

Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario (OACAO) COVID-19 Re-Opening Survey: Perspectives of Centre Participants

Pembroke 50+ Active Living Centre

August 2020

OACAO

The Voice of Older Adult Centres
La voix des centres pour aînés

OACAO COVID-19 Re-Opening Survey

Understanding the Needs and Concerns of Centre Participants

This report has been prepared by the OACAO. We are a non-profit charitable provincial organization that is a recognized leader in the development of quality services, resources, and supports for our network of 180+ community-based older adult centres and associate members. We share a strong commitment to ongoing liaison and advocacy with government and other provincial associations in matters which affect older adult centres and Seniors Active Living Centres (SALCs).

We recognize that the work of the OACAO and our members takes place on traditional territories of Indigenous people who have lived here and cared for this land for thousands of years. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land, and by doing so, give our respect to its first inhabitants.

We would like to acknowledge the partners that came together to support this work, including the OACAO COVID-19 Survey Sub-Committee, OACAO Re-Opening Working Group, Government of Canada – New Horizons for Seniors Program, Government of Ontario – Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility and the OACAO staff. We thank our language translation team from Better Living Health and Community Services, Centre Pauline-Charron, Rexdale Community Health Centre and The Good Companions Seniors Centre. We would also like to thank the participants, staff, volunteers and board members from Centres across Ontario who participated in this project.

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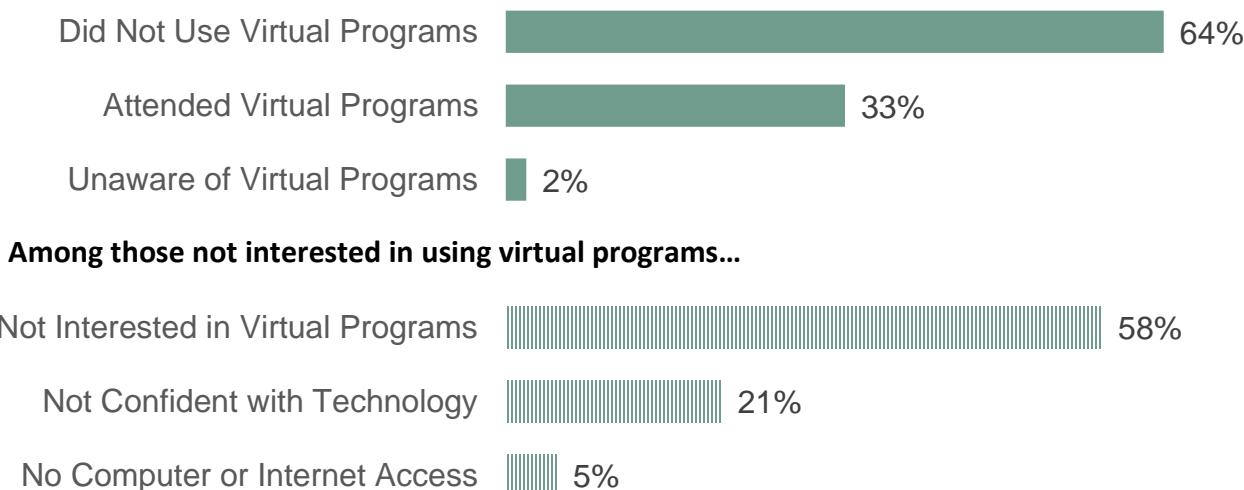
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Guiding the Re-Opening Process

A total of **131** centre participants responded to the e-survey. Participants ranged in age from 50 to 90+; however, most were between the ages of 60-69 (34%) and 70-79 (45%). Prior to the pandemic, most participants were attending their centre once (56%) or twice (26%) per week. Although 33% have been using virtual programs while the centre was closed, 45% felt comfortable resuming in-person programs.

