What is Needed to Promote the Uptake and Implementation of Social Prescribing?

What is social prescribing?

- Social prescribing is a holistic approach to healthcare that connects individuals with non-medical needs to community-based services and resources.

- Uptake in Canada has increased considerably, but access remains largely limited – reducing potential benefits to patients and systems.

80%

Proportion of variance in health outcomes attributable to **non-clinical/non-medical** factors.

Study Aim

- Identify what is needed to promote the uptake of social prescribing.

Methodology

- Survey responses from screening tool
- Focus group interviews with patients (n = 9) and social care providers (n = 15)

CASCH
Canadian Alliance for
Social Connection and Health

RESEARCH REPORT
What is Needed to Promote the Uptake and Implementation of Social Prescribing?

Domains Explored

- Perceived barriers to social prescribing implementation
- Resource needs to address these barriers
  - Training needs
  - Screening patients
  - Educating Patients
  - Linking Patients to community navigators
  - Identifying appropriate services
  - Linking Patients to these services
  - Following up with patients

www.casch.org/publications

Perceived Barriers

- **Accessibility** (Service Availability, Transportation, Cost, Hours of Operation, Personal Fit, Digital Literacy/Navigation)
  - Interactive map/directory with access information, ride sharing

- **Process Efficiency** (Lack of coordinated care, lack of autonomy in one's own care)
  - Integration of prescriber, link-worker, and patient as core to care team.

- **Variation in Individual Needs/Interests** (Diet, disability, culture, diversity/homophily/fit,)
  - Cultural safety and inclusion training, friendly faces and warm hand offs.

