

# SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS: THE OTHER PANDEMIC?

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# Outline



- Defining social isolation and loneliness
- Consequences and risk factors
- The COVID-19 impact
- Promising practices

# Defining social isolation and loneliness

- No universally accepted definitions and measures
- No universally accepted cut-offs to identify socially isolated or lonely individuals
- Numerous terms used interchangeably and inconsistently, particularly for social isolation



# Defining social isolation and loneliness

## Social Isolation

- objective situation
- absence of social network or small social network
- limited contact with social network

## Loneliness

- subjective experience
- unpleasant experience resulting from perceived mismatch between the (quantity or quality) of relationships we *want* compared to what we *have*

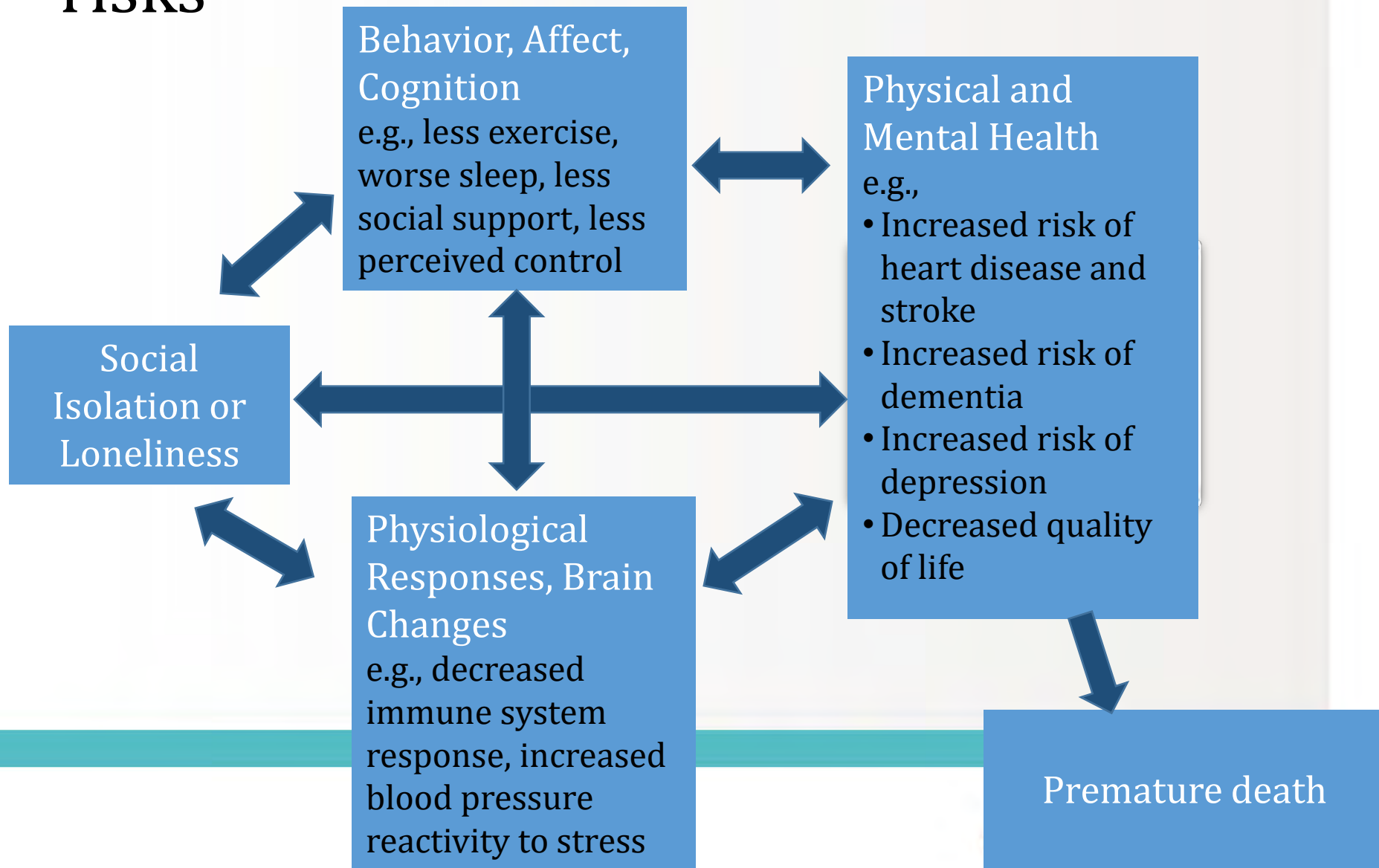
# Social isolation and loneliness are health risks

