



## **Social Prescriptions for Older Adults<sup>1</sup>**

### ***A pathway for healthcare providers to link older adults to social and recreational opportunities to promote their wellbeing***

Research has shown that participating in social and recreational activities has a measurable positive effect on the health and wellbeing of older adults. Finding meaningful ways to include isolated older adults is critical; social prescriptions can help to achieve that outcome.

#### **What is social prescribing?**

*Social prescribing is 'a means for trusted individuals in clinical and community settings to identify that a person has non-medical, health-related social needs and to subsequently connect them to non-clinical supports and services within the community by co-producing a social prescription – a non-medical prescription, to improve health and wellbeing and to strengthen community connections.'<sup>2</sup>*

#### **What will social prescribing look like in your community?**

Which of your clients might benefit from this referral? Those presenting with, for example, loneliness and/or social isolation, mild depression and/or anxiety.

SALCs<sup>6</sup>, PCPs and other health professionals in their communities connect

PCP identifies clients that may benefit from participation in SALCS and writes social prescription for local SALC

Rx received. Designated Centre Contact (DCC) connects the older adult with VLA.

VLA meets with client and connects them with programs of interest at the SALC

Lessons learned from data collection and the experiences of older adults used to enhance services.

#### **What are the potential benefits for you and your healthcare team?**

<sup>1</sup> The Links2Wellbeing 3-year project (launched in 2021) represents a unique partnership between the Alliance for Healthier Communities and the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OCAO). For more information, please contact the OCAO at 905-584-8125 or 1-866-835-7693 or at ocao.org.

<sup>2</sup> Muhl, C., Mulligan, K., Bayoumi, I., Ashcroft, R., & Godfrey, C. (2022). Establishing internationally accepted conceptual and operational definitions of social prescribing through expert consensus: A Delphi study. medRxiv. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2022.11.14.22282098>

<sup>6</sup> SALC – Seniors Active Living Centres; PCP – Primary Care Provider; DCC – Designated Centre Contact; VLA – Volunteer Link Ambassador

- Fewer non-medical primary care visits where the presenting symptoms include, for example, symptoms of loneliness and/or social isolation.
- Fills in gaps in the healthcare system by providing links to community resources

### What are some of the anticipated benefits for your patients?

- Helps with social and community connections and expands the older adult's network of peer support
- Healthcare providers are able to use their time more effectively by directing clients to sources that can address their non-medical needs
- Improves health and well-being
- Potentially fewer visits to hospital emergency departments
- Barriers are reduced as older adults are empowered to identify their needs and values and to connect with what matters most to them

### What does the research say?

According to a 2015 study of over 70 papers involving 3.4 million participants led by Brigham Young University, a lack of social connections is as great a risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and constitutes a greater risk than obesity and lack of exercise. It is associated with increased risk of heart disease, stroke, depression and substance misuse leading to more frequent hospital admissions, longer stays in hospital and long-term care admissions (Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review. PLOS Medicine 7(7): e1000316. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>)

### Additional resources



1. Alliance for Healthier Communities (\*Ontario’s Social Prescribing Pilot Project lead)  
<https://www.allianceon.org/Social-Prescribing>
2. National Academy for Social Prescribing, U.K.  
<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/>
3. The Social Prescribing Network  
<https://www.socialprescribingnetwork.com/>
4. Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing  
<https://www.socialprescribing.ca/>
5. WHO Tool Kit on Implementing Social Prescribing  
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619765>
6. National Institute on Ageing report *“Understanding Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Canadians and How to Address It”* <https://www.niageing.ca/reports>