

## The Loneliness Epidemic and Social Isolation: Older Adults Most at Risk

*New report warns of the risks for adults 50 and older this holiday season.*

**TORONTO, December 5, 2023** — Holiday loneliness is something that many older adults will experience this holiday season. A new report from the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) warns that social isolation and loneliness are significant issues affecting the older population in Canada.




The report, [Understanding the Factors Driving the Epidemic of Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Canadians](#), finds that as many as 41 per cent of Canadians aged 50 years and older are at risk of social isolation and up to 58 per cent have experienced loneliness before.

To date, a lack of consistent definitions and measurement scales of loneliness and social isolation have made it challenging to fully characterize the scope of the problem in Canada, which could better enable measures to address it. Using data from the NIA's inaugural [2022 Ageing in Canada Survey](#) results, the report aims to fill this evidence gap by examining the extent to which both social isolation and loneliness are impacting Canadians aged 50 years and older across 10 provinces, and will continue to do so over the coming decade.

“While we know that older adults are at greater risk of experiencing social isolation and loneliness, we still don’t fully understand the extent to which these issues affect older Canadians,” explains Natalie Iciaszczyk, Research Program Manager and co-author of the report. “One reason we still don’t have a clear picture is due to significant data gaps in characterizing the Canadian context. This report provides the most currently available estimates of reported rates of social isolation and loneliness among older Canadians, and is unique in considering both their distinct implications together.”

The following segments of Canada’s population aged 50 years and older appear to be most at risk for social isolation and loneliness:

- Income insecure older adults reported higher levels of social isolation and loneliness when compared to their high-income counterparts.
- Women reported experiencing higher levels of loneliness than men.
- Older adults who have children tended to be less socially isolated and were not as lonely compared to those without any children.
- Those in poor health reported higher levels of social isolation and loneliness.
- Older adults who were not living independently in their own homes were more likely to experience social isolation and have feelings of loneliness compared to those living independently in their own homes.

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The effects of social isolation and loneliness can be devastating; both have been linked to a range of poor health outcomes among older adults. Premature mortality from social isolation and loneliness have been found to be comparable to other well-established risk factors such as smoking, lack of physical activity, obesity, substance abuse, injury and violence, and lack of access to health care.

“Social isolation and loneliness has been linked to more negative health outcomes including a greater risk of death,” says Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Health Policy Research at the NIA. “Fortunately, there have been a number of practices and programs showing promise to better address these issues affecting older adults. There needs to be further consideration of these emerging areas that could potentially better support older adults who may especially be at risk. As we enter the holiday season, we also need to take time out of our busy holiday schedules to visit older adults in their homes.”

By facilitating the creation of more age-friendly communities, expanding the availability of social prescribing programs and supporting the development of useful technologies that could better address these issues, governments can continue efforts to reduce the prevalence and negative impacts of social isolation and loneliness across Canada.





The NIA has previously recommended, and continues to advocate for, the development of a national strategy to address the growing issue of social isolation and loneliness among Canada’s ageing population.

If you are interested in discussing the impact of social isolation and loneliness among older adults in Canada with the co-authors of the report, Natalie Iciaszczyk, Research Program Manager, NIA or Dr. Samir Sinha, NIA Director of Health Policy Research, please contact Magdalen Stiff, Director of Communications at [magdalen.stiff@torontomu.ca](mailto:magdalen.stiff@torontomu.ca).

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### **About The National Institute on Ageing**

*The National Institute on Ageing (NIA), based at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU; formerly Ryerson University), is Canada’s leading policy and research centre dedicated to enhancing successful and healthy ageing throughout people’s lives. Through our collaborative approach, expert-driven analysis, and public-facing reports and tools, the NIA provides meaningful research, analysis, advice and advocacy on the most pressing issues that are affecting the health and wellbeing of older Canadians.*

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