

You are not alone.

A Guide to Improve Social Connectedness



DID YOU KNOW?

The social connections you make with other people are good for your health.

Social connections reduce stress by providing a sense of meaning, purpose and belonging.

INSIDE:

Reflect on your social connections

Understanding the risks

Additional resources within
the City of Waterloo

Help your neighbours, friends or family

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If you would like to access this online visit www.waterloo.ca/seniors

Gradually or suddenly, your social circle can become very small. Your social participation can drop. When this happens, you may start feeling **socially isolated**. Even if you maintain many social contacts, you may be experiencing a feeling of social disconnection. This is **loneliness**.

Read the stories below. As you review this guide reflect on how it could help someone in a similar situation.



MEET MARIA

Maria lived with her brother when she arrived in Canada a few years ago. He passed away unexpectedly last year. Now she lives alone. She has a part time job, but unsteady hours have made it difficult for her to pay rent every month.

She has no drivers license or access to public transit. She struggles to understand english, and avoids interactions that may expose her limited language capabilities. As a result, she has not sought out community services. Her niece Christina, sometimes helps with essentials and phone calls, but she's not around very often. Due to restrictions out of her control, she is no longer able to attend church and her weekly knitting group. To top it all off, she's begun experiencing worsening back and hip pain, and considers her health to be poor. Everyday tasks are becoming difficult to complete independently.



MEET DON

Don's wife passed away six months ago and he's having trouble adjusting to living alone. Since her passing he's stopped going to their monthly bridge game with the neighbours. Don's worsening vision keeps him from his old hobby of

woodworking and makes using technology difficult. Recently he's lost his license due to his vision issues and feels like he's forced to stay home. Don's adult children and grandchildren live in British Columbia, so his only social interactions are with his neighbours when the weather is nice. On a recent call, Don has shared with his kids that he feels lonely.

Do these stories sound familiar?

If you or someone in your life are experiencing a similar situation, please use this guide to learn more about social isolation and the resources available in our community to help build positive social connections.

The information contained in this Guide is intended for your general knowledge only and does not to take the place of medical advice. Information provided in this guide is current as of October 1, 2021 and is subject to change at any time. References, including additional information on social isolation can be found on www.waterloo.ca/seniors.

Get Started

Reflect on your social connections.



- ☐ Do you live alone?
- ☐ Are you an older adult? (>80 years old are at higher risk)
- ☐ Do you feel left out of things or lack companionship?
- ☐ Are you providing caregiving without adequate help?
- ☐ Do you have limited social support or feel as though you don't have a 'support person' in your life (i.e. someone that is available and responsive if you need something)?
- ☐ Do you feel disconnected from your community?
- ☐ Do you experience discrimination (i.e. based on race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc.)? All of these factors may contribute to social isolation and/or loneliness.
- ☐ Do you have limited contact with those in your social network?
- ☐ Do you live far away from friends, family, live in a Long Term Care home or in a rural or isolated community?
- ☐ Have you recently moved or are you a newcomer to Canada?
- ☐ Do you spend less time on leisure activities than you would like to?
- ☐ Are you experiencing or grieving a loss (person, home, job)?

Selecting more factors means it's more likely that you're experiencing disconnection.

Consider how the resources provided in this guide may help you or someone you know become socially connected.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many Indigenous and LGBTQ2+* older adults are at a far greater risk of exclusion and discrimination, factors that contribute to social isolation.

*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Two-Spirit and additional sexual orientations and gender identities.

DID YOU KNOW?

A residential move can increase your risk for social isolation as you are no longer close to the social and cultural supports you are familiar with.

For support with interpreting this guide, contact the KW Multicultural Centre at 519-745-2531. They support and assist the ethno-cultural and newcomer community in Kitchener-Waterloo through a broad range of programs and services.

Why Get Connected?

Understanding the Risks.

As an older adult, transitions present the greatest risk of becoming socially isolated. Events like losing your driver's license or having adult children move out can change your social habits and patterns dramatically.

As things change, it's important that we remember that social needs are basic human needs, just like hunger and thirst. If we neglect our social needs, it can lead to real harm.

What's the worst that could happen?

- Depression, anxiety and increased suicide risk
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Physical health decline (or poor general health)
- Increased risk of dementia
- Increased chance of early death
- Reduced quality of life
- Disability from chronic diseases (i.e. long lasting health issues such as arthritis, diabetes.)
- Caregiver and family stress
- Increased risk for elder abuse

"I am grateful for my niece who helped connect me with transportation services and I finally feel like I have some independence back."



DID YOU KNOW?

Elder Abuse is defined as a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person.

Elder abuse is considered both a risk factor and a consequence of social isolation. Being socially isolated can increase the risk that could lead to neglect as well as physical, emotional and financial abuse by others.

Ageing Well in Waterloo

Additional resources in your community.

Finding a sense of belonging in your community is important, and we're here to help. The City of Waterloo's *Ageing Well Directory* is a comprehensive list of resources for older adults residing in our city, available in print and online.

The Directory functions as a "one-stop-shop" for residents looking for information on:

- housing
- home support
- health services
- recreation and leisure
- ethnic and cultural supports
- and much more


When you need help, finding a safe place offering services and support can be overwhelming. Fortunately, there are many inclusive, accessible programs and services in Waterloo listed in the *Directory*.


