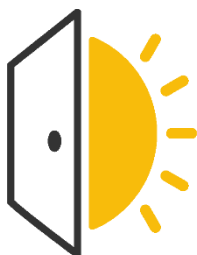


Community Assets Survey with Faith-based Organizations in Halton Region



Connection in Action

Every door is the right door

January 2022



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The Older Adult Isolation Action Table (OAI AT) thanks all the contributions of community partners and volunteers who have made this effort possible. We thank the 28 faith-based organizations who participated in this survey.

The OAI AT thanks Links2Care as a partner in the *Connection in Action* initiative. Additionally, we acknowledge Halton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and the Regional Municipality of Halton for their ongoing support.

For more information:

Visit us at links2care.ca/program/connection-in-action/
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Introduction and Project Background

Social isolation among older adults (55+) is a growing issue in Canada and across the four diverse municipalities in the Halton Region. As the Canadian population aged 65 and over continues to grow, it is increasingly important that people of all ages become aware of older adult social isolation and the negative impacts this has on the health and well-being of our communities. There are many risk factors and barriers that contribute to social isolation among older adults, and increasingly it is being linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes. Communities coming together to address and prevent social isolation can be empowering for us all - we're all in this together to support well-being in Halton.

In September 2018, the Older Adult Isolation Action Table (OAI AT) was formed at the recommendation of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan (CSWB), a plan developed by the Regional Municipality of Halton and the Halton Regional Police Service in collaboration with community partners. The CSWB Plan (<https://www.halton.ca/The-Region/Projects-and-Initiatives/Community-Safety-and-Well-Being-in-Halton>) identified social isolation among older adults as a priority for Halton. The Plan calls for collaboration and action with community partners to create a model to identify and address emerging issues and trends that impact safety and well-being in our community. The Plan will also enhance the region's ability to respond to issues in a coordinated manner and builds on many successful efforts that contribute to a strong sense of community safety and well-being in Halton.

The OAI AT has been tasked with developing an Action Plan to address isolation among older adults (age 55+) and to support those at risk of isolation in the region. Social isolation and loneliness are often connected and intertwined but the terms refer to different objective and subjective experiences. Social isolation is defined as having low quantity and quality of interactions with others, whereas loneliness is an individual's perception of the quality of

Social Isolation: having low quantity and quality of interactions with others

those interactions. An individual can be socially isolated with few social connections and not feel lonely, or conversely an individual can feel lonely but be surrounded by people.

As Halton's older adult population continues to grow, it is important to take steps to build communities that foster a strong sense of belonging, and to support those who are most at-risk of poor outcomes due to a lack of social support.

The OAI AT membership consists of over twenty stakeholder organizations including nonprofit health and social service providers, local health integration networks, local

municipalities, police services, and older adults. Community Development Halton, a nonprofit organization, provides the backbone support for the Table.

Three key areas of focus were established for the year 2022:

- to improve access to meaningful supports to those at risk of isolation through proactive system navigation – “Every door is the right door”
- to deepen community knowledge about social isolation, its risks factors and to mobilize a collective response
- to evaluate our work and its impact

Connection in Action initiative

The *Connection in Action* initiative, advised and supported by the Older Adult Isolation Action Table, is a proactive community project focusing on adults 55 and older, who may be at risk of or experiencing isolation and loneliness. The following supports and resources are offered to community organizations at no cost.

LITE Education and Training (Loneliness, Isolation to Empowerment):

- Consists of in-person or virtual education and training on the risk factors of isolation and loneliness, how to identify them, and resources available
- Content includes current information on age-friendly communities and elder abuse (entitled – “It’s Not Right”), with a focus on how neighbours, friends, and families can help.
- LITE education and training can be modified and adapted to your organization’s needs

Connection Specialist Services:

- Provides one-on-one assistance to support adults aged 55 and older with accessing information and resources in the community
- Works collaboratively with the community member, facilitating links, and coordinating services that will meet the individual’s needs and reduce isolation
- Services can be provided support over the telephone or in person

Resources and Information:

- Relevant resources and information for older adults who require services and supports are available and can be shared online as well as paper copies
- Examples of services might include – bereavement support, mental health, food security, homecare, housing, etc.

Community Assets Survey with Faith-based Organizations

As part of the planning process to identify strategies and actions for the OAI AT, members of the OAI AT identified that faith-based organizations are an invaluable community resource, as they are seen as the 'eyes and ears' of the community and are often well positioned to identify older adults who are isolated or at-risk of isolation. It is not always clear, however, what programs, supports, services or strategies can be put in place to support these individuals.

Through enhanced knowledge and awareness, the community knowledge and mobilization strategy of the OAI AT seeks to build capacity among residents, service providers and other stakeholders to identify and support older adults at-risk of isolation in a more proactive manner. Community knowledge and mobilization activities seek to leverage existing community supports and resources through a 'no wrong door' approach.

“Faith communities do not just fulfill religious/spiritual functions, but they also address social and survival needs for its members”

- Sheridan Centre for Elder Research

Included among the list of actions under the community knowledge and mobilization efforts was the development and distribution of a survey to connect with, learn from, and support faith-based organizations

within the context of engaging older adults in their communities. Defining *faith-based organizations* can be ambiguous; however, for our purposes, we define *faith-based organizations* as religious places of worship. Research has shown that faith-based organizations are lifelines to older adults in community, as they provide spaces of belonging and inclusion through trusting relationships. There is a connection between positive associations with faith-based organizations and reduction in depression as well as improvements in sense of wellbeing¹.

