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Enabling Aging in Place Promising Practices: Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing Program

The following promising practice was prepared following interviews with the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing team during the fall of 2023. Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) would like to formally acknowledge the generosity of the Maple Ridge / Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing team in sharing their skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences to form this promising practice.

About Healthcare Excellence Canada

Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) works with partners to spread innovation, build capability and catalyze policy change so that everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare. Through collaborations with patients, essential care partners and people working in healthcare, we turn proven innovations into lasting improvements in all dimensions of healthcare excellence.

HEC focuses on improving care of older adults, bringing care closer to home and supporting pandemic recovery and resilience – with quality and safety embedded across all our efforts. We are committed to fostering inclusive, culturally safe and equitable care through engagement with different groups, including patients and essential care partners, First Nations, Métis and Inuit, healthcare workers and more.

Launched in 2021, HEC brings together the Canadian Patient Safety Institute and Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement. We are an independent, not-for-profit organization funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

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Model description

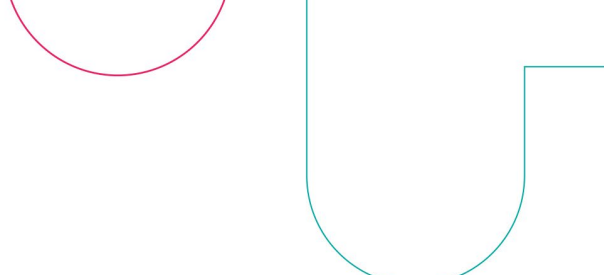
Social prescribing is an emerging framework with variation across initiatives and settings. However, a consistent set of foundational principles exists for social prescribing. In all cases, this framework:

- acts as a supportive bridge between healthcare and non-clinical, community-based supports and services
- operates as a person-centred approach where solutions are co-created based on what matters to clients
- is characterized by intentional follow-up and engagement with clients, healthcare providers and social and community service organizations
- involves data collection and tracking

The Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing Program is a model specific to this community and provides a holistic approach to supporting older adults by bringing together the social and medical models of health and wellness. Healthcare providers often witness the complex interaction between the social determinants of health and the medical care needs of their patients. Social prescribing provides a formal pathway for healthcare providers to address the social determinants of health of their older adult patients by connecting them with community programs, services and resources that support their mental, physical and social well-being. The Social Prescribing Program may help older adults with:

- food security
- mental health
- substance use
- social support system
- financial well-being
- housing
- physical activity
- creative self-expression
- activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living

The Social Prescribing Program is facilitated by Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services. It is one of 19 older-adult social prescribing programs operated by local community organizations in partnership with Fraser Health and the United Way of British Columbia.



The **vision** of the Social Prescribing Program is for older adults to age in place and stay connected with their communities. It achieves this by:

- supporting older adults and their caregivers in self-managing their health and social concerns to delay and prevent frailty and loss of independence
- using a comprehensive, strength-based approach to foster resilience and social support

The Social Prescribing Program has four **core elements**:

1. Older adults with non-medical health needs who could potentially benefit from its services are identified.

This identification can come from various sources, such as healthcare providers, family members, caregivers or even self-referrals. Once identified, older adults are referred to the Seniors' Community Connector, who conducts a thorough and holistic assessment of the social situation that is affecting the individual's health.

2. The Seniors' Community Connector collaborates with older adults to understand their needs.

The Seniors' Community Connector spends time talking one-on-one with the older adults in their homes to better understand their needs. They identify the issues at the root of the presenting health concern for which the older adult is referred. Based on this assessment, a wellness plan is developed that focuses on the older adult's well-being.

3. The Seniors' Community Connector develops a wellness plan focused on well-being.

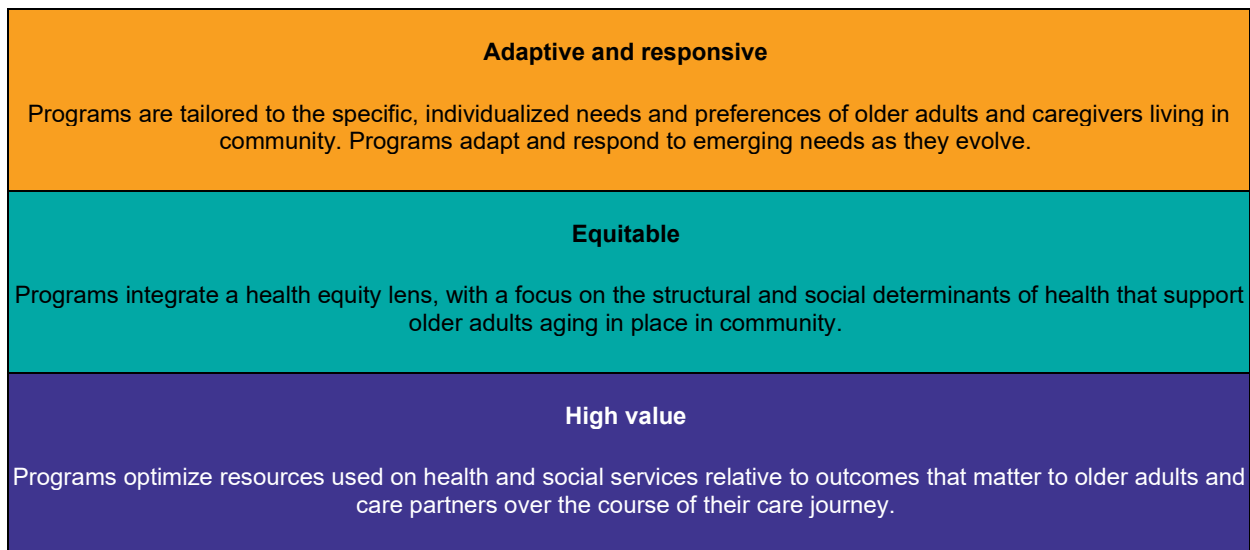
The Seniors' Community Connector identifies appropriate community programs and services for older adults and provides the necessary support, such as transportation and accompaniment, and financial support to alleviate barriers and facilitate access. The connector works with the older adult and their caregivers on an ongoing basis to adjust their wellness plan as their needs and preferences change.

