



**HelpAge**

**Canada**

## **Bearing the Brunt**

**The effect of COVID-19 on  
Older People in Low- and  
Middle-Income Countries**

Gregor Sneddon, HelpAge Canada

The logo for HelpAge Canada consists of two overlapping rectangular shapes. The top shape is a vibrant pink and contains the text 'HelpAge' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The bottom shape is a bright orange and contains the text 'Canada' in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

# HelpAge

## Canada

1. HelpAge Canada
2. Bearing the Brunt
3. Violence, Abuse, Neglect
4. Voice, Dignity Rights
5. Break out – Recommendations and Canada
6. Plenary

By 2050, 20% of the global population will be over 60.

Ageing is transforming the world, bringing both challenges and opportunities.

# Who We Are

HelpAge Canada funds community-based initiatives through its partnerships locally and abroad to improve the lives of older persons and their communities. We develop innovative projects and lead network-wide collaborations to create a world for all to age with dignity.

The **HelpAge Canada Vision** is a world in which all older persons will lead secure, healthy, active and dignified lives.

**Helping older persons live with dignity in Canada and around the world since 1975.**



**HelpAge**

**Canada**

# HelpAge

## Canada



Magnifies partnerships with a network of communities serving older Canadians, bringing the voice of older persons to the national discussion of how to strengthen the fabric of Canadian society.



Engages a diverse approach to funding strategies, supporting a sustainable, high impact approach to aging in Canada and globally.



Serves as a Thought Leader, Funder, Convenor, Coordinator and Collaborator within the Community Based Seniors Services Sector and convenes Canada's bi-annual national Aging Convention (2024).



Tells the story of older persons in Canada and around the world.



Is Canada's contributor through fundraising and thought leadership to HelpAge International and a charitable vehicle for global aging intervention, engagement, and protection.



HelpAge Canada is proud of its flagship pan-Canadian programs, all of which seek to address isolation and loneliness by promoting social inclusion and protection in a variety of ways:

**Digital Literacy**

providing low income seniors with access to devices and age friendly digital literacy.

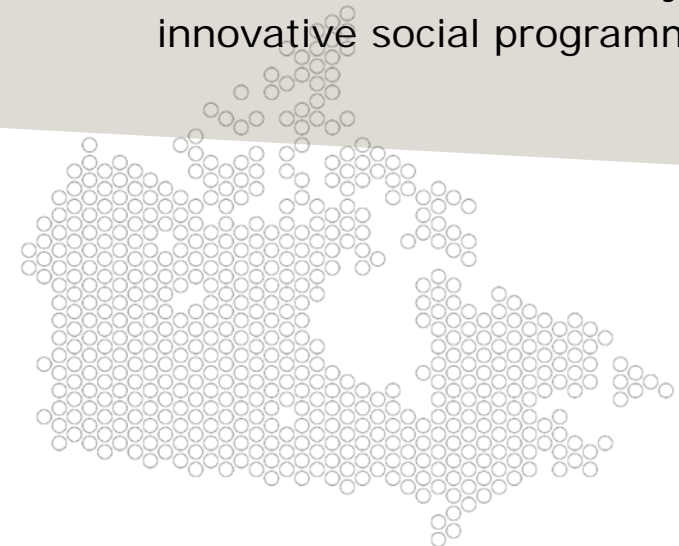


**Seniors Can!**

offering grants to seniors to access mobility and innovative social programming.

**Age Friendly Transportation**

an integrated pan-Canadian platform for age friendly transportation.





We lead the  
**Sponsor A  
Grandparent Program**  
which provides older  
persons in six  
developing countries  
with grants to  
support health and  
wellbeing within  
their communities.



**HelpAge**

**International**

We are equally proud as a founding member of HelpAge International to promote **social inclusion** and **protection of older persons abroad** by both supporting in its Humanitarian and Development work throughout the world, and by fundraising within Canada and contributing to the HelpAge International network of global thought leaders on aging.

We work in partnership, because we are stronger together.

# International Programs

The HelpAge International network counts 158 members across 86 countries.

With our partners, HelpAge Canada delivers the following international programs:

## **Sponsor a Grandparent**

We support elders and their communities in 6 countries.

