



## On Newsstands Now: Zoomer Asks Canadian Experts to Share Their Latest Research Into Healthy Aging

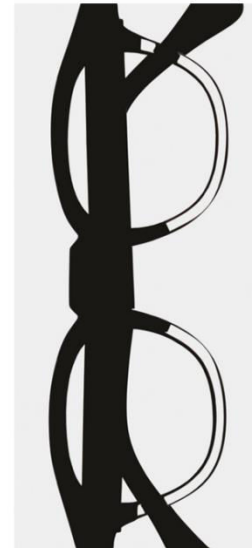
SHARON OOSTHOEK | FEBRUARY 11TH, 2020



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## Vision 20/20: Social Isolation and Loneliness

[Zoomer Magazine](#), March-April 2020

*Eddy Elmer, British Columbia Psychogeriatric Association board member, is doing his PhD in social gerontology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, focusing on loneliness in marginalized groups.*

“Isolation and loneliness increase the risk of poor health and early death, especially among older adults. In response, governments have declared a public health crisis, with the U.K. even appointing a Minister of Loneliness. In Vancouver, the [Healthy City Strategy](#) calls for everyone to have at least four people to rely on in times of need.

Yet, in trying to foster social connections, much of our focus has been on the ‘low-hanging fruit,’ like people at seniors centres. We overlook those who want to be socially connected but are homebound, introverted or don’t consider themselves seniors. Cities must increasingly focus on reaching older adults where they are and make neighbourhoods more conducive to social interaction.

Supporting ‘naturally occurring retirement communities’ is one way. These are large communities of seniors who decide to age in place instead of moving into retirement homes. Expanding Vancouver’s [Hey Neighbour program](#), where apartment dwellers are paid to be social concierges, will also help. We can give incentives to developers to incorporate sociable design features in new buildings, such as common rooms, outdoor

seating, and intersecting pathways. And postal carriers, police and firefighters might start getting to know people in their neighbourhoods through community events. In an era of fiscal deficits, these initiatives may seem like luxuries, but for those with no social contact, they can be life-saving.”

**The Future:** Researchers at the University of Toronto have created a non-language-specific Android app called [InTouch](#) that allows seniors to communicate without typing. They can say hello simply by waving their hand. The project, according to Elmer, shows that even older adults with cognitive impairment and physical disabilities such as poor dexterity can enjoy the benefits of online social networking.