Accessibility

Alignment with Individual Needs & Interests

Good Process
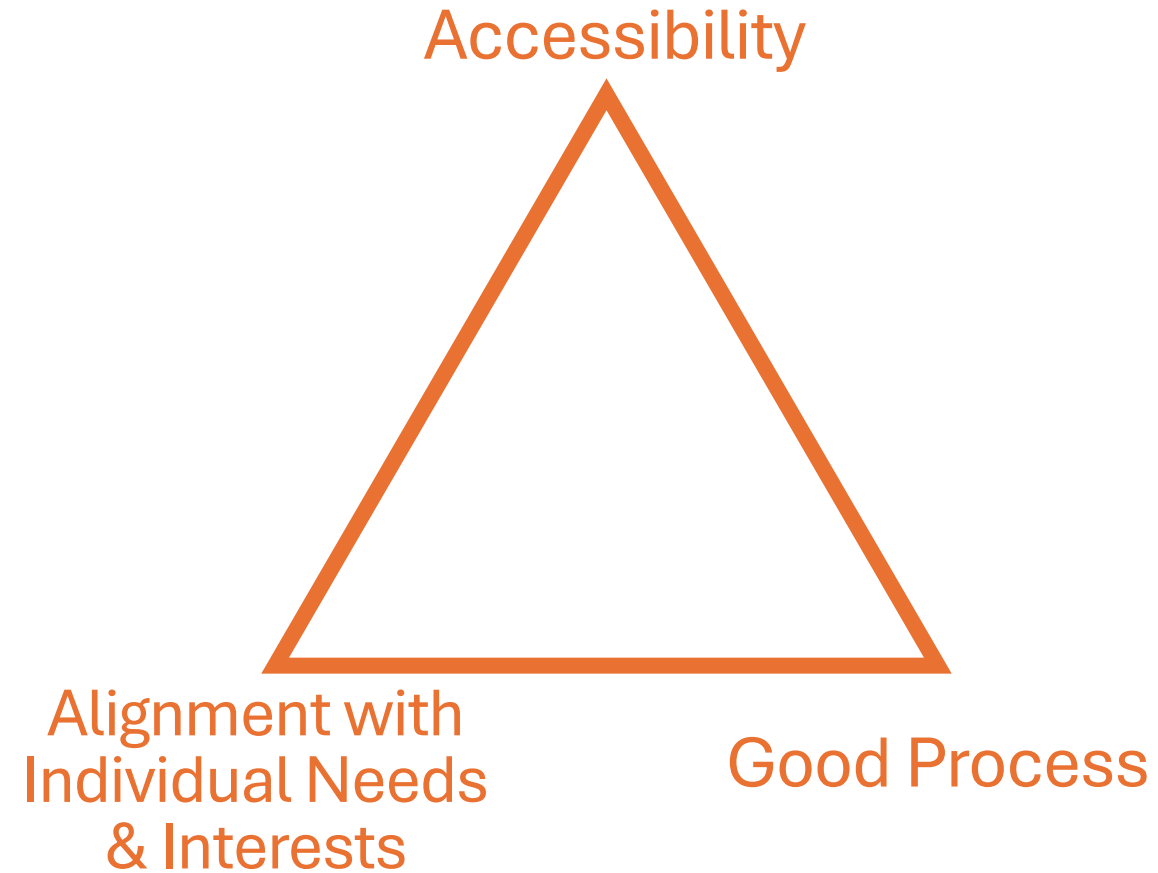
Training Needs

- **Training for Healthcare Providers**
  - Comprehensive, standardized modules on social determinants of health
  - Incentivized online training accessible across provinces
  - Quick-learning formats (videos, practical demos) on non-medical referrals

- **Training for Community Navigators/Link Workers**
  - Clear role definitions and standardized training paths
  - Skills in patient engagement, needs assessment, and local resources
  - Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity

- **Training for Community Organizations**
  - Capacity-building to handle increased referrals Tools for integrated service delivery and unified communication

Example Resources for Training Healthcare Providers

- **The Alliance for Healthier Communities' Social Prescribing Online Course** (https://www.allianceon.org/Social-Prescribing-Online-Course) offers a series of equity-focused training modules designed for healthcare teams interested in implementing or improving their social prescribing process.
- **The Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing's Social Prescribing Initiatives Directory** (https://www.socialprescribing.ca/search) provides physicians and healthcare providers with foundational elements of social prescribing.
- **The World Health Organization's Social Prescribing Toolkit** (https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619765) allows healthcare providers to educate themselves on how to implement social prescribing at a community level.
- **Healthy Aging Core Alberta's Social Prescribing Partner Toolkit** (https://corealberta.ca/resources/social-prescribing-partner-toolkit) introduces social prescribing to healthcare providers, government entities, and community-based organizations/
- **Family Caregivers of BC's Caregiver Rx Project** (https://www.familycaregiversbc.ca/resources-for-health-care-providers/identify-and-refer-a-caregiver) offers strategies on how healthcare providers can build partnerships with family caregivers to help expedite evaluation and prevent errors in care.
- **The Government of Canada's Social Prescribing and Implementation toolkit** (https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/reports-publications/health-promotion-chronic-disease-prevention-canada-research-policy-practice/vol-44-no-9-2024/guides-facilitating-implementation-evaluation-social-prescribing-lessons-access-resources-community-model.html) is helpful for healthcare providers to learn about the principles of social prescribing implementation.
- **The Centre for Effective Practice's Social Prescribing toolkit** (https://cep.health/clinical-products/social-prescribing/) is a guide on how to assess and prescribe different services.

Educating Patients

- Importance of social health and community participation

- Improve self-efficacy and motivation

- Ability to be an active participant in the referral process.

Example Resources for Educating Patients About Non-Medical Needs

- **Self Management BC** (https://www.selfmanagementbc.ca) is a resource where patients have access to coaches, online and in person programs for those with one or more conditions.
- **Social Prescribing by Healthy Aging Alberta and United Way** (https://calgaryunitedway.org/healthy-aging-alberta/social-prescribing/) is a resource that explains what social prescribing is and the different steps of the social prescribing process.
- **Social Prescribing Program by 211 British Columbia and United Way** (https://bc.211.ca/result/social-prescribing-program-79088468/) offers support for social prescribing programs after patients 55 years of age or older have been given a social prescription.
- **What is Social Prescribing by Canadian Institute on Social Prescribing** (https://www.socialprescribing.ca/about-social-prescribing) is a useful webpage that explains what social prescribing is using different learning styles (visuals, videos and written in plain text).

