

Introduction: Social Determinants of Mental Health

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The guiding principle of Canada's health and social systems is recognition of the inherent dignity of every individual. One's *dignity* is formed by the social fabric and relationships that surround it. As the Ubuntu African philosophy describes, "a person is a person through other people" (Wikipedia 2025). We know that brain development, neural processes and mental health are configured by social structures and connections relevant to our lives, as we experienced first-hand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social connection is a known determinant of physical and mental health, and while it is clear it must be embedded into practice for a comprehensive approach to human health, it is less clear how to go about it. This segment of *Healthcare Quarterly (HQ)* on mental health and social determinants provides practical insights into the tools, resources and actions being applied across jurisdictions to address loneliness and social isolation, such as in the articles by D'souza et al. (2025) on social prescribing and intersectoral collaboration to address loneliness by Savage et al. (2025). In a third commentary, Steve Lurie, a well-known advocate for mental health reform, provides insights he has gained over many years into how healthcare leaders can better support work being done in the community (Lurie 2025).

In a world dominated by individualism and social fragmentation, loneliness and disconnection affect every aspect of life. Research shows that human connectedness is essential not only for personal well-being but also for fostering trust, economic growth and social stability within nations. In response, some governments have prioritized this issue, guided by the WHO's report, "From Loneliness to Social Connection: Charting a Path to Healthier Societies" (WHO 2025). As reflected in the articles in this issue of *HQ*, it is reassuring to know that researchers and practitioners in Canada are broadening health's horizons by acting on the emerging knowledge in this important field.

The gradual decrease in mental health stigma may have played a pivotal role in expanding our understanding of what it means to be truly well. Society has taken a significant step toward a more inclusive and holistic view of what it means to thrive. Our understanding of well-being extends beyond the individual to include the quality of our relationships and the strength of our social supports. As reflected in the articles, Canada's health and social systems are once again laying the groundwork for a more connected and compassionate society, while calling to attention the historical shortfalls.

References

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About the Author(s)

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