

April 30, 2021

Supporting Resident Mental Health and Wellness

National Mental Health Week kicks off next week (May 3-9), prompting us to reflect on our own mental health and the wellbeing of others. This bulletin contains strategies (many shared by OARC resident Board Members) that residents might consider to enhance their personal wellness and to support the mental health of those they care about. Team members may also explore and circulate these resources and ideas.

Reflecting on some of the challenges of the last year, one OARC Board member shared, *“experiencing depression during the pandemic has been a very paralyzing thing.”* Despite widespread campaigns and other efforts to raise awareness and bring mental health issues to the forefront, many of us continue to hold the perception that this subject is taboo and private. Mental Health Week gives us an opportunity to invite difficult conversations and work to normalize the issues that affect so many.

“Depression [in LTC] DOES exist, and it exists on a much bigger scale than you think. We have to start talking about it, so that people aren’t afraid, and they get the support they need.” – OARC Director.

OARC recognizes that the suggestions contained in this bulletin are in no way a replacement, but they may be used to supplement a formal medical assessment and intervention. If you or someone you care for is experiencing signs of depression or distress, please speak with your nurse/physician or someone you trust to get the help that you/they deserve right away.

Your mental health matters. YOU matter.

Mental Health Week is not just 7 days on a calendar. Let’s make mental health a year-round priority!

Sincerely,

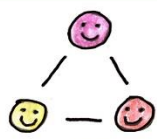
The OARC Board and Team

Lean into Your Social Connections


Last year, in consultation with key stakeholders (including OARC, Family Councils Ontario, Behavioural Supports Ontario) and in collaboration with an interdisciplinary team, Jennifer Bethell (The Kite Research Institute, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, University Health Network) conducted a review of the research literature linking social connection to mental health outcomes, specifically among long-term care residents. The study identified strategies to help residents build and maintain social connection during COVID-19. These strategies are summarized in this [publication](#). The team also created an [infographic](#) as a visual representation of the importance of social connections and the various strategies that residents might use to maintain them:

Social Relationships are Important for the Mental Health of People Living in Long-Term Care Homes

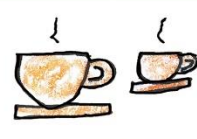
What do we mean by social relationships?



Social Network
The people we have relationships with, like family, friends and other people in the home.



Social Support
The help we get from people in our social network, including with emotional and physical needs.



Social Engagement
When we take part in activities with others, like having lunch or going for a walk together.

Why are social relationships important for the mental health of people living in long-term care homes?

Social relationships are good for our physical health and quality of life.
Not having enough quality or quantity of social relationships have also been linked to:

Depression

Sadness

Cognitive decline

Negative mood


Loneliness

Anxiety


Boredom

Responsive behaviours


Our social networks, the time we spend together and the support we give and get from others, are all important in our lives.
Some things that might help build and maintain social relationships for people living in long-term care homes include:




Manage Pain



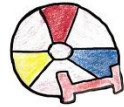
Address Vision and Hearing Loss




Sleep at Night, Not During the Day




Find Opportunities for Creative Expression, like Art, Music and Storytelling




Exercise




Garden, Either Indoors or Outside




Visit with Pets




Use Technology to Communicate




Maintain Religious and Cultural Practices




Laugh Together




Reminisce About Events, People and Places




Communicate Non-verbally




Family Councils Ontario



Behavioural Supports Ontario
Soutien en cas de troubles du comportement en Ontario



UHN Toronto Rehabilitation Institute
The Kite Research Institute



OARC Ontario Association of Residents' Councils

This infographic explains that “**our social networks, the time we spend together and the support we give and get from others, are all important in our lives**” (Bethell et. al, 2020).

Our bulletin contains a range of strategies and suggestions that you might find helpful as you take steps to support your own wellness, several of which were identified in this important research. The following are ways that residents living in long-term care can stay connected with their peers:

OARC Weekly Resident Forums:

Over the course of the last year, OARC Directors have led the facilitation of weekly Resident Forums, bringing together residents from across Ontario for peer support and sharing. We invite you to join a special-edition **Mental Health and Wellness-themed Resident Forum** next week on **Thursday, May 6th from 10:30-11:15am**. In this Forum, resident facilitator Barry Hickling will ask residents to share ways they keep their spirits up during challenging times. Learn more and register [here](#).

***New* Resident-Led Facebook Group for Residents under 65**

Recognizing the importance of peer connection now more than ever, a resident from a Scarborough-based long-term care home, along with another friend, has launched a new Facebook group for younger resident populations across the country called, “**Canadian Young Residents of LTC**.” The Facebook group is completely resident-led, and is intended for residents to speak freely and support one another. It is open to ANY resident age 65 and under in ANY Canadian long-term care home or adult ally to the resident as long as that ally understands that this is a resident-based group. According to Sage F., group creator and co-Administrator, “my reason for creating this was I have noticed that young residents have little in common with our senior neighbors and we need a safe place to explain ourselves... We need a group tailored to our ages which is the first step in recognizing that we are here and long-term care is not just for seniors.” Sage explains, “I chose Facebook because it is the most common social media and you don’t need an account to access it. The group is designated as “Public” so residents under 65 can find it.

Residents’ Council Meetings

Long-term care homes across the province have been encouraged to work with the resident leaders in their homes to adapt and resume Residents’ Council meetings. These regular meetings give residents an opportunity to stay informed and engaged in home operations and to connect personally, peer-to-peer.

Still struggling to get your Council back up and running? OARC has some tools to help you get started including a [Guidance Document](#) with companion [Questions and Answers Document](#) and an [Elections Fact Sheet](#).

