

## INTERVENTION 1:

# Helping older adults cope with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak

- Older adults, especially in isolation and those with cognitive decline/dementia, may become more anxious, angry, stressed, agitated, withdrawing, overly suspicious during the outbreak/while in quarantine. Provide emotional support through informal networks (families) and mental health professionals. Share simple facts about what is going on and give clear information about how to reduce risk of infection in words older people with/without cognitive impairment can understand. Repeat the information whenever necessary.
- The suggestions below generally apply to community-dwelling older people. For older people in residential care (e.g., assisted living, nursing homes), administrators and staff need to ensure safety measures are in place to prevent mutual infection and the outbreak of excessive worries or panic (the same as in hospitals). Likewise, support needs to be provided to care staff who may be in extended lock-down/quarantine with residents and not able to be with their families.
- Older adults are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 given their limited information sources, weaker immune systems, and the higher COVID-19 mortality rate found in the older population. Pay specific attention to high-risk groups, i.e. older people who live alone/without close relatives; who have low socioeconomic status and/or comorbid health conditions such as cognitive decline/dementia or other mental health conditions. Older people with mild cognitive impairment or early stages of dementia need to be informed of what is happening within their capacity and provided support to ease their anxiety and stress. For people at moderate and late stages of dementia, their medical and daily living needs need to be met during the quarantine time.
  - Medical needs of older adults with/without COVID-19 need to be met during the outbreak. This includes uninterrupted access to essential medicines (for diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, HIV). Tele medicine and online medical services can be used to provide medical services.
  - Isolated or infected older people shall be presented with truthful information on risk factors and chances of recovery.
  - During quarantine, adjust respite or home care services to use technology (WeChat, WhatsApp) to provide trainings/counselling for family caregivers at home, also include psychological first aid training for family caregivers.
- Older people may have limited access to messaging apps, like WeChat.
  - Provide older adults with accurate accessible information and facts about the COVID-19 outbreak, the progression, treatment, and effective strategies to prevent an infection.
  - Information needs to be easily accessible (i.e. clear, simple language, large font) and come from multiple trusted (media) sources (public media, social media and trustworthy health care providers) to prevent irrational behaviour such as stocking of non-effective medical herbs.
  - The best way to contact older people is via their landline phones or through regular personal visits (if possible). Encourage family or friends to call their older relatives regularly and teach older people how to use video (chat).
- Older people might not be familiar with the use of protective devices or prevention methods or refuse to use them.
  - Instructions on how to use protective devices need to be communicated in a clear, concise, respectful and patient way.
- Older people may not know how to use online services such as online shopping for daily supplies, consultation/helplines, or health care.
  - Provide older people with details and how to get practical help if needed, like calling a Taxi, or dropping off supplies.
  - Distribution of goods and services such as preventive materials (e.g., facial masks, disinfectants), sufficient grocery supplies, and emergency transportation access can reduce anxiety in everyday life.
- Provide older people with simple physical exercises to perform at their home/in quarantine to maintain mobility and reduce boredom.
- Encouraging older adults with expertise, experiences and strengths to volunteer in community efforts to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. Elders can provide peer support, neighbour checking, and childcare for medical personnel restricted in hospitals fighting against COVID-19.