



CONNECTING EDMONTON SENIORS

...to reduce **loneliness**
and **isolation**

A summary report of community
collaboration advanced by the
**Pan-Edmonton Group Addressing
Social Isolation of Seniors**



EDMONTON
SENIORS
COORDINATING
COUNCIL

Canada

www.seniorscouncil.net

Connecting Edmonton Seniors is a goal and a movement involving people and organizations working together for seniors in the Greater Edmonton area.

Connecting one senior can be as simple as a single act of kindness.

Connecting every senior can be complicated – addressing the individual needs of thousands.

Anyone may become socially isolated, but older adults are especially at risk of being isolated or lonely.

The large number of risk factors mean that individuals may become isolated, and emerge from isolation, for countless reasons. Personal circumstances can change quickly.

By the time people reach their 80s, most are living alone, often because of the loss of a spouse. Social networks usually get smaller – children and grandchildren may move away and siblings and friends may pass away.

Other common Risk Factors:

- Poor health and mobility
- Financial challenges
- Language barriers
- Life transitions such as retirement
- Providing care to a family member or friend
- Unstable or insecure housing situation

We heard

Programs can thrive by striking a balance between addressing 'common needs of the many' while also being flexible to respond to 'particular needs of the few'.

Two population surveys were conducted to help us better understand seniors' loneliness and isolation. In our 2019 survey of 720 Edmonton seniors:

- *More than 1 in 5 (21%) scored as lonely*



- *1 in 4 don't have someone they can count on to listen to them or rely on for help*



- *2 in 5 seldom or never have someone they can count on*



What was PEGASIS?

From 2016 until 2019, the **Pan-Edmonton Group Addressing Social Isolation of Seniors** ran **several unique projects to support seniors**. Seven organizations were funded by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program to do this work.

- **Goal:** Reduce isolation and increase social connections for older adults.
- **How:** Combine efforts to create a 'collective impact' larger than any organization could make alone. Coordinate information and programs in new ways. Learn as you go; quickly adapt and change to reach and support more seniors.
- **Core Group:** Drive Happiness, Edmonton Southside Primary Care Network, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, GEF Seniors Housing, Sage Seniors Association, Westend Seniors Activity Centre, and Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council as the glue that held the collaborative together.
- **Community Partners:** Many other organizations and individuals joined to improve services for seniors in Edmonton and beyond.

Together all the partners created the Connecting Edmonton Seniors movement. This growing group of partners work in health services, seniors centres, grassroots societies, housing and transportation, government departments, universities as well as local businesses.

Since 2019, they continue to cooperate through the Stewardship Round Table.



Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council provided overall coordination and support – the glue to hold 7 projects together. They guided vision and strategy, built networks, and evaluated results.



Westend Seniors Activity Centre ran a *How Can We Help You?* marketing campaign to raise awareness of social isolation and available services. Thousands of households were reached through multimedia.



More than 6,300 Edmonton seniors were served through information, socialization, and a range of personalized supports provided by five direct-service projects. See page 3 of this document to learn more.

PEGASIS direct-service projects

Assisted Rides by Drive Happiness

Door-thru-door assisted rides were offered 7-days a week for shopping, recreational outings and more. **1,008 seniors got the rides they needed to get out of their homes and engage with their community.** Drive Happiness continues to help reduce social isolation, having provided **over 18,000 rides in 2019 alone.** Volunteer drivers make every ride friendly and safe. Ongoing fundraising subsidizes costs, ensuring affordability for riders.

Seniors' Centre Without Walls at Edmonton Southside Primary Care Network:

From the comfort of home, seniors enjoyed no-cost, interactive telephone-based programming to socialize, learn new skills, and stay connected. **805 isolated seniors participated in 697 program sessions.** Building on their success with PEGASIS, the Seniors' Centre Without Walls continues to offer a wide variety of programs and is expanding across Alberta.

Community Support Program at GEF Seniors Housing:

On-site outreach workers helped resident seniors to connect with community programs and services. **More than 530 residents received one-on-one interventions** to reduce social isolation. **Over 2,200 attended information sessions** to learn how and where to find neighbourhood activities and resources. This program has become a valuable part of operations at GEF buildings.

Community Connections through English as an Additional Language at Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN):

Language learning can open the door for isolated seniors to find various social supports. **More than 360 immigrant seniors participated in English classes** and field trips. Community Connectors assisted participants with settlement and integration. Although this unique seniors program was not sustained, EMCN integrated learnings into their regular classes and programs.

