

Evaluating Factors Affecting Community Engagement and Social-Connectedness of Seniors Residing in Metro-Vancouver

For: Seniors' Advisory Committee, City of Vancouver

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND ON SOCIAL ISOLATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Social isolation among seniors is on the rise and its impact can be felt by communities all over Canada. It is defined by the lack of engagement in one's community, an inadequate support system, feelings of unfulfillment and an absence of belonging. It is characterized by the complex interplay of personal, community and societal factors that holistically impact social cohesiveness, public cost and individual well-being. Existing literature describes a direct link between social isolation and deteriorating physical and psychological health. Furthermore, it shows social isolation is most prevalent amongst seniors.

In an urbanized metropolis like Vancouver where growth and progress are valued above community and social connections, ramifications of social isolation are heightened and go unaddressed. Social isolation is known to be an enhancer as well as the underlying basis of many other serious issues faced by seniors. Therefore, the lack of recognition and action in response to this problem poses a great burden on government funded programs, shelters and non-profit organizations. This saturates available resources and drains the limited amount of social funding designated for senior care.

B. OVERVIEW OF PROBLEM AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

Social isolation is prevalent amongst seniors; it negatively impacts individual health and poses a great economic and social burden on society. There are a few major implications of this problem: firstly, social isolation is not just an enhancer of issues faced by seniors (i.e.

homelessness, poverty, abuse, mental health and etc.) but also a key component assisting their development. Secondly, the unproportionate response and lack of preventative measures enable it to persist and over time worsen the social, physical and economic condition of seniors. This neglect leads to an overall increased reliance on government subsidized care programs and depletion of limited public funds.

Therefore, purpose of this report is to evaluate factors affecting community engagement and social-connectedness of seniors, in order to develop a comprehensive guideline that outlines effective strategies and initiatives to promote and sustain seniors' involvement in their communities. The aim is to provide insight on how to effectively promote community engagement amongst seniors and subsequently how to fight the adverse effects of social isolation.

Overall, seniors are an integral part of our society and are crucial in creating and sustaining healthy and vibrant communities. Promoting community engagement, encourages seniors to actively participate and contribute to their communities. This mobilization of seniors is extremely beneficial to the development of community initiatives and programs. Additionally, comprehensive review of current community engagement strategies and their subsequent improvement will serve as a proactive and preventative approach to addressing the many other seniors related social and health issues. This is beneficial to society as a whole as it reduces the burden on government funded programs, shelters and non-profit organizations.

C. DATA SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary data sources will include consultation with Brightside Community Homes Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing for seniors and people with disabilities. They provide independent living options for seniors and hope to address many

senior specific social problems by enhancing social connectedness within their residences.

Additionally, I will reach out to senior residents living in Brightside owned buildings to gain insight from their first-hand experiences and record their responses using a standardized survey.

Secondary sources will include existing academic literature, government publications and relevant reports exploring detriments of social isolation and mitigating effect of community engagement.

D. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF REPORT

<need to include after data collection is complete >

II. DATA SECTION

A. SUMMARY OF FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL-CONNECTEDNESS OF SENIORS

This report will be evaluating the following factors affecting community engagement and social connectedness of seniors residing in Metro-Vancouver. The evaluation of these factors will be used to compose a comprehensive guideline that outlines effective strategies and initiatives to promote and sustain seniors' involvement in their communities.

- i. Funding <will insert more thorough description>
- ii. Accessibility <will insert more thorough description>
- iii. Availability <will insert more thorough description>
- iv. Health and wellness <will insert more thorough description>
- v. Awareness
- vi. Perception and beliefs about local community <will insert more thorough description>

B. EVALUATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL-CONNECTEDNESS OF SENIORS

- i. Survey Results and Figures

<data collection is in progress >

III. CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

< data collection in progress >

B. SUMMARY OF COMPILED RESEARCH OUTLINING EFFECTS OF FACTORS

< data collection in progress >

C. INTERPERTATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

< data collection in progress >

D. RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICATION OF PROPOSED SOLUTION

Promoting social connectedness and encouraging community engagement for seniors can prevent and mitigate much of the harm associated with social isolation. Allocating funds to support programs that encourage seniors to get involved in their communities, provides the means for them to socialize and contribute.

