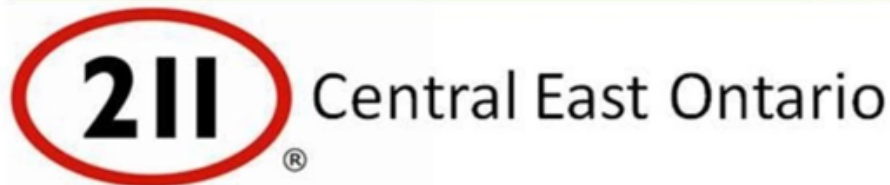


OLDER ADULT (55+) SOCIAL ACTIVITY FOCUS GROUPS



A discussion on social
isolation and social
connection in Simcoe
County

FINAL REPORT JULY 2022



Community Connection is a nonprofit information and referral service accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS). Our mission is to create and improve access to services for people.

Our core areas of work are, providing call centre services for 211, a national 24/7 helpline that connects people to essential services; maintaining a database of community resources and supporting online directories for public access; and producing reports on community needs/trends, and service gaps to support community planning. Another important area of our work is in our community where we are involved in numerous partnerships, shared service initiatives, and collective impact projects that are collaborative approaches to improve and support access to services for people. Several years ago, Community Connection established a volunteer program with the goal to connect volunteers to organizations and increase awareness of the impact of volunteering in our community.

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Funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons For Seniors Program

We want to thank all those who contributed to our discussions and for your insights and ideas that shaped this report.



Table of Contents

04

Background

05

Social
Isolation

06

Survey
Summary

07

Participants

08

Activity
One

09

Problem
Statement

10

Activity
Two

11

By Region

13

Themes

14

Recommendations

15

Path Forward

Background

A recent survey completed by more than 800 people over the age of 55 living in Simcoe County has provided insight to new perspectives on social engagement. The project team made up of a cross-sector of community leaders and service providers aimed to “Reducing Senior Social Isolation” in Simcoe County, surveyed seniors during the month of September 2021 for feedback on their level of social activity, their interests and how best to become or stay involved in their communities in meaningful ways.

One of the survey questions was, “Would you be interested in participating in older adult focus groups to discuss solutions to increase social engagement for older adults?” and we received an overwhelming response from interested seniors willing to discuss this issue.

**810 Completed
Survey**

**351 Interested in Follow up
Conversation**



Desired Outcome

Improved delivery of senior programs and developing a community that values their seniors.

Work with those who are isolated or at risk of becoming isolated (due to COVID or normally Isolate) to build citizen-led initiatives that are specific to geographic locations to improve social connection.

Social Isolation



The literature considers a person to be socially isolated if they “ live alone, have less than monthly contact with friends or family, and don’t belong to a group. (e.g., religious congregation, club or volunteer organization) (Clements-Cortes & Yip 2019)

Loneliness and social isolation are different, but related. Loneliness is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated. Social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly. You can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated, and you can feel lonely while being with other people.

Community Connection is leading a 5-year project, funded in part from the Government of Canada’s New Horizons for Seniors Program.

An estimated 16% of adults 55+ years of age living in Simcoe County experience social isolation. (Stats Canada 2016)

Simcoe County is also experiencing rapid aging: According to Statistics Canada (2016) 18% of the population in Simcoe County is 65+ years of age, with predicted ongoing growth. This is higher than the provincial population (16.7%) and the national population (16.9%).

Increase Social Engagement



An estimated 16% of adults 55+ years of age living in Simcoe County experience social isolation



Socially Active

79.3% of adults surveyed were not as socially active as they would like to be

Activities of Interest

59.4% Volunteering

78.1% Social Activities

39.1% Work

27.0% were not too confident or not confident at all that they would

How can community help?

- Increase variety of social activities 65.5%
- Better advertising of current programs 58.5%

Sense of Belonging



Family 79.5% or Friends 69.5%
 NOT Health Care system 39.7%
 or Community 27.3%

-
- 59.5% Social/entertainment/games
 - 59.2% Education/training
 - 53.2% Exercise/sports

Participants

82 Total Participants

Midland

10

Collingwood

17

Orillia

10



Barrie

15



15

**All County
on Zoom**

Innisfil

17

Activity One

Individuals suggested way to better connect and identified barriers to overcome.