Canadian Social Connection Guidelines as an Educational Tool and Resource for Professionals

www.socialconnectionguidelines.org

Did you know social connection is the key to living a happier, healthier, and longer life?

Like food and exercise, social connection is a fundamental determinant of our health, happiness, and longevity. Our recommended public health guidelines for social connection provide evidence-based guidance for fostering healthy social lives at the individual and community levels.

Individual guidelines **Community guidelines**

Live longer and happier together

Our social well-being is shaped by many factors, including some outside of our control. Every person can take steps to improve their social life. The guidelines below offer evidence-based recommendations to help individuals meet their social needs.

Make social connection a priority throughout your life

Social connection is a basic human need for people of all ages, but meeting your social needs often requires time, effort, and intentionality.

Learn more

Cultivate social confidence in yourself and others

Sometimes how we think and feel about ourselves and others makes social connection intimidating and difficult. These feelings are normal and they can be overcome with practice and patience.

Learn more

Build a strong social network with a variety of kinds of relationships

A strong social network includes a variety of social connections across different domains of your life. This includes interactions of varying depth and quality as well as a variety of different types of relationships in different areas of your life.

Learn more

Invest in getting enough social connection

Individuals need regular and frequent social interaction. This includes spending time with those we're close to as well as with other people we are less familiar with.

Learn more

Maintain and deepen your relationships with others

Positive relationships are among the most important contributors to our health and happiness. However, all relationships require care and attention to thrive.

Learn more

Seek out face-to-face interactions and use technology wisely

Technology is an important tool for facilitating social interactions, but it is important to ensure that we do not replace face-to-face connections with online ones.

Learn more

Build strong, connected communities

Communities thrive when everyone feels connected and supported. The guidelines below provide recommendations for communities and their leaders. By implementing these guidelines, we can reduce and prevent loneliness, social isolation and disconnection.

Promote awareness of the importance of social connection

All organizations play an important role in facilitating social interactions and creating norms that make social connections easier.

Learn more

Foster healthy social and emotional development

Strong emotional and social skills foster health and happiness. To achieve these skills, communities should facilitate and support individuals at all stages of life to refine their social skills and meet their varied social needs.

Learn more

Make social connection a priority in policies and practices

Policies and practices across all layers of governance play an important role in shaping social wellbeing. Many policy areas that are not immediately relevant to social connection or health can have profound consequences on social and community wellbeing.

Learn more

Design environments for connection and invest in social events, activities, and programs

Built, natural, and social environments play an important role in facilitating social interactions.

Learn more

Improve accessibility and inclusion for all people

While all human beings need social connection, people in every community can experience barriers to accessibility and inclusion. These barriers can create unique vulnerabilities to loneliness, isolation, and disconnection. Communities must work together to remove these barriers.

Learn more

Measure and make progress towards improving social wellbeing

Achieving social wellbeing at the individual and population levels requires ongoing investments in monitoring and improving social connection.

Learn more

Make social connection a priority throughout your life

← Core recommendation

Social connection is a basic human need for people of all ages, but meeting your social needs often requires time, effort, and intentionality.

← Rationale
(Brief and Extended Versions)

- Be thoughtful and aware of how much and what types of social connection you're getting and whether you're getting enough social connection.

- While recognizing that relationships are not always easy, strive to pursue meaningful, satisfying, and positive connections with others.

← Core principles
(Brief and Extended Versions)

Additional considerations

Recognizing and responding to loneliness   +

The importance of proactive and intentional efforts   +

← Additional
Considerations

Avoiding social overload   +

Individual differences in sociability   +

Additional resources

GenWell
A Canadian movement promoting social well-being through face-to-face interactions. It aims to combat social isolation and loneliness by encouraging people to reconnect with their communities and provides tools to help foster meaningful social connections.

Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones
A Netflix documentary exploring the lifestyles of communities where people live longer, healthier lives, emphasizing the importance of strong social bonds and community connections for wellbeing and longevity.

CDC's Social Connection Topic Page
Discusses the role of social connections in mental and physical health, emphasizing how supportive relationships contribute to longer, healthier lives and how communities can foster social bonds to enhance resilience.

Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect
A book by Matthew D. Lieberman revealing how our brains are designed to thrive in social environments, underscoring the necessity of social connections for human survival and wellbeing.

Connect: 100 Ways to Create Happiness in Your Life
A workbook offering actionable steps to increase social connections, social support, and inclusion. It's suitable for various groups, from individuals to families, LGBTQ+ communities, and underserved populations.

Join or Die
A documentary following social scientist Robert Putnam, examining the decline in community connections in the U.S. and its impact on democracy, highlighting the importance of civic engagement and rebuilding community bonds.

The Village Effect: How Face-to-Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier and Happier
A book by Susan Pinker exploring the significant impact of in-person social interactions on health and happiness, emphasizing the importance of maintaining personal connections in an increasingly digital world.

Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection
A book by John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick discussing how loneliness affects health and offering strategies to overcome isolation by building meaningful relationships.

Rationale

Given the established importance of social connection and the harms of loneliness and social isolation, we must make social connection a priority in our lives. Indeed, in the fast-paced and often disconnected world we live in, meeting our social needs often requires conscious effort and intention – particularly when we live in physical and social environments where these needs are not routinely met. This is why all of us need to actively engage in social activities, strive to cultivate meaningful relationships with those we know, and work with others to build a supportive social environment. This proactive approach not only enhances individual health outcomes but also enriches community wellbeing.

Of course, in order to prioritize social connections, we need to be aware of how much and what types of social connections we are getting. Further, as preferences for specific levels and types of social connection may vary from person to person, each of us must be thoughtful about whether our own individual social needs are met. For those of us responsible for the health and development of others, such as parents/guardians, teachers, and other caregivers in health and welfare, we must also be thoughtful of the social needs of those around us; we must actively strive to pursue meaningful, satisfying, and positive connections in order to maintain our and others' social wellbeing.

Read more about this guideline

Confidence Rating / Supporting Evidence

Related Evidence Briefs

Want to learn more? You might find these supporting evidence briefs interesting.

- What is social health?
- How does loneliness affect health?

For a full list of evidence briefs, visit our Evidence Library.

Case Studies

Looking for some inspiration on how to get started with this guideline? Check out these case studies:

- Genwell: Generating Wellness Through The Power of Human Connection
- Queers & Beers YYJ: Building LGBTQ+ Community Connections Over a Pint

For a full list of case studies, visit our Case Study Repository.

Supporting Research

Decades of research support this guideline. Check out these key studies:

- "Vitamin S: Why Is Social Contact, Even With Strangers, So Important to Well-Being?"
- "A systematic review and meta-analysis of 90 cohort studies of social isolation, loneliness and mortality"

Want to read more of the research supporting this guideline? Check out our Research Studies Collection.

Make social connection a priority throughout your life

Confidence

Quality of Evidence

The scientific evidence supporting the importance of social connection is generally of high quality. Indeed, multiple studies across diverse populations have demonstrated that strong social connections contribute significantly to physical and mental health, longevity, and overall wellbeing. However, while longitudinal and cross-sectional studies provide robust data on the health impact, there is less evidence from interventions to promote social connection from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) due to the inherent difficulties in experimentally manipulating social connections. Some experimental studies have shown that individuals benefit from increasing social connections or acting more prosocially Yet, despite those demonstrated benefits definitive causal proof for the magnitude of benefits of social connection is difficult to establish – particularly given the relative influence of psychological, biological, social, and structural factors in shaping social experiences and situations. Additionally, few studies have explicitly aimed to examine the potential consequences individuals may experience when they fail to improve their social circumstances after engaging in meaningful effort. Some evidence suggests that self-evaluation and self-monitoring behaviours may be detrimental and as such it is possible that by asking people to evaluate their social lives we might inadvertently direct their attentional focus inward, triggering potentially harmful psychological mechanisms. In short, the evidence strongly suggests that social connection is important, but it is less certain as to whether individuals can actually make sustained changes in their social behaviour and whether doing so results in substantial health gains. More research is needed to explore these questions specifically.