“... social relationships, or the relative lack thereof, constitute a major risk factor for health – rivaling the effects of well-established health risk factors such as cigarette smoking, blood pressure, blood lipids, obesity, and physical activity.” (House et al, 1988)

“The influence of social relationships on risk for mortality is comparable with well-established risk factors for mortality.” (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010)

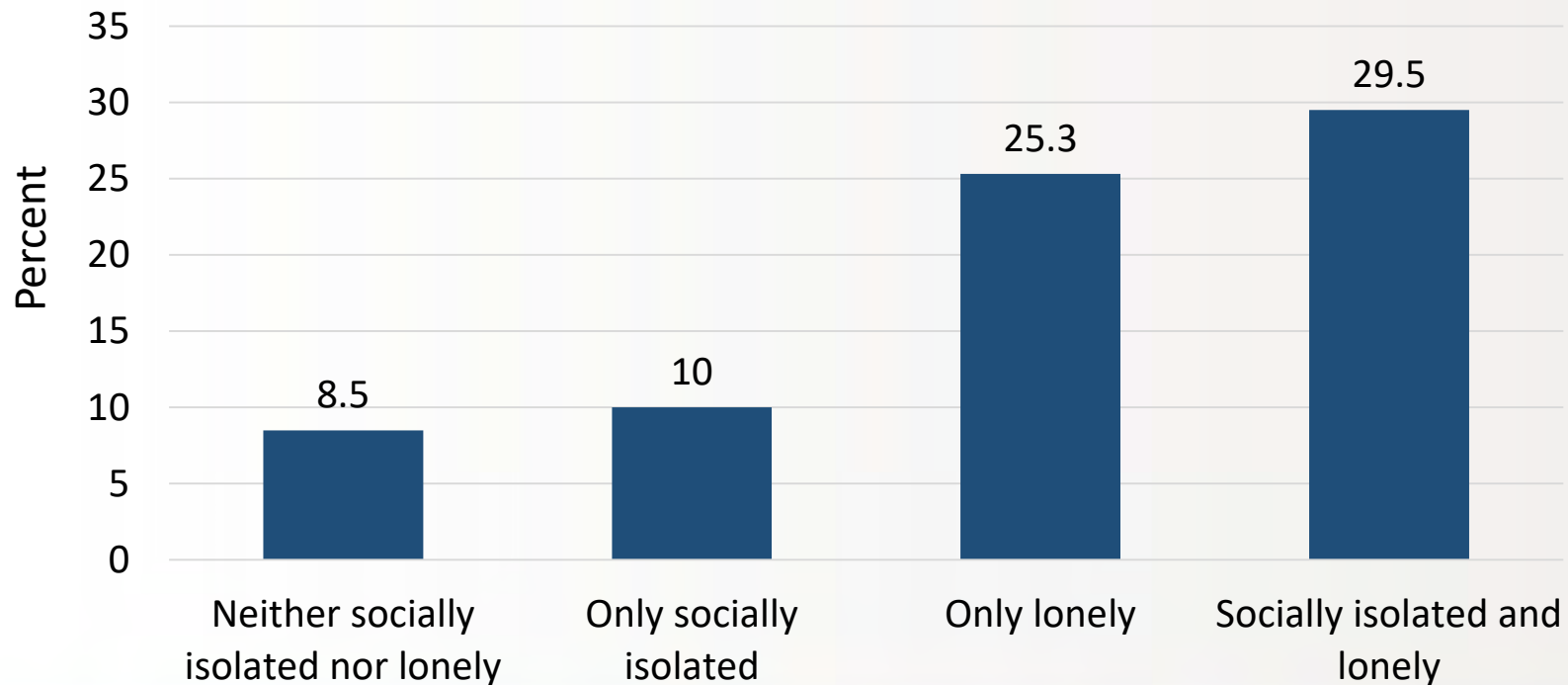


# Social isolation and loneliness are health risks



# For example, among Canadians aged 65+ ...

Percent reporting high psychological distress  
(18 months after baseline)