A recent Home Care Ontario Study revealed that 93% of older adults in Ontario “would prefer to stay at home with additional care support than move into [long-term care]².” The study also found that “91% of seniors plan to stay in their own home or apartment as long as possible.” With more older adults wishing to remain at home, their connections to

¹ Banu, Reshma; Liladrie, Sirena; and Noka, Behije, "The Role of Faith Communities in Improving Supports to Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation in Immigrants 65+" (2019). The Role of Faith Communities in Improving Supports to Reduce Loneliness and Social Isolation in Immigrants 65+. 1.

https://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_building_connected_communities_reports_faith/1

² Home Care Ontario Study July 2020.Report. August 7, 2020.
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ed5ba488f3def4cae17ed81/t/5f2c7b3ba3553d76af3a0b9a/1596750653006/HomeCareStudyJuly25th2020forMediaRelease\(Final\).pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ed5ba488f3def4cae17ed81/t/5f2c7b3ba3553d76af3a0b9a/1596750653006/HomeCareStudyJuly25th2020forMediaRelease(Final).pdf)

community and community services are even more vital, as they may not have ease of access to services and resources as they might living in a care facility. With aging in place, older adults may need external supports such as personal care, health care, household and outdoor chores, and/or meals, as well as other potential supports.

Faith-based organizations play an important role. Traditionally and historically, faith-based organizations are known to provide for their community with food, clothing, shelter, as well as provide social supports and a place where one can feel a sense of belonging. By learning more from these organizations and by facilitating collaboration with non-profit organizations that offer services to older adults, the *Connection in Action* initiative aims to amplify the ability to serve the older adult community in Halton. We believe that faith-based organizations are key players in approaches to age-friendly communities.

Purpose

One of the primary purposes of this survey was to introduce the OAI AT and the *Connection in Action* initiative to faith-based organizations across Halton with the objective of creating awareness of our initiative. Our second primary purpose was to learn about if and how faith-based organizations in Halton are connected with older adults within their community. Our goal in connecting with faith-based organizations is to develop mutually supportive relationships to reduce isolation and enhance connectedness for older adult populations within Halton.

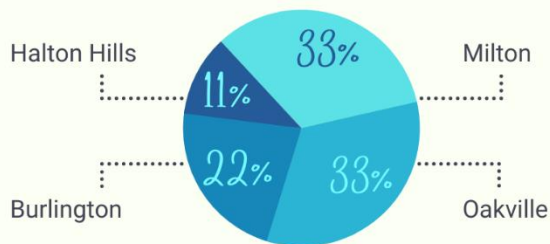


HIGHLIGHTS

community assets survey with faith-based organizations in Halton

14% RESPONSE RATE

Over 200 surveys were emailed. We received 28 responses. Most respondents were from Christian-based organizations, and from Milton and Oakville.



PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- 81% of respondents offer programs and services to older adults
- 86% of respondents offered 'support and outreach' services prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
- 85% offered 'support and outreach' services throughout the pandemic

OLDER ADULT MEMBERSHIP



Just over half of respondents indicated that older adults make up about 3/4 of their membership. All respondents offered their services in English, while some also offered services in at least one other language.

- 67% of respondents are connected with other supports and community organizations
- 73% of respondents want to be connected with the *Connection in Action* initiative

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted programs and services for 50% of respondents. Although respondents continued providing services in accordance with pandemic restrictions, the kinds of programs and services were a reflection of pandemic related needs.

'SOCIAL GROUPS' OFFERED BY 76% OF RESPONDENTS PRE-PANDEMIC AND BY 40% DURING THE PANDEMIC

100% OF RESPONDENTS OPEN THEIR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO OLDER ADULTS WHO AREN'T MEMBERS

Community Development Halton 2022

What do the findings mean for the Older Adult Isolation Action Table? Take-aways

Respondent Profile

As we received the least number of responses from Halton Hills, this may guide our engagement work to prioritize relationship building this municipality. Most respondents are from the Christian faith, which may guide our work to build relationships with other faith groups represented within Halton region. Our response rates may suggest that we connect with community leaders by accessing our networks.

Language

We received responses from organizations that predominantly provide service in English. This may indicate a need to provide communication and engagement efforts in languages other than English to connect with a wider range of faith group organizations. Providing materials in languages spoken in Halton has already been identified as an action item for the OAI AT.

Programs and Services for Older Adults

Responses show that older adults make up a considerable portion of membership in faith-based organizations. These organizations provide supports for older adult populations in their community beyond that of religious and/or spiritual offerings, as indicated by programs and services open to older adult participation. Most respondents who provide programs and services to older adults are already connected with some community organizations. Some respondents identified some gaps in service that might benefit their older members, gaps that could be closed by accessing the Connection Specialist with *Connection in Action*.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted programs and services, respondents were able to continue providing supports while being flexible and accommodating to public health concerns and the needs of older adults. As we get ready to move out of the pandemic, the *Connection in Action* initiative has an opportunity to continue building partnerships with faith-based organizations to support work already being done to reduce isolation and increase connectedness for older adults in Halton.

Methodology

Survey

Survey questions were developed and approved by the OAI AT team. The survey consisted of a total of 19 (nineteen) questions. This included names of respondent, location, and contact information. Depending how respondents answered certain questions, they may have been asked to respond to only a few questions.

Distribution

A list of faith-based organizations and their respective contact information was compiled by the Table's *Community Engagement Lead* through multiple sources, including Table members, community partners, and regional databases found online (i.e., Halton Information Providers [HIP]). This list comprised of a total of 204 multi-faith organizations across Halton.

Microsoft Forms was used as the data collection tool. A link was created and was emailed to the distribution list along with an introduction to the Table and background of the *Connection in Action* initiative. Reminder emails were sent out to those organizations that did not respond. Phone call attempts were made to some organizations where email addresses did not exist, were bounced back, or when contact information of the organization was limited. Some phone calls were unanswered. However, some phone calls helped us redirect our survey request to someone else in the organization.

Surveys were sent out on June 17 and were initially intended to close on June 30, however, to encourage more responses, the online survey remained open until July 16.

Data

The Community Engagement Lead reviewed all survey responses and used Microsoft Excel to compile and summarize the data. Only those with access to the Microsoft account had access to the results of the survey, which were the Community Engagement Lead, Connections Specialist, and Director of the initiative.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Survey responses were collected over Microsoft Forms. The Community Engagement Lead was the primary member to access this data for reporting purposes.

A list of contact information was created for respondents who indicated that they would like to be connected with the *Connection in Action* initiative. This contact list may be accessed by

members of the OAI AT. How these respondents interacted with all other questions on the survey will not be provided within the contact list.

Findings

Respondent locations

We sent surveys to 204 faith-based organizations and received responses from 28 organizations, a response rate of 14%. Although 28 organizations participated in the survey, findings within this section are reflective of 27 respondents, as the location of one respondent could not be determined.

Figure 1 shows that we received most responses from organizations located in the municipalities of Milton and Oakville at 33% respectively. Twenty-three per cent of responses were from the municipality of Burlington, and 11% (three respondents) were from Halton Hills.

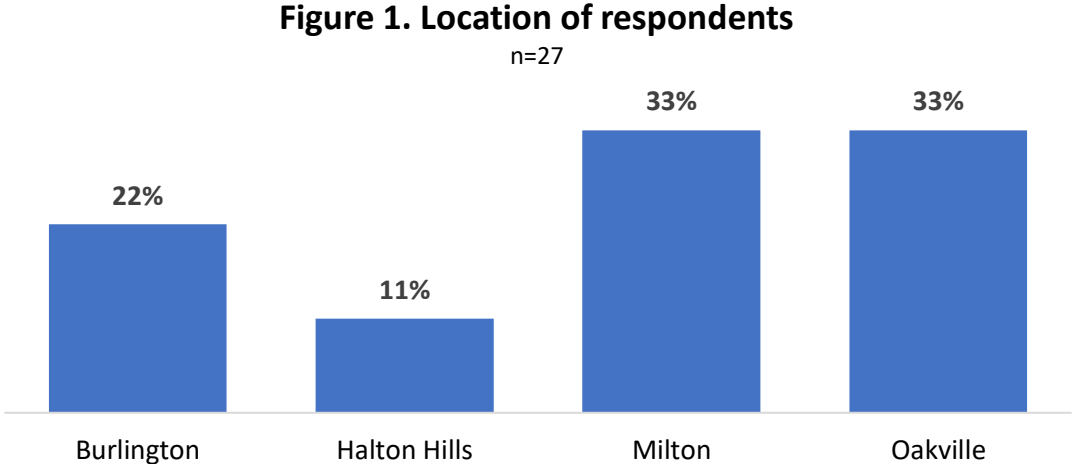


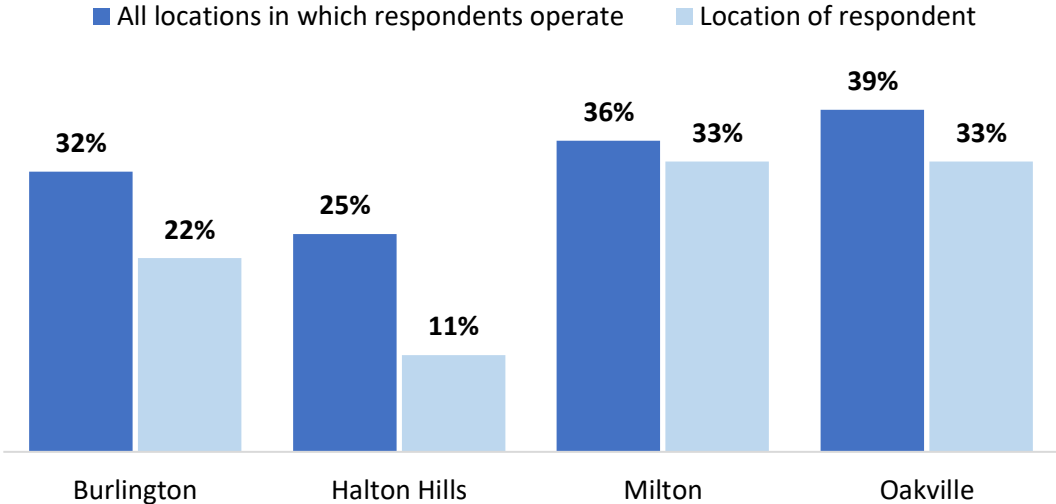
Figure 2 and Table 1 highlight the response rates of each municipality by the number of surveys sent to those municipalities. The municipality of Milton had the highest response rate of 27%. Table 1 shows that 33 faith-based organizations in Milton received surveys and that nine organizations participated in the survey. Oakville and Burlington received the highest number of survey requests at 71 and 67 respectively.

