REACH helps build connections and reduce social isolation

New community initiative addresses an issue that affects two-in-five older Canadians

REACH ISOLATED SENIORS

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program

Canada

Thanks to special funding from the Government of Canada, seniors and older adults in Greater Victoria, the Saanich Peninsula, and the Westshore have new supports to build and maintain social connections.

Through the REACH initiative, the District of Saanich is working with 11 local organizations to strengthen our region's capacity to reach and support isolated seniors.

The image to the right describes the different focus areas of each partner organization.

To learn more about the REACH project, scan the QR code below, or visit saanich.ca/reach.

Collectively, these initiatives help remove barriers, enable new and expanded programs, and share more information with the community.

Read about the program's early progress and examples of success stories on the following pages!



DID YOU KNOW?

Loneliness is not uncommon, but it can have a big impact on your health. Social connection is essential to healthy aging.

As social circles shift over time, there are new chances to build friendships aligned with who you are today. Making and maintaining friendships after retirement and as we age is not only possible, but incredibly rewarding.

Tips to build connections:

- Look for and join clubs and regular activities that match your interests.
- Volunteer for a cause that matters to you.
- Start a conversation during everyday moments in your community.
- Extend and accept invitations. It can feel uncomfortable to ask people for their time but remember how good it feels when people ask you.



Stories of REACH success

How REACH is creating and maintaining social connections within the Greater Victoria community

As the REACH program embarks, different organizations are approaching the collective goal in different ways. Read on to learn more about how REACH is creating connections and helping reduce older-adult isolation.



VICCIR
VANCOUVER ISLAND COUNSELLING CENTRE FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Fostering immigrant seniors' wellbeing

The Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees (VICCIR) has been offering culturally-grounded arts and social programs. A regular participant in their Círculo de Conexión reflected on how the wildflowers they grew from seeds planted during a workshop were like flourishing communities – and how thriving gardens need a variety of species and colours, just like communities.



SAANICH
neighbourhood place

Strengthening food security and fun

Saanich Neighbourhood Place asked a well-connected older adult they had a relationship with to invite more isolated older adults from her community to their Cooking Connections social kitchens. For the new participants, having someone they knew bring them addressed any transportation barrier and made them more comfortable accessing all the organization's services, including the universal access community fridge and pantry.



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Supporting diverse family caregivers

Family Caregivers of BC partnered with the Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees and the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society to co-design culturally and linguistically appropriate caregiver workshops. These sessions created welcoming, culturally safe spaces for connection, learning, and shared experiences, helping caregivers feel more confident, informed, and supported in accessing resources.



CITY OF VICTORIA

WEST SHORE PARKS & RECREATION

Gathering Two-Spirit, transgender and non-binary seniors

As part of their work to support regional social programs for older Two-Spirit, transgender, or non-binary adults and their allies, West Shore Parks & Recreation and the City of Victoria's joint REACH project has been able to support the Oaklands Community Association in their delivery of the monthly Trans Older Adult (55+) Lunch Social. They are working to make it easier for 2STNB older adults to find safe, welcoming gathering places across the region.

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Encouraging community connections

The Capital Regional District (CRD) hosted an event to empower over 100 new community builders, seeking types of connection ranging from small neighbour connections to community-wide events.

One participant shared that her goal was to ask her neighbour if she could join her weekly walk. She was worried about rejection, but the entire table supported her and shared suggestions for how she could approach her neighbour. She left the event with increased confidence and feeling empowered.



Reclaiming Elders at the centre

Indigenous Elders in a Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) advisory group talked about the importance of intergenerational programming like the monthly beading and cultural workshops. These are led by Indigenous Elders and cultural practitioners, and all ages are invited so Elders and seniors can socialize and share culture, language, and stories. Fluent speakers help with Protocols and share language related to activities.



Building digital literacy

A newcomer senior joined two of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society's (VIRCS) culturally responsive and inclusive digital literacy workshops for seniors, learning both about cybersecurity and how to navigate government websites. She was later supported through several one-on-one sessions on basic smartphone use and translation tools. She is now more confident using technology independently.



Facilitating intergenerational volunteering

A participant in a Volunteer Victoria workshop for non-profits on intergenerational volunteer programs said that it had helped them see these programs as more than simply bringing youth and older adults together in the same space. They appreciated learning practical ways to intentionally design volunteer opportunities that encourage relationship-building, shared learning, and meaningful participation for everyone involved.



Connecting seniors where they live

Silver Threads has begun delivering information and referral services and social programs at seniors' housing sites. After attending an information and coffee party, a resident followed up with staff for help. She had been connected with the Lifestyles RX program for her diabetes but had not been able to fully participate due to technology challenges. A tech volunteer spent time with her to get her comfortable using technology and gain full access to the service, which has been a big step forward for her improving her health.

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Other older adult resources you can look for



COMMUNITY CONNECTORS

Supported by a diverse range of partners, United Way British Columbia's Community Connector program helps participants connect with community services, activities, and other means of support that enhance their health and well-being. Using a social prescribing approach, Community Connectors work with individuals to identify what matters most to them and link them to meaningful local resources that reduce social isolation, strengthen connections, and support a sense of belonging.

GREATER VICTORIA - SAANICH, CITY OF VICTORIA, OAK BAY, ESQUIMALT & VIEW ROYAL

Oak Bay Volunteer Services
connector@oakbayvolunteers.org | 672-974-2323

SAANICH PENINSULA - ROYAL OAK, CORDOVA BAY, PROSPECT LAKE, CENTRAL SAANICH, NORTH SAANICH, SIDNEY

Beacon Community Services at SHOAL Centre
communityconnector@beaconcs.ca | 250-656-5537 ext. 121

JAMES BAY AND THE CITY OF VICTORIA

James Bay Community Project
connector@jbcp.bc.ca | 250-388-7844 ext. 309

ESQUIMALT AND VIEW ROYAL

Esquimalt Neighbourhood House
connector@enh.bc.ca | 250-385-2635 ext. 201

WESTSHORE - LANGFORD, COLWOOD, METCHOSIN AND SOOKE

Pacific Centre Family Services Association
healthyaging@pcfsa.org | 250-478-8357



RECREATION

The LIFE Program provides no-cost and low-cost recreation opportunities for individuals and families on limited incomes. Residents of Saanich, Victoria, the Peninsula, Esquimalt, and the Westshore all apply through their municipality or recreation centre.



TRANSPORTATION

BC Bus Pass: Lower income seniors may be eligible for a reduced cost annual BC Bus Pass.

handyDART offers door-to-door transit for people with temporary or permanent disabilities who can't use regular bus service. Registered handyDART customers can also use the Taxi Saver program.



FOOD RESOURCES

Capital Region Food Share Network:
A local network working together to enhance food security in the Capital Region. Search their Resources page to find meals, food pantries, and community fridges near you.



SENIORS SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

BC Housing maintains housing listings of seniors' subsidized and supported housing. Look for the lists for Zone 8 Vancouver Island South, Saanich and Victoria.

Shelter Aid For Elderly Renters (SAFER): Lower income seniors renting in the private market may be eligible for a rent supplement.

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