



Social prescribing

SOCIAL ISOLATION

This evidence theme on social prescribing is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a scoping review of the social isolation research.

Key points

- Social prescribing is a person-centred and community-based approach to connect individuals with non-medical support and community resources to address their social, emotional, and wellbeing needs.
- Primary care professionals and other community-based practitioners can be involved in social prescribing to address social isolation among older people.
- There were three different social prescribing techniques reported in the review including, Concierge Club, Health TAPESTRY, and an un-named technique. Evidence did not provide enough information to determine their effectiveness in reducing social isolation.

What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing aims to provide primary care professionals (i.e. general practitioners) and other community-based practitioners (i.e. social prescribing link workers) with opportunities to deliver individualised social interventions. [1]

Social prescribing for older adults addresses health inequities and social determinants of health by providing quality non-medical, health-related social support in the community to minimise risks of isolation and loneliness. [2, 3]

Examples of socially prescribed interventions can include engagement in social activities, volunteering opportunities, or counselling services. [2]

Many local organisations can suggest social prescribing to bring together support for an older person and promote collaboration. [4] Primary care professionals are a source of referral, along with other organisations such as local authorities, multidisciplinary teams, and social care services. [4]

What do we know about social prescribing in aged care?

We identified three reviews that provided evidence on the various types of social prescribing techniques discussed within the literature. [5-7]

Evidence reported on three different prescribing techniques including the Concierge Club, Health Teams Advancing Patient Experience: Strengthening Quality (Health TAPESTRY), and an unnamed prescribing technique. [5-7]

The Concierge Club provides a community-based care model with diverse services, including information, transportation, and in-house health assessments. [5-7]

It comprehensively addresses physical and social aspects of health to promote overall wellbeing and reduce social isolation. [5-7] The Health TAPESTRY targets social isolation among older adults. [6] Trained volunteers collect health information from clients, shared with a primary care team. [6]

They collaborate with healthcare professionals, community agencies, and volunteers to create care plans aligned with client goals. [6] The unnamed prescribing technique encompasses four key roles: identifying social isolation and loneliness among older people, assessing their suitability for intervention, delivering health-related information (such as raising awareness about loneliness and isolation), and providing clinical support as required. [7]

The available evidence on social prescribing did not provide enough information to determine which methods were effective in reducing social isolation in older people. [5-7] This highlights the need for more robust research to establish definitive conclusions in this area. [5-7]

Limitations

This evidence theme has been informed by the results of a scoping review intended to map the published research in this area. Our findings reflect the current state of the evidence which we note is limited in breadth and quality.

What can an individual do?

- Encourage older adults to reaching out to a primary care provider or community-based practitioner for support and guidance.
- Provide information about clubs, organisations, or social groups that align with their interests and hobbies. This can be a great way for them to meet new people who share their passion.

What can an organisation do?

- Healthcare organisations can ensure that they provide comprehensive care that addresses not only physical health but also mental and social wellbeing.
- Conduct community outreach programs to identify older adults who may be at risk of social isolation and provide support, resources, and information about available services.
- Forge partnerships with local community organisations and agencies that specialise in combating social isolation among older individuals. This collaboration can facilitate access to a broader range of services and resources.

References

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