Table 1. Response rate per municipality

Municipality	Number of surveys sent	Respondents	Response rate by municipality
Burlington	67	6	9%
Halton Hills	33	3	9%
Milton	33	9	27%
Oakville	71	9	13%

Faith-based organizations may hold places of worship in more than one location to serve their communities. Thus, respondents were asked to indicate all locations in which their organization operates across Halton Region. Figure 2 indicates that 39% of respondents' faith-based organization operate in Oakville, while 33% of respondents are located in Oakville and thus their respective responses reflect their Oakville location. It is worth noting that there is representation from all four municipalities within our demographic region of Halton, however Halton Hills is least reflected at 12% of data representation.

Figure 2. All locations in which respondents operate versus location of respondent



We received responses from Christian organizations at 89%, and some from the Baha'i faith, at 11%, as shown in Figure 3. This presents as a limitation in respect to findings, as the Christian faith is overrepresented. Figure 4 shows a breakdown of surveys sent to faith groups by location, which highlights that surveys were sent largely to Christian organizations over any other faith group.

Figure 3. Respondents by faith group

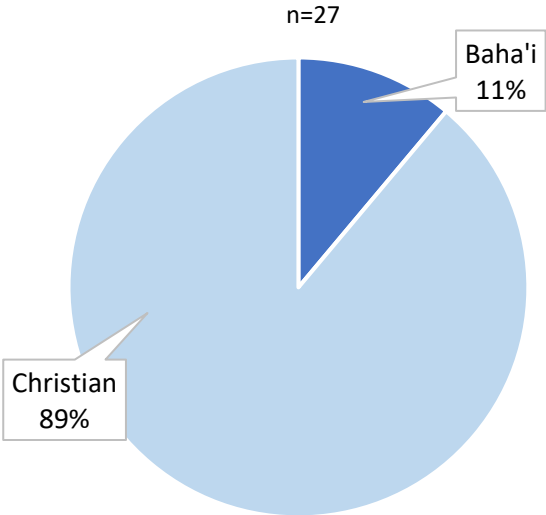
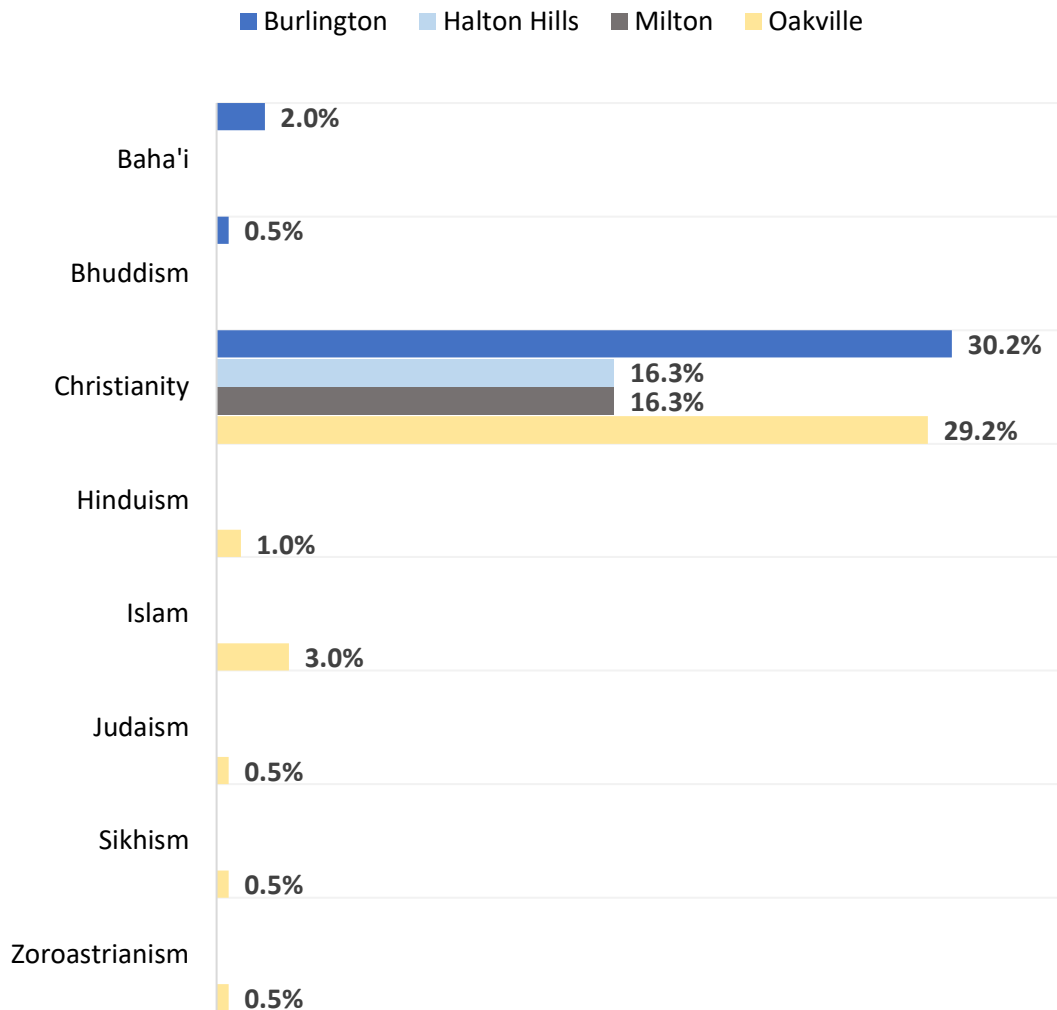