During the pandemic, 33% of participants joined virtual recreation programming; however, over half do not want to access virtual programs once the centre re-opens, mostly due to lack of interest



43%

Feel comfortable returning to the centre

89%

Have access to and are able to wear a face mask

45%

Are interested in virtual programs after their centre re-opens



Keeping Seniors Safe

To feel comfortable returning, participants wanted to see multiple safety measures in place

84%

Hand
sanitizer
available for
frequent use

70%

Staff and
volunteers
wearing
masks

68%

Small class
sizes
(<10 people)

68%

Senior
participants
wearing
masks

53%

Daily
screening for
COVID-19
symptoms

42%

Reducing
building
capacity

18%

Bubbling with
other centre
participants

Social distancing was a commonly noted requirement for safe return to the centre. Participants have suggested that frequent cleaning and sanitization of common areas and washrooms, daily screening of each member, and wearing masks at all times or when in close contact with others could allow in-person programs to occur safely amidst the ongoing pandemic.

Participants wanted to ensure that different activity rooms had clearly stated capacities, with efforts to keep numbers small.

Participants who were not comfortable returning were worried about how difficult it can be to social distance if in-person programs were to open. While they knew masks were important, some worried that wearing a mask at all time might be challenging for them.

Although none of the current respondents used public transit, participants at other centres expressed concern getting to and from the centre when they had to rely on transit, taxis or rides from others. Being able to walk or drive a personal vehicle helped people feel more confident returning.



Re-Starting Centre Programs

Participants want to prioritize a variety of recreation programs upon re-opening



67%

Fitness
programs



37%

Group
Games



37%

Lectures &
Seminars



37%

Arts and
Crafts



23%

Special
Events



21%

Trips &
Travel



17%

Computer
Programs



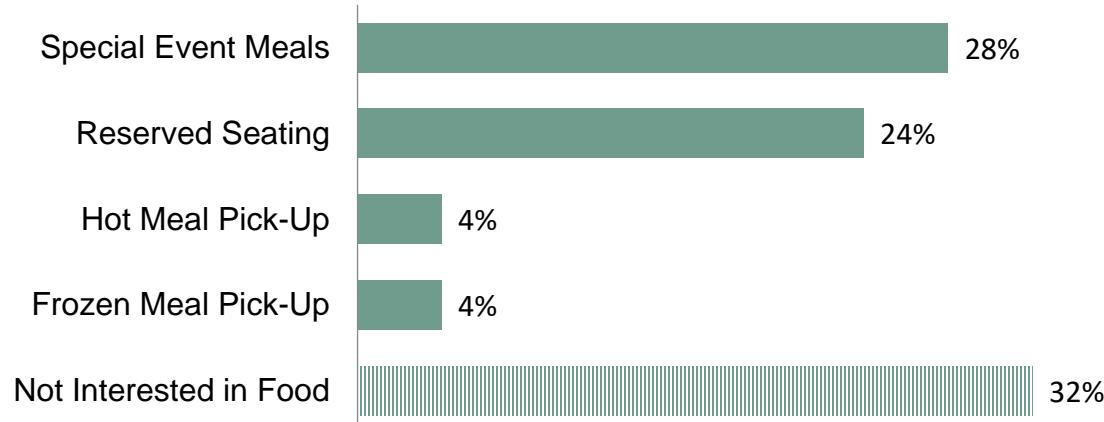
7%

Music
Programs

In addition to the programs shown above, many participants wanted to restart line dancing, meditation, and carpet bowling.

Among those who previously accessed meals at the centre, most wanted to continue doing so through special events and reserved seating. No one was interested in accessing food through cafeteria-style serving or through Meals on Wheels.

More than half of the participants usually accessed food at the centre, and most wanted to continue doing so





Centres are Crucial for Social & Physical Activity

Centre closures had a substantial impact on wellbeing, particularly for those who are highly dependent upon the centre for their physical, mental and social wellbeing. Between 59% and 72% of participants were fully or somewhat reliant on their centre for participating in physical activities, fostering a sense of belonging, and maintaining their mental well-being through friendships.

