

New project examines mentally healthy living after social distancing

Toronto, Feb. 28, 2022 – How has the pandemic impacted the mental health of older adults in Canada? Which evidence-informed strategies are most effective in helping older adults reduce anxiety and cope with fear and loneliness? These questions and more will be answered through a new research study called *Mentally Healthy Living After Social Distancing - A Study of Older Canadians* funded by the RTOERO Foundation

The study is led by the *Living well research team*, an interdisciplinary group from the University of Alberta, Simon Fraser University and Memorial University. The team will analyze existing research on mental health support strategies and conduct a nationwide survey with older Canadians, including RTOERO members, about older Canadians' strategies to reduce stress, fear, anxiety, and loneliness.

“Canadians over 60 have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic,” explains Gail Low, associate professor of nursing at the University of Alberta and principal investigator. “For many, it’s meant living alone at home in isolation, with moderate to severe anxiety, fear, and loneliness. We want to understand more about the impacts of this experience and what folks found effective to help them manage their mental health during this time—what can we learn that will help us all moving forward?”

Research results will be summarized into a recipe book for RTOERO members and the general public that outlines what older adults can do to support their wellbeing, drawing on the advice from older Canadians involved in the study. The cookbook will feature anxiety-lessening strategies, sage advice and simple, healthy comfort food recipes. A research chef from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology will develop the recipes.

“The recipe book and the focus on good mental health information tailored for older adults are what drew us to this project,” says Mike Prentice, executive director of the RTOERO Foundation. “When we evaluate possible projects, we like to see that our donors, RTOERO members and older Canadians can experience short and long-term benefits through tangible takeaways.”

The research study will undergo an ethics review later this spring. Ethics review is a standard step with any research project. It’s expected the survey will launch in summer 2022. Literature reviews will take place during the same timeframe. Initial findings are expected to be available late 2022. Watch for updates on this project as it gets underway. RTOERO members will receive an email inviting them to participate in the research.

Learn more about the various [projects funded by the RTOERO Foundation](#). If you’re interested in supporting critical research and innovative programs to improve the quality of life for aging Canadians, please consider becoming a [donor](#).



The RTOERO Foundation is one of the only charitable foundations in Canada focused on the health and well-being of older adults. The Foundation envisions a society in which all seniors live with dignity and respect. To learn more about our mandate and projects, visit www.rtoerofoundation.ca.

RTOERO is a bilingual trusted voice on healthy, active living in the retirement journey for the broader education community. With 82,000+ members in 51 districts across Canada, we are the largest national provider of non-profit group health benefits for education retirees.

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