

“Being socially connected in meaningful ways is actually key to human health and survival.”

Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad

Chronic loneliness and social isolation can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day & increases risk of premature death by as much as 50%.

Strong social supports are protective for physical and mental health and cognitive decline.

Evidence Backgrounder

HOW DOES SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

By Meridith Sones, MPH, PhD(c)

Decades of research shows that being socially connected helps us live longer, healthier, and happier lives. But it isn't just our family ties, close friendships, or group membership that make a difference. Evidence reveals that the health benefits of social connectedness can be unlocked starting at home, with our own neighbours.

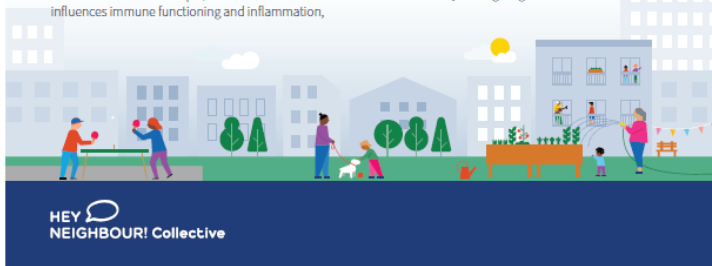
BACKGROUND

Social connectedness is vital to our health and well-being. Substantial evidence shows that people who are socially connected live longer. A lack of social connection — marked by social isolation and loneliness — increases risk for premature death by as much as 50%, comparable to major health risks like obesity, smoking, and air pollution. The effect of social connectedness on life expectancy is independent of other risk factors like age, sex, initial health status, lifestyle factors, income, and education. In addition to premature mortality, poor social connectedness has been linked to a range of other adverse physical, cognitive, and mental health outcomes, including increased risk of heart disease and stroke, respiratory infection, dementia, depression and anxiety.

The influence that social connectedness has on our health and well-being can be biological, psychological, or behavioural. For example, social connectedness influences immune functioning and inflammation,

which has been linked to several chronic diseases. Supportive social connections also help us cope with stress, and influence healthy behaviours like sleep and physical activity.

Given mounting evidence on its health effects, local and global declines in social connectedness are increasingly recognized as a public health crisis that requires policy action at all levels. New data shows that more than 1 in 10 British Columbians reported feeling lonely always or often. For young adults or those living alone, the proportion of people experiencing loneliness doubles to more than 1 in 4. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Surgeon General has described social connectedness as equally important to global recovery as vaccines. Evidence shows that one way to curb social isolation and loneliness is to start at home, by building connections and community among neighbours.



WHY ARE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS *WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURS* IMPORTANT?

- **Higher levels of happiness, well-being and life satisfaction**
- **More likely to give and accept help in a crisis**
- **Deeper localized sense of belonging**
- **More likely to volunteer, vote and otherwise engage in strengthening civil society**
- **CHILDREN:** twice as likely to engage in daily outdoor play
- **YOUTH:** better mental and physical health, enhanced feelings of safety and self-esteem, and less risky and violent behaviour
- **OLDER ADULTS:** decreased loneliness, increased self-reported health, lower risk of mortality

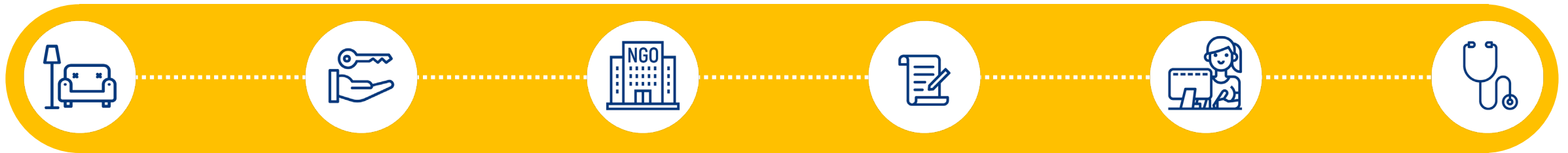
<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2022/06/how-social-connectedness-between-neighbours-supports-health-wellbeing/>

HEY NEIGHBOUR! Collective

2019 - ?



MORRIS J. WOSK
CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE



Residents of Multi Unit Housing

Housing Providers (Landlords & Property Managers)

Non-governmental Organizations

Policy Makers, Local & Regional Governments

Researchers

Health Sector

- Concert Properties
- Brightside Community Homes Foundation
- Catalyst Community Developments Society

- BC Non-Profit Housing Association
- LandlordBC

- West End Seniors' Network
- Seniors Services Society of BC
- Building Resilient Neighbourhoods (& City of Victoria)

- Cities of Vancouver, North Vancouver and New Westminister
- Metro Vancouver Regional Government

- Simon Fraser University
(Urban Studies, Gerontology & Health Sciences)
- Happy Cities

- Vancouver Coastal Health

How do we do our work?

1 Piloting Community-Building Programs

2 Research & Learning

3 Sharing stories & knowledge

4 Housing Industry & Policy Engagement

Foundational principals

Housing as
a Human Right

Equity

Relationships
& Trust Building

Asset-based
Community Development

Addressing
Root Causes

Multi-sector &
Interdisciplinary Collaboration

- **6 partners, each with their own program approach & context;**

3 landlord organizations

(Brightside, Concert, Catalyst)

3 non-profit community

organizations (Building Resilient Neighbourhoods, West End Seniors' Network, Seniors Services Society)

- 40+ buildings between them
- Facilitated community of practice (peer learning)

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OUR BIG LONG-TERM QUESTIONS:

- What is the impact of our 6 partners' programs on residents' sense of well-being and social connectedness?
- Do partners' approaches help older adults to stay happy & healthy in their homes for longer?
- What benefits are landlord partners seeing for their organizations?
- How can we work in buildings that are poorly designed for neighbourly connections? How can we advocate together for better design of future housing?

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a Human Right

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Relationships
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Asset-based
Community Development

Addressing
Root Causes

Multi-sector &
Interdisciplinary Collaboration



Supporting a culture
of learning and
experimentation



Facilitating
organizational
partnerships



Convening and
promoting more “joined
up approaches”
through multi-sector
dialogue and action

**Impacts of
peer learning,
research &
education**



Raising awareness
and building evidence
about social
connectedness and
resilience in multi-unit
housing



Building a field of practice and
beginning to identify “best
practices”

How do we do our work?

- 1 **Piloting Community-Building Programs**
- 2 **Research & Learning**
- 3 **Sharing stories & knowledge**
- 4 **Housing Industry & Policy Engagement**




LANDLORD AND HOUSING OPERATOR-LED APPROACHES TO GROWING COMMUNITY IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #2



DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD COMMUNITY IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #3



Learning from the Community Connectors

Practice guide for implementing resident-led social programming in multi-unit rental housing

October 2022



SUPPORTING RESIDENTS TO BECOME COMMUNITY CONNECTORS IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #1



ROLES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND RESILIENCE ACTIVITIES IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #4