an all-time low in Metro Vancouver.
- Poverty inhibits access to **transportation** and social support and restricts participation in social activities.
- Many seniors lack **information** about the services available.

What cues might you notice?

What actions may be helpful?

Linguistic & Cultural Barriers



- 15% of Metro Vancouver seniors are **unable to speak English or French**. Many find it daunting to leave their homes.
- Many have difficulty managing daily affairs (e.g. groceries, transportation, medical, etc.)
- Greater **reliance on friends and family** for support can cause strain on interpersonal relationships.
- Many seniors for whom English is a second language have **no independent income**.
- Older adults may be afraid to say no to children fearing that financial support may be cut; increased **risk of elder abuse**.
- Low levels of inter-ethnic contact can lead to a lack of understanding of cultures different from one's own and an **"us versus them"** mentality.

What cues might you notice?

What actions may be helpful?

Caregivers



- 27% of caregivers ages 75+ spend **20+ hours per week care giving** with the vast majority caring for their spouse.
- Seniors **caring for those with dementia**, are at risk of isolation due to the demands of care giving, work and other duties.
- Many older adults caring for loved ones have never before reached out for support and are **unfamiliar with resources** available.
- **Many** feel they are the only one going through these challenges and **do not ask for help**.
- While **social connections and emotional support are** especially **important**, social activities often tend to decrease for seniors caring for loved ones.

What cues might you notice?

What actions may be helpful?

Transitions



- **Following the death of a partner**, grief can leave seniors more susceptible to health problems, depression and cognitive disorders.
- The **risk of** an elderly person **dying within 3 months** of their spouse is greatly increased.
- **Loss of Independence** - Frail couples may have maintained their independence by compensating for one another. Without their spouse, they may no longer be able to manage on their own.
- The **loss of a driver's licence** is often followed by depression, a loss of independence and quality of life. Access to a car affects a person's independence and social habits.
- The **thought of moving is traumatic**. It signals the end of an era and represents loss of control.
- **Aging in place can be isolating**. Some find they've become prisoners in their own homes, not seeing others for days and being surrounded by items gathered over many years.

What cues might you notice?

What actions may be helpful?

Thank you

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