4. The Seniors' Community Connector connects back to the healthcare provider.

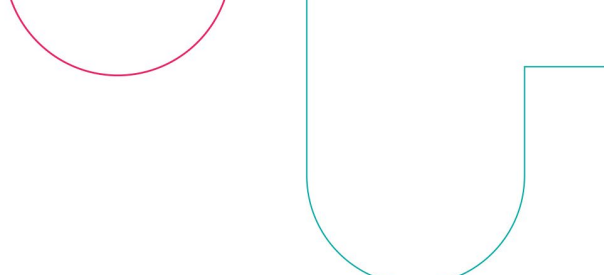
The connector provides the referring healthcare provider or caregiver with updates on the older adult's progress.

Enabling aging in place principles

Person-centredness is a core philosophy of HEC’s Enabling Aging in Place program. All the principles must be implemented in a person-centred way and reflect a deep understanding of community assets and the needs of older adults and their care partners.



The following reflects how the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing Program fulfils HEC’s Enabling Aging in Place program principles:



Access to specialized healthcare services – The Seniors' Community Connector links older adults and caregivers to providers from community health and social service agencies to enable them to manage health conditions and promote overall health and well-being.

Access to social and community support – A comprehensive assessment helps uncover the social support needs that are the root cause of an older adult's health concerns, such as social isolation, loneliness, depression and other barriers, including vision loss, hearing loss and oral health. Older adults are connected to social support resources alongside specialized services for specific non-medical health needs.

Access to system navigation support – The Seniors' Community Connector facilitates access to community services and resources by providing transportation, accompaniment, language and culturally appropriate support.

Adaptive and responsive – A comprehensive assessment helps uncover the social and community support needs that are the root cause of an older adult's health concerns. Wellness plans are tailored to an older adult's unique needs and preferences and are modified as their capacities evolve and change.

Equitable – The Social Prescribing Program provides a pathway for healthcare providers to address the social determinants of health that affect aging in place. It is free for all older adults, and referrals and support are proportionate to the level of need of the older adults who are referred to the program.

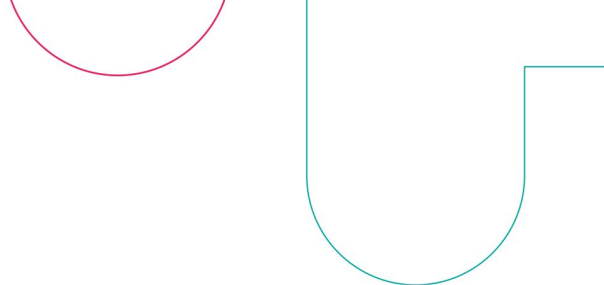
High value – The Social Prescribing Program efficiently uses system resources by capitalizing on the resources available in local communities to support the non-medical health needs of older adults.

Funding

Funding for the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing Program is provided by the British Columbia Ministry of Health and administered by the United Way of British Columbia.

Implementation

Assessing needs and assets: The Social Prescribing Program creates a wellness plan for older adults centred on their strengths and needs. To achieve this, the Seniors' Community Connector engages in one-on-one conversations with the older adults in their homes to develop a personal relationship and gain a thorough understanding of their concerns and preferences.



Social Prescribing Program team: The Seniors' Community Connector is the primary human resource for the Social Prescribing Program at Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services. This position is supported by a team responsible for numerous complementary older adult programs such as the Seniors Navigation and Peer Support Program, Seniors Activity Program, Better at Home, Digital Literacy and Meals on Wheels.

The Social Prescribing Program works in collaboration with the Seniors Outreach Worker from Ridge Meadows Urgent and Primary Care Centre, who works alongside the Seniors' Community Connector two days a week to support complex cases with, for example, joint home visits, assessments and referrals.