Data source: Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging; Menec et al., 2020

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# Risk factors for social isolation and loneliness

- Age
- Sex and gender
- Life transitions (e.g., widowhood, retirement)
- Physical and mental health (e.g., mobility challenges, hearing and vision problems)
- Low income
- Lack of transportation
- Low-income neighborhoods
- And many more



# Social isolation and loneliness are more common among some groups (2 examples)

8% of Canadians aged 65+ are socially isolated

10% of Canadians aged 75-85 are socially isolated

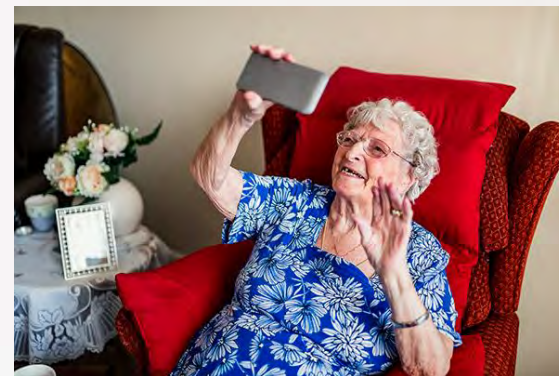
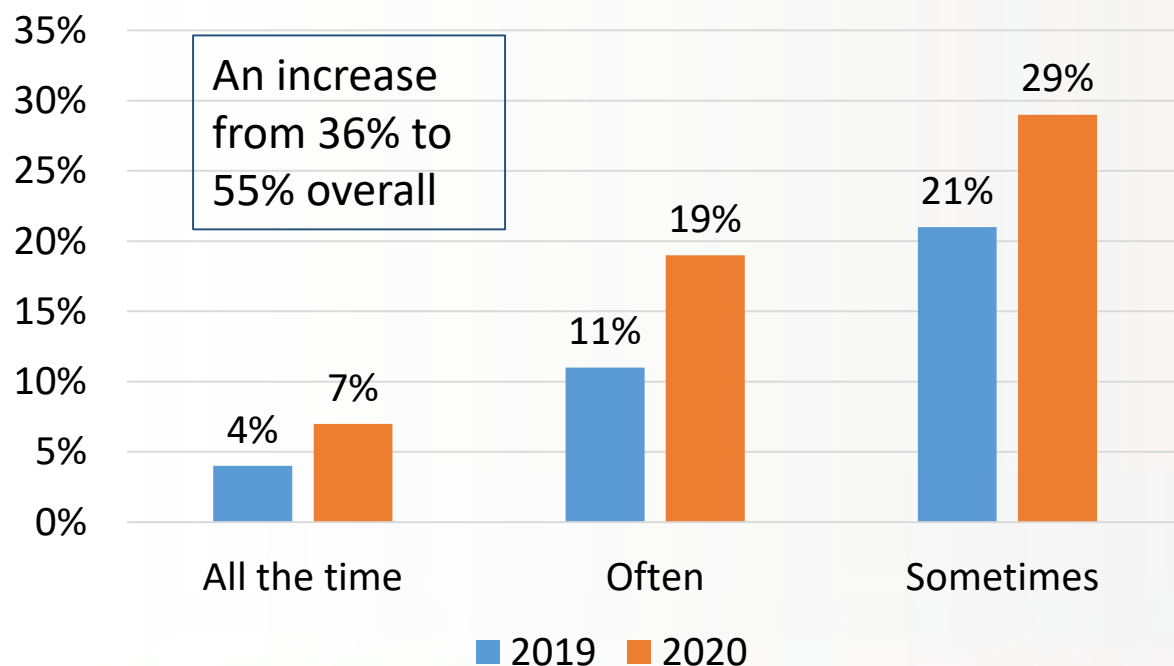
11% of Canadians aged 65+ report being lonely

