

**Special COVID-19 Online Meeting #1 - May 1, 2020:
Age Friendly Niagara Network (AFNN) Leadership Council and
Leaders of Local Municipal Seniors/Age-Friendly Advisory Committees**

Themes and Next Steps

This summary draws on comments, discussion, and ideas shared by leaders with Age-Friendly and Seniors Advisory committees from all 12 of Niagara's local municipalities. Participants shared their thinking about COVID-19-related impacts on older adults in our community, and learned from each other's local experiences.

Everyone is encouraged to distribute this summary to their respective networks:

- to disseminate the **key themes** identified so that leading practices and innovative ideas can be explored and possibly replicated in other municipalities
- to reflect on the identified **emerging themes** of unmet needs and provide input to future similar on-line meetings (next meeting planned for May 22, 2020)

Key Themes:

Mental Health, Physical Fitness

- With increased demand for mental health supports for older adults, service providers are emphasizing wellness promotion; suicide prevention; and increasing capacity to identify older adults who may need help. For example, the City of Niagara Falls is promoting physical activity at home, by offering online seated Zumba instruction for which 50+ Centre members can register to participate. The Niagara Region created a *How to Cope During Isolation* guide: <https://bit.ly/2WeNzVI>

Food Insecurity

- Community Support Services Niagara (CSSN) and Niagara Region Seniors Services (NRSS) are collaborating with United Way Niagara to support grocery order/payment/delivery for older adults 55+. NRSS is supporting all 5 Meals on Wheels organizations in Niagara, by collectively ensuring meal providers have necessary resources to continue providing the contracted volume of meals.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

- How do older adults who are in self isolation maintain social connections during COVID-19?
 - "Socialization for seniors only a phone call away" - For example, some Seniors Centres across Niagara are launching telephone-based opportunities for older

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adults to enjoy connections and programs from the comfort of their own home (eg. <https://www.stcatharines.ca/en/playin/OlderAdultCentres.asp>).

- Fighting off loneliness and reducing increased feelings of worry can be supported by having regular contact with friends and family. When that isn't possible, phone-based wellness checks, like programs being offered by both Community Support Services Niagara (CSSN) and Niagara Region Seniors Community Programs can help.

Issues related to Long Term Care (LTC)/Congregate Care Settings

- LTC Homes and Congregate Care settings are susceptible to transmission of infectious diseases. This is due to many inherent systemic factors, notwithstanding the heroic efforts of front-line staff. (Factors include funding shortfalls that lead to issues with staffing, supplies and resultant infection prevention and control.)
- Question for local benefactors: What can be done to show support for residents and staff? (e.g. donations of tablets, books, other helpful items that the homes can accept)

Seniors Month (June 2020) Celebrations during COVID-19

- The AFNN Collaborative of Local Municipal Seniors/Age-Friendly Advisory Committees had envisioned robust celebrations and events, including the raising of the newly designed Age-Friendly Niagara flag, and yet COVID-19 has intervened.
- Questions for local municipalities: What is planned for Seniors Month? What creative alternative approaches will be used to meet the challenge of drawing attention to Seniors Month and to the new flag?

Emerging Themes:

Improving Virtual Connections

- Older Adults Capacity/Accessibility to technology, internet connection, social networks, i.e. online: telemedicine/telehealth, banking, grocery ordering, fitness resources, virtual spiritual and recreational programming/activities

Transportation to essential appointments

- Immediate Concern: With volunteer transportation programs on hold, how do older adults gain access to essential appointments during COVID-19? Niagara Region, as well as Community Support Services of Niagara (CSSN) have small capacity to assist.
- Concern Going Forward: As medical services and non-essential appointments (salons) are rescheduled, will access to volunteer-based transportation services ramp up at the same pace as potential demand?

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