

Social Prescribing



“Social prescribing reflects a recognition that loneliness affects our health, and we have a universal need to connect to one another.”

- Vivek H. Murthy (2020)

Social prescribing enables healthcare professionals to refer people to local, non-clinical services, including community and social services¹. It enables providers to enhance their support of patients by connecting them to resources aimed at addressing social risk factors such as poverty, loneliness, and housing. By attending to the social determinants of health, social prescribing strives to reduce barriers to health and wellbeing, and ultimately, gaps in population health².

What is Social Prescribing?

Social prescribing views individuals holistically². Building on individuals’ strengths, social prescribing encourages people to take more control of their own health and wellbeing¹. It is a tool that complements and supports medical care by connecting people to a range of local, non-clinical services that address the social determinants of health².

Social prescribing emphasizes co-creating solutions with clients, staff and community providers². Health care professionals work together with individuals to connect them to services based on identified social needs which are typically provided by volunteers and the community sector. For example, social prescriptions could include art and dance classes, supportive peer networks, cooking classes, caregiver supports, volunteering roles, gardening, communal dining programs, bereavement support groups, etc. See Figure 1 for an example of a social prescription.

Social prescribing varies across communities based on availability of local services and resources².

This **Population Health** series explores the concept of population health and the role a hospital can play in producing population health. The series also offers local and international examples of health systems that have reached beyond their walls to improve the health of their communities.

Figure 1: Adapted from Alvanley Family Practice: Stockport, England

WELLBEING PRESCRIPTION

PART 1:

I am interested in receiving more information about the following:

- Veggies on Prescription** - *Grow your own, cook your own*
- Weekly Health Walks** - *Every Wednesday*
- Coffee and Conversation** - *Feeling alone fancy a chat?*
- Social Events for New Mums** - *Don't feel alone*
- Singing for Health** - *Singalong*
- Cook and Taste** - *Let us show you how to cook it*
- IT Skill** - *Let's get you started with the basics*
- Telephone Support** - *A friendly voice on the end of the line*
- Monday Advice** - *Advice and guidance*
- Evening Get Togethers** - *A friendly group gathers*

PART 2:

I understand that the details I give will be passed on to the Practice Health Champions who will contact me with the information I have requested.

PART 3:

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Contact Number/Email Address: _____

The Alliance for Healthier Communities has identified five essential elements of an impactful social prescribing model based on research and learnings from the 2018 Ontario social prescribing pilot project, Rx: Community² (see Figure 2).