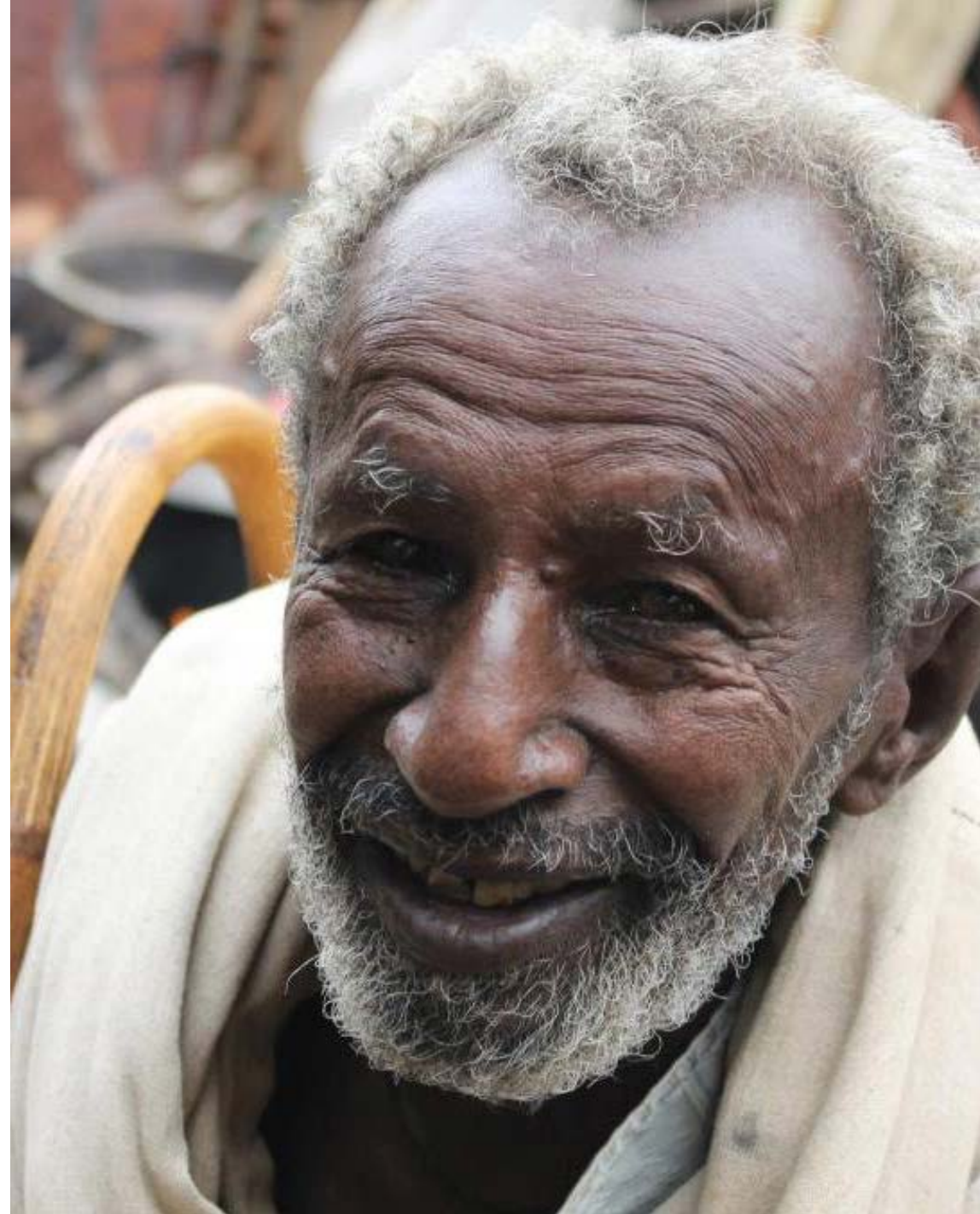
## **Humanitarian Aid and Development**

### **HelpAge International**

We serve as the funding window for Canadian donors and provide humanitarian relief, currently in Ukraine, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **United Nations Decade of Healthy Aging**

We engage in advocacy and the promotion of the UN Convention on the Rights of Older People.





