

Pandemic Perspectives on Ageing in Canada in Light of COVID-19: Findings from a National Institute on Ageing/TELUS Health National Survey



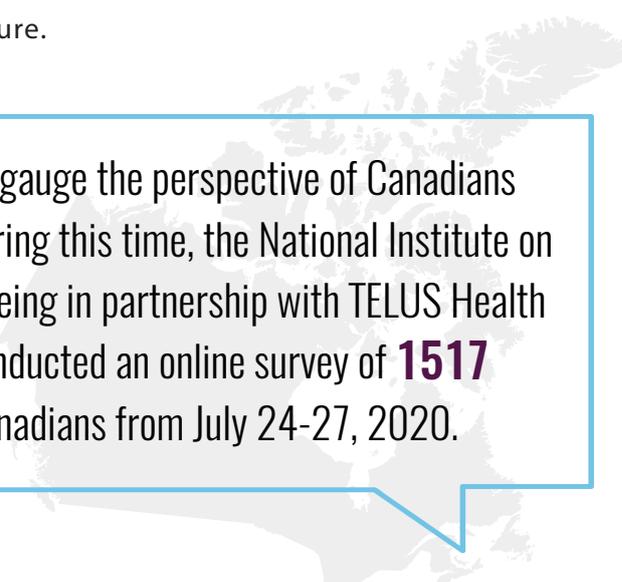
Pandemic Perspectives on Ageing in Canada in Light of COVID-19: Findings from a National Institute on Ageing/TELUS Health National Survey

The COVID-19 pandemic has been having a disproportionate effect on the health and well-being of older Canadians.

Approximately, 80% of COVID-19 deaths in Canada have occurred amongst older Canadians in long-term care settings like nursing and retirement homes. For the majority of older Canadians who live in their own homes, concerns about social isolation, receiving appropriate and timely care, and maintaining one's independence have heightened in part due to recommended restrictions on non-essential social interactions, which are expected to persist to some extent for the foreseeable future.

This survey specifically focused on understanding the perspectives of Canadians around where they want to live as they age, how much have they been impacted by social isolation, their perspectives on being a caregiver to an older person, and their concerns about living independently and safely at advanced ages, and their view on the value of wearable technologies to support ageing in place. What follows are our key findings.

The online survey of 1517 Canadians aged 18+, was completed between July 24-27, 2020, using Leger's online panel. With a sample of 1517 respondents, the margin of error is +/-2.5%, 19 times out of 20.



To gauge the perspective of Canadians during this time, the National Institute on Ageing in partnership with TELUS Health conducted an online survey of **1517** Canadians from July 24-27, 2020.

COVID-19 has Shifted Canadians' Views on Ageing in Their Own Homes Rather Than in Retirement or Nursing Homes

The disproportionate number of COVID-19 deaths that have occurred in Canadian nursing and retirement homes has prompted Canadians to change their perspective on where they might want to receive long-term care in older age.

Indeed, a [recent survey](#) has shown that 90% of Canadians report being aware of the significant number of COVID-19 deaths that have occurred in Canadian nursing and retirement homes. The ongoing measures that have limited or prevented family members from visiting, caring for, and monitoring the well-being of their loved ones in care homes has further impacted the health and wellbeing of many living in these settings. As a result, it's not surprising that older Canadians and Quebecers are more likely than other Canadians to report that COVID-19 has shifted their perspectives on ageing in their own homes rather than in retirement or nursing homes.

The NIA/TELUS Health Survey found that:

- Approximately **60%** of Canadians, and almost **70%** of Canadians 65 years of age and older, report that COVID-19 has changed their opinion on whether or not they'd arrange for themselves or an older loved one to live in a nursing or retirement home.
- In Quebec, [where over 4,600 COVID-19 deaths occurred in 27% of its nursing and retirement homes](#), **68%** of respondents report that COVID-19 has changed their opinion on whether or not they'd arrange for themselves or an older loved one to live in a nursing or retirement home, compared to **55%** of the rest of Canada.
- **91%** of Canadians of all ages - and almost **100%** of Canadians 65 years of age and older report that they plan on supporting themselves to live safely and independently in their own home as long as possible.

