

Play Forever

Fall 2025



Healthcare Excellence Canada would like to formally acknowledge Play Forever's generosity in sharing their skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences to inform this promising practice.

About Healthcare Excellence Canada

Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) works with partners across the country to shape a future where everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare. We bring together people, evidence and action to move Care Forward - spreading and scaling quality and safety improvements, strengthening capacity and collective leadership and catalyzing change in policy and practice.

At HEC, healthcare excellence means improving safety, quality and value for everyone. It means care grounded in what matters most to patients, caregivers, communities and people in the workforce. It also means care that respects and responds to First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities and is culturally safe, equitable and supported by the appropriate use of technology. Together with our partners, we embed these foundations across the health system.

Our work also focuses on expanding access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community. This includes supporting people with primary health care needs and older adults with health and social needs.

HEC is an independent, not-for-profit charity funded primarily by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

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Enabling Aging in Place collaborative

The Enabling Aging in Place collaborative brought together health and social service organizations from across the healthcare continuum to implement promising practices that can delay people's entry into long-term care. The collaborative aimed to improve safety, health and quality-of-life outcomes, while also reducing emergency department visits, lessening demands on care partners and making better use of health and social care resources.

Teams from communities across the country participated in the Enabling Aging in Place collaborative.



Play Forever

Play Forever supports older adults to remain connected to their community, enhancing social engagement and reducing loneliness. As a community-based organization, Play Forever started by providing structured and accessible recreation, education and mental health services to youth in the greater Toronto area. However, older adults in the community soon started expressing interest in having similar opportunities. Play Forever took this in stride and now offers programming for older adults, while also providing intergenerational connection opportunities with youth, primarily through social housing communities. The organization works to create an inclusive space for diverse communities of older adults by incorporating culturally appropriate activities and offering activities in multiple languages when possible.

The programs bring joy and connection to older adults and help build healthy and vibrant communities. By focusing on health promotion, social connection and technology skills, Play Forever supports older adults in maintaining independence and improving their quality of life as they age in place.

Key Features

Objectives

The objectives of the program are to:

- improve quality of life and overall well-being for older adults
- support older adults to live independently and comfortably in their own homes and communities for as long as possible
- foster social connections, reduce isolation and create a supportive environment for older adults within the community
- ensure equitable access to program benefits and services for diverse populations of older adults

Population served

Play Forever provides programming to those aged 65 and older in seven communities across the greater Toronto area. The organization has also had requests to expand into an additional five to 10 communities and is working towards this expansion.

Program team

The program team includes the executive director, seniors program manager and volunteers.

- Executive director – provides program oversight, develops and maintains partnerships to support programming.
- Seniors program manager – plans and delivers activities with older adults.

- Volunteers – including co-op students, youth program participants, older adults and corporate partners – all contribute to program activities.

To support the diverse older adults participating in programs, Play Forever recruits a diverse team of staff and volunteers to enhance cultural competence and language support for participants.

Play Forever

Play Forever’s programming for older adults is designed to create a welcoming environment for all older adults. The organization is taking steps to create inclusive spaces and address barriers to accessing programs such as transportation. It also offers flexible programming options to accommodate varying schedules and includes supportive resources for care partners.

Referrals

Older adults often connect with the programs through:

- the administrative team at a housing organization or seniors’ centre
- promotional flyers, emails or social media posts
- invitations from friends and neighbours

Once an older adult participates in an activity, those interested in future opportunities are invited to join a WhatsApp group to receive updates and reminders on upcoming events.

Enrollment and services

Interested older adults can sign up to participate in many different opportunities with Play Forever, including health education and promotion workshops, technology workshops, field trips and social events. These programs address key needs of participants and continually evolve to ensure they are offering meaningful and positive experiences.

Health and technology workshops

Play Forever provides workshops focused on health education and promotion for older adults around topics such as nutrition, fitness and chronic disease management. These sessions are facilitated by local healthcare providers and can offer opportunities for older adults to learn and connect with providers. Overall, these health workshops provide evidence-based information and support for older adults in staying well and aging in place.

In some communities, Play Forever has connected with a mobile community health bus, which travels to a building affiliated with the program and facilitates wellness screenings and health assessments for program participants.

Additionally, Play Forever offers technology workshops to teach older adults basic digital skills, such as using smartphones, tablets and computers. These workshops aim to improve older adults’ quality of life by helping them stay connected with family, enabling them to access information and promoting independence in being able to use technologies safely.

Field trips and social events

Play Forever offers curated field trips for older adults, providing social, cognitive and emotional engagement. Older adults have enjoyed many benefits from these outings, including:

- opportunities to connect and socialize with peers and youth
- building meaningful relationships
- engaging in new environments, learning experiences and interactive activities
- reduced social isolation
- improved well-being and sense of fulfillment

Examples of field trips include visits to local parks, museums, cultural events and local attractions (e.g. Niagara Falls, aquarium, zoo).

Play Forever also hosts social gatherings in communities for older adults to connect. These social gatherings incorporate popular local activities such as coffee mornings, radio bingo and card games to align with community interests and promote social connectedness.



