Empowers people to be co-creators in improving their own health and wellbeing.

Social prescribing uses the familiar, trusted process of writing a prescription to refer patients to local, non-clinical services that empower them to improve their health and build invaluable connections within their community.

In doing so, social prescribing:

- Gives a structured pathway for healthcare providers to address the social determinants of health.
- Bridges the gap between clinical and social care.
- Empowers people to be co-creators in improving their own health and wellbeing.

**What is Social Prescribing?**

Social prescribing uses the familiar, trusted process of writing a prescription to refer patients to local, non-clinical services that empower them to improve their health and build invaluable connections within their community.

**Why is Social Prescribing Needed?**

The effect of social isolation on mortality is comparable to that of other risk factors such as smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity, according to research from the WHO.

Addressing the social determinants of health (political, socioeconomic, cultural factors) is crucial to an individual’s well-being.

- 80% of an individual’s health are related to the social determinants of health.
- 47% of socially disconnected older adults rate themselves as being less healthy overall.

The echo pandemic of COVID-19 restrictions means that experiences of social isolation are common. Throughout the pandemic, in Canada:

- 43% showed symptoms of moderate to high depression.
- 54% say their mental health has worsened.

**What kinds of social prescriptions are there?**

Together with a link worker, clients are encouraged to co-create social prescriptions that help them to develop their interests, goals and gifts while connecting with their community.

- Art class, dance lesson
- Community garden, hiking group
- Good Food box to support food security
- Bereavement network or support group
- Caregiver or newcomer support

**How does social prescribing work?**

A healthcare worker sees a need and refers the patient to a link worker.

The link worker connects with the individual to understand their needs and interests.

The link worker connects the patient to a wide range of community supports and follows up.

Together with a link worker, clients are encouraged to co-create social prescriptions that help them to develop their interests, goals and gifts while connecting with their community.

Among other things, a social prescription could look like:

- Art class, dance lesson
- Community garden, hiking group
- Good Food box to support food security
- Bereavement network or support group
- Caregiver or newcomer support

The echo pandemic of COVID-19 restrictions means that experiences of social isolation are common. Throughout the pandemic, in Canada:

- 43% showed symptoms of moderate to high depression.
- 54% say their mental health has worsened.
The Impact of Social Prescribing

Participants in the Alliance for Healthier Communities’ research pilot Rx: Community – Social Prescribing reported

- **49%** decrease in loneliness
- **12%** increase in mental health
- **19%** increase in social activities

The impacts of social prescribing go beyond each client’s individual health and well-being. Healthcare systems also benefit from social prescriptions. Results from programs in Shropshire and Frome, UK (2017-2019) meant that from social prescribing, the healthcare system saw a:

- **14%** decrease in emergency room visits
- **40%** decrease general physician visits
- **20.8%** reduction in costs to the health care system

Social Prescribing in Ontario

In partnership with the Older Adult Centres’ Association of Ontario (OACAO), the Alliance of Healthier Communities supports participating Community Health Centers (CHCs) and other primary care providers in prescribing social programs to older adults at Seniors Active Living Centers.

References

- Association of social isolation and health across different racial and ethnic groups of older Americans, Ageing and society, November 2015
- A longitudinal analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of middle-aged and older adults from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, Nature Aging, December 2021
- Reducing emergency hospital admissions: a population health complex intervention of an enhanced model of primary care and compassionate communities, British Journal of General Practice, November 2018
- Two Years of COVID-19: Half of Canadians say their mental health has worsened; women under 55 hit hardest, Angus Reid Institute, March 11, 2022

Visit allianceon.org/Social-Prescribing to find out more and join a community of practice