**HelpAge**

**Canada**

# Older People in Crisis in Ukraine: HelpAge's Response

March 15, 2022



# Older People Disproportionately Impacted

One out of four people in Ukraine are 60+  
Health and mobility issues constrain movement

## Disrupted supplies

- Active shelling and airstrikes impacting water supply
- Damaged electricity lines and gas networks
- Temperatures regularly below zero
- Local supply chain disruption hindering access to basic items
- Road conditions and curfews affecting access to food and medications

Of those in humanitarian need,

**32%**

are ages 60+

**13%**

have disabilities

\*UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)



“

*I constantly hear explosions, and I don't know if they will reach me.*

*- Older Woman, Ukraine*



## Rapid Needs Assessment – Eastern Ukraine

- 99% do not want to be evacuated from homes
- 91% need food assistance
- 91% report electricity has been interrupted
- 79% lack access to sufficient clean drinking water
- 75% need hygiene items
- 34% urgently need medication for chronic illnesses

“

*I constantly hear explosions, and I don't know if they will reach me.*

- Older Woman, Ukraine

# HelpAge Uniquely Positioned to Respond

- Specialize in needs of older people in humanitarian crises
- Since 2014 implementing humanitarian programs in Eastern Ukraine funded by Global Affairs Canada
- One of few INGOs on the ground
- Total workforce of >250 including volunteers and contractors
- Offices in Kyiv, Luhansk and Donetsk regions, and Lviv
- Able to cover entire country with local partners\*
- Country office in Moldova and strong network partner in Poland

“

*We keep in touch with older people, we regularly call them on the phone. Many of them are crying and praying.*

*They say: “Why is it happening with us? What have we done to deserve this?”*

- Project Assistant, 61, Ukraine

**HelpAge**

**International**

# COVID-19 Impact Report

Funded under global MOU with UNFPA

## Thematic scope:

- Health and Care
- Violence, Abuse, Neglect (VAN)
- Income Security
- Humanitarian and Conflict Settings
- Voice, Dignity, Rights (VDR)
- Data



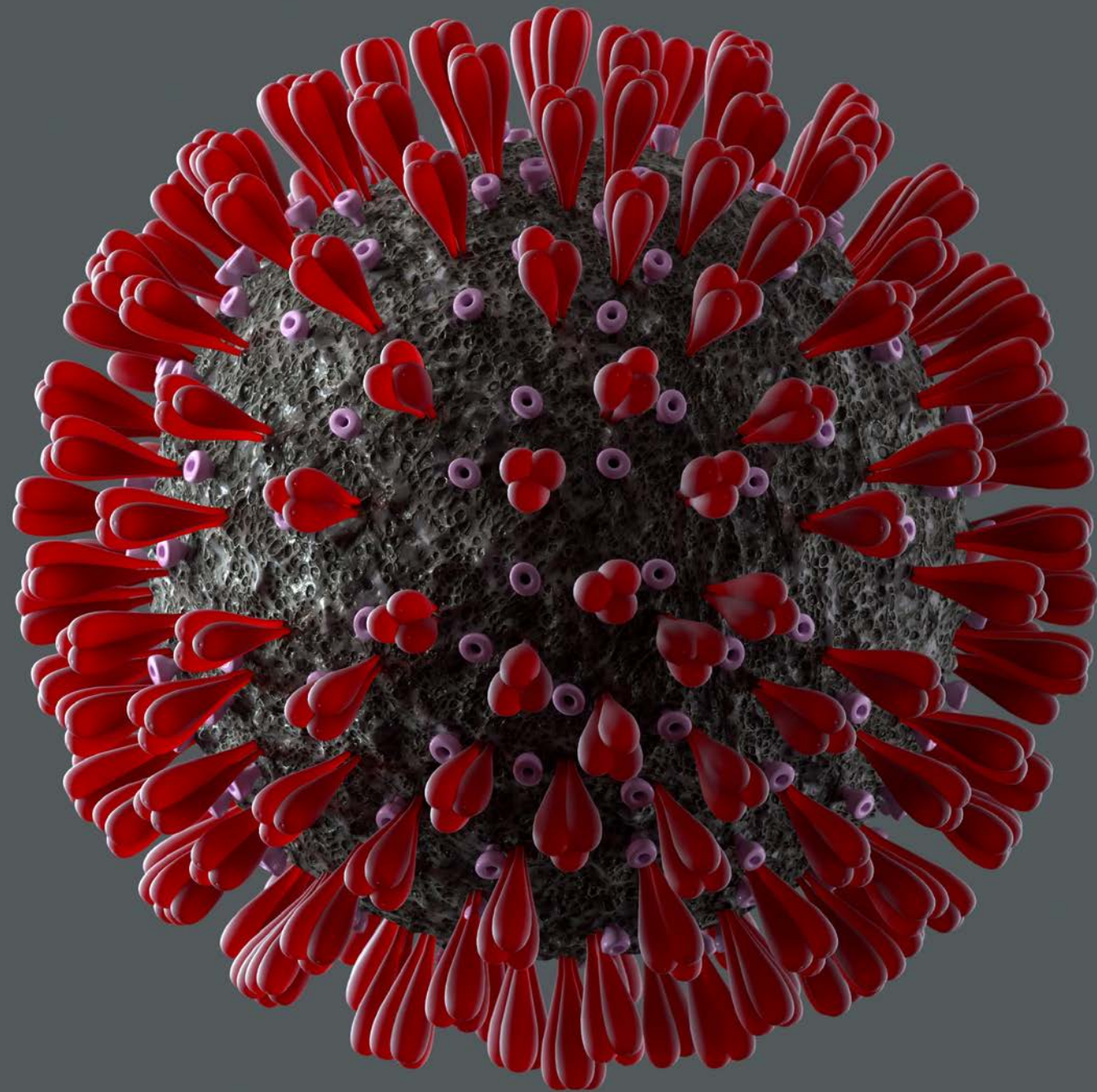
## Bearing the brunt

*The impact of COVID-19 on older people in low- and middle-income countries – insights from 2020*

# Key findings

- **Older women and men chronically invisible** in efforts to monitor impacts of COVID-19
- Older people most at risk of serious illness and death, but **broader impacts on their health and wellbeing are also severe** and go beyond immediate effects of virus
- **Risks of older people experiencing VAN exacerbated** during pandemic but significant gaps in data prevent more effective prevention and response
- Income, livelihoods and poverty of all age groups severely impacted by COVID-19, but multiple risk factors and disadvantages accumulate over the life course so **some groups of older people will face particular challenges in recovering**
- Pre-existing failures of humanitarian system to support older people according to standards it set itself remain, so **highly vulnerable communities at even greater risk**
- Public **health responses have discriminated against older persons, denied their rights**, and negatively impacted upon their ability to exercise their voice
- COVID-19 has **exposed inadequacy and failures of systems at local, national and international level to meet needs and rights of older people** & support their resilience
- We need radical change if people of all ages are to be able to contribute to and share in gains of recovery; this means **political commitment and resources**

COVID-19



SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS

# Violence Abuse and Neglect

Data on violence, abuse, and neglect of older people during the COVID-19 pandemic is extremely limited.

Before the pandemic, the WHO estimates that as many as **1 in 6 persons** aged **60 years** and older have experienced some form of **abuse**.





# Older Women and Men

## Older Women

neglect (35%)  
isolation (28%)  
financial abuse (25%)

## Older Men

neglect (30%)  
isolation (24%)  
financial abuse (32%)

Elder Abuse on the Rise During Pandemic?  
India Survey - **70% say yes**

“

*Because of the crisis, we're living in tents. Some people are even sleeping under trees. I worry because where I live is very insecure.*

- Older Woman, South Sudan



# Changes in Risk Factors During the Pandemic

- Quarantines, isolation, and stay-at-home orders
- Overcrowded, precarious living conditions
- Gender, disability, dependant on caregivers, financial insecurity
- Limited monitoring
- Discontinuation of “non-essential” support services
- Substance abuse, mental health, economic pressure
- Digital literacy, accessibility

“

*During quarantine, my son and daughter-in-law began to neglect my needs. Previously, I did not notice their behaviour, but since all family members must stay home, I started feeling their bad attitude to me.*

*They don't give me food and medicine on time, and they don't even talk to me. Sometimes my daughter in-law yells at me. I feel like a burden to my family.*

- Older Woman, Kyrgyzstan

# Older People Most at Risk

Age, Gender, Disability

People with disabilities are **3x**  
more likely to experience violence



# Older people's help-seeking behaviour

WHO estimates that only **4%** of cases of elder abuse were reported before the pandemic.

