

# Social Inclusion of Seniors: Creating Supportive Housing Policies

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study published by The University of Western Ontario reveals that many older seniors (aged 85+) actively participate in activities that allow them to continue living in their homes.

These seniors seek social opportunities to maintain their current relationships and to make new [friends](#). Their social networks are important because they allow seniors to feel included in their communities. Participating in activities such as discussion groups, concerts, lectures and book clubs gives seniors a better quality of life, better psychological wellness and a sense of positivity that helps keep them living in their homes.

The study also illustrates that seniors are not passive recipients of care. While they often benefit from some formal and informal care from children, spouses, or paid help, seniors try to build reciprocal relationships with their caregivers and communities. They often return the support by providing things like child or pet care, by contributing money to gas expenses when someone gives them a ride and by volunteering in their communities.

Lead author and adjunct researcher at Western, Judy Lynn Richards, says the study debunks the stereotype that older seniors are helpless or completely reliant on others. "Much like the rest of us, they are self-reliant and are also engaged in reciprocal relationships with their support persons in all aspects of their lives," she says. "These seniors taught us that we all need to change our thinking about seniors — to see them as

actual members of society.”

Most seniors in the study found the idea of moving to an institution upsetting to consider because it meant losing independence, autonomy and privacy, and it meant increased isolation. Home meant “everything” to seniors in the study: independence, autonomy, freedom and sanctuary. Seniors and their caregivers were willing “to do what it takes” to allow seniors to continue living in their homes.

The study also revealed a number of services that seniors and their caregivers felt would help them to live at home, including:

- care services that are available when needed at low or no cost
- community activities that take place near seniors’ homes
- easily accessible transportation and a driving school or driving classes for seniors
- an organized check-in program
- a non-Internet-based grocery delivery service
- courses to teach seniors and their caregivers how to use computers and the Internet
- a seniors-helping-seniors volunteer bank through which seniors could be called upon to help each other with household tasks

The study was conducted as part of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded Population Change and Lifecourse Strategic Knowledge Cluster, a national network based at Western and led by Sociology professor Rod Beaujot. Richards conducted her research in London while on sabbatical from the University of Prince Edward Island.

The study is based on interviews with 16 [seniors](#) aged 85-94 living predominately in the London area. A summary of the study can be found at: [sociology.uwo.ca/cluster/en/ResearchBrief1.html](http://sociology.uwo.ca/cluster/en/ResearchBrief1.html)

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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