

NAPCRG 52nd Annual Meeting — Abstracts of Completed Research 2024.

Submission Id: 6702

Title

Examining mobility patterns and social health of older Canadians living at home to inform decision aids about housing

Priority 1 (Research Category)

Social determinants and vulnerable populations

Presenters

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Abstract

Context: Older adults' mobility patterns and social health have not been adequately considered as pivotal considerations in decisions about housing.

Objective: Examine mobility patterns and social health of older Canadians living at home to inform decisions about housing options.

Methods: Using a mixed-methods study, we recruited a convenience sample of 20 older adults in Quebec and Alberta. Eligibility criteria were: a) aged 65 years or older, b) living autonomously at home or in a senior residence, and c) with outdoor mobility. Data gathered included: i) a sociodemographic, health and quality-of-life survey, ii) GPS tracking, iii) a walking interview, iv) a daily journal, and v) an in-depth interview. We triangulated data to add qualitative dimensions to our quantitative results. Finally, we selected four contrasting participants, 2 in Quebec and 2 in Alberta, to create activity space maps based on GPS data and interpreted them using the other data sources.

Results: Out of 25 people approached, 20 participants agreed to participate in the study. Of these, 14 (8 from Alberta and 6 from Quebec) agreed to use GPS trackers and completed the survey, interviews and journals. Maps generated from GPS showed people mostly left home to drive to stores and go for walks. In 14 days, the mean number of trips per person was 10.4 (± 5.8). The average distance travelled per person was 186.9 km (± 130.4), and average per day was 16.8 km (± 29.8). GPS shows the means of transportation was mostly car ($n=9$) and walking ($n=5$), while 2 participants used the bus. Daily journals showed that participants typically travelled alone. The interviews showed that their mobility gave them access to important physical assets, among which the 2 most frequently reported were libraries and supermarkets ($n=10$),

and to important social assets, notably family support when desired (n=13) and familiarity with the neighborhood (n=14), contributing to their social health. Winter weather was the most frequently mentioned factor affecting how much or whether participants went out (n=13). Conclusions: In a Canadian cohort of older adults, mobility patterns and existing social and physical assets, such as contact with the neighborhood, made important contributions to their social health and are important to inform decisions about housing options.

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