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NEWS RELEASE

There is no need to suffer in silence from incontinence

New NIA report calls for efforts to raise awareness about this common condition to help counter the stigma that keeps many older adults from seeking treatment

TORONTO, June 20, 2023 — Incontinence is far more common than we think, affecting about a quarter of Canadian adults. But because of the stigma around it, older adults living with incontinence are unlikely to seek medical attention for it — and may face significant challenges, loneliness and financial stress as a result. Incontinence can also be a major barrier to ageing in the right place as it's one of the most common triggers for being admitted to a long-term care home in Canada.

In a new report, the National Institute on Ageing calls for greater public awareness about incontinence and better supports for those affected by it. [***We Don't Ask, They Don't Tell: Breaking the Silence to Address Incontinence in Canada***](#) is the newest report in the [Ageing in the Right Place](#) research series.

Incontinence, or the involuntary loss of urine or feces, is one of the most under-reported and under-treated conditions faced by older Canadians. Exacerbating the challenge is that many Canadians believe it is a normal part of ageing. But it's not — while age is a risk factor, incontinence is often both preventable and treatable.

- *Canadians with urinary incontinence are more likely to visit physicians and spend more time in hospitals and nursing homes compared to those without.*
- *Fear of being able to find a toilet in public can inhibit older adults from leaving the house, contributing to social isolation; those living with incontinence are 1.8 times more likely to experience loneliness than those without it.*

Along with shame and social isolation, incontinence can lead to other serious medical problems and be financially draining — in 2014, it was estimated that an older Canadian living with incontinence would spend \$1,400 to \$2,100 per year on products. It's estimated that urinary and fecal incontinence could currently cost Canadians more than \$10 billion per year, when considering costs to the individual, costs of lost productivity and costs to the health care system.

The NIA’s report also finds it’s not just the general public that lacks awareness — health care providers often feel unprepared to discuss or treat incontinence with their patients.

“If incontinence were better recognized and addressed, more people could be supported to remain independent, productive and engaged citizens, and to continue to age well in their communities,” said **Dr. Samir Sinha**, Director of Health Policy Research at the NIA. “Current messaging seems to normalize incontinence and makes people feel that they can, and should, live with it. We need to build awareness around its prevention and treatment, and reduce the stigma associated with the condition for older Canadians, their unpaid caregivers and care providers.”

The NIA makes six recommendations to better address incontinence in Canada:

1. Increase efforts to raise public awareness and reduce stigma around incontinence
2. Improve resources and educational opportunities for health and care professionals
3. Encourage quality and standards organizations, such as the Health Standards Organization (HSO), to incorporate and promote evidence-informed practices and measures to better address and manage incontinence
4. Promote research and knowledge translation of best practices to manage and treat incontinence
5. Ensure the availability of publicly accessible toilets, as part of the creation of more age-friendly communities
6. Promote greater equity around funding support to manage incontinence

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About the Ageing in the Right Place Research Series

Supporting more older Canadians to age in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, commonly referred to as “ageing in place,” will be essential to better caring for Canada’s ageing population. Yet doing so effectively requires more responsive systems and services that allow for what the National Institute on Ageing calls Ageing in the Right Place: “The process of enabling healthy ageing in the most appropriate setting based on an older person’s personal preferences, circumstances and care needs.” This [ground-breaking research series](#) presents a practical framework to understand the concept of Ageing in the Right Place (AIRP) and what is required to make it work,



and highlights existing best practices and new opportunities that can reduce unnecessary long-term care home admissions and better support the implementation of successful AIRP policies and programs across Canada and beyond.

About The National Institute on Ageing

The [National Institute on Ageing](#) is a think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) focused on the realities of Canada's ageing population. Follow us on Twitter [@NIAgeing](#) and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy [@NSS_Now](#).



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