Specialized Outreach and Case Finding at Sage Seniors Association:

To find socially isolated seniors, **56 presentations, reached 1,790 people** through community organizations, health services, places of worship and businesses. Community Navigators worked with 1,554 individuals. **Approximately 10% required complex supports to manage significant barriers.** Community development work also sparked the Men's Sheds movement in Edmonton. Although this unique case finding project was not sustained, SAGE integrated learnings into their regular outreach and support services.

Marketing project lessons

Westend Seniors Activity Centre's project confirmed that costly multimedia campaigns are neither necessary nor sustainable. Word of mouth remains most effective for drawing people to their centre. They built an e-platform for ongoing social media/online communications. They continue to engage other senior serving organizations and businesses to mutually promote programs and services.



Assisted transportation serves as a linchpin



During the PEGASIS collaborative, **assisted rides were a linchpin essential service that helped all the other projects**, ensuring that seniors got safely to and from classes, appointments, social events and recreational programs. These low or no-cost rides allowed seniors with financial, language or transportation barriers to participate.

Assisted transportation remains one of the most pressing unmet needs for older adults in Edmonton.

Health conditions, cost, transportation problems, and 'not wanting to go alone' are some of the most common reasons that seniors gave when asked what interferes with them being more active.* Assisted rides respond to all these barriers.

Despite increasing demand for this essential service, not-for-profit organizations like Drive Happiness face ongoing challenges of stable funding and capacity to recruit and support their volunteer drivers. Widespread community recognition and a reliable long-term financing solution are needed.

This issue remains a priority for the Connecting Edmonton Seniors partners. **The Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council continues to lead advocacy work to find solutions with 'whole community' involvement.**

* PEGASIS population-level surveys on Loneliness and Social Isolation in Seniors Living in Edmonton 2017 and 2019

"I really appreciate [Drive Happiness], because without them, I'd be stranded here [at home]."

-Rider

Social vulnerability does not necessarily lead to isolation

The Connecting Edmonton Seniors movement continually seeks to better understand what contributes to seniors' isolation and what more can be done to reduce it. However, these answers tend to vary from individual to individual. **Two people with similar health and access to resources likely have different levels of personal resilience and different comfort levels around socializing versus aloneness.**

The (journey) map below was created in collaboration with the creative staff at Mapping and Planning Support (MAPS) Alberta Capital Region, to show the complexity of risk factors and circumstances that contribute to isolation and resilience.

Content of the map was drawn from in-depth interviews with seniors and senior serving workers as part of the PEGASIS initiative. **Results showed wide variations in personal experiences across a spectrum of factors.** Although each person's journey is unique to their situation, there are common issues and conditions that can be linked to social isolation.

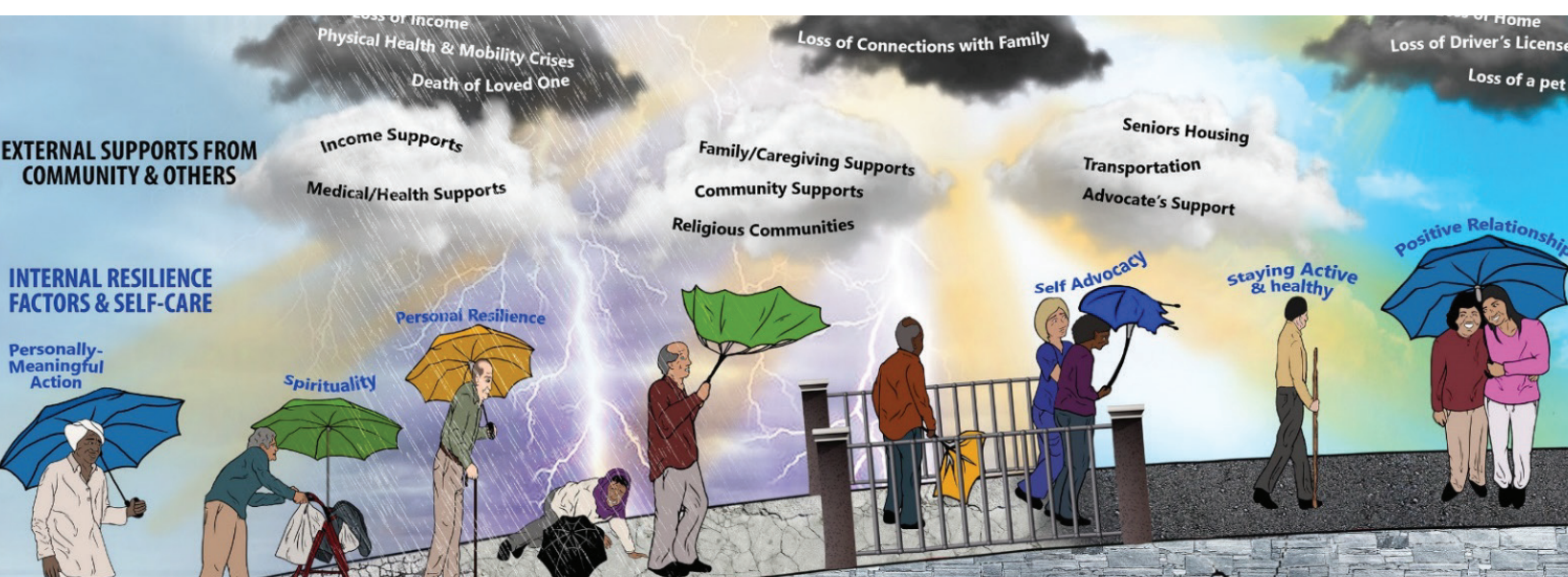
The below image is a snippet of the full journey map. You can download the complete, printable resource by visiting seniorscouncil.net/network-resources and clicking the "social isolation" tab.

