

AGING MATTERS

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

PRIORITY AREA: SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT



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Goal:

To provide meaningful, accessible social engagement opportunities for all older Manitobans

Background:

Social engagement is an important contributor to healthy aging. A lack of social participation or social isolation puts people at increased risk of disability, heart disease, stroke, mental health problems, such as depression, dementia, and premature death. Social isolation is as much a health risk as other well-known risk factors, for instance, smoking or lack of physical activity. Socially isolated individuals also use more health care services than those who are more socially connected; they are more likely to have repeat hospitalizations and longer hospital stays.^[i]

Social participation rates decrease with age and older adults face an increased risk of being socially isolated. Being single or widowed, living alone, having less education, having low income or financial strains, and a lack of access to transportation are also risk factors for social isolation.^[ii]

Among older Canadians, 35% for women aged 65-74 and 32% of women age 75 or older would have liked to participate in more social activities in the past year. For men, the percentages were 31% for those in the 65-74 year age group, and 31% for those in the 75+ year age group, respectively. About a quarter (26%) of women aged 65-74 and almost a third (31%) of women aged 75 or older who would have liked to be more socially active had symptoms of depression. Among men, about 18% in both age groups had depressive symptoms.^[iii]

Given the significant impact of social engagement on health, and the heightened risk for social isolation among older adults, it is critical that there are enough opportunities for older adults to remain socially engaged.

It has been estimated that if we could increase older adults' activity level by one social activity, we could reduce the proportion of individuals who develop a mobility disability from 62% to 43%.^[iv] Similarly, older adults who participated on a daily or weekly basis in social activity had a 40% reduced risk of developing dementia compared to those who were not socially engaged.^[v]

Actions:

- Develop a social engagement network of organizations to identify older adults at risk of social isolation and provide appropriate resources and follow-up
- Continue to work with the regional health authorities, service providers community partners and funders to increase the awareness of existing social engagement programs and services
- Improve / increase communication with older adults regarding the available programs and services that address social isolation
- Actively promote best practices related to social engagement i.e.:
 - A & O: Support Services for Older Adults specialized social engagement programming
 - Enhance and promote senior/active living centre programming
 - Enhance community supports
- Support volunteer programs specifically aimed at strengthening people's connections across generations, genders, and cultures
- Advocate for affordable transportation options to encourage mobility among older Manitobans and reduce barriers to social participation
- Promote social engagement by creating age-friendly communities
- Focus on the promotion of active healthy aging in order for older adults to reduce their risk of becoming social isolated

A&O: Support Services for Older Adults (A&O)

www.aosupportservices.ca

info@aosupportservices.ca



Support Services for Older Adults

Manitoba Association of Senior Centres

www.manitobaseniorcentres.com

info@manitobaseniorcentres.com