33% of Canadian men who are widowed report being lonely



# From an in-person to a virtual world

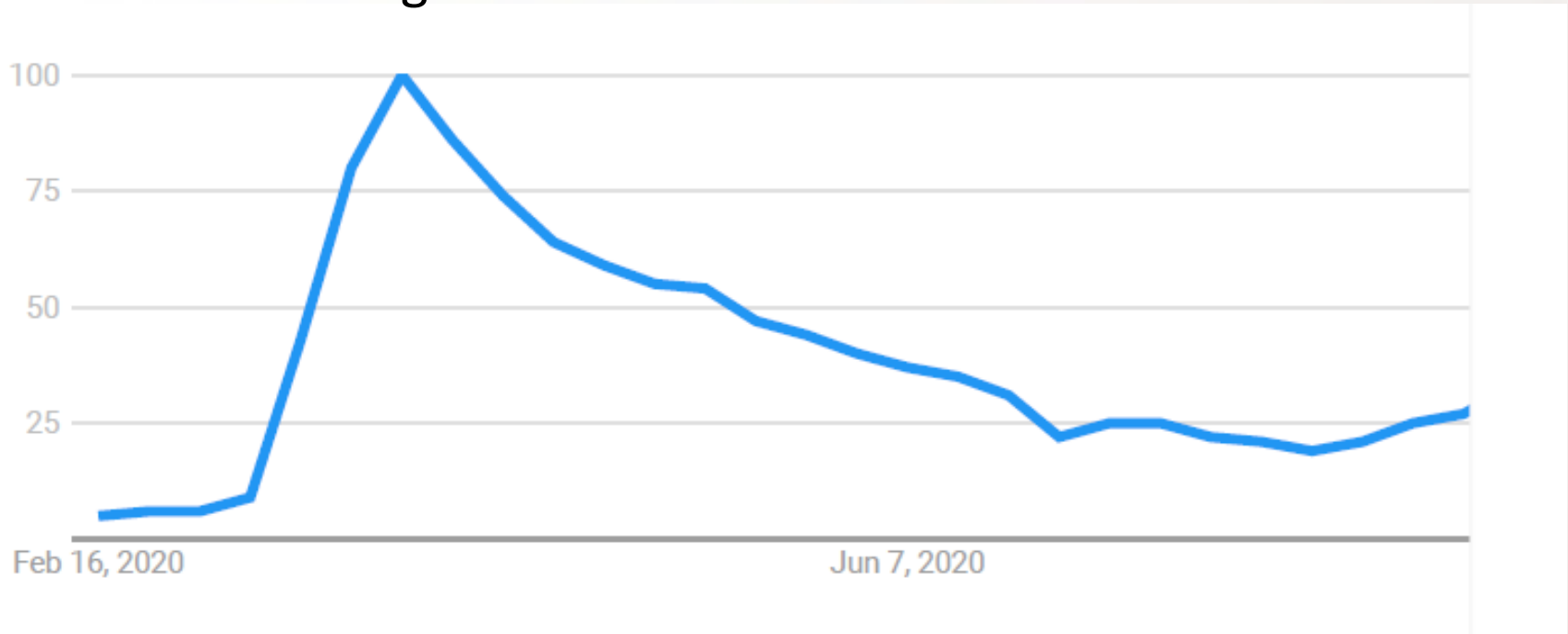
Use of video calling apps  
Canadians aged 55+



Source: Angus Read, 2020

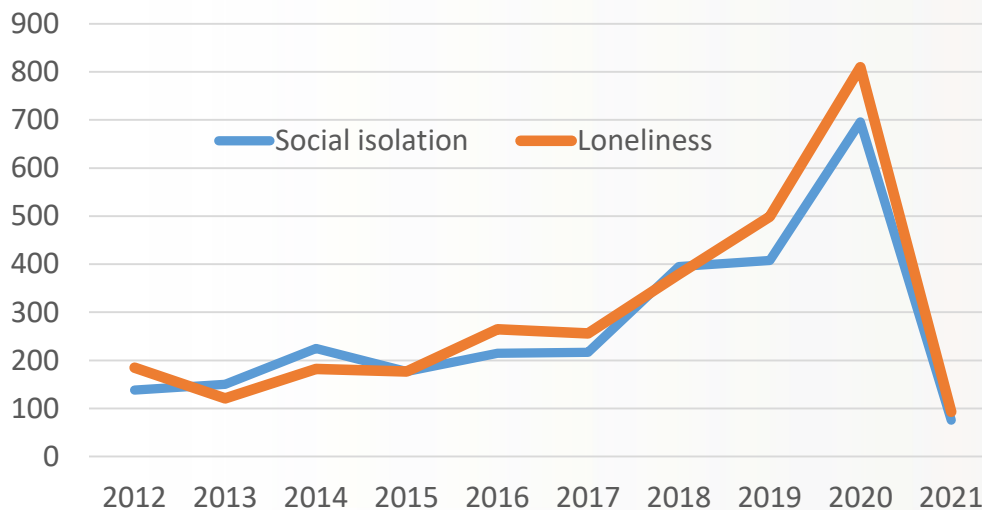
# From an in-person to a virtual world

Google Trend: Search term 'Zoom'



