

AIMS OF THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROJECT

- To identify high priority issues for socially isolated seniors and community stakeholders
- To work alongside six organizations of the Hamilton Seniors Isolation Impact Plan (HSIIP) Connector Program to train community workers about social isolation and to share knowledge about how to identify, connect and anchor isolated seniors in Hamilton, Ontario
- To co-create innovative solutions to reduce social isolation across Greater Hamilton

SENIORS' PROJECT: WHO DID WE SPEAK WITH?

28 seniors (age 55+) living in Hamilton (interviews and focus groups)

- All were socially isolated, had experienced or were identified as 'at-risk' of social isolation
- Some participants had received support from an HSIIP Connector, others had not

SENIOR PERSPECTIVES

What leads seniors into social isolation?

- Inaccessible communities / concerns for personal safety
- Physical isolation / lack of suitable transportation (especially in rural areas)
- Shortage of affordable, safe, supportive housing
- Personality and personal preferences for solitude
- Language and cultural barriers
- Poverty / low income

**Multiple pathways often intersect to increase risk of social isolation and jeopardize access to support*



SENIOR PERSPECTIVES

People who are socially isolated often experience...

- Loss of independence
- Loneliness
- Inactivity and lack of a meaningful role
- Resolve and self-reliance

SENIOR PERSPECTIVES: PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL ISOLATION OF SENIORS

Seniors identified four priorities to reduce isolation, and support independence and engagement in the community. **“We need....”**

1. Safe and affordable housing options with proximity to social and practical supports

- Provide access to affordable amenities and practical supports for activities of daily living (housekeeping, grocery shopping, personal care)
- Provide practical and financial support to develop and sustain a culture of social engagement and participation (residents' associations; social programs/meeting spaces; informal “chit-chat”)



2. Improved transportation service in rural areas



- Provide a range of transportation options that include access to regularly scheduled community bus programs, develop ride sharing programs, create options for fare reductions or free access to taxi when needed
- Hold public consultations with seniors to identify their specific priorities related to transportation

3. Improve accessibility of programs, services and public spaces

- Make it easier for people with mobility devices (walkers, wheelchairs) to use public transit and navigate community spaces and buildings
- Prioritize translation technology and the availability of culturally diverse support staff to address language and cultural barriers
- Continue mobile and delivery services that improve access to meals, groceries, prescriptions and other needs, and promote independence



4. Sustainable funding for community programs such as the Connector Program that focus on addressing barriers to social engagement



- Connectors build trust and rapport with clients and in doing so find ways to break down barriers that cause and complicate social isolation
- Connectors provide crucial information and practical links to services
- Connectors instill confidence and motivation to engage seniors outside of the home
- Connector services often offer the most fundamental and valued support received by seniors