Kyrgyzstan:

**33%** of women

**30%** of men

said they would not seek help if they experienced or witnessed domestic violence.

“

*The reported numbers of older people affected by abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic do not reflect the reality as many don't know how to report incidents or even if they do, they may not have a telephone and they are scared.*

*Often abuse is perpetrated by family members that they are dependent on; they have no means to support themselves and they fear they would be threatened, or worse, if they asked for help.*

- CEO of Sisterhood is Global Institute, Jordan



# Adequacy, relevance and coverage of violence, abuse, and neglect support services

Data gaps = Lack of protection mechanisms, services, prevention programs for older people.



Voice, Dignity and Rights



# Voice

“Voice” aims to ensure that older people can **influence decisions** that affect their lives, claim, and enjoy their rights and challenge ageism and inequality.

# Human Rights

Emergency Response vrs Human Rights?

Ageist Depiction of older people as frail, vulnerable, narrow focus.

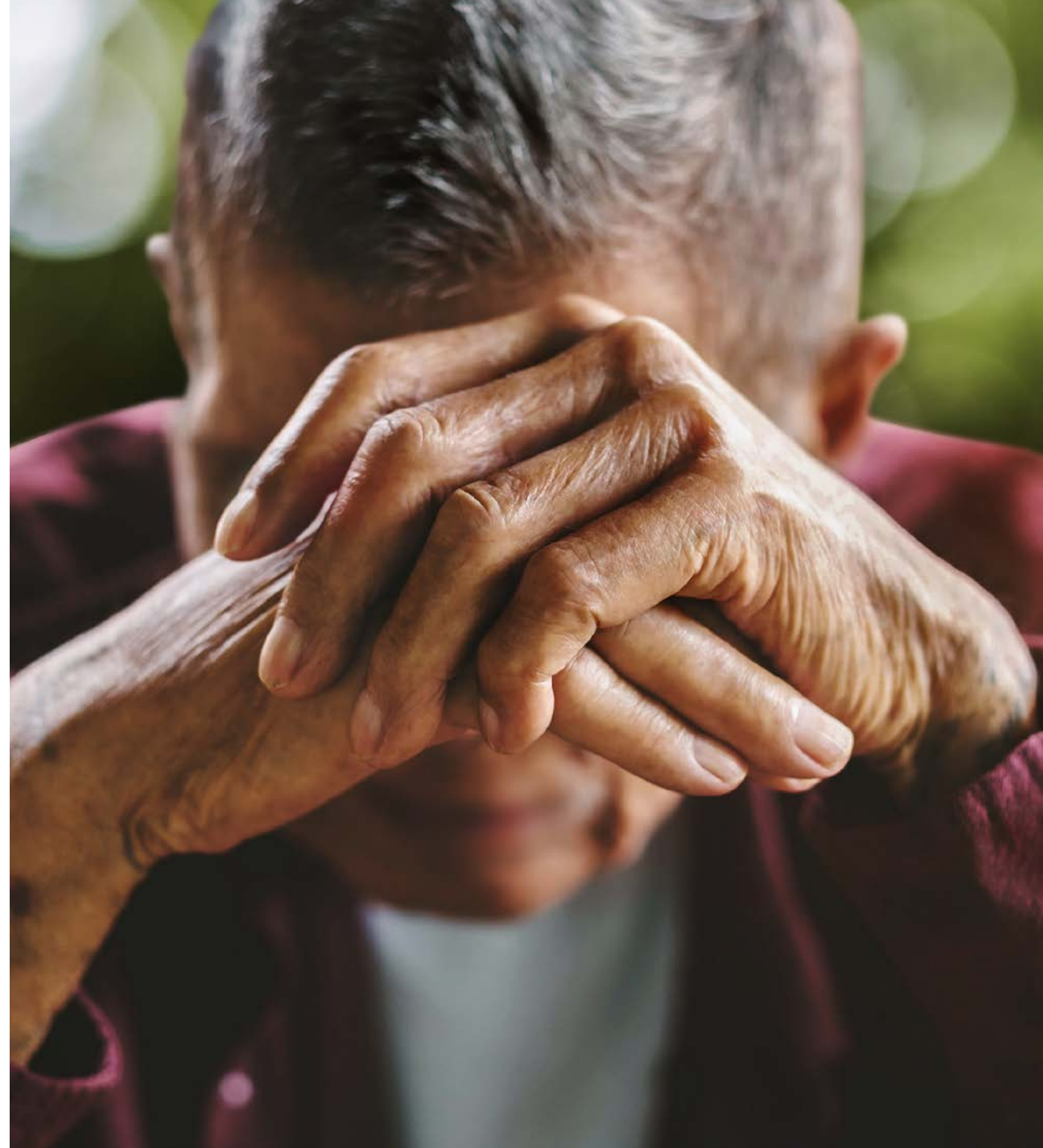
Public health measures vrs rights

access to justice, autonomy and independence, or participation as equal members of society.

“

*Our movements have been restricted. It seems like we're caged. It's like we're imprisoned. Even though we are able and healthy, someone questions us if they see us outside the house*

- Older Man, the Philippines



# Older people's right to equal access to healthcare has been denied

*There were only three ventilators in the hospital and they were in great demand. Five minutes later, my grandfather died. I reported this to the staff and one of them told me that they had to give the ventilator to a younger man as it is their policy to prioritise younger patients.*

- Older Woman, Democratic Republic of Congo







## Older people's right to work has been denied

“

*Our income is greatly affected, we had to stop working. I know that this measure helps to prevent COVID-19, but unlike before, now we cannot buy what we want to eat.*

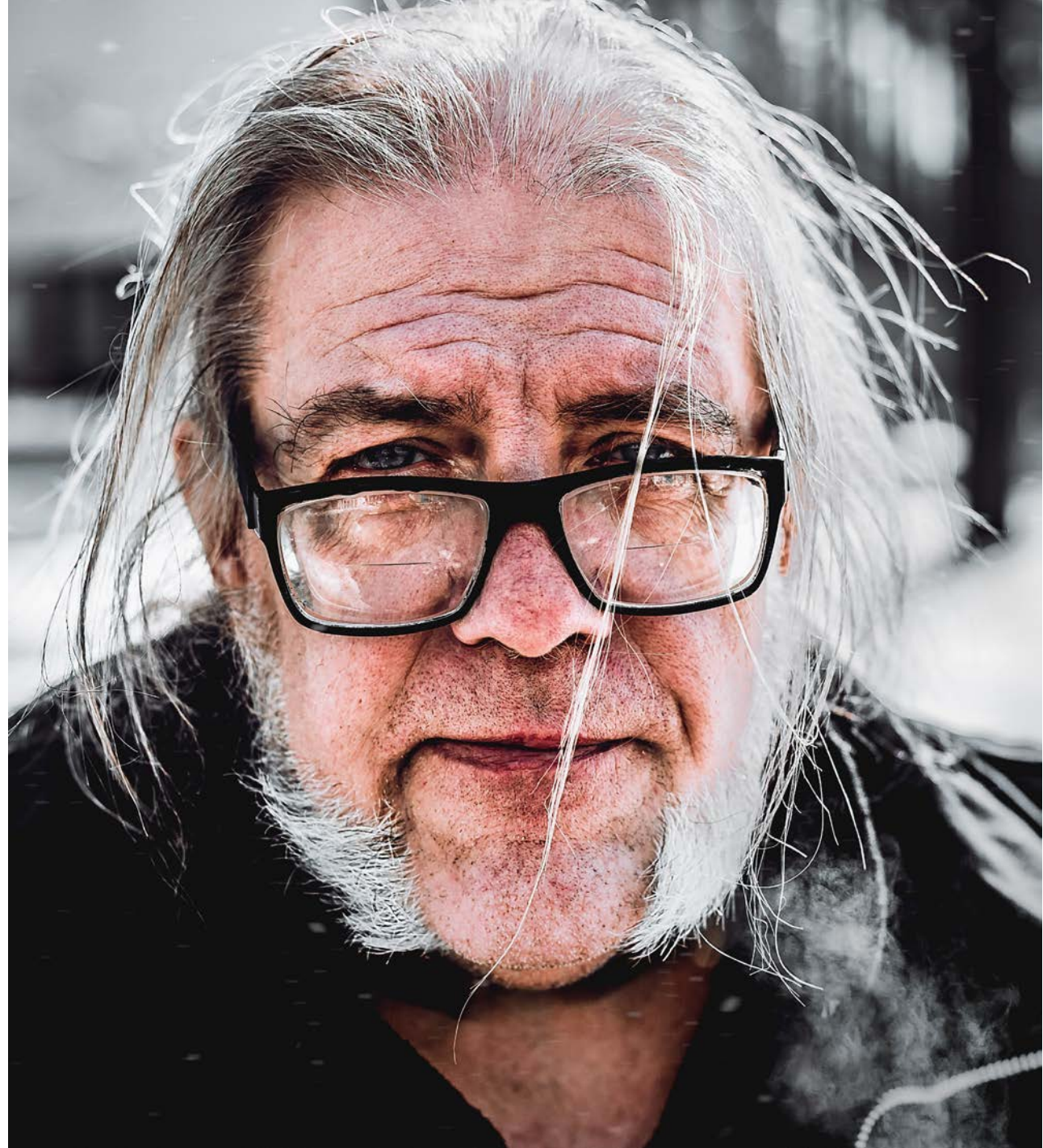
- Older Man, the Philippines

Older people's right to care and support to enable them to live autonomous and dignified lives has been denied.

“

*I'm very concerned about people in nursing homes. I know of people who have been isolated from their families. A camera is not the same as a presence. They are two totally different situations.*

- Older Man, Argentina





Older people's right to social security has been restricted and denied.



# Ageism

# Stigmatization, Discrimination, Fear, Paternalism

“

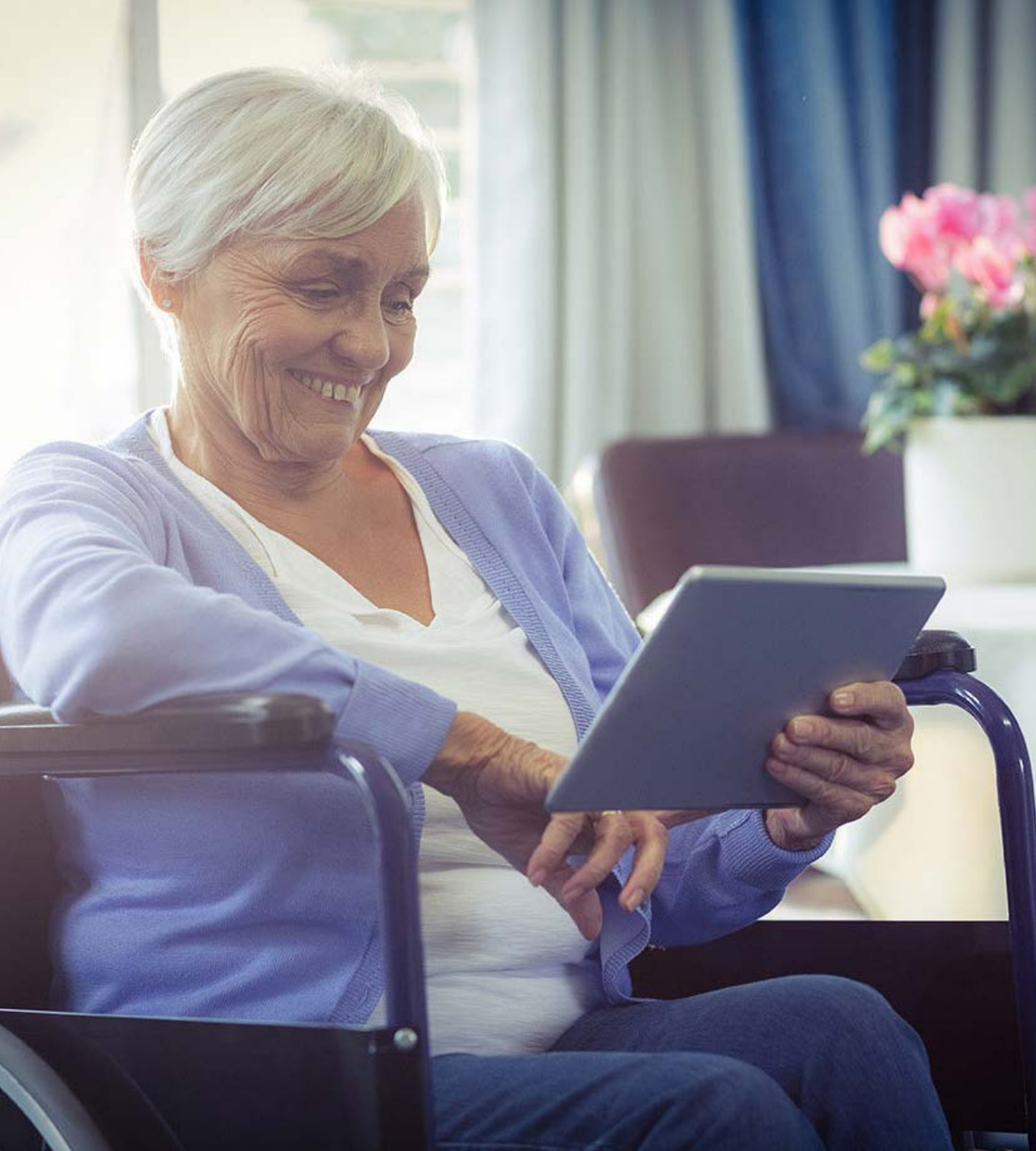
*They only cater for the youth. There are few workers and they don't interact with many people due to the fear of Corona. A lot stopped. They only like working with younger people, **neglecting older people**.*