# Social and loneliness: The other pandemic?

EBSCOhost Search Results  
(not screened, includes duplicates)



## Is Extended Isolation Killing Older Adults in Long-Term Care?

Five months of COVID-19 lockdowns have created a mental health crisis

by Emily Paulin, AARP (<http://www.aarp.org>), September 3, 2020 | Comments: 56



COVID-19

Radio

**Sharing stories of loneliness can help connect people — perhaps now more than ever**



COVID-19

World

**Casual social contacts can help combat loneliness and improve well-being during pandemic, psychologists say**



## Do COVID-19 Patients Really Have to Die Alone?



By Dennis Thompson  
*HealthDay Reporter*

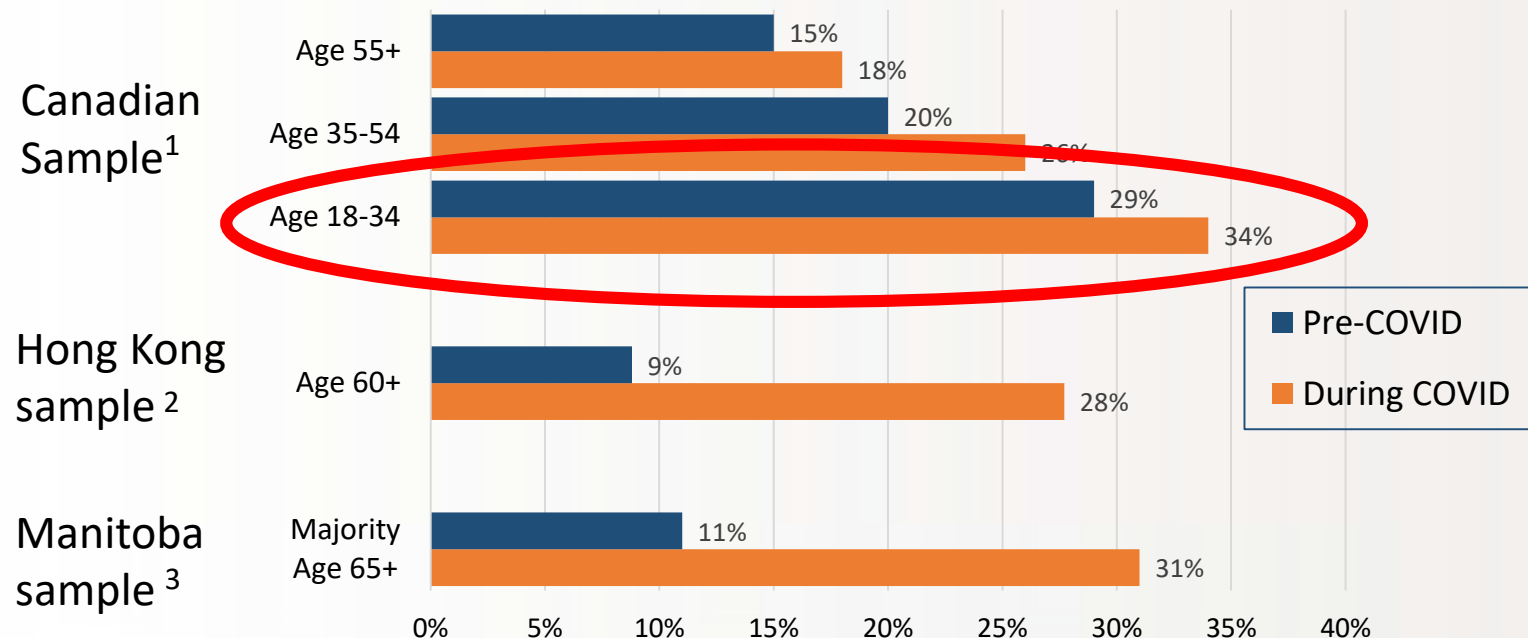
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# Social and loneliness: The other pandemic?