Enablers

List things that aid in social connection

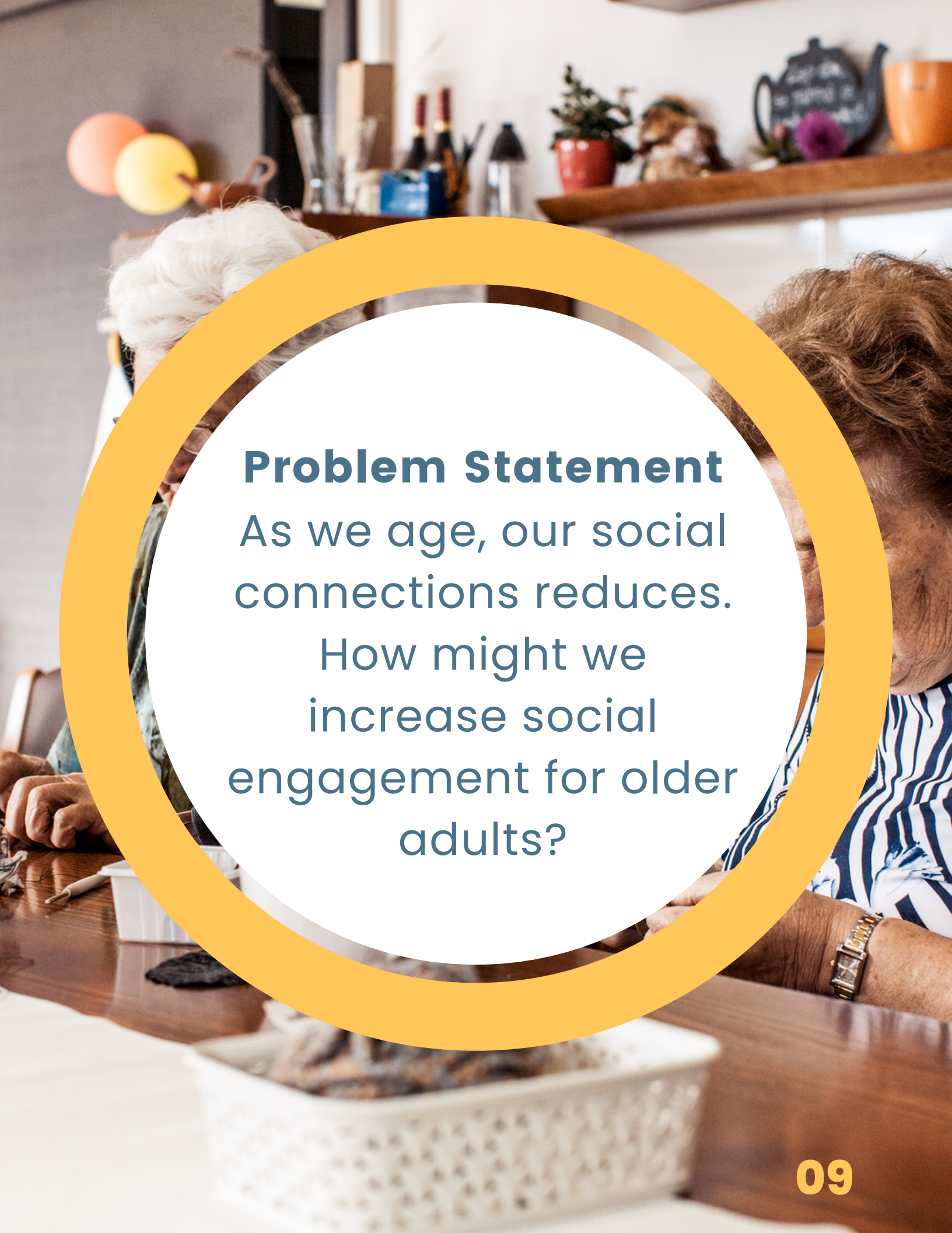
- Relationships–family and friends
- Groups–Church, service organizations
- Information sharing
- Digital literacy/Technology
- Coordinating services e.g. Senior centres
- Navigation supports
- Themed–based groups
- Clear and organized communication
- Transportation to and from events
- Welcoming services
- Buddy System (go to event with someone)
- Drop in Centres
- Volunteer outreach
- Information sessions
- Activities organized by interests
- Self motivation
- Regular time/Scheduling
- Safe walking trails–check in and out of activities
- Cell phones
- Physical and mental activities options
- Part–time work
- Accessible gathering places
- Willingness to learn new things
- Ambassadors
- Good content and facilitation
- Having something to offer. being listened to
- Variety of social actions
- Seniors helping seniors
- Age friendly neighbourhoods
- Technological support

Barriers

List things that are barriers to social connection

- Physical–hearing and mobility
- Cost
- Awareness of what is available
- Anxiety/depression
- Ability to travel to event
- Lack of knowledge as to what is happening/when
- Fear of physical security/illness
- Lack of accessibility
- Privacy concerns
- Apathy/Lack of energy
- Weather
- Available spaces to meet
- New normal to be isolated
- Trust–so many scams
- Size of group–if too big
- Time of day/not at night
- Wait–times
- Agism
- Being single
- Do not want to ask for help
- Language/cultural limitations
- Exhaustion from COVID
- Change in routine

Social engagement and reduction in social isolation for Older Adults



Problem Statement
As we age, our social connections reduces.
How might we increase social engagement for older adults?

