



Chatting to Wellness Launches Program to Help Seniors Combat Loneliness

(Toronto, April 13, 2020) - Chatting to Wellness is launching free Chatting Sessions for seniors across Canada to combat loneliness and isolation, which has increased during self-isolation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local university students are available by phone every weekday evening to chat with seniors as part of this new volunteer-run phone-call program.

The conversations, led by the senior, are entirely free and are for 45 minutes in length. Calls are scheduled between 6 pm - 9 pm EST, Monday to Friday. Seniors can either sign up directly, or have a family member sign up for a call on their behalf by visiting www.chattingtowellness.ca/phonechats.

New data compiled by Statistics Canada in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic confirms that seniors are more susceptible to the harmful effects of social isolation. The data finds that more than 10% of seniors aged 65 to 74 did not have close friends, which rises to 15% for seniors aged 75 and older. The report notes that social isolation can be a particular challenge for those who are living alone, especially if they have little or no interaction with others.

Chatting to Wellness is a student-run non-profit organization that combats senior isolation and loneliness to improve mental health. Prior to the current pandemic, volunteers conducted weekly visits to retirement homes, to chat with lonely, isolated, and abandoned seniors. The organization was founded by university student Mahad Shahzad in 2017 at age 19 after he became aware of the prominence of senior loneliness and isolation.

Since its launch two years ago, Chatting to Wellness has provided over 3,000 in-person Chatting Sessions to seniors across the Greater Toronto Area and Southern Ontario. Sessions are conducted by student volunteers with a passion for mental health and senior wellness. The sessions focus on allowing the senior to speak their mind, talk about anything they like, relieving a burden off their shoulders. Feedback shows that 90% of seniors who received three consecutive Chatting Sessions have shown increased engagement with their community. This is in-line with a recent study from Statistics Canada, which shows that social support and participation are associated with better mental and physical health outcomes.

Chatting to Wellness plans to reach more seniors with the introduction of remote Chatting Sessions, supporting those across the country who have no or reduced access to family or friends during this trying time.

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