Most Canadians are not Prepared Personally or Financially to Become Caregivers to an Older Family Member or Friend

A [2013 Statistics Canada Report](#) found that over 8 million Canadians over the age of 15 are providing care to a loved one. Currently, more than 3 million unpaid Canadian caregivers, or 40% of all Canadian caregivers, provide care to an ageing parent. The NIA/TELUS Health Survey further found:

- While **28%** of Canadians report already having taken on unpaid caregiving responsibilities for an ageing parent or loved one, only **43%** say that, if needed, they are personally and financially prepared to become a caregiver for an ageing family member.
- More than **30%** of Canadians younger than 65 years of age report that they have already taken on unpaid caregiving responsibilities for an ageing parent or loved one, compared to less than **20%** of those 65 years of age and older. As Canadians live longer with fewer adult children, providing unpaid care for older persons will continue to become a more common experience for us all.
- **35%** of Quebecers are already taking on unpaid caregiving responsibilities for an ageing parent or loved one, compared to only **26%** of respondents from the rest of Canada. Only **31%** of Quebecers, however, state that they are both personally and financially prepared to become a caregiver for an ageing family member, compared to **47%** of respondents from the rest of Canada.



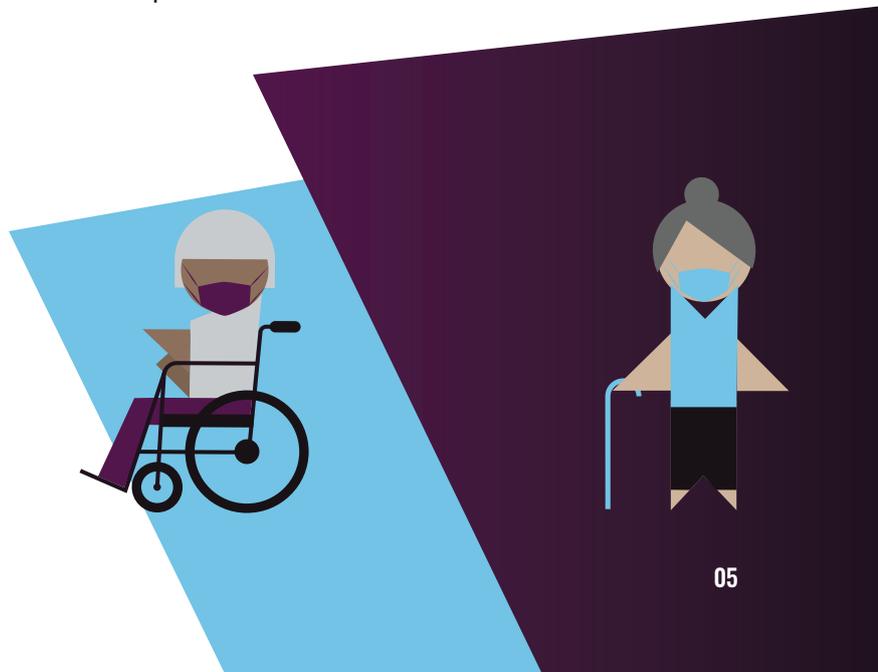
COVID-19 has Significantly Increased Canadians' Feelings of Social Isolation and Loneliness

Loneliness and isolation can lead to negative health outcomes for people of all ages. While it is often assumed that older adults are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness, the [2018 Toronto Social Capital Study](#) co-sponsored by the NIA found that older Torontonians 55 years and older are almost twice as likely to report satisfaction with their frequency of contact with family and friends compared to those between 25 and 54 years of age. As the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited the ability of people to regularly socialize in person with their family and friends, the NIA/TELUS Health Survey further found:

- While **51%** of Canadians younger than 55 years of age report that they have been experiencing a lack of companionship and regular social connections with other people, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, **40%** of Canadians older than 55 years of age reported feeling the same way. At the same time **67%** of Canadians believe that a lack of social connection with other people negatively impacts their overall health and well-being.

- While **70%** of Canadians younger than 55 years of age report that a lack of companionship and social connection negatively impacts their health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, only **54%** of Canadians 75 years of age and older expressed the same concern.

- Only **54%** of Quebecers reported that a lack of companionship and social connection negatively impacts their health and well-being, compared to **70%** of respondents from the rest of Canada who expressed the same concern, despite there not being a difference between these groups in reporting that they have been experiencing a lack of companionship and regular social connection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