"I had no idea where to go for help. If my neighbours hadn't been looking out for me, I would never have thought to visit my local Library branch. So it's been a real life-saver".



For a paper copy of the Ageing Well Directory, please contact the City of Waterloo at 519-579-1020. To view it online, visit <https://www.waterloo.ca/en/government/resources/Documents/Cityadministration/Aging-well-Waterloo-directory.pdf>

Connect with a neighbour, get involved in your neighbourhood!

 Call 519-747-8772

 Email neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca

 Visit waterloo.ca/neighbourhoods

Subscribe to the "Neighbourhoods helping neighbours" e-newsletter at waterloo.ca/subscribe.

8 Tips to Avoid Social Isolation:

Resources to help if you are struggling



The sooner you reach out, the better!

For assistance with navigating or getting connected to older adult support services within the City of Waterloo, contact Home Support Services at 519-579-6930.

1

Ensure your care needs are met and that you are properly managing health issues. Visit your doctor regularly. If you don't have a doctor, register through Health Care Connect at 1-800-445-1822 or www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/healthcareconnect/pro/

2

Complete essential daily tasks like meal preparation, dressing and shopping. If you need assistance, Home and Community Care Support Services can help connect you 519-748-2222 or visit www.healthcareathome.ca/ww/

3

Maintain a well-balanced lifestyle, eat well and stay physically active.

Get connected to your local recreation centre! Call 519-579-1020 or visit www.waterloo.ca/seniors

4

Use technology to connect socially or participate in programs virtually.

There are many programs and services within Waterloo that only require a telephone connection! WOW Waterloo offers social/recreational small group programs over the phone. For more information on this program and others, call 519-579-1020 or visit www.waterloo.ca/seniors

5

Make ends meet, pay your bills on time and secure suitable housing.

If you are struggling, trustworthy financial and housing support may be available. Contact the Region of Waterloo Service First Call Centre at 519-575-4400 or visit www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/contact-us.aspx

6

Access suitable and appropriate transportation services.

Contact Waterloo Home Support Services at 519-579-6930 or Grand River Transit customer service at 519-585-7555 or visit www.grt.ca/en/rider-information/using-specialized-services.aspx

7

Be mindful of changes with your mood, self-esteem, motivation, etc.

Create and follow a daily routine and stay positive. If you have any significant concerns about your mental or emotional well-being, contact HERE 24/7 at 1-844-437-3247 (HERE247) or visit here247.ca

8

You have the right to live in dignity and safety, free from abuse and neglect.

If you are experiencing elder abuse please reach out. Contact the Senior Support Team in Waterloo by calling 519-579-4607 or visiting www.wwhealthline.ca/displayservice.aspx?id=100727 or reach out to Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario by calling 1-866-299-1011 24/7 (available in 200 languages) or visiting www.eapon.ca/what-is-elder-abuse/help-for-seniors.

Please note, many of the 24/7 call centres listed are not emergency services.
If you are in need of immediate emergency support, please call 911.

Ontario 211

If the specific programs and services listed in this Guide are not what you are looking for, you can call Ontario 211 by dialing 211 on any phone.

This free 24/7 helpline offers a directory to community and social services in over 150 languages. You can also visit 211ontario.ca.



Help your neighbours, friends or family

Do you know someone who is isolated?

Not everyone experiences loneliness or social isolation in the same way or to the same degree. And change doesn't happen all at once: reestablishing engagement and connection to social networks and programs takes time. Let's look at the important role you can play as a neighbour, friend, caregiver or family member.

- Above all, be welcoming and respectful. Allow the individual to progress at a rate that's comfortable for them.
- Remember, recreation and socialization are only two of many factors that help prevent social isolation.
- Always consider any underlying basic needs such as income, housing, physical and mental health.

For support with interpreting this Guide in other languages, please contact the KW Multicultural Centre. Call 519-745-2531 or visit kwmulticultural.ca

Waterloo Wellington

Neighbours Program: hosted by the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington, aims to educate local community members to be change-makers by helping to identify vulnerable and at-risk older adults. To learn more contact 1-844-HERE 24/7 or email: wwneighboursinfo@cmhaww.ca

The best thing you can do?

Start a conversation! Here are some tips:



Be an active listener



Be patient, don't rush the conversation



Respect privacy



Allow personal choice and independence



Involve the person in planning and decision making



Attempt to understand or recognize barriers



Develop cultural awareness and be sensitive to diverse needs

A warm thank you to all who contributed

The City of Waterloo's Guide to Improve Social Connectedness was created as a resource for the community to better understand the implications of social isolation and how someone can get connected to local services. The information contained in the Guide is intended for general knowledge only and does not take the place of medical advice.

The full Guide would not be possible without the time and dedication of various organizations and community members. In collaboration with the Age-Friendly Waterloo Multi-Agency Committee, the development of the Guide was led by a working group, comprised of the following members:

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ADDENDUM ON

You are not alone.

A Guide to Improve Social Connectedness.

The Guide to Improve Social Connectedness is intended to offer general information and it not exhaustive of all local resources or information on the implications of social isolation. The following list of resources were utilized in the development of the Guide and are being provided as additional supporting documents.



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