- Older Man, Rwanda

“

*Disturbing rumours, gossips, **unverified information** are being spread like a virus, including by my friends. The media speak of older people as a risk group. They try to warn, explain, scare us. But apparently younger people get sick too.*

- Older Woman, Russia



# Access to Information

**Access to information is critical for enabling older people to be able to exercise their voice and claim their rights.**

Language, Literacy, Digital Literacy

Isolation, Restricted Movement

“

Many elderly persons in rural communities were not **fully informed** about the pandemic and how they could **protect themselves**.

- NGO representative, Nigeria

“

Technology is becoming extremely important in information and programmes. But there are **serious limitations**, especially in **remote areas**. This includes both literacy issues/challenges and infrastructure challenges.

- NGO representative, India

“

The ability of older people to acquire information and **knowledge on their rights** and entitlements continues to be set back. ... It is an aspect that urgently needs to be invested in. Where older people are **aware**, they have been able to **demand change**, but this needs to be at a large scale to bring returns for older people.

- NGO representative, Africa region

“

One of the obstacles that most affects awareness and capacity is gaps in **access** and management of new communication and **information technologies**. Access to digital tools, when it is not scarce, it is at least limited.

- NGO representative, Venezuela



# Channels for older people to raise their voices and be heard

## Lack of Digital Literacy, Accessibility

“ Older people have limited ability to *express their needs*, identify solutions, or form a collective, legitimate and representative voice.

- NGO representative, Myanmar

“ Neither men nor women have spaces to express their *claims, desires and demands*.

- NGO representative, Venezuela



# Older People and Voice

“ COVID-19 has separated the older people as rights holders from the rights providers. The rights providers **rarely engage the older people** in their homes, and older people have no means of transport if they have to get to court, to health centres or to social service centres. ... This prevailing condition has hindered rights access by older people [...] **Their land has been grabbed, property sold and their health unattended to.**

- NGO representative, Uganda

“ *It does not seem that current government policies take into account **the voice of the elderly.***

- NGO representative, Russia

“ *There are various levels of committees that are being initiated by government from grassroots to top-level but there are **no older people representatives** on them.*

- NGO representative, India




# COVID-19 is increasing the marginalisation of some groups

“

*Some older indigenous women had no idea of what COVID is about. There was no information or educational materials about COVID written in a **language** and **mechanism** easily understood by them.*

Excerpt from a statement of a representative of an indigenous people's community, the Philippines

The image features the Canadian national flag, which consists of a white square in the center with a red maple leaf, flanked by two red vertical bands. The flag is shown waving against a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent dark grey horizontal bar is positioned at the bottom of the image, containing white text.

How do the recommendations relate to the impact of COVID-19 on older Canadians' experience of VAN and VDR and what can we draw from them for the future?