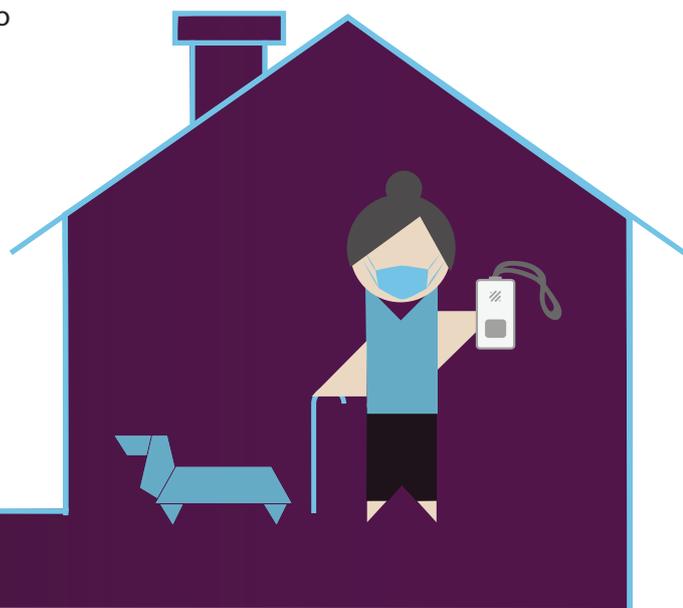


Canadians Want to Maintain their Independence as they Age. While Falls Remain a Threat, Technology Could be an Enabler.

Falls are preventable, and yet they are the leading cause of injury and injury related hospitalizations amongst older Canadians over 65 years of age. [While 56% all falls occur outside the home, 55% of fall-related injuries amongst older adults occur inside their own homes. 80% of falls also occur during the day. One-third of people over 65 will fall at least once a year. Falls are often a key reason for why older Canadians end up moving into nursing or retirement homes.](#)

The NIA/TELUS Health Survey further found:

- **91%** of Canadians of all ages, and almost **100%** of Canadians 65 years of age and older, report that they plan on supporting themselves to live safely and independently in their own home as long as possible. Furthermore, those who hope to stay in their own home as long as possible are significantly more likely to agree that wearable technologies could allow Canadians to live safely and independently for longer in their own homes as they age.
- **90%** of Canadians of all ages, and almost **100%** of Canadians 65 years of age and older, report that they intend to do whatever they can to stay active and maintain their optimal health and independence.
- Over **85%** of Canadians 65 years of age and older say they are open to receiving advice on how to live safely on their own from trusted friends and family.
- **30%** of Canadians 65 years of age and older, however, said they don't feel prepared should they be alone when a medical emergency occurs. The disconnect between an older person's desire to live independently and their level of preparedness for medical emergencies could pose a risk to their ability to age at home safely.



- For instance, falls make up the overwhelming majority of hospitalizations due to injury among older Canadians, but **79%** of Canadians say they have not spoken to their healthcare providers about what to do if they or a loved one falls.
- When asked if they know what to do to reduce their chances of falling in or around their homes, only **71%** of Canadians under 55 years of age said they knew what to do compared to **91%** of Canadians over 65 years of age, and **96%** of Canadians over 75 years of age.
- Only **21%** of Canadians say they have spoken to their healthcare provider about what to do if a fall happens to either themselves and/or their family members, and this rate doesn't seem to improve with age. However, those Canadians who have spoken to their healthcare provider about what to do if a fall happens are more likely to report feeling prepared in case they are alone and suffer a medical emergency (77% vs. 55% of Canadian who did not talk to their healthcare providers).
- Nearly **80%** of Canadians 55 years of age and older say they are open to receiving advice on how to live safely on their own. Similarly, **79%** of Canadians agree that wearable technology could help Canadians live safe and independent lives in their own homes for longer as they age. Furthermore, the older Canadians get, the more likely they are to agree with these two statements. Indeed, **95%** of Canadians older than 75 years of age agree that wearable technologies could allow Canadians to live safely and independently in their own homes as they age.



Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the opinion of a majority of Canadians on whether or not they'd arrange for themselves or an older loved one to live in a nursing or retirement home. It's clear now more than ever that Canadians have become interested in doing whatever is necessary to stay active and maintain their optimal health and independence, and to live safely and independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

The pandemic has made it more difficult for some older adults to stay well-connected with their family and friends and receive in-person health care from family caregivers and home care providers. The use of technology has been one useful way to keep people socially connected with each other, and assist with keeping track of appointments and schedules, and finding health information. Nevertheless, a significant number of Canadians reported still experiencing considerably greater levels of social isolation during this pandemic.

Finally, with 30% of older Canadians reporting they don't feel prepared should they be alone when a medical emergency occurs, wearable technologies may become an increasingly welcome method to enable Canadians to live safely, independently, and longer in their own homes as they age, especially by those who hope to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.

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