## Percent Lonely Pre-/During COVID



Sample sizes, methods, time frames, and definitions of loneliness vary across studies

1 Angus Reid, 2020; 2 Wong et al., 2020; 3 Menec, Newall, & Parker, 2020 unpublished data

# Resilience

“I feel that we’re one of the most fortunate groups there are, and we’ve been doing well as well. We haven’t lost a paycheque. We don’t have little kids we’re trying to educate or entertain or look after. So, I think, as a group, seniors are some of the most lucky people. Now, I’m lucky I have a partner, so I’m not totally socially isolated. That was difficult in the beginning.”

Quote by Winnipeg focus group participant (Menec, Newall, Parker, 2020, unpublished data)

“Since I’m bedridden, my life has not been affected by this pandemic. My caregivers continue to come and assist me. I am grateful for that.”

Quote by San Francisco Bay study participant who scored low on a loneliness scale (Kotwal et al., 2021)

# Increased inequities

- Access to computers/internet vs not
- Access to phone vs not
- Financially comfortable vs not
- Living with somebody vs not
- No/few health problems/disabilities vs having some or many problems
- Not being a caregiver vs being a caregiver
- Living in the community vs a nursing home
- And more



# Promising practices – Some examples



A & O: Support Services for Older Adults Inc.  
Active Aging in Manitoba  
Manitoba Association of Seniors Centres  
Transportation Option Network for Older Adults  
University of Manitoba

*The overarching goal of the project is to improve  
the social inclusion of vulnerable older adults in  
Winnipeg*

The project is funded by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program



# Promising practices – Online programs

## Welcome to PAL (55+)

Pembina Active Living (55+) is a charitable, seniors serving organization in South Winnipeg committed to enhancing the lives of all older adults.

[VIEW OUR CURRENT PROGRAMS](#)



y 2021

**MUN**

**TUE**

**WED**

**TH**

1

Older Adult Resistance/Weight Training-online  
Seniors Yoga: Intermediate-online

2

Tai Chi-all levels- online  
Zumba for Seniors-online

3

Seniors Yoga (online)  
Art-Arlene's Joy of Painting (online)

4

Art-Arlene's Joy of Painting (online)  
Older Adult Resistance/Weight Training-online  
Always Write-online  
Presentation (online)- Challenges Faced by Lake Winnipeg

5

Older Adult Weight Training (online)  
Beginner Qigong (online)



[Home](#) » [Calendar](#) » For 55+

## EVENTS FOR 55+

FEB 9

### Over the Rainbow - Email, Social Media & Privacy (ONLINE)

10:00am – 11:30am

Learn the basics of email, social media, and how to protect yourself online.

FOR 55+

FEB 10

### Over the Rainbow Coffee & Chat - ONLINE

10:00am – 12:00pm

Over The Rainbow's Coffee and Chat has moved online while Rainbow Resource Centre is closed. For more information and to join the online Coffee and Chat, please email Over the Rainbow at

[OTR@rainbowresourcecentre.org](mailto:OTR@rainbowresourcecentre.org).

FOR 55+

FEB 11

### Over the Rainbow Coffee & Chat - ONLINE

10:00am – 12:00pm

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FOR 55+

## What is Virtual Minds in Motion?

The Minds in Motion virtual version takes place on a ZOOM link for 1 hour and 30 minutes. It offers 6 weekly sessions that include a gentle chair fitness class followed by socially engaging activity and conversation. It is designed for people with early to moderate symptoms of dementia to attend with a family member or friend.

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# Promising practices – Online programs



*“We started doing our [exercise program] that we used to do at the Active Living Centre on Zoom. We do it six mornings a week. We chat every morning, and I think it was a real saviour that we can get and see and hear people every morning.”*

Quote by Winnipeg focus group participant (Menec, Newall, Parker, 2020, unpublished data)

*“I answered ‘left out’ because I do not have a working tablet to get on the internet from my apartment.”*

Quote by San Francisco Bay study participants with limited social interaction (Kotwal et al., 2021)

# Promising practices – Providing computer access and training

The Manitoba Association of Senior Centres, through the OWSEP New Horizons funds has purchased tablets and training for older adults who live in low-income senior housing. Tenant coordinators in the building provide support to get seniors online.



