

## What is Social Inclusion?

Social inclusion is the act of making all groups of people within a society feel valued and important. Social inclusion recognizes that every individual, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, or other factors can contribute to society in some way.



## Why does social inclusion matter?

Social isolation and loneliness are two of the most pressing concerns in Canadian society. As a result, social inclusion is important if we want to create healthy, safe, inclusive and vibrant communities for all ages. While it is true that one can feel isolated at any age, being isolated disproportionately affects older adults.

## What is the impact of social isolation?

- Low levels of social engagement and participation can have damaging effects on health and the quality of life of older adults.
- Older adults who are socially isolated may experience higher rates of depression and other mental health conditions.
- There are greater negative impacts among more vulnerable older adults who may be living with serious medical conditions, live in substandard housing, who are homeless, are financially insecure or experiencing other uncertain conditions.

**Canada's National Seniors Council has estimated that up to 16% of individuals 65+ experience isolation, or almost 965,000 older adults across the country (Statistics Canada, 2017)**

# KEY MESSAGES

1. **There is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to supporting older adults who may be socially isolated.**

Milton Friesen, Program Director, Social Cities – Cardus, puts it this way: *‘a common problem does not equal a generic solution or response’*. It is important that we remember that older adults are not all the same. They are at different stages and ages and will have individual needs, wants and interests; social inclusion will mean something different to each person. We must acknowledge and address these differences if we are to be effective in promoting inclusion.

2. **Organizations and individuals must work together to prevent social isolation in the future and to increase social inclusion now.**

We must focus on prevention while continuing to build our community’s capacity to identify, reach and connect isolated older adults. Doing so benefits not only older adults; it also improves the capacity of our healthcare and social service systems to respond to and deliver appropriate services and other resources. We need to do more to bridge silos, share resources and leverage the expertise that exists in our community to maximize the benefits for older adults.

3. **As a result of Hamilton’s Seniors Isolation Impact Plan (HSIIP, May 2016-December 2019), older adults who participated in the project reported feeling more valued and more connected to others.**

The HSIIP project effectively demonstrated the value of creating connections to reduce isolation among older adults. While these self reports were encouraging, we must continue to find ways to include older adults in our communities.

## Resources:

[Hamilton Council on Aging website](http://www.coahamilton.ca/Our Priorities/Social Inclusion Matters)

[www.coahamilton.ca/Our Priorities/Social Inclusion Matters](http://www.coahamilton.ca/Our Priorities/Social Inclusion Matters)

[Sheridan Centre for Elder Research. Building Connected Communities: Social Inclusion and Loneliness Toolkit](https://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_building_connected_communities/)

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**What are some of the ways you can support older adults in your community?**