We heard

PEGASIS participants reported:

- *expanded social networks overall, due to social connections and social activities they had established through projects.*
- *a positive and lasting impact on their wellbeing overall, including feeling happier; having less worries and uncertainties in their lives; having more control over their lives; feeling more independent; having more sense of purpose and motivation.**

**Note: These results were often not retained when programs ended.*



Importance of ‘Connectors’

Frontline connectors are key to the direct support of older adults who are, or may become, socially isolated.

Connectors provide a range of expertise and guidance to help seniors. Agency-based connectors include staff and volunteers in a variety of roles such as peer supporters, language and cultural interpreters, outreach workers, and assisted transportation drivers.

The work of ‘finding’ isolated seniors and ‘navigating’ systems to help connect seniors is more complicated than it might sound. **There is no single best way to find, connect with and provide navigating support for those who are isolated or at-risk.** ‘The many ways’ need to be manageable for the organization and suit the specific circumstances of the individuals involved.

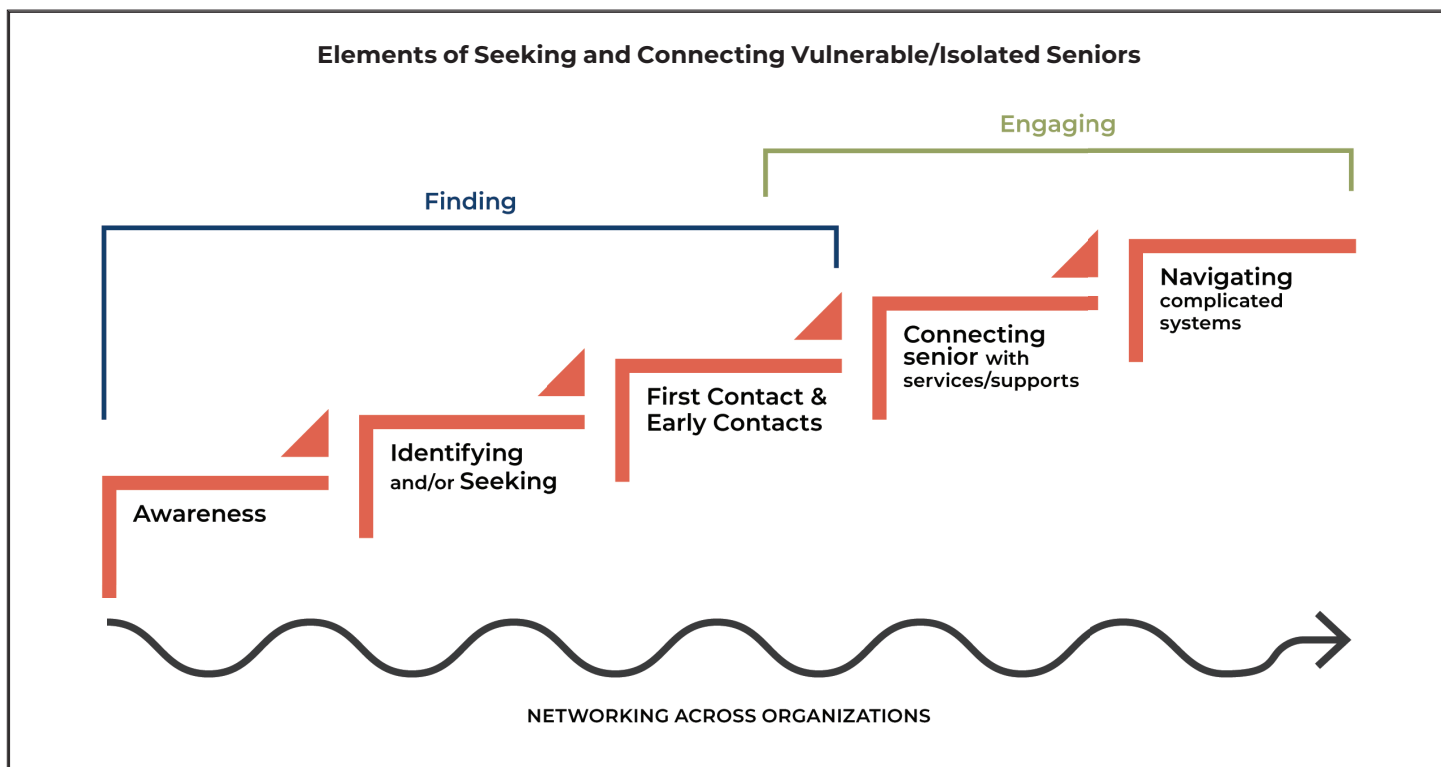
The process diagram below shows the multiple activities undertaken by the five PEGASIS direct service programs in order to identify and support seniors.

