



Links2Wellbeing
social prescribing for older adults

Supporting older adults who face health impacts from isolation with connections to social and recreational opportunities

Alliance for Healthier Communities and Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario partner on new project to address loneliness and impact of pandemic measures

TORONTO – June 14, 2021 – The [echo pandemic](#). A rising tsunami of mental health and addictions issues. Isolation epidemic. Fraying of social fabric. [Frantically busy helplines](#). Whatever we name it, whatever the headlines call it, evidence abounds of the impacts of COVID-19 on people's mental and physical wellbeing, and how significant the resulting challenges will be as we emerge from the acute stages of spread of the deadly virus. Among older adults, there's rising awareness that measures taken to protect older people from the virus – isolation, lack of physical contact, loss of communal gathering spaces, reliance on unfamiliar technology – have also taken significant tolls on their mental, cognitive, and physical health, and will require deliberate and coordinated actions at the local level to help people reconnect – to services, to community, and to each other. Solutions, designed and implemented hyper-locally, will need to be novel, tailored to population needs, and intensive enough to match the level of isolation and disconnect people have faced, and continue to face.

This is why we're excited to share with you that the Alliance for Healthier Communities, which led the way with our member health organizations to introduce social prescribing as a concept to Ontario, is partnering with the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OACAO). The partnership is called **Links2Wellbeing**, a project designed to help connect socially isolated older adults with community programs and services offered by Seniors Active Living Centres (SALCs) across Ontario, available through people's primary health care providers. Physicians and nurse practitioners, alongside other providers, will work over the three-year project to further develop the framework by which they "prescribe" and refer older adults to a range of tailored, non-clinical services available through their local Seniors Active Living Centre.

The process of social prescribing recognizes that not all health and wellbeing needs are primarily medical in nature, and the process of social prescribing aims to address people's needs in holistic ways. For older adults emerging from the pandemic, these supported connections to community services are vital to ensure people can truly have more control of their own health and wellbeing again.

"During our social prescribing pilot program, we found that people were really able to co-create and connect with programs and supports that decreased their sense of loneliness significantly. With Links2Wellbeing, we hope to build on what we've learned and focus on connecting older adults to their communities in new ways, with an increased sense of belonging."

- Sarah Hobbs, CEO, Alliance for Healthier Communities

"Our experience with social prescribing has demonstrated the benefits of referring older adults to their local Seniors Active Living Centres (SALCs). They meet with a peer volunteer to determine which programs are of most interest to them. It is empowering to make those decisions while creating a strong sense of belonging in their communities. Given the levels of isolation we have witnessed over the past year, it is critical we listen closely to our older adults."

- Sue Hesjedahl, Executive Director, Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario

To learn more about **Links2Wellbeing**, the health organizations and Seniors Active Living Centres involved, or to schedule an interview with project leaders and organizers for your article or segment, please contact:

Jason Rehel

Alliance for Healthier Communities

Jason.Rehel@AllianceON.org 416-817-9518



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