

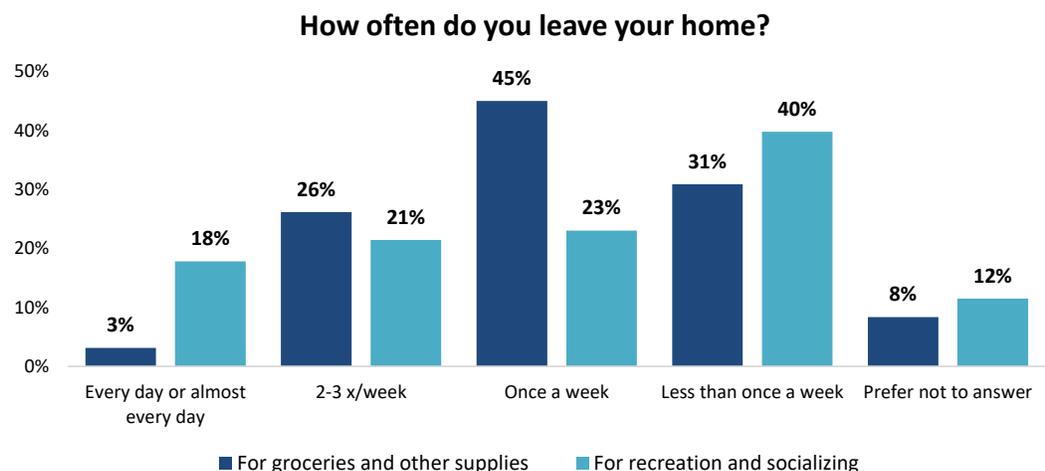
Senior Wellbeing During COVID-19

We know that the impact of COVID-19 has affected many in Halton and, in particular, older adults. With restrictions on accessing stores and the financial constraints brought about by the pandemic, there has been an impact not only on accessing healthy, appropriate food, but also on interaction with others. This change in interaction can lead to social isolation and loneliness, especially amongst older adults and those living with lower incomes. There is evidence that shows the negative impacts of social isolation and loneliness.¹ According to a recent report by Angus Reid,² more Canadians report being socially isolated and lonely since the pandemic began.

The *Putting Food on the Table* project is a partnership between Sheridan Centre for Elder Research, Food for Life, and Community Development Halton to better understand the needs of older adults who receive food supports from Food for Life. A survey went out in the summer of 2020 to approximately 1,000 older adults (aged 50 and over) in Halton who receive food supports from Food for Life asking about their nutrition, food security, food needs, health, and overall wellbeing. A total of 217 surveys were returned. This *Community Lens* provides an overview of some of the responses to questions related to feelings of social isolation and other impacts of COVID-19.

The majority of the respondents (74%) to the survey were women, with the largest group consisting of women in their 70s. The survey also found that the women who responded have different living situations than the men. They tended to be widowed, whereas the men tended to be married or living with a common law partner. Almost three quarters of the women who responded to the survey lived alone, compared to less than a quarter of men, who lived alone.

A series of questions were asked to understand the impact of COVID-19. As shown in the chart below, respondents were more likely to leave their homes to get groceries and other supplies versus for recreation or socializing.

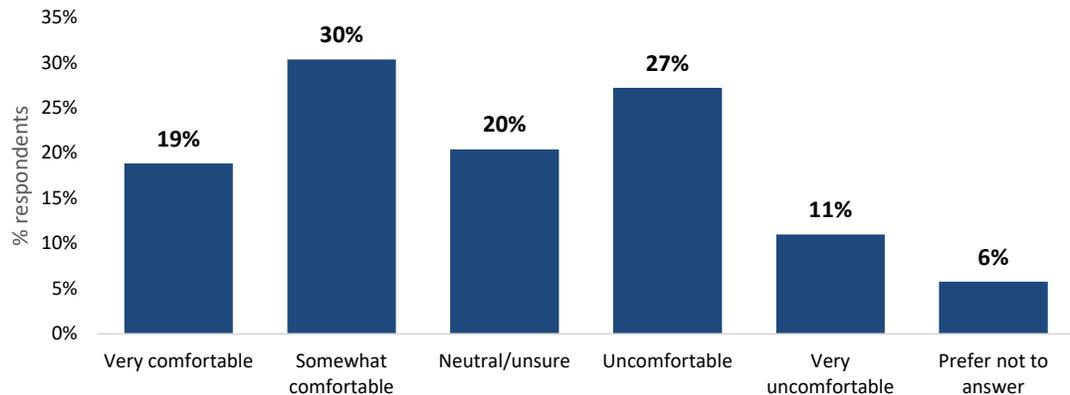


¹ *Seniors: Loneliness and Social Isolation*, Community Development Halton, 2016.

² *Isolation, Loneliness, and COVID-19: Pandemic leads to sharp increase in mental health challenges, social woes*, Angus Reid Institute, October 2020 <http://angusreid.org/isolation-and-loneliness-covid19/>

Furthermore, of the 31% of respondents who reported leaving their homes less than once a week for groceries or other supplies, it was found that 90% of them reported leaving their homes less than once a week for recreation or socializing. This means that about a quarter of these older adults are leaving their homes less than once a week for any reason. This indicates the inclination for people to stay home due to the pandemic during the summer of 2020. A follow up question on the comfort of leaving home found that almost 40% of respondents said they were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable leaving their homes during the pandemic.

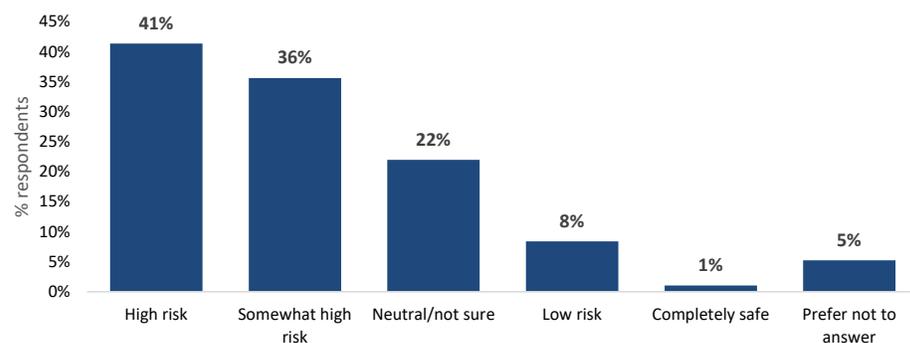
How comfortable are you leaving your home during the pandemic?



Knowing the importance of socialization for wellbeing and mental health, a set of questions were asked about socialization. When asked if they had someone to socialize with, 15% responded “No” and for those who did have someone to socialize with, 11% said they socialize less than once a week. When asked how they socialize with others, the responses were varied, with the telephone playing an important role in their lives. Given the move of many services to online delivery, 36% of respondents indicated challenges with access to the Internet and 32% indicated a level of discomfort learning new technologies.

Finally, when asked about their wellbeing during the pandemic, 41% said that it has stayed the same or is better while 40% said that their wellbeing is worse. In addition, when asked how much of a risk COVID-19 is to them, 77% of these older adults indicated being in the “high risk” or “somewhat high risk” category.

How much of a risk do you believe COVID is to your health, safety and wellbeing?



The team has worked hard to develop changes to the “older adult food package” from Food For Life to improve the over all experience and provide additional resources to support the older adults. A second survey is currently underway to learn about the impact of this work, what changes may have occurred with the second wave of COVID-19, and what work still needs to be done.



Community Development Halton would like to acknowledge the ongoing financial support of the Regional Municipality of Halton.



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