The positive impact of front-line connectors was seen across projects, regardless of their job description. Volunteers were as important as professionals.

Future isolation-reduction programs should place a high priority on allocating resources to front-line staff and volunteers.

We heard

Participants praised both staff and volunteers for their support and care. Participants felt the connectors had become an important part of their support systems.



Neighbourhood connectors grow the Men's Sheds movement

A Men's Shed is a welcoming, respectful, and inclusive place that provides the opportunity for men to build projects, form positive relationships, and increase neighborly connections.

Through its PEGASIS project, SAGE Seniors Association lent a hand to start the first Men's Shed in Edmonton. But soon the 'shedders' were driving this grassroots, peer-run movement.

The Men's Sheds program aims to create safe spaces for men to connect and build new relationships, while combating social isolation and depression. Members share their skills and learn new skills from others through activities of their own choosing (e.g. woodworking, painting, cooking, etc.).

"Men's Sheds have been a resounding success across the city."

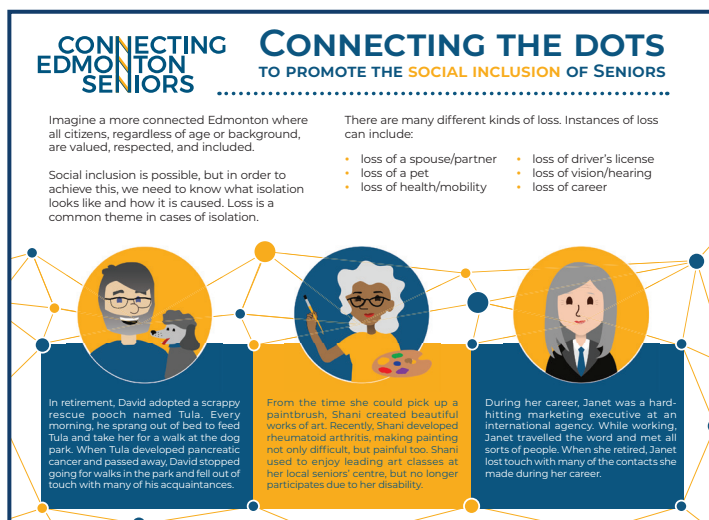
-PEGASIS Partner



Pictured left: Members of the Downtown Edmonton Men's Shed gather to socialize and work on projects together.

Pictured below: The Connecting Edmonton Seniors initiative developed many resources to assist connectors in their goal of helping seniors and their caregivers navigate a complex system.

You can find more resources like this at:
www.seniorscouncil.net





Learnings about collaboration and sustainability

Collaboration among agencies, governments, departments and communities is critical to achieve powerful outcomes. **Collaboration takes hard work, but the positive ripple effects of organizations working together can be well worth the investment.**

Trusting, collaborative relationships are one of the most lasting benefits that partners sustained from the PEGASIS/Connecting Edmonton Seniors experience. These relationships took years and commitment to build, and they resulted in ongoing advantages to serve seniors.