# Promising practices – Programs over the telephone



Support Services for Older Adults

## Senior Centre Without Walls

Established in 2009, A & O's Senior Centre Without Walls (SCWW) program was the first of its kind in Canada. The program provides free-of-charge educational and recreational programming over the phone.

**CELTIC MUSIC VOYAGE:  
PARTS 28 & 29**  
TUESDAYS, JANUARY 19  
& APRIL 27 - 11:00 AM -  
12:00 PM

### **MUSIC THERAPY**

*Presenter: Cindy Bass, BMT, MTA*

**GUIDED IMAGERY SESSION WITH ACCREDITED MUSIC  
THERAPIST CINDY BASS**

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 29 - 11:00 - 11:30 AM**

**DREAMS OF WARMER WEATHER - EXPLORING MEXICO**  
TUESDAY, APRIL 20 - 2:00 - 3:00 PM

**MAKING MAPLE SYRUP  
IN MUSKOKA**  
TUESDAY, APRIL 13 -  
10:00 - 11:00 AM



# Promising practices – Programs over the telephone



Support Services for Older Adults

- **Daily Hello** - a daily call-in program was provided in the early stages of the Covid lockdown to allow individuals to check in with others and increase social connection. The program also provided the opportunity to make sure they were able to access groceries, prescriptions, and other necessities.
- **Connect program** - an organized companionship and socialization program that matches community volunteers with isolated older adults 55+ - changed from in-person contact to over-the-phone contact.
- **311 Food Security Phone Line** – in partnership with the City of Winnipeg, older Winnipeggers who may be feeling isolated and in need of assistance can call 311 to be connected with a number of resources available through A & O, including information on accessing emergency food hampers, or specialized social services.
  - Over 1000 referrals were made to A & O between April and December, 2020

# Promising practices – Programs over the telephone



Support Services for Older Adults

Medical student volunteers are making phone calls to A & O clients.

## U of M students answer call to fill seniors social-distance gap

Going the Extra Mile By: Julia-Simone Rutgers

Posted: 5:08 PM CDT Monday, Apr. 13, 2020

Last Modified: 3:06 PM CDT Wednesday, Sep. 2, 2020



# Promising practices – Healthy aging programs



- **Take a Minute to Move radio campaign** - one-minute clips targeted at older adults to get active, in a safe way at home
- **Take a Minute to move TWOgether** - peer leaders call a socially isolated older person to do exercises together over the phone (or via video conferencing)
- **Healthy aging webinars**



# Promising practices – But do they work?

- Previous research shows benefits of online/telephone-based interventions/programming on outcomes, such as loneliness, well-being, and physical activity.

## **But**

- Many studies show no effects
- There are relatively few, good quality RCTs

(Examples of review articles: Jarvis et al, 2020; Chipps et al., 2017; Poscia et al., 2018; Ibarra et al., 2020; Forsman et al., 2017a; 2017b; Muller et al, 2014; **Williams et al., 2021**)

# Promising practices – But do they work?

- Preliminary research during Covid-19 shows some promising results:
  - Group zoom-based cognitive-behavioral therapy reduces loneliness and depression during Covid (Shapira et al., 2021)
  - Older adults who participated in zoom-based activities as a substitute for in-person activities during Covid enjoyed the content, especially physical exercise programs and lectures given by professionals (Cohen-Mansfield et al., 2021)
  - Student volunteers who made phone contacts with older adults felt the calls were well received and of benefit (Joogste et al., 2020; Office et al., 2020)

# Promising practices – But do they work?

## Relatively few studies with nursing home residents

- Robot dogs or seals show some promise (Williams et al., 2021)
- Video interventions with nursing home resident show some promise, but can also be challenging  
(Noone et al., 2020; Moyle et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2021)

‘Too much on the brain. Too complicated ... Press this one for that, and this little one for that. It’s just I’ve got to exercise my brain. And I’m thinking, what do I do next? ... my brain is worn out.’

(Quote by nursing home resident on the use of Skype on iPad, Moyle et al., 2020)

What promising practices  
do you see in your community?