



INTERNATIONAL LONGEVITY CENTRE (ILC) CANADA. GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR UN OPEN ENDED WORKING GROUP ON AGEING 13 – FOCUS AREA 2 - SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion is a challenging phenomenon in Canada as our population ages. Currently persons over 65 make up 15% of the population, growing to approximately 25% by the mid 2030's. Research shows that 30% of older Canadians are at risk of becoming socially isolated.¹ Given this statistic our focus in the area of social inclusion will look at how social isolation occurs and how addressing isolation can lead to social inclusion.

Social isolation is commonly defined as “a low quality and quantity of contact with others. ...as well as the absence of mutually rewarding relationships.”² Social Isolation can lead to poor health, loneliness, emotional distress and other negative effects. It is linked to the undervaluing of and the loss of older persons in the volunteer sector and in paid employment. Social isolation impacts society at large through lack of social unity, higher social costs and the loss of the wealth of experience of older persons to community.³ Moreover social isolation significantly increases premature death from all causes, and is associated with a 50% increase in dementia, adverse mental health outcomes and higher rates of depression and suicide.⁴

Evidence indicates that the Pandemic had a negative impact on the social inclusion of older persons and combined with ageism led to worsened health outcomes for older persons as reported in a recent study by the Yale School of Public Health. These adverse outcomes are magnified again by the impacts of racism.⁵ A National Seniors Council Report also shows that older Indigenous people, older immigrants and older persons who are care givers are at higher risk of social isolation than others.⁶

The Government of Canada and the provincial and territorial governments have undertaken several studies on the impact of social isolation in recent years as evidenced by the “Final Report: A Profile of Social Isolation in Canada”. Submitted to the Chair of the F/P/T Working Group on Aging (2014) and “Social Isolation of Seniors Volume 1: Understanding the issue and finding solutions” FPT Working Group on Social Isolation and “Report on Social Isolation of Seniors 2013 -2014” National Seniors Council, 2014. These reports outline the factors that lead to social isolation which including living alone, having a low

Final Report: A Profile of Social Isolation in Canada. Keefe J., Fancey P., and Hall, M. Submitted to the Chair of the F/P/T Working Group on Social Isolation 2014. ¹

² **Social Isolation of Seniors – Volume 1: Understanding the issue and finding solutions.** Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors.

³ **Final Report: A Profile of Social Isolation in Canada.** Keefe J., Fancey, P., and Hall, M. Submitted to the Chair of the F/P/T Working Group on Social Isolation 2014.

⁴ **A Social Determinates Perspective of the Intersection of Ageism, Racism and Social Isolation During COVID 19.** Gilbert Nick, Katie Schloss, Helen Marie Kenna, Kerstin Pahl, Crystal Fuller Lewis and Nathan Kline. Behaviour Health News Jan. 2021.

⁵ **A Social Determinates Perspective of the Intersection of Ageism, Racism and Social Isolation During COVID 19.** Gilbert Nick, Katie Schloss, Helen Marie Kenna, Kerstin Pahl, Crystal Fuller Lewis and Nathan Kline. Behaviour Health News Jan. 2021.

⁶ **Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors.** National Council on Aging. 2016.

income, being age 80 or older, having a compromised health status, lacking in access to transportation and to community services and programs, and being a caregiver (amongst other factors). The Reports also outline protections to move towards social inclusion, including having enough income, safe housing, having the skills to seek services and access to health and community services , having supportive social networks, and access to transportation etc.

There is work underway to increase the social inclusion of older persons, including Canada's New Horizons for Seniors program, which provides funding for projects that make a difference in the lives of seniors and in their communities. New Horizons received additional funding of \$20 million in the 2022 federal budget.⁷ Some provinces have adopted adult protection legislation for vulnerable and incapable adults (Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador) and, for older adults (New Brunswick). Quebec is unique in having enshrined protection against exploitation of older persons and of persons with a disability in provincial human rights legislation. That said there is much more to be done to increase social inclusion among older persons. At present consideration of older persons are not mainstreamed in Canadian legislation or jurisprudence. Anti-ageism mainstreaming would involve integrating the perspective of older persons into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, laws, and regulation to promote age equality and reduce age discrimination.

The factors influencing social inclusion and the complex solutions required need an integrated, multi-governmental legislative and policy approach along with societal change and community responses. There are still mountains to move to reach true social inclusion and it cannot be addressed without a comprehensive human rights based approach that looks at multiplier effects such as rampant ageism and racism. As such International Longevity Centre Canada calls for a United Nations convention on the rights of older persons which could lay the international legislative foundation to address fulsome social inclusion and ageism.

⁷ Government of Canada, 2022 Budget: A Plan to Grow Our Economy and Make Life More Affordable, at page 190, available at <https://www.budget.canada.ca/2022/home-accueil-en.html>.