The building blocks

- 1. Time:** Collaboration and collective impact takes years.
- 2. Stable resources:** Organizations need predictable, ongoing funding and reliable personnel who can invest the necessary time to understand their partner organizations, build relationships and trust. Besides funding and staff, resource requirements are numerous, such as facilities, equipment, transport, and expertise.
- 3. Mutual accountability:** Organizations participating in a collective impact initiative need to be primarily accountable to each other and to their common agenda, not to the funder. PEGASIS partnerships were less aligned when projects were wholly answerable to the funder.
- 4. Organizational commitment:** The organizations that sustained their projects beyond the PEGASIS funding made a long term commitment from a top leadership level to fully adopt their program and find ways to fund it.
- 5. Strong Shared Functions:**
 - **Communications:** Both internal and external communications are key to any project. Communications must be a priority for funding and cooperation from the start.
 - **Strategic Learning Approach:** Strategic learning should be central to collective impact initiatives. Partners choose strategic learning questions; evaluation measures are only part of a continuous learning process to improve programs and services.

We heard

PEGASIS projects benefitted from working together in many ways, including:

- *A broader reach for their projects from shared promotion, cross-agency referrals, and more*
- *More effective or enhanced programs and services, such as added opportunities for seniors to learn new skills and knowledge.*

Help us build a happier, more connected Edmonton

Everybody can and must help for this movement to succeed!

A CONNECTING Role for Everyone: There are lots of ways to get involved – either informally as a neighbour, friend, or family member – or more formally as a volunteer.

Little things matter

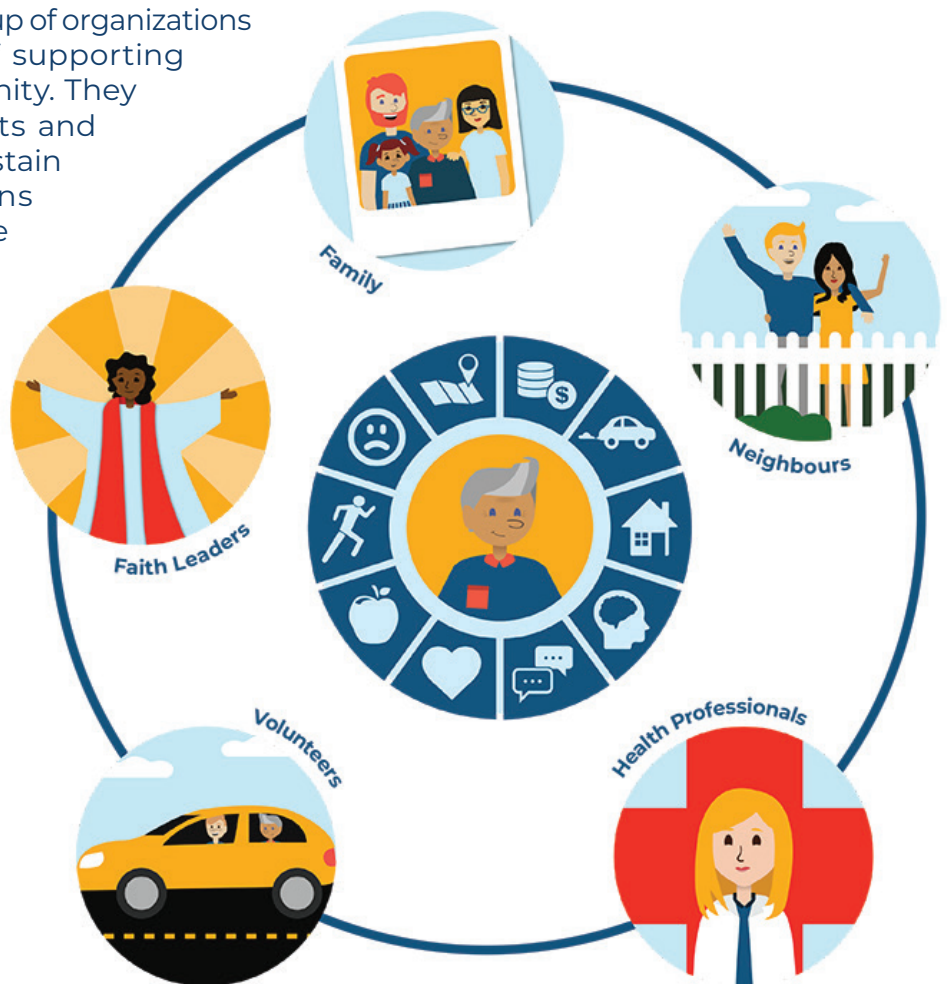
A friendly smile, saying hello, or having a short conversation can open doors for isolated seniors.

Join our change network

The Stewardship Round Table is a group of organizations and people with a shared goal of supporting every senior to age well in community. They share expertise, resources, contacts and talent. Their long-term aim is to sustain a broad network of organizations working together to create big-picture systemic improvements.

You can help!

*Find more resources to connect older Edmontonians at:
www.seniorscouncil.net.*



The PEGASIS/Connecting Edmonton Seniors project was made possible with funding from The Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program.