The OARC team is always available to support you over the phone or computer! Reach out to Melissa McVie at mmcvie@ontarc.com or 1-800-532-0201 extension 260.

Education Resources

OARC has partnered with experts to share promising practices around mental health and strategies for resilience. The following resources may be of interest to residents and team members:

Residents' Council Supporting Wellness Webinar

In this 40-minute archived [webinar](#) we explore the topic of late life depression and self-care for residents and caregivers with guest speaker Jennifer Blaik, Psychogeriatric Resource Consultant, Community Programs and Partnerships, Community and Health Services, The Regional Municipality of York. (Webinar originally recorded December 2018).

- Consider viewing segments of this webinar or using some of the emerging themes to inspire a small group discussion during Mental Health Week. You may even consider including wellness tips in your monthly newsletter or post information on Resident Information Boards throughout your LTC home.

Seasons Magazine

On pages 8-9 of OARC's latest [Seasons Magazine](#), Dr. Jane Kuepfer, Schlegel Specialist in Spirituality and Aging provides tips for tapping into your spiritual resources in an article called Seeds of Hope: Spiritual Resources for Stressful Times.

- Consider printing and sharing this article as a handout or using it as a jumping off point for a discussion group during Mental Health Week.

Other Helpful Resources

OARC has compiled a great list of resources created by partner organizations to support resident engagement and wellness. Check them out here on our website: [Resident Activities and Resources](#).

Inspiration from OARC Board Members

Mental Health Week might be a great time to host small group discussions about mental health. To support you in these efforts, OARC Board Members shared some of their own strategies that they've used to boost their moods over the last year.



OARC Director Carolyn Snow recommends... **Laughter Yoga**

According to Carolyn, *"the brain can't tell the difference between a natural laugh or a forced laugh –both have the same calming effect on the brain!"* Carolyn's daughter became a certified Laughter Yoga facilitator through her workplace, but you don't need to be formally trained to bring this concept to your homes! If you search for "Laughter Yoga" on a computer, many free YouTube videos and resources are available to you to have fun with.

Laughter is the best medicine, so they say!



OARC President Sharron recommends... the healing power of **Music** Throughout the pandemic, many homes have creatively tapped into free live-stream or pre-recorded concert series available online. Don't have an internet connection? Your home likely has a collection of music performances on DVD that could be played for small groups of residents. Consider reaching out to some of your regular paid entertainers– they might be willing to perform in a courtyard or offer a virtual concert to brighten a residents' day!



OARC Director Jamie recommends...tapping into your creative side with **Arts and Crafts**

Jamie has always been drawn to painting. Earlier in the pandemic, he learned to channel his inner Jackson Pollock and began experimenting with splatter paintings. More recently he has been painting portraits of his favourite musicians and celebrities. Some artwork has been used to fill the walls in his room, with others have been photographed and shared with family and friends!



OARC Director Barry recommends... **Reading** and **Learning a New Skill** When asked what has helped Barry get through some of the challenging periods of loneliness and isolation over the last year, Barry shared that he has spent lots of time reading. He also surprised himself by taking the time to learning how to use an IPAD to stay in touch with family and friends.

Other Suggestions from Resident Leaders:

Get Reacquainted with Supportive Partners in your LTC Homes and Communities

Consider inviting your home's Social Worker, Champlain/Spiritual Care Leader, BSO team Lead or Recreation Therapist (or any other team member of interest) to a future Residents' Council meeting. This might be a great way for these team members to inform residents about the scope of their role and how they can support resident wellness. Your home may also have a Resident Services Coordinator who could present on other resources available to residents. Consider creating a Resident Wellness display or posting resources on a Resident Information Board on each floor/home area in your home.

Show some TLC for LTC

Research shows that giving back and experiencing feelings of gratitude is positively correlated with happiness and improved mental health. Residents might use Mental Health Week and Nursing Week, which also falls in the month of May, as opportunities to

work with their Programs/Recreation Departments to show appreciation to team members/LTC staff who have been working tirelessly throughout the pandemic using these "[Gratitude Hacks.](#)"

Support a Campaign – Hopeful Hearts LTC

In recognition of the significant impact that the COVID-19 virus has had on the long-term care sector, OARC launched a campaign called [Hopeful Hearts LTC](#). Over the last month, residents and their long-term care home teams have been busy creating heart displays in their homes to convey their feelings of hope for a brighter future. According to Sharron, OARC President, “giving residents something to get involved in and be hopeful for has the power to lift their spirits!”

Free Mental Resources for Residents and Team Members

BounceBack Ontario

BounceBack is a free skill-building program to manage low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or worry. Over the phone with a coach & through videos, you will get access to tools to support you on your path to mental wellness.

<https://bouncebackontario.ca/>

MindBeacon

During the Pandemic, the Ontario government is offering MindBeacon free of charge to LTC health care workers and residents. MindBeacon’s Therapist Guided Cognitive Behavioural Therapy supports individuals with depression, generalized anxiety, health anxiety, stress, insomnia, PTSD, chronic pain and more. Individuals have their own e-therapist to meet their unique needs and busy calendar.

<https://info.mindbeacon.com/btn542>

Note: As a resident living in long-term care you might also have access to alternative counselling/therapy services on a referral basis. Ask your nurse or physician for more information. Team Members may have the option to access services through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Canadian Mental Health Association

With slogans such as “Name it, don’t numb it” and #GetReal about how you feel, the 2021 campaigns of the Canadian Mental Health Association seeks to normalize and better understand our mental health. More information including 2021 toolkits can be accessed here: <https://mentalhealthweek.ca/>