Screening Patients

- Better screening tools and conversations with providers
- Comprehensive scope for identifying different needs
- Centralized System for monitoring/tracking
- Self-referral

Example Resources for Screening Patients to Identify Non-Medical Needs

- **The Health Equity Evidence Centre's guide on how to screen for social needs in primary care** (https://www.heec.co.uk/resource/social-needs-screening/) offers a practical guide on how primary care providers can screen for social needs.
- **The UCLA's Loneliness scale** (https://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/stories/pdf/selfmeasures/Self_Measures_for_Loneliness_and_Interpersonal_Problems_UCLA_LONELINESS.pdf) is a tool that assists with determining eligibility on which patients qualify for social prescribing programs.
- **The Patient Health Questionnaire by the Government of British Columbia** (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/practitioner-pro/bc-guidelines/depression_patient_health_questionnaire.pdf) is one of the tools that can be used when assessing patients eligibility for social prescribing programs.
- **The CLEAR toolkit** (https://www.mcgill.ca/clear/files/clear/clear_toolkit_2015_-_english_1.pdf) is a methodology that goes through a step-by-step process on how healthcare workers can address the causes of poor social health.
- **The Social prescribing assessment tool** (https://socialprescribingqualification.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Social-Prescribing-Assessment-Tool.pdf) is a questionnaire that that poses key indicating questions on whether individuals require social prescribing.

Linking Patients

- Easy linkage to a worker with system-initiated follow-up

Example Resources for Linking Patients to Community Navigators

- **Referral database by Pathways BC** (https://pathwaysbc.ca/community) offers an online portal for physicians in BC are able to look up referral information and submit referrals online to streamline the referral process.
- **Seniors' Community Connector document by Fraser Health** (https://www.fraserhealth.ca/Service-Directory/Services/home-and-community-care/seniors-community-connector) discusses how to explain the process of social prescribing to patients and available social prescribing programs in their region.
- **Alberta Referral Directory by Alberta Health Services** (https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/page14282.aspx) is currently used in Alberta to streamline the referral process by having submissions and physician information online.
- **S.U.C.C.E.S.S. referral form by Healthy Aging CORE** (https://healthyagingcore.ca/files/25408) is a referral form for patients 55 years and older who require social prescribing.

Linking Patients

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Identifying Services

- Easy linkage to services

- Help with overcoming barrier

- Meet patient needs with spectrum of online, AI-assisted, and personally guided connections

Example Resources for Identify Appropriate Services in the Community

- **8-1-1 Nurses Line by the Government of British Columbia** (https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/more/about-healthlink-bc/about-8-1-1) offers a direct connection with a health service navigator that can help patients find health information and services
- **Find Support BC** (https://findsupportbc.com) This is a resource where patients with disabilities can enter their information and be given a list of support resources that can help with their condition.
- **BC Health Service Locator App by the Government of British Columbia** (https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/bc-health-service-locator-app#:~:text=The%20BC%20Health%20Service%20Locator%20App%20helps%20you%20find%20walk,information%20from%20your%20mobile%20device) helps British Columbians find walk-in clinics, hospitals, emergency rooms, urgent care centres, immunization locations, pharmacies and laboratory services near them.

Following-Up

- Need for centralized process
- Track progress
- Effective communication

Example Resources for Following Up on Patient's Engagement

- **Care Connect by MCT Technology** (https://www.mcttechnology.com) is an online platform that is meant to administer health and child care by maintaining patient relationships, quick delivery of care, assists with retaining staff and delivery of payments on time.
- **Health Gateway App by Government of British Columbia** (https://www.healthgateway.gov.bc.ca). provides a way for British Columbians to access all their health records in British Columbia.

Conclusion & Recommendations

We still have a long way to go in building an ideal eco-system for social prescribing, but we're making good process (even if a bit patchwork).

- Enhanced training for professionals and patients.

- Better connections within and across health, social, and community care organizations.

- Inclusion of patient, provider, and link worker in care team.

- Consolidation of services in maps and directories with detailed information about each service.

- Standardization in screening and patient monitoring/follow-up.

- Diversity in services, pathways, and meeting individual needs.
    - Use of Online, AI-assisted, and professional referrals.

- Adequate resourcing for all involved.

Thank you!

Thoughts? Questions?