

For Immediate Release

Social isolation a terrible threat for Canada's seniors

Ottawa, Canada, April 23, 2014 – Social isolation is on the rise in Canada according to a new report by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada.

Growing old alone: The rise of social isolation as Canada ages looks at how shifting demographics are causing social isolation to become more prevalent. There are fewer young adults available to spend time with increasing numbers of elderly Canadians. Modern families are more likely to be scattered geographically, and community ties have weakened. As a result, this is having a significant impact on many seniors, affecting their mental and physical health and their ability to live independently.

Social isolation occurs when a lack of social contact and reduced social networks cause a person to suffer measurable negative effects. It is a particular concern amongst the elderly, who are more likely to have outlived loved ones and suffer from mobility or financial limitations.

The number of Canadians affected is likely to grow as Canada ages. Within the next few years, there will be more Canadians 65 and over than children 14 and younger.

According to the report, social isolation is a risk factor in the development of chronic illness and a strong risk factor in early death:

- Social isolation is associated with "chronic lung disease, arthritis, impaired mobility, and depressive symptoms"
- Loneliness associated with social isolation leads to a decline in the ability to carry out daily activities, as well as difficulty in upper extremity tasks (such as reaching for items in upper cupboards) and stair climbing
- Social isolation is as great a factor in early death as smoking 15 or less cigarettes per day

"Social isolation can be both debilitating and deadly. It's time to take this issue seriously, for the sake of our aging loved ones and neighbours," says lead researcher Derek Miedema.

The report concludes with practical steps that families can take to decrease social isolation in their own communities.

The study can be found online at: <http://www.imfcanada.org/growing-old-alone>