Activity Two: Ideas

In groups, ideas and actions on how they can or their community can help seniors become or stay engaged

- **Reintroduce Welcome Wagon/Newcomer groups**
- **Build special interest groups such as gardening groups**
- **Improve communications and outreach to seniors**
- **Balanced digital and non-digital communication methods**
- **Create opportunities for compatible conversations and opportunities for people to meet each other**
- **Continue to offer skill development opportunities such as language classes**
- **Create mobile events that go to where the Seniors are**
- **Advertise events in places that Seniors go such as Doctors offices**
- **Create a number to call in to hear what is happening in area**
- **Set up Senior EXPOS to learn about available activities**
- **Have Seniors read to children**
- **Hold "Stuff Swaps"**
- **Introduce an Ambassadors program**
- **Balance both physical and mental activities**
- **Host sessions and supports on when to move out of house**
- **Enhances supports for hearing better at activities**
- **Combine activities with different groups/partners/joint communications**
- **Offer more activities in small towns**
- **Create Volunteer information ambassador**
- **Have a Senior phone line**
- **Expand Neighbourhood watch**
- **Offer Space to do crafts such as woodworking**
- **Expand Advocates for Seniors and have them work with Municipalities**
- **Offer Tech support**
- **Expand Lifelong learning**
- **Build Outdoor senior fitness parks**
- **Create a Senior section in papers/Phone inline**

Considerations

**55 + is too large a group/
Need to segment into
smaller groups**

Looks at stages of life

**Need to manage stress of
going to activities alone**

**Seniors should be
mentoring and sharing
wisdom**

**Difficult to find activities for
men**

Need a reason to meet

Recommendations by Region

While we heard similar themes throughout the County, there were different resources and activities available depending where you lived. Below we have summarized key points from each discussion.

Each region can learn from each other and we hope they will continue to share ideas and actions



Innifil

Access and Transportation

- Improve ways to get to events
- Create hubs
- Include diverse groups
- Age-friendly neighbourhoods



Orillia

Communication and Awareness

- Senior section in paper
- Activities in multiple location (urban/rural)
- Senior playground
- Continuous Learning events



Barrie

Diversity in events and with groups

- Access for computers
- Language and cultural programming
- Neighbourhood watch
- Move away from COVID restrictions

Recommendations by Region

While we heard similar themes throughout the County, there were different resources and activities available depending where you lived. Below we have summarized key points from each discussion. (continue)



Collingwood



Midland



Zoom

Meeting new people

- Compatible conversations
- Increase awareness of programming
- Create art walks
- Expand programs without municipal restrictions

Physical and mental

- Supports to hear better at events
- Offer Mobility aids and closer parking
- Gender specific events
- Opportunities to use personal skills and strengths

Fear and Finances

- Where to find FREE activities
- Build self-confidences to go to activities
- Create Senior EXPOS
- Set up networks to share communications

Overall Themes



MOTIVATION

- Use skills and strengths
- Share wisdom
- Overcome fear
- Find partners so do not have to go alone
- Overcome COVID restrictions

AVAILABILITY

- Urban and rural offerings
- Increase transportation options
- Offer a variety of events and activities
- Have online and in-person activities

ACCESSIBILITY

- Keep costs reasonable
- Need help as cost of volunteering going up
- Build computer skills and supports
- Senior designed spaces

COMMUNICATIONS

- Share knowledge of what is happening
- Have ambassadors and advocates
- Senior section in papers
- Phone in information

WHOLISTIC APPROACHES

- Physical activities designed for different ages
- Mental exercises to keep mind working
- Opportunities for spiritual connections

SEGMENTATION

- Create gender specific activities
- Offer intergenerational connections
- Develop local neighbourhood events



Overall Recommendations

- **Continue to educate people on the negative effects of social isolation**
- **Use a wide variety of communication methods**
- **Develop segmentation when appropriately (by age, by interests, by income, by neighbourhoods approaches)**
- **Encourage Urban designer/planners to build spaces for community building and senior activities**
- **Aid in reducing agism and increasing value of seniors**
- **Continue to support individuals to build technological skills**
- **Consider equity, diversity and inclusion to ensure all feel welcome**
- **Ensure mobility and transportation is considered in the implementation of programming**

Path Forward

While you may have heard some of these ideas and actions before, it is our hope that some new ideas are highlighted.

We will share ideas with age-friendly, libraries and senior groups in hope that they will implement some of the ideas and consideration when developing new programs.

This report might also support additional funding applications to ensure action happens.

While there were some citizen-led actions that happened at each focus group e.g. email exchanges, new social activities, there is still much work that can be done.

Social connection is complex but critical to the health and well-being of our older adults.

Together, we hope to build stronger connections and reduce social isolation.



"I was also getting feedback from many seniors who said they attended our focus group, and said it was a great experience and felt good information and feedback was given"

**Cheryl Cantin, Administration
Co-ordinator**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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