Implementation context

Play Forever has implemented these programs at the neighbourhood and community level in urban settings, including in social housing buildings and communities. These communities are often naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) with high percentages of older adults living in them. Implementation is also supported by youth involvement, so communities with a mix of generations are well suited to these programs.

Outcomes¹

Improved health and well-being of older adults

After participating in Play Forever programs:

- 76 percent of older adult participants report reduced anxiety, loneliness and depression.
- 72 percent of older adult participants report improved mobility and flexibility

¹ The outcome and impact information shared reflects information available at the time of writing this promising practice. HEC would like to acknowledge that evaluation activities are an ongoing process for many promising practices and

the type of data collected is influenced by program goals, the length of time the program has been implemented and the level of resources available to support evaluation.

(through participating in yoga, walking clubs and tai chi).

These improvements support their overall well-being and quality of life, as well as enable them to remain active in their communities and age in place.

Building digital literacy and intergenerational connections

Through technology workshops, Play Forever supported more than 100 older adults to complete beginner and intermediate digital literacy training from 2024 to mid-2025.

After participating in the programs:

- 86 percent of older adults feel more comfortable using technology to stay connected.
- 65 percent of older adults can independently pay bills or access online health services.
- 78 percent of older adults now use WhatsApp or Zoom to connect with family regularly.

Youth mentors acted as one-to-one supports for older adults in building their technology skills and digital literacy through the workshops. This provided opportunities to build intergenerational relationships. These exchanges were rated positively by youth and older adults, who gave a 9.4/10 satisfaction score.

Improved social connections and sense of community

Play Forever programs contribute to building communities and forging strong social connections among participants and volunteers.

- 82 percent of older adults report feeling more connected to their community.
- 89 percent of older adults report the program gives them “something to look forward to each week”.

“Before this program, I barely left my apartment. Now, I come down every Wednesday to see friends and learn something new on my tablet. It’s the highlight of my week.”

– Play Forever older adult participant

Participation in a Play Forever program has a ripple effect, with 48 percent of older adults indicating they joined a physical or social group outside the program after gaining confidence through their participation.

Funding

The Play Forever programs for older adults are supported by funding from various grants as well as through other resources, such as the program’s strong network of volunteers and partnerships.

Play Forever’s sustainability would be enhanced by funding support from municipal, philanthropic or longer-term grant programs. If you are interested in partnering, supporting or growing Play Forever, please consider reaching out to the contact below.

Asset-Based Community Development Approach

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a strengths-based approach to solving challenges in communities that focuses on and develops the strengths of local assets (e.g. people, physical assets) that are key to ensuring a sustainable community.

Play Forever is a community-based organization that effectively mobilizes community assets to support older adults. This includes building partnerships with regional housing organizations, seniors' centres, local businesses and attractions. Having partnerships with different types of organizations promotes the sustainability of Play Forever's programs, as partners support them with diverse resources such as spaces to host activities, volunteers, connections through their networks and more.

Play Forever also recruits volunteers from the local community to assist with the programs. These volunteers include older adults with deep ties to the community, who act as connectors and support establishing and running programs. By having older adults as leading contributors in the planning process, Play Forever ensures programming is relevant for the groups they are supporting and that community members have opportunities to share their gifts in meaningful ways.

Additionally, youth in Play Forever programs often join in activities with older adults as volunteers. They are invited to join on field trips, where they participate in activities and may assist older adult participants with mobility challenges. Youth participants also support technology workshops, offering advice to older adults who are participating. These activities provide opportunities for intergenerational connections between older adults and youth.

"Helping someone send their first video call was a big moment. It wasn't about the phone – it was about them feeling part of something again."

– Play Forever volunteer

Play Forever volunteers share their expertise in a variety of creative ways, including lending their strong videography skills to capture the experiences and impact of the program. These skills allow them to communicate program results through cinematic storytelling videos. This approach has helped Play Forever engage additional interest holders and enhances understanding and appreciation of the results, fostering greater transparency and support for the initiatives they undertake.



Partnerships

The Play Forever team has developed many important partnerships to support their work with older adults. They have been working in partnership with Toronto Community Seniors Housing and Housing York Inc. to deliver workshops and organize field trips for older adults who live in these communities. These collaborations allow them to reach a wider audience of older adults. They are also exploring partnerships with other housing organizations that are interested in bringing Play Forever programming into their communities.

Play Forever partners with organizations to support the delivery of its health workshops, such as local healthcare providers, community centres, senior services agencies and Community and Home Assistance to Seniors (CHATS), a not-for profit organization. These partners support the health workshops by leveraging their resources, expertise and networks for the workshops.

Play Forever has also developed strong corporate partnerships, such as with EY, which has provided volunteers to help run the technology workshops.

Overall, Play Forever's diverse partnerships promote the sustainability of the programs for older adults and are critical to the organization's ability to support older adults to connect with their communities.

This promising practice was co-produced with Play Forever. Information was compiled in the fall of 2025. To reflect the changing and evolving nature of care, the information may change. We encourage you to reach out to this team for any information that could help you as you work to improve care for those you serve.

How can I learn more?

playforever.ca