

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

## Eastern Region Report

**August 2020**

**OACAO**

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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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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Older Adult Centres closed their doors in March 2020 to help flatten the curve. As communities across Ontario begin to re-open, centres are exploring new ways of delivering services so they can continue to support the health and wellbeing of their participants. The OACAO conducted a province wide, COVID-19 re-opening survey to examine how comfortable participants felt returning to the centre; this report describes the responses from 1,417 participants attending 18 centres in the Eastern region of the OACAO.

- Approximately one half of participants felt comfortable returning to their centre, and comfort level did not differ by age groups.
- Participants overwhelmingly indicated they wanted to see physical distancing protocols in place at their centres. Many also requested that everyone wear masks, and that there be ample hand sanitizer available throughout the facility.
- Almost all participants had access to a mask and were able to safely wear one.
- Many who relied on transit were not comfortable traveling to and from the centre.
- Over one third of participants used virtual programs during their centre's closure. While just 44% of participants were interested in trying online programs once the centre re-opens, others noted they did not like online programs or were not confident using the technology.
- Between 50% and 75% of members were fully or partially reliant on their centre for physical activity, social connection and sense of belonging, indicating the importance of re-starting centre programs.
- Participants are excited to re-start fitness and arts-based programs; however, many were concerned about their ability to comfortably wear masks during some programs, particularly fitness programs.



## METHODS

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led older adult centres across the province to pause their recreation, social and health programming.

As communities across Ontario begin to re-open, Centres have begun exploring how they might resume programs and services to continue supporting the health and wellbeing of their participants while protecting community safety.

The OACAO conducted a province-wide COVID-19 re-opening survey to gather vital information for centres to develop their re-opening plan so that participants can be safe and comfortable participating in programs.

### About the Survey:

The survey included 12 questions that examined:

- 1) Usual centre attendance (pre-pandemic)
- 2) Programs to prioritize in re-opening
- 3) Comfort returning to the centre
- 4) Safety measures and access to masks
- 5) Participation in virtual programs
- 6) Impact of the centre closures

The survey was offered through SurveyMonkey in English, French, Spanish and Chinese.

The survey was available on Survey Monkey from July 23, 2020 to August 7, 2020.

### About the Participants:

**Eighteen centres** from the Eastern region of the OACAO participated in the survey, collecting a total of **1,417 responses** from centre participants.

Many centres elected not to participate in the survey as they were completing their own COVID-19 re-opening survey.

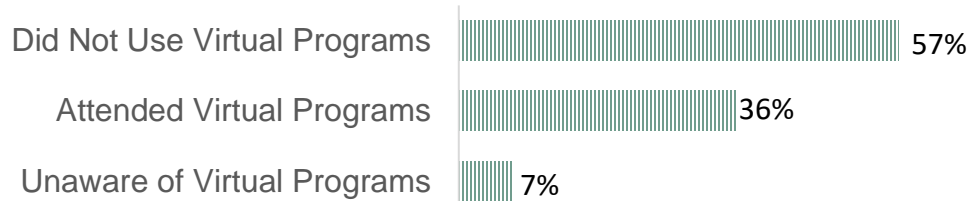
Participants ranged in age from 50 to 90+; however, most were between the ages of 60-69 (33%) or 70-79 (46%). Prior to the pandemic, most participants were attending their centre once (51%) or twice (27%) per week; however, 8% attended four or more times per week.



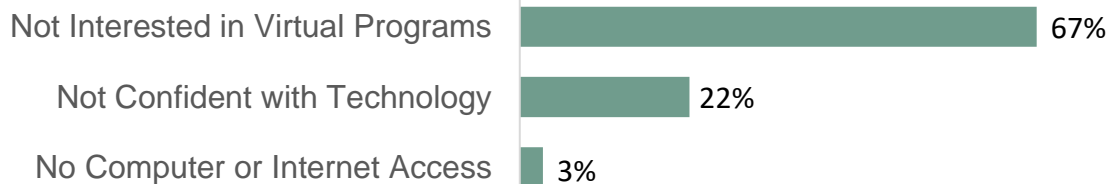
# Guiding the Re-Opening Process

Comfort returning to the centre was not related to age or attendance frequency. While online programs are becoming a popular alternative among centre participants, 57% did not access any virtual programs during centre closures, and 56% are not interested in using them once the centre re-opens. This was predominately due to **lack of interest in virtual programs; however, 22% were also not comfortable using the technology.**

