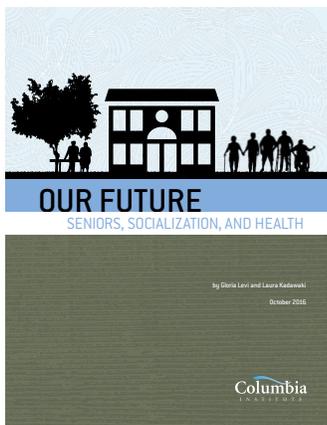


# Executive Summary



**MUNICIPAL SERVICES TO SENIORS ARE**, and will become increasingly important in providing the support they need to live in the community. They are usually the first line of defense in maintaining good health. And, they should be seen as the first link in the continuum of health care.

*Our Future: Seniors, Socialization, and Health* focuses on surveying and reviewing how effectively municipal seniors' centre programs are meeting the holistic needs of older adults living in the community. Concerns about the rising costs of health care for an aging population frame much of the discussion in

the media about the future sustainability of our public health services. There is also a growing consensus that “aging in place” is the most cost-effective and appropriate way of supporting the needs of this population. Seniors and their families have a strong preference for services that support older adults in their own homes as long as it is practical and in the best interests of all family members.

There is a substantial amount of evidence that describes the correlation between degrees of health and social isolation. Socially isolated seniors are more at risk for falls, not eating well, and sedentary behaviour. Isolation is even a predictor of mortality from coronary disease and stroke, and isolated seniors have a four to five times greater risk of hospitalization. Social isolation also affects the psychological and cognitive health of seniors, such as depression and suicide. Ironically, the cause of death of socially isolated seniors is often stated as “failure to thrive.”

Although most health services are the responsibility of the provincial government, the need to provide social support systems falls under the aegis of municipalities. Central to the success of a centre is the diversity and breadth of the range of programs being offered. The centres try to answer the basic human needs of physical well-being and include wellness programs such as fitness, nutritional supports, and health promotion. They offer activities that enhance creativity, whether it is painting, writing, quilting or gardening. They stimulate intellectual development through lectures, book clubs, concerts, and travel, and answer the need for a sense of purpose by providing broad opportunities for volunteering.

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## Key Messages

1. Municipalities are the frontline step in maintaining seniors' health.
2. Seniors centres offer a wide variety of programs to fulfill the needs of seniors living in their communities.
3. By providing seniors with opportunities for socializing, healthy meals, and physical activity, senior centre programs play a key role in keeping seniors healthy and independent. This can delay/prevent seniors from requiring more costly health care services.
4. Both provincial and municipal services have a vital role to play in seniors care, and seniors programs should be recognized as an important part of the health care continuum.
5. To continue to meet the needs of the expanding senior population, health authorities and municipalities need improved communication and understanding. Secure funding, adequate space, and the support of organizational/associational partners is required.

Download the full report at [civicgovernance.ca](http://civicgovernance.ca)

**OUR FUTURE:** Seniors, Socialization, and Health

October 2016

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