These types of programs would allow isolated seniors to forge connections within their communities, feel valued and gain a sense of belonging. Furthermore, they would enable the formation of support networks that are crucial to maintaining individual health and safety.

Developing initiatives that create opportunities for senior participation and contribution will also benefit society as a whole. Seniors involved in their communities will extend significant social capital and offer vital services that will ultimately advance the organization of community initiatives and promote overall public health.

By incorporating the findings from the evaluation of the core factors being evaluated in this report the quality and effectiveness of community programming can significantly improve without demanding substantial increase in funding. The following recommendations were

developed with practicality and understanding of funding limitations of social programming.

That is why most of the listed suggestions require facilitation and support in the beginning but if implemented successfully can be independently sustainable.

i. Funding

<will inset specific recommendation based on this factor after data collection complete>

ii. Accessibility

<will inset specific recommendation based on this factor after data collection complete>

iii. Availability

<will inset specific recommendation based on this factor after data collection complete>

iv. Health and wellness

<will inset specific recommendation based on this factor after data collection complete>

v. Awareness

<will inset specific recommendation based on this factor after data collection complete>

vi. Perception and beliefs about local community

<will inset specific recommendation based on this factor after data collection complete>

III. APPENDIX

A. SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What type of events and programs have you seen occur or advertised in your community recently?
 - a. Community Gardens
 - a. . Community BBQ
 - b. Holiday Parties
 - c. Social Gatherings/Neighbourhood House
 - d. Information Workshops

2. Have you participated in any community events/initiatives? Yes/No
 - a. If so which ones?
 - i. Community Gardens
 - a. Community BBQ
 - b. Holiday Parties
 - c. Neighbourhood House/Social Gatherings
 - d. Information Workshops
 - e. Other _____

3. Are you able to participate in community events and initiatives? Yes/No
 - a. If no, why?
(Select all that apply)
 - a. I was feeling unwell
 - b. They are none offered/ I don't know about any
 - c. I did not have transportation
 - d. I could not make it during the specified time
 - e. I don't know anyone there

4. Pick the main factor affecting your involvement in community events and initiatives? i.

They are none offered/ I don't know if any are offered

- a. I have no interest in the type of programming offered
 - b. I was feeling unwell
 - c. I did not have transportation
 - d. I could not make it during the specified time
 - e. I don't know anyone there
5. Are you satisfied with the types of community events and programs that you have access to? Yes/No
6. Do you enjoy interactions with your neighbours or community members? Yes/No
7. Do you feel safe in your community? Yes/No
8. Can you rely on your neighbours for help during an emergency? Yes/No
9. Do your relationships with your fellow community members affect your involvement in community events and initiatives? Yes/No a. If so how?
- a. Motivates me to get involved
 - b. Discourages me to get involved
10. Are you satisfied with the type and quality of events offered in your community? Yes/No
11. Are you satisfied with your involvement in your community? Yes/No

12. After participating in initiatives organized in your community are you more inclined to volunteer in any future community events? Yes/No; a. If yes how? i. I am happy with my current level of involvement

- a. Attend more events
- b. Become part of a recreation club that meets weekly
- c. Volunteer on a committee

13. Are there any specific health related needs and conditions that affect your involvement in community events and initiatives? Yes/No a. If so what are they?

14. What type of events would you like to see implemented in your community?

15. How do you find out about current events and programs occurring in your community?

- a. Community newsletters (email)
- b. Community Newsletter (mail/flyers)
- c. Community poster boards
- d. Social Media
- e. Community Centers
- f. Door-to-door promotions
- g. Other: _____