

## Submission on Canada's Men and Boys' Health Strategy

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input to Health Canada in the development of a Men and Boys' Health Strategy. Founded in 2016, the NIA is a research and policy institute housed at Toronto Metropolitan University with a mission to improve the lives of older adults and the systems that support them.

Canada is now a super-aged nation, with 1 in 5 Canadians over the age of 65. It is important that the Men and Boys' Health Strategy reflect Canada's changing demographics and adopt a life course approach that recognizes how social norms, structural barriers, and key transition points shape behaviours and outcomes over time.

The [NIA's Ageing in Canada Survey](#) is one of Canada's most comprehensive annual snapshots of the experiences, perspectives and expectations of Canadians aged 50 and older. In 2025, the survey revealed that close to half of older men (44%) are at high risk of social isolation and almost one in three (29%) report poor health. Compared to older women, older men were less likely to have a regular primary care provider compared to older women (66% to 70% respectively). Addressing these challenges requires targeted, gender-responsive strategies grounded in prevention, social connection, and accessible care.

**How do we help men build healthy relationships and adopt healthy habits that improve their overall well-being?**

Supporting men in building healthy relationships and adopting positive habits must begin early but continue across the life course. [Social norms](#) that discourage emotional expression and help-seeking behaviours often persist into older age. Programs that promote emotional literacy, peer connection, and community participation can play a critical role in shifting these norms. Evidence from the NIA's 2025 Ageing in Canada Survey shows that 36% of older men report small social networks and low levels of social engagement (27% almost never participate in social activities). Older adults living alone are at particularly [high risk of loneliness and social isolation](#), which are strongly associated with [poorer physical and mental health outcomes](#).

Gender-sensitive approaches are especially important for older men. Creating environments where men can build relationships through purposeful activity can help normalize help-seeking and strengthen social ties. There are also opportunities for increasing digital tool usage to maintain social connections, manage daily activities, and support their health and well-being. The NIA's [2024 Ageing in Canada Survey](#) revealed that using smartphone apps or other digital devices to keep in touch with family and friends was lower among men than women (70% versus 79%).

How do we help men seek out the care they need to support their mental health and well-being?

Encouraging men to seek care for their mental health and well-being requires addressing both structural and cultural barriers. The 2025 Canadian Men's Health Report produced by the Canadian Men's Health Foundation found that men aged 60 and older were less likely to access mental health services than younger men (77% compared to 57%). Among older adults, [risk factors](#) such as retirement, bereavement, declining health, and social isolation often converge.

Improving access to care involves [integrating mental health supports](#) into settings that men already use, such as workplaces and community organizations. It is important that [clinicians](#) remain alert to depression and social isolation risk factors in older adults, especially during major transitions such as retirement.

Where are the biggest transition points where support is most needed?

Key transition points across the life course represent critical opportunities for intervention and later life transitions such as retirement can lead to a loss of [identity](#) and reduced [social connection](#).

Male caregivers represent another group requiring targeted attention. While the number of men providing care to spouses, partners, and family members is increasing, they are [less likely](#) than women to access formal support services. Social expectations and stigma may discourage men from seeking help, even when caregiving demands are high. Tailored outreach and programming such as peer support groups designed specifically for men can help address these barriers and improve caregiver well-being.

The NIA's work highlights the importance of enabling [ageing in the right place](#), defined as the process of enabling healthy ageing in the most appropriate setting based on personal preferences, circumstances and care needs. For men, this includes addressing risks of social isolation and ensuring access to integrated

health and social services. Initiatives such as dementia awareness campaigns also demonstrate the value of targeted outreach in reducing stigma and

promoting early intervention with approaches that could be adapted to men's mental health and well-being more broadly.

In conclusion, a comprehensive Men and Boys' Health Strategy should adopt a life course approach that prioritizes prevention, social connection, and equitable access to care. By addressing key transition points, reducing stigma, and designing gender-responsive interventions, Canada can improve health outcomes for men while supporting healthy ageing across the population.

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