Figure 4. Total surveys sent by faith and location

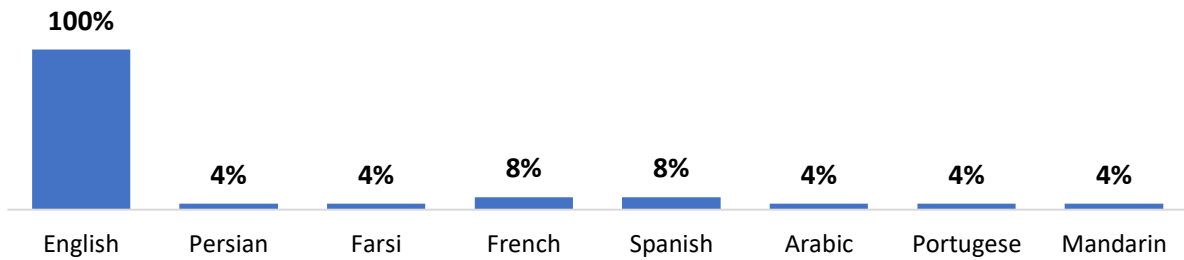


Language

Respondents were asked to indicate all languages offered throughout their services. One hundred per cent of those who responded to this question provide service in English. French and Spanish are offered by eight per cent of respondents, while Persian, Farsi, Arabic, Portuguese, and Mandarin are offered by four per cent of respondents.

Figure 5. Languages offered by respondents

n=26

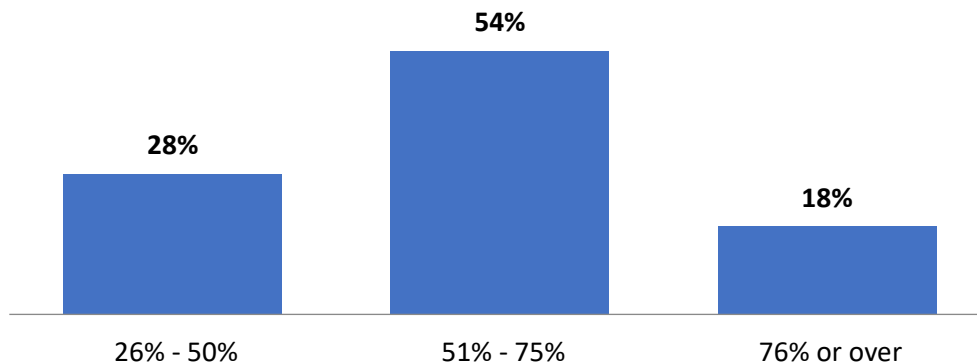


Programs and Services for Older Adults

Respondents were asked to estimate how many of their members are older adults (age 55+). All 28 respondents provided a response to this question as shown in Figure 6. All respondents indicate that at least 26% of their members are older adults. More than half of respondents at 54% indicate that older adults make up between 51% and 75% of their total members. Eighteen per cent of respondents estimate that at least three quarters of their members are older adults.

Figure 6. Older adult membership

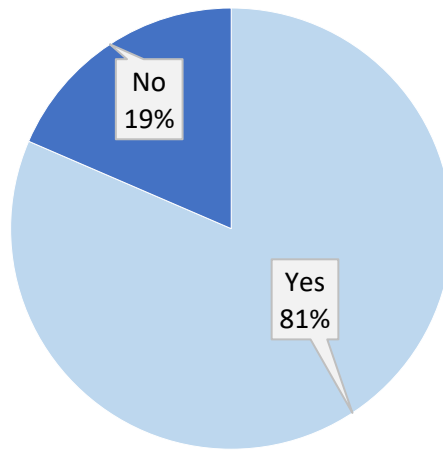
n=28



All respondents indicated that at least 26% of their members are older adults (Figure 6), and 81% of respondents indicate that they offer programs and services for older adults (Figure 7). Nineteen per cent of the 27 respondents indicated that they did not offer programs and services catered to older adults. Respondents who indicated they did not provide programs or services for older adults were not asked follow-up questions.

