

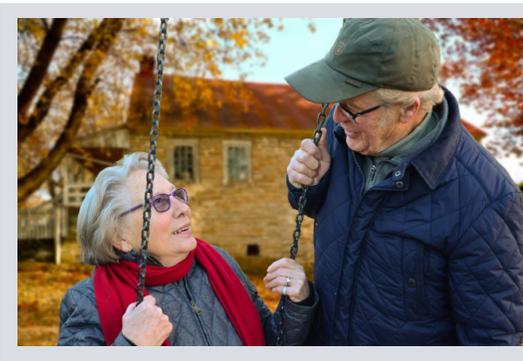
## INFO SHEET 5: How Does Social Isolation Affect Health?

Social isolation is considered to be closely linked with health outcomes. The literature on social isolation outlines a direct relationship between our physical health and social disconnection, or feelings of isolation from others<sup>1</sup>. People with few social connections are also more likely to experience negative health effects such as infections, elevated blood pressure, depression, sleep issues and even increased risk of early death<sup>1,2</sup>.

### WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN SOCIAL ISOLATION AND HEALTH?

Isolation can be stressful, and stress is known to take a toll on health<sup>1,2</sup>. Physical inactivity and health-risk behaviours like smoking and an unhealthy diet are also more common among people who are socially isolated, which can lead to long term health effects such as malnutrition, functional decline and cardiovascular disease (CVD)<sup>2, 3</sup>.

### HOW DO SOCIAL CONNECTIONS BENEFIT HEALTH?



Staying socially connected is considered to be good for our health. Social connections make it easier for people to access information, transportation, and emotional support<sup>1</sup>. Social support may also encourage older adults to seek out medical treatment, and adhere to medications and treatment plans<sup>4</sup>. Research suggests a need for community programs to foster social connections (such as friendly visiting programs) and lower the risk of social isolation among older adults<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cornwell, E. Y., & Waite, L. J. (2009). Social disconnectedness, perceived isolation, and health among older adults. *Journal of Health & Social Behavior*, 50(1), 31-48.

<sup>2</sup> Shankar, A., McMunn, A., Banks, J., & Steptoe, A. (2011). Loneliness, social isolation, and behavioral and biological health indicators in older adults. *Health Psychology*, 30(4), 377-385.

<sup>3</sup> Boulos, C., Salameh, P., & Barberger-Gateau, P. (2017). Social isolation and risk for malnutrition among older people. *Geriatrics & Gerontology International*, 17, 286-294.

<sup>4</sup> Coyle, C.E., Dugan, E. (2012). Social isolation, loneliness and health among older adults. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 24(8), 1346-1363.

Learn more about the Hamilton Seniors Isolation Impact Plan:

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