

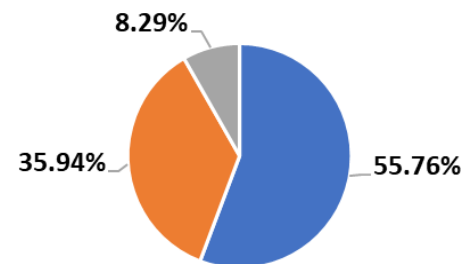
Senior Wellbeing During COVID-19: Part 3

Community Development Halton is continuing its analysis of the results of a survey that went out to older adults (aged 50 or older) in Halton “who receive food supports from Food for Life asking about their nutrition, food security, food needs, health, and overall wellbeing.” The survey was sent out to older adults in 2020 and then again as a follow-up in June 2021. This was part of the Putting Food on the Table project, a partnership between Sheridan Centre for Elder Research, Food for Life, and Community Development Halton.

This Community Lens, the third analysis of the series, will focus on older adults’ access to technology during the pandemic. Readers can find the previous Community Lens publications in the series, here: [Senior Wellbeing During COVID-19](#) and [Senior Wellbeing During COVID-19: Part 2](#).

Older adults were asked in the second survey, ‘Do you have consistent access to the Internet’? Almost 56% of respondents answered “Yes”, with almost 36% of respondents not having consistent access to the Internet. When we compare these survey results to other cohorts of the population, it appears that the older adults in this survey are facing barriers to Internet access at a disproportionately higher rate than the rest of Canadians. To illustrate this point, the 2020 Canadian Internet Use Survey found that 94% of Canadians had “household Internet access” or, in other words, “consistent access to the Internet” as it was framed in our survey.¹

Do you have consistent access to the Internet?



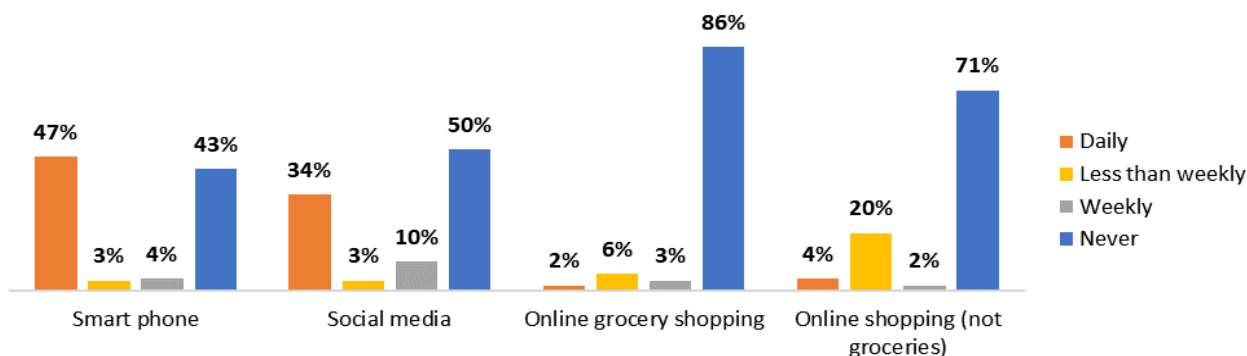
■ Yes ■ No ■ Prefer not to answer

What is perhaps more illuminating is that seniors’ access to the Internet in our survey also compares unfavourably when compared with seniors’ access to the Internet in the 2020 Canadian Internet Use Survey. In the national survey, 83% of seniors, “those aged 65 and older”, had home access to the Internet, compared to almost 56% in the Putting Food on the Table project survey. It is important to point out a key difference between the two surveys: the 2020 Canadian Internet Use Survey defined seniors as “those aged 65 and older”, while the Putting Food on the Table project survey was sent out to individuals over the age of 50. Of which, no one responded in the 50-54 age cohort, and a little over 5% of respondents were under 65 (1.69% in the 55-59 age cohort, and 3.39% in the 60-64 cohort).

Therefore, almost 95% of respondents to the Putting Food on the Table project survey were over the age of 65.

¹ Statistics Canada, ‘Access to the Internet in Canada, 2020’ (2021). Accessed 8 November 2021. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210531/dq210531d-eng.htm>

How often do you use the following technologies?



(Multiple Answers Available.)

Elsewhere, interesting findings around older adults' relationships with technologies were revealed with the following question, "How often do you use the following technologies?" The proportion of respondents, for example, that never use a mobile phone, 43%, is nearly as high the proportion that use a smart phone daily, 47%, while 3% use a smart phone on a "less than weekly basis", and 4% use one on a "weekly basis".

When it comes to using social media, which one might have considered a valuable way to remain connected during COVID, 50% of respondents never use it, while 34% use it daily.

Interestingly, 86% of respondents never use "online grocery shopping", while the balance of 14% use it at various frequencies. One might have expected a larger proportion of older adults using online grocery shopping during a period when accessing public spaces for older adults was considered high risk behaviour. The proportion of respondents that use "online shopping (not groceries)" is higher, with 24% of respondents using it on either a "daily" or "less than weekly basis."

This Community Lens showed that not only are there digital divides between the older adult cohort and the rest of the population, which has been consistently demonstrated across studies and surveys; it showed that there are significant divides, such as smart phone use, within the older adult cohort itself.

Canada's digital economy continues to change people's relationships with commerce, healthcare, banking, and even public services. Ontario, for example, recently announced its Digital Identity Program which is due to launch in late 2021. It is imperative that older adults are part of this digital future – and not, as is happening right now, left behind.

¹ Government of Ontario, Digital Identity Programme: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/digital-id-ontario>

Community Lens is prepared by Community Development Halton to disseminate and interpret important community data as it becomes available. For more information please contact us at data@cdhalton.ca or 905-632-1975



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



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