Figure 7. Are programs and services offered to older adults?

n=27



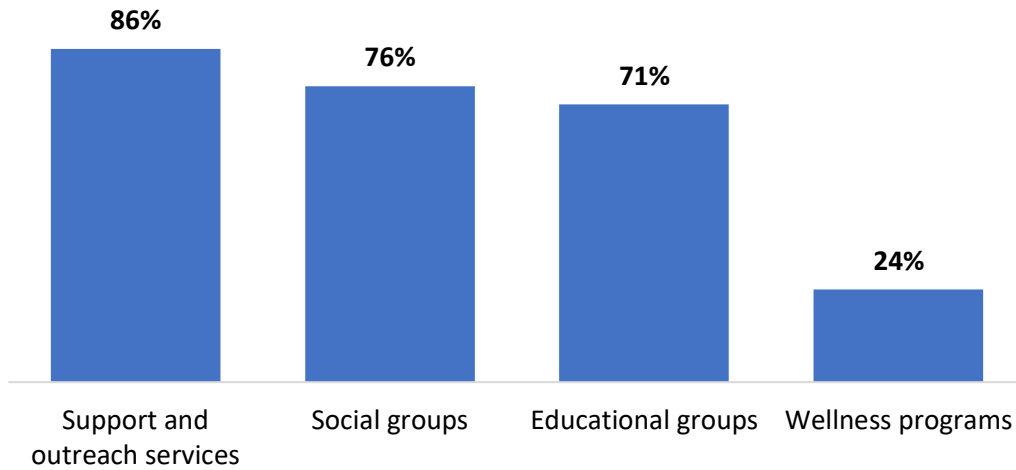
Respondents were asked what kinds of programs and services their faith-based organization offered to older adults. Four categories were offered as choices, with examples of the kinds of programs and services for each. This was listed as the following:

- **Social groups** (ex. knitting, cards, choir, conversation groups, meals, crafts, arts, etc.)
- **Support and outreach services** (ex. meal services, telephone support/check-ins, counselling, meal/grocery delivery, visitation, yard work, snow removal, food bank, transportation, etc.)
- **Wellness programs** (ex. exercise, walking, fitness, etc.)
- **Educational groups** (ex. workshops, guest speakers, information sessions, etc.)

Respondents were able to choose all that applied to them. Of the 21 responses to this question, Figure 8 shows that 'support and outreach services' were offered the most at 86%. 'Social groups' were offered by 76% of respondents. 'Wellness programs' were offered the least, at 24%.

Figure 8. Categories of programs and services offered before the COVID-19 pandemic

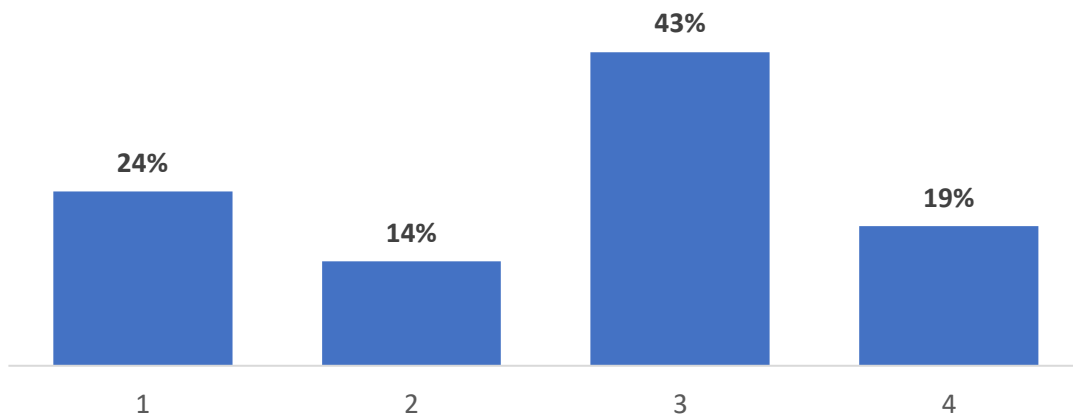
n=21



Regarding the number of categories of programs and services offered by respondents, 43% of respondents offered three out of four listed categories prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 9). Twenty-four per cent offered only one type of program or service.

Figure 9. Numer of categories of programs and services offered to Older Adults before the COVID-19 pandemic

n=21



Half of the respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the programs and services offered to their older adult members, while the other half indicated that programs and services did not discontinue as a result of the pandemic (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Programs and services offered to older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic
n=20

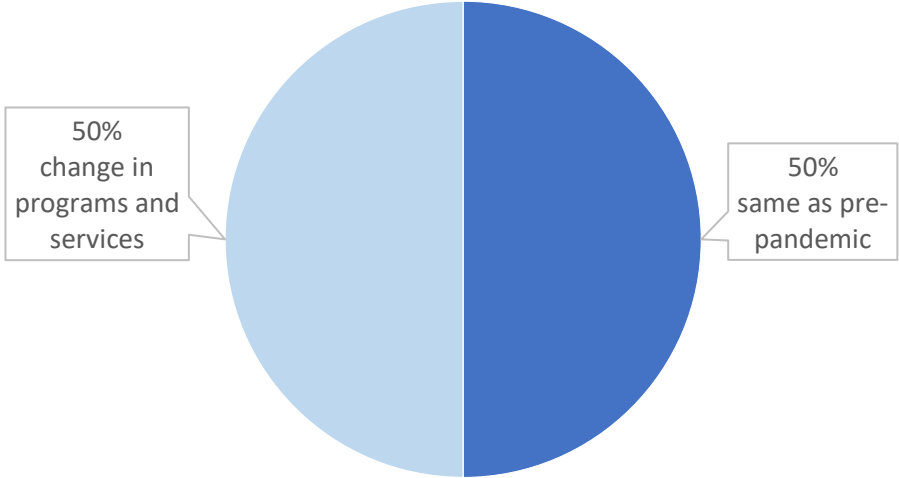


Figure 11 represents the changes in programs and services offered to older adults before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the pandemic. It is shown that ‘support and outreach services’ were offered by 85% of respondents during the pandemic, which is about the same as pre-COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on ‘social groups’ amongst respondents. Prior to the pandemic, 76% of respondents offered ‘social groups’ as a program or service, and throughout the pandemic it was offered by 40%. Ninety-one per cent of respondents indicated that the programs and services currently being offered will continue when pandemic related restrictions lift (Figure 12). All respondents indicated that programs and services offered to their older adult members are also open to non-member older adults in the community (Figure 13).