Target population: While there is no age requirement, the Social Prescribing Program is open to older adults living in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows who may be:

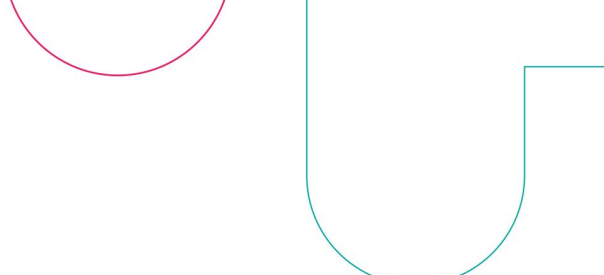
- socially isolated or marginalized
- experiencing emotional problems and/or major life events such as loss of a spouse
- experiencing a chronic disease
- physically inactive
- experiencing poor nutrition and/or food security concerns
- experiencing poor health outcomes associated with social determinants of health
- frequently using primary healthcare

Enrollment: The Social Prescribing Program can be accessed through a referral from various sources, such as healthcare providers, family members and care providers, or through self-referral. Referrals can be made by a range of healthcare providers, including primary care, hospitals, pharmacies and assisted-living facilities.

Partnerships: The Social Prescribing Program is supported by several local collaborations, including with the Salvation Army, Alouette Addictions, Meadow Ridge Rotary Club, the Food Banks, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows/Katzie Seniors Network, Hospice Society, Community Response Network, Fraser River Indigenous Society and the Seniors Centre.

The Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services Social Prescribing Program's formal partnerships include Fraser Health and the United Way of British Columbia.

Adaptations over time: In 2020, the Social Prescribing Program launched as a pilot program in collaboration with a local physician champion in an assisted living facility. During the pilot, the facility's healthcare workers identified older adults with social care needs and referred them to the program. The program's key referral assessment and communication processes with healthcare providers were developed and refined during this period. While some processes have evolved over time, the program's premise has remained stable. Since its inception, the Social Prescribing Program has expanded to involve referrals from a wider range of healthcare providers throughout the communities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.



As the Social Prescribing Program grew, it became apparent that some older adults lacked access to vital health resources and mobility aids that could enhance their quality of life and ability to age in place. To address this issue, the Program Director of the Seniors Department leveraged community partnerships, donors and grant opportunities to establish a Seniors Wellness Fund. The fund provides financial assistance to low-income older adults to help them pay for critical items such as vision care, dental care, hearing aids, walkers, medicine and healthy foods. Additionally, the fund helps eligible older adults access income support programs like the Canadian Pension Plan, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement. By addressing these income-related barriers, seniors are able to fully participate in the Social Prescribing Program.

Evaluation and impact¹

From 2020 to 2022, 64 older adults benefited from the Social Prescribing Program. The impact of the program is demonstrated through stories from older adults who have been supported by it.

“With the help of Senior Services, I was able to secure housing, get out of my depression and participate in Senior Party Bus events where I made some friends.”

“I am a senior who was starving and ill. They got the Food Bank to deliver food, and I was sponsored to receive Meals on Wheels until I got my finances sorted.”

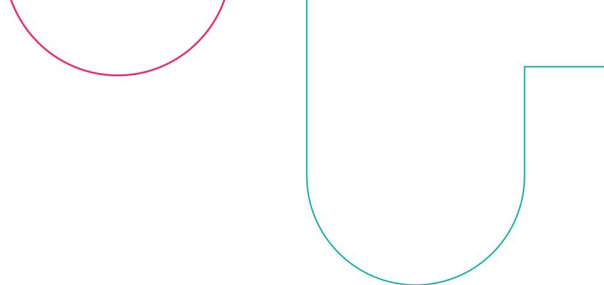
“Sending meals to our home made it possible for us as a married couple to stay together in our own home.”

“They helped give me hope. I had lost hope. I had totally lost hope at that point. I had given up, and I had already decided that I wasn’t going to keep going.”

Keys to success

Network of service providers: Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Community Services operates within a robust network of collaborators in its community. The Seniors Network in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows acts as a unified voice for older adult services and programs, and endeavours to collaborate in promoting the well-being of older adults. The Seniors Network

¹ The evaluation and impact information shared reflects information available at the time of writing this promising practice. HEC would like to acknowledge that evaluation activities are an ongoing process for many promising practices and the type of data collected is influenced by program goals, the length of time the program has been implemented and the level of resources available to support evaluation.



facilitates referrals, provides access to resources and fosters connections to various opportunities for the benefit of older adults.

Relationship building: Meeting face to face with older adults in their homes and the spaces they frequent is key to fostering trusting relationships with older adults.

Key challenges

Physician engagement: At the program's outset, it was a challenge to convince physicians to provide referrals to the Social Prescribing Program. This hurdle was overcome through several strategies, such as building strong relationships with Fraser Health and its primary care networks, having a local physician advocate for the program, conducting a pilot program to establish referral pathways and organizing lunch-and-learn presentations and meetings for primary care providers to promote the program. When physicians began making referrals, they quickly began to see the value of the program for their older adult patients, leading to positive word of mouth and subsequent referrals from other primary care providers.