



HONOURING OUR SENIORS

A Survey of Canadians Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Background

Due to a grant from the Government of Canada in 2022, Compassionate Community Care (CCC) was able to survey over 500 Canadians who volunteered to participate. This survey touched on issues important to seniors, including questions that addressed issues of elder abuse, neglect, depression, self and social isolation, personal vulnerability and disability. Many participants' responses mentioned COVID-19 and its impact.

This is a summary report only. A more complete report, *Honouring Our Seniors: A Survey of Canadians Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic* is available in digital format online at www.beingwith.org in the Resources' section.

Survey Participants and Methods

Seniors who were 55 years or older were included in this survey. Survey participants included seniors from across Canada: from The Maritimes to the West Coast and Territories.

A team of callers from JMJ Communications conducted this survey and gathered responses. Seniors were contacted by email, mail and/or phone. Those who responded to the invitation were able to complete the survey either online via a survey link and answer the questions themselves or by telephone while speaking with someone who recorded their answers. Responses were entered into a confidential database and the results synthesized and used to create the report.

Overview of Results

There were two distinct groups within the study: those who were isolated and did not see their family or friends, and those who acted “as if there was no COVID-19”. Separate from these two groups was a third smaller, more fragmented group. These seniors felt isolated to a certain degree, but due to either having a spouse/partner with whom they lived, pet or supportive faith community, endured fairly well through the lockdowns. While they expressed some feelings of loneliness, it seemed manageable because they were not alone.

Survey Data

Over 500 Canadians were surveyed. Of these; 67% said they are female and 33% said they are male; 24.4% of seniors surveyed said they live alone, 52.3 % of seniors surveyed live with their spouse/partner, and the remaining 23.3% surveyed said they live with family, or in retirement housing, etc.

In response to relying on another individual or others for daily activities such as grocery shopping, laundry, cooking, pharmacy, banking, etc., 85% of seniors said “No,” 7.4 % of seniors reported requiring some form of assistance such as needing help to perform these daily activities. The remaining seniors required assistance for various tasks such as banking, cooking, etc.

The majority of survey participants displayed regular healthy habits and behaviors; 90% of respondents participated in outdoor activities even if just for some fresh air, or regular walks. The majority of participants (52.7%) reported that they were eating three plus meals per day, while 41.1% of seniors reported two to three meals per day. Of those surveyed, 63.4% replied “No” to the question whether the increased cost of food affected their daily eating habits or not, 17.2% said “Not really,” and 14.8% replied “Yes.” Some seniors’ feedback stated that they ate more greens and veggies, and/or they found the prices

concerning, and/or found it difficult to follow their regular eating habits [now] compared to before the pandemic.

Responding to the question if they felt harmed or hurt by anyone: 88.3% of responders replied “No”. The remaining responses varied with replies of disputes around COVID-19, discrimination during the pandemic, and feeling isolated and/or bullied.

In response to the question if there is someone who depends on them for financial support, 17.4% of seniors surveyed replied “Yes,” whereas 79.4% responded “No” to there being someone who relies on them for support. The remaining 3.2% of seniors surveyed replied, “Maybe”.

In response to being able to attend their religious community or participate in spiritual activities during COVID-19, 51.4% of seniors surveyed replied “Yes,” 18% replied “No,” and the remaining answers included watching online/TV whenever they were able to, and feeling alone and needing in-person and human connection which faith communities provide.

When asked about their daily mood, reported feelings included: happy, normal / average / OK, sad, positive, contented, joy, excited, mixed emotions, good, grief over loved one passing, alone / lonely, peaceful, frustrated, joyful, hopeful, worried, uncertain, and grateful.

When asked how seniors felt when they had to deal with feelings of depression or negativity during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Spiritual responses included faith in or talk to a higher power, prayer, meditation, expressing gratitude, reading scripture or devotionals and/or attending faith community gatherings.

Social responses included: spending time with family, child(ren), spending time with friends, calling each other, nurturing relationships, going for a car ride,

joining a ladies group within the faith community and watching movies and/or having grandkids over.

Physical activities included: walking, reading, playing guitar, learning piano, drawing, spending time in nature, biking, listening to music, Polka dancing, exercise, webinars, keeping busy, baking, gardening, knitting, sewing, crocheting, puzzles, swimming, hockey, baseball or attending the YMCA.

Other responses included: struggling through it, sleeping, taking medication or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, speaking to a professional / psychiatrist / psychotherapist, watching TV/YouTube, eating chocolate, playing board games over Zoom, reading books or listening to audio books, reading old letters and albums, taking teatime, taking anti-depressants, learning Spanish, working, crying or talking to their children.

Many seniors expressed that there needs to be more support from other seniors, citing the need to obtain medical help, locating a suitable doctor, specialist, or practitioner who may help with their health challenges. Many seniors requested help with transportation or travel, such as increased wheelchair accessibility, job or volunteer opportunities, information on seniors programs and activities, and community support services, or even simply having someone to connect with and speak to on a regular basis.

Conclusion and Follow-Up

Although many of the survey responses expressed a concern about the state of Canada due to lockdowns and mandates during the pandemic, seniors also expressed concern about health care and end-of-life care. Some seniors expressed specific fears about MAiD (medical aid in dying/euthanasia). As well, another theme arose, that of genuine concern for the well-being of others, and the need to ensure individual human rights and freedoms are protected.

A participant's response sums this up well in their final feedback:

“Seeing seniors in person is the most important way to help them.”

Compassionate Community Care thanks all seniors who participated in this survey
and welcomes any questions, comments and feedback.

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