Figure 11. Programs and services offered to older adults before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

n=20

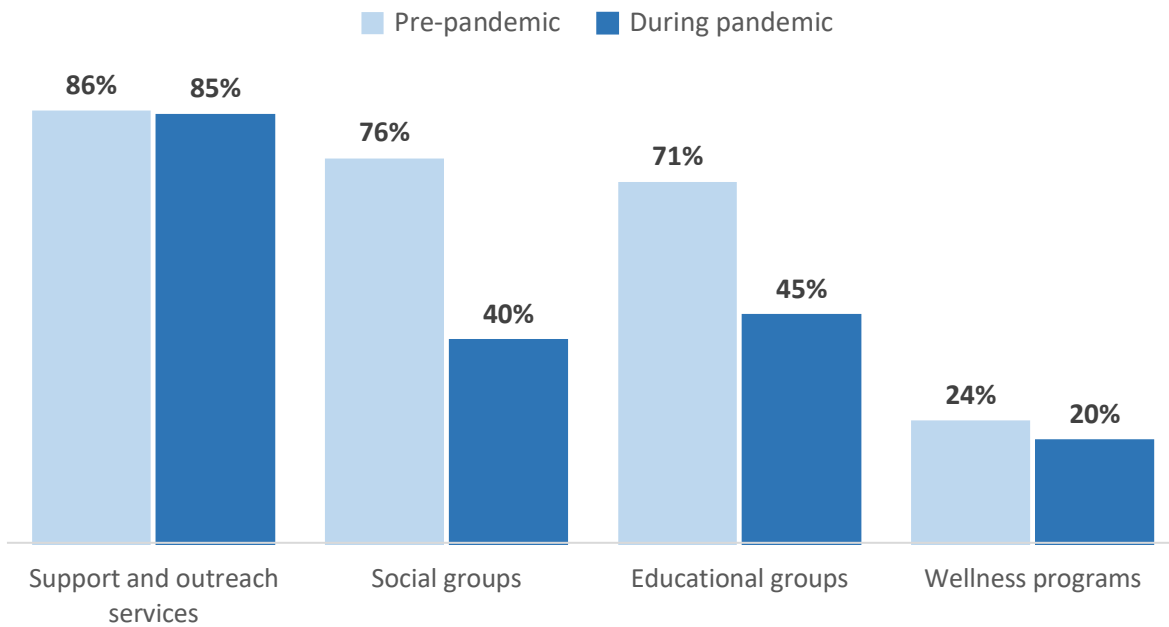


Figure 12. Will these programs and services continue as COVID-19 restrictions begin to lift?

n=20

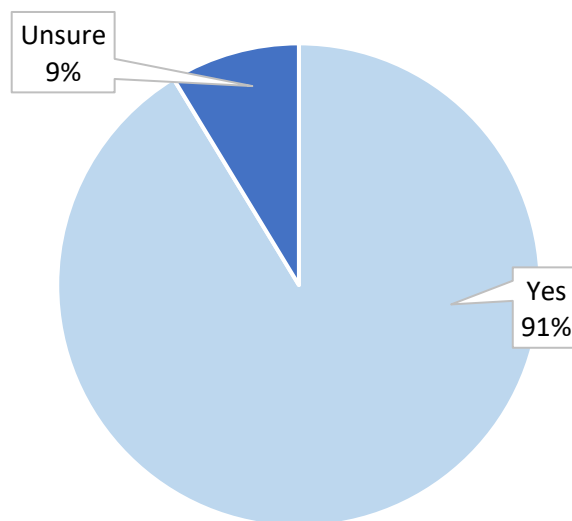
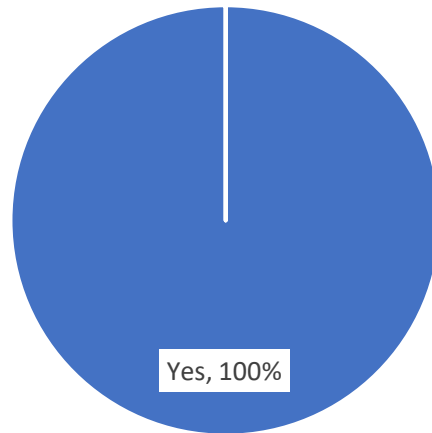


Figure 13. Are older adults within the community who may not be members of your Faith-based Organization welcome to participate in any of your programs and services?

n=22



When asked if they were connected with any community supports and organizations, most respondents (66%) indicated yes (Figure 14). Respondents who indicated they provide programs and services for older adults were about twice as likely to be connected with other community supports and organizations than not (Figure 15).

