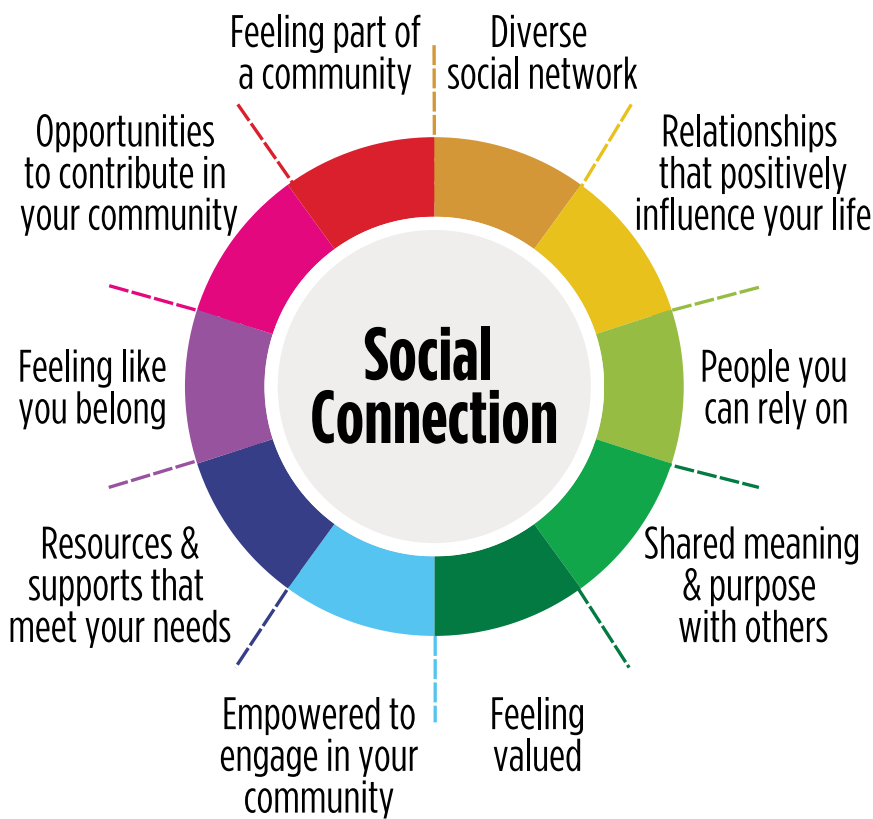




Social Connection A PRIMER FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Connection is:



“The rise of social isolation is not a personal choice or individual problem, but one that is rooted in community design, social norms, and systemic injustices” (Healthy Places by Design, 2021).¹

The World Health Organization has declared social isolation and loneliness a **global public health concern**.

Social connection is an important and often underappreciated contributor to individual and population health, and community safety, resilience and prosperity. On average, people who have strong social connections are happier, healthier and live longer than those who don't.²

“A socially connected community is a place where everyone feels like they belong. It’s a place where people know their neighbours and feel motivated to get involved, build relationships, and contribute to the creation of strong social networks. It requires spaces and events for people to gather, create new friendships, and contribute to the community through volunteering. Connected communities support strong citizen engagement and increase the health and well-being of residents” (Plan H, 2018).³





Policy Considerations

Municipal policies create the foundation for social change through policy to guide decisions and use of resources that impact social connection.

Include social connection language in municipal plans (e.g., Strategic Plans, Official Plans, Recreation Master Plans, Community Safety and Well-Being Plans)

Develop a strategy to support inclusion for newcomers

Invest in meaningful community engagement not only to generate more resident-focused ideas but understanding that the participation itself creates opportunities for connection

Create a shared-use space policy for community partners to use municipal-owned space to run programming that promotes social connection (e.g., exercise classes, pop-up library programs, service club meetings)

Collaborate with partners to create a community social connection strategy

Measure community connection in resident surveys

Planning and Community Design

Social and civic infrastructure (e.g., libraries, town halls, parks, recreation facilities) are the physical places that allow social connections to develop and are the heart of community life.

Invest in outdoor spaces like parks, community gardens and public squares. These spaces should be inclusive and accessible, intergenerational, and support a wide range of activities

Co-design public spaces with the residents that use them to prioritize social connection (e.g., picnic tables, shade structures, opportunities for events)

Work with local artists to use art to create welcoming spaces

Include gathering spaces in housing developments

Prioritize walkability and "complete streets"
[Complete Streets Overview | City of Toronto](#) | www.toronto.ca

Offer amenities to encourage use of natural environments (e.g., signage/wayfinding for trails, washroom facilities, kayak rentals for waterways)



Programming and Practices

Programming and practices are the day-to-day actions taken by individuals, institutions, coalitions, networks, and other groups that enhance opportunities for social connection.

Participate in awareness campaigns related to the importance of social connection

Offer diverse, low-cost recreation opportunities to bring community members together

Host and promote a variety of community events throughout the entire year

Support service clubs and community agencies to host events that encourage social connection

Offer a 'welcome to the community' package for new residents

Celebrate diverse communities through multicultural events and programming

Activate streets as places for connection by temporarily closing them to motor vehicles. Use them for walking and cycling and/or programming (e.g., parades, community events and festivals, farmers' markets)

Support neighbour-to-neighbour connections by:

- Encouraging block parties
Block Party in A Box | NeighbourGood London | www.neighbourgoodlondon.ca
- Asking residents to submit placemaking ideas to make their neighbourhood connected and vibrant and offer funding to make those ideas a reality
Canada's Placemaking Community | Canada Healthy Communities Initiative | <https://placemakingcommunity.ca>
- Promoting "Meet your Neighbour" events
Love My Hood | The City of Kitchener | www.lovemyhood.ca

Coordinate/encourage/promote neighbourhood and community greening projects to beautify and transform green spaces (e.g., community clean-ups, pollinator projects, wildlife habitats, tree planting, nature walks)

Connect with other municipalities to learn about more social connection opportunities

References:

¹ Healthy Places by Design. (2021). [Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation.](#)

² Office of the Surgeon General. (2023). [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community.](#)

³ Plan H. (2018). [Social Connectedness](#)

Contact municipal@hpph.ca for:

- a consult with HPPH staff
- evidence-informed strategies
- opportunities to collaborate



Huron Perth
Public Health



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1-888-221-2133