



BY Pallium Canada

## The Power of Social Connection: Explore the Evidence-based Impact of Friendly Calls on People, Communities, and the Healthcare System

Presenters: **Asha Croggon**, Director of Friendly Calls Program, Canadian Red Cross

**Doris Sun**, BCY Friendly Calls Coordinator

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Feb 5, 2025: 12pm-1pm

AGENDA ITEM	DISCUSSION
<b>Learning Objectives</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Understand the health impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness (SI/L)</li> <li>2) Understand the benefits of the Friendly Calls Program on people, communities, and health systems</li> <li>3) Understand how the Friendly Calls program can assist the palliative community</li> </ol>
<b>Presentation Key Points</b>	<p>Social Isolation &amp; Loneliness (SI &amp; L):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loneliness is a global health concern. Concern especially for older adults but we are seeing more than 50% of 18-34 year olds report feelings of loneliness.</li> <li>• We expect SI &amp; L to impact mental health, but it also significantly impacts physical well-being: Shortens lifespan by up to 15 years, equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes/day</li> <li>• Higher rates of SI &amp; L among caregivers</li> <li>• People who feel more isolated can be the top 5% of users in the healthcare system, accounting for up to 50% of healthcare spending</li> <li>• Overall, we can see the impacts on individuals, communities and healthcare system</li> </ul> <p>Friendly Calls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National program from Canadian Red Cross providing evidence-based, culturally sage accessible connections for those 18+. Addressing impacts of social isolation and loneliness on people, their communities and health care system</li> <li>• Key difference from other call services where you call in to get support, Friendly Call volunteers initiate the calls after an individual has done intake call in. Many express how helpful this is to have someone calling them</li> <li>• Benefits of Friendly Calls: protection through connection (emotional support, coping strategies, strengthened connections), strengthen community resilience (identify referral pathways), reduce strain on health care system (SI&amp;L equates to over \$43B annually in Canadian Health Care System)</li> <li>• Flow into communities where there isn't access to a similar program and/or in an area where there is a similar one, flow around the community to an option if an individual doesn't meet criteria or timeline</li> </ul> <p>Continuum of Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friendly calls acts as an upstream early prevention service. Gap was identified in prevention while other elements addressed by existing services</li> <li>• The largest nationally accessible social prescription program</li> </ul> <p>Impacts of Friendly Calls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants report feeling less lonely, feel safer, better able to cope with stress</li> <li>• Potential savings of \$11M each year (<a href="#">based on study on ROI for social prescription programs</a>)</li> </ul> <p>Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designed to support participants at every step</li> <li>• IMPACT: Intake, Plans, Connection, Match, Access, Transition</li> </ul> <p>Learnings</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reaching those in need: More people are living alone, over 50% participants report poor to fair mental health, higher social isolation and financial insecurity</li> <li>• Making a significant impact on participants and volunteers in their quality of life, coping &amp; resilience, community connection and healthy habits.</li> </ul> <p><i>Michelle and Doris shared some anonymous quotes from program participants sharing their experiences in the program.</i></p>
<p><b>Discussion and Q&amp;A</b></p>	<p><b>Q: How often are people called?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>A:</b> It depends on their needs - it is usually once a week via a volunteer and if they would benefit from added support, a skilled staff will reach out for a series of calls focused on coping strategies or supporting individualized referral pathways</li> </ul> <p><b>Q: How to access the program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>A:</b> 1-833-979-9779 - Friendly Calls National Phone Line. <a href="#">Friendly Calls Program - Canadian Red Cross</a>. Caregiver/family member may refer individual as well. Intake is done to see if it's a good fit, guide to appropriate resources if not a fit</li> </ul> <p><b>Q: Do you ever encounter people pushing boundaries of this and asking volunteers to meet in person to connect?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>A:</b> At this time the program is primarily provided virtually for safety of both. Usually, people respect and understand this. If someone seeking in-person connections, we can work to identify if there a program within their community and encourage a social care plan to identify people in their life to connect with in-person. We train volunteers around these boundaries.</li> </ul> <p><b>Q: For people receiving the calls with the program, is there any sort of support system for people when there is a climate change event or evacuation during wildfire etc?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>A:</b> Within BC/YK program we are working to support volunteers to be trained in BeReady – emergency preparedness with how to make a kit, encouraging volunteers to have conversations around climate crisis events to help participants (based on risk level in their regions) in getting prepared. Prepare and Care calls – leading up to climate crisis seasons.</li> </ul> <p><b>Q: Would the program be willing to have a conversation after the webinar to do training for small groups whose mandate is to connect to provide compassion and understanding?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>A:</b> Michelle and Doris can speak with community health director in BC and see what that could look like. Possibly sharing resources or cross-training perhaps</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No matter the financial assets that people have, loneliness and isolation can be a real lived experience! Small things like an offer to have a cup of tea with them, provide a meal, organize regular coffee session are very appreciated and I believe add to the quality of peoples live</li> <li>• Nav-Care program will meet a client in person to provide socialization and help</li> <li>• Mental health stigma – can be very beneficial to have the connection outside of community with a Friendly Calls volunteer. See this especially prevalent in small communities</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How do you see the Friendly Calls program supporting you or the people you support? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I work in a hospice, and I can definitely see this being helpful for some patients and their loved ones</li> <li>• I am a community hospice SW. I refer my clients to receive a friendly call for companionship and more informal support, especially if the client's family does not live close by and mobility is impacted</li> </ul> </li> <li>2) What are steps we can take to support each other? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make necessary referrals</li> </ul> </li> <li>3) Action you would like to take?</li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am going to a Community Social Connections meeting tomorrow and will definitely be talking about this program. I so appreciate this presentation. I will be sharing this for sure.</li><li>• Reach out to a couple of elders/seniors who would like the connection, ask how they are doing, it makes a difference</li></ul>
<b>Additional Resources</b>	Upcoming BCCPC ECHO sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b><i>Understanding Grief in Canada: A Canadian Grief Alliance Perspective</i></b> Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 12pm-1pm PST <a href="#">Registration link</a></li></ul>