Figure 14. Are you connected with any community supports/organizations?

n=27

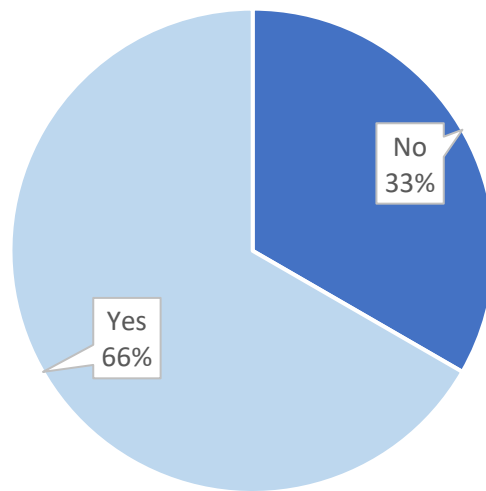
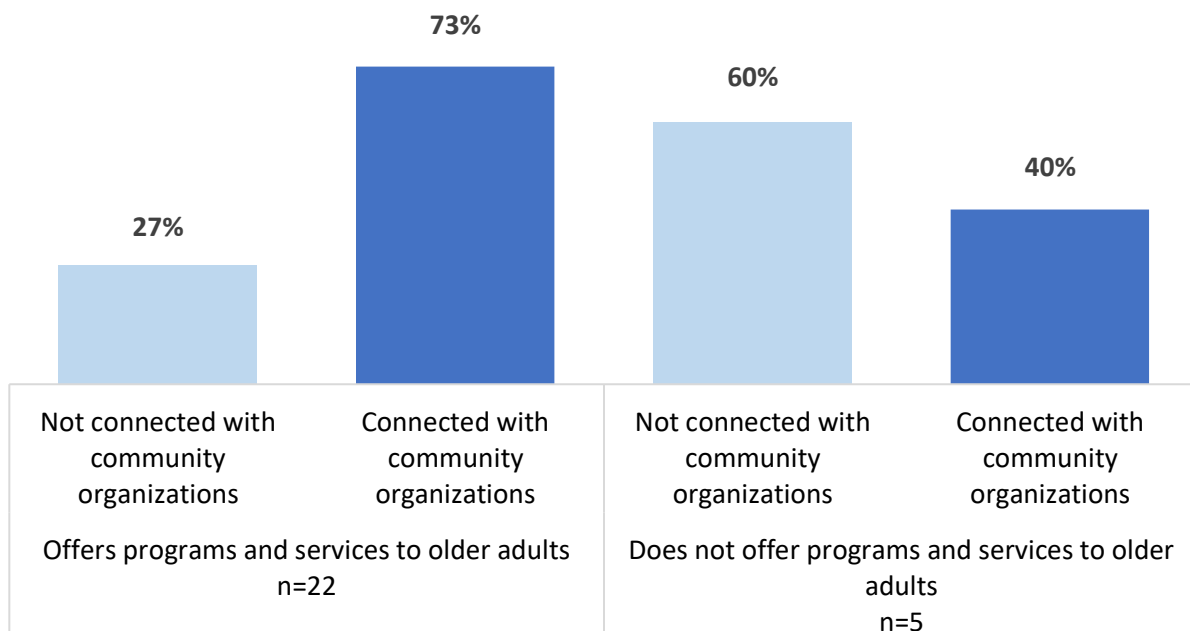
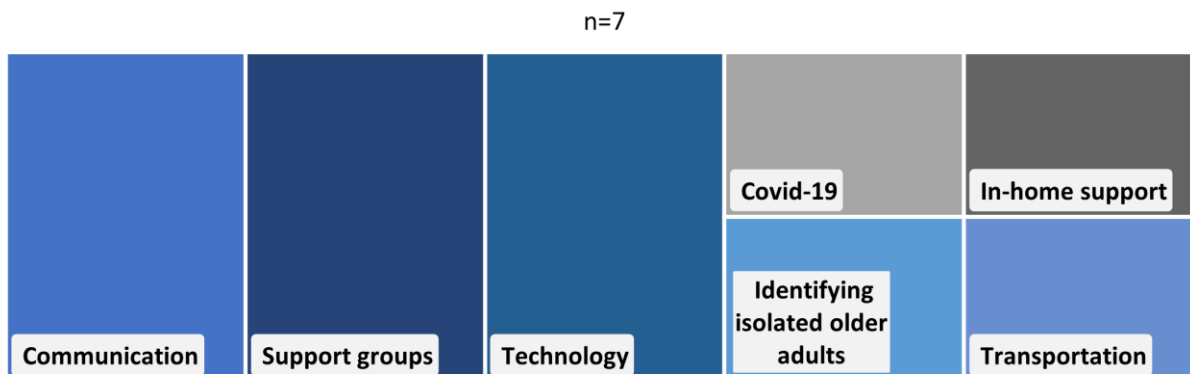


Figure 15. Relationship between offering programs and services to older adults and being connected with other community organizations



Respondents were asked to identify gaps in programs and services for their older adult members. Seven faith-group organizations responded to this question, shown in Figure 16. Communication, support groups (including bereavement and caregiver), and technology (including lack of internet) were identified as the main gaps. COVID-19 was identified as a barrier. Transportation, in-home supports, and the ability to identify isolated older adults were also identified as gaps.

Figure 16. Identified gaps in programs or services to support members who are older adults



When asked if respondents would like to connect with the *Connection in Action* project, 73% (seventy-three per cent) indicated yes. This means that these faith-based organizations would like to receive more information about the *Initiative* and would be interested in connecting with other community organizations that may help to strengthen their impact and reach.

Figure 17. Would you like to be connected with the *Connection in Action* project?