**During the pandemic, 36% of participants joined virtual recreation programming; however, 56% do not want to access virtual programs once the centre re-opens, mostly due to lack of interest**



**Among those not intending to use virtual programs...**



# 43%

Feel comfortable returning to the centre

# 97%

Have access to and are able to wear a face mask

# 44%

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

80%

Hand sanitizer available for frequent use

69%

Staff and volunteers wearing masks

67%

Senior participants wearing masks

57%

Small class sizes (<10 people)

53%

Daily screening for COVID-19 symptoms

41%

Reducing building capacity

18%

Bubbling with other centre participants

Physical distancing and masks were two commonly noted requirements for safe return to the centre. Many also discussed the importance of centre cleaning policies, noting that they wanted to see regular cleaning and disinfecting of common spaces and program equipment. Participants also noted the importance of hand sanitizer being readily available for everyone to use.

Some participant felt especially comfortable returning to the centre because they could walk or drive a personal vehicle.

15% of participants regularly used public transit to get to the centre; however, 40% of transit users no longer felt comfortable using it to get to and from the centre.

Many participants that they were afraid of catching the virus at their centre and bringing it home to their families; however, they overwhelmingly noted how they trusted the staff at their centre to follow public health guidelines and proper cleaning protocols.

Many indicated they would prefer to return to the centre once a vaccine has been developed.



# Re-Starting Centre Programs

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



53%

Fitness programs



30%

Arts and Crafts



28%

Group Games



26%

Lectures & Seminars



23%

Special Events



17%

Trips & Travel



12%

Music Programs



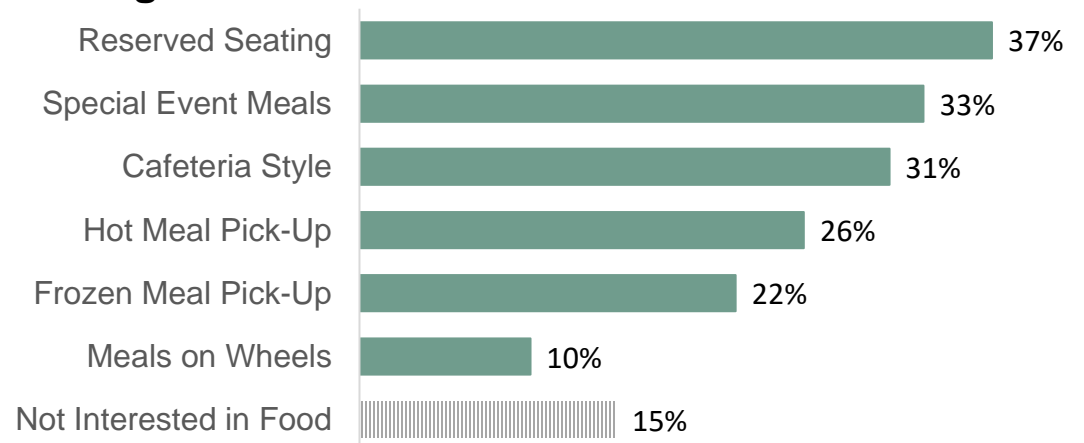
11%

Computer Programs

In addition to the programs shown above, participants identified several other programs they wanted to re-start including pickleball, movie nights, swimming, ping pong, quilting and language classes. **Several also noted that while they wanted to re-start fitness, they were concerned about their ability to participate while wearing a mask.**

Most participants felt comfortable accessing food at their centre, and were also eager to restart coffee clubs and lunch programs.

**58% of participants accessed food at the centre prior to the closure, 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 50% and 75% of participants were fully or somewhat reliant on their centre for participating in physical activities, fostering a sense of belonging, forming social connections and engaging in programs to promote their mental health, underscoring the importance of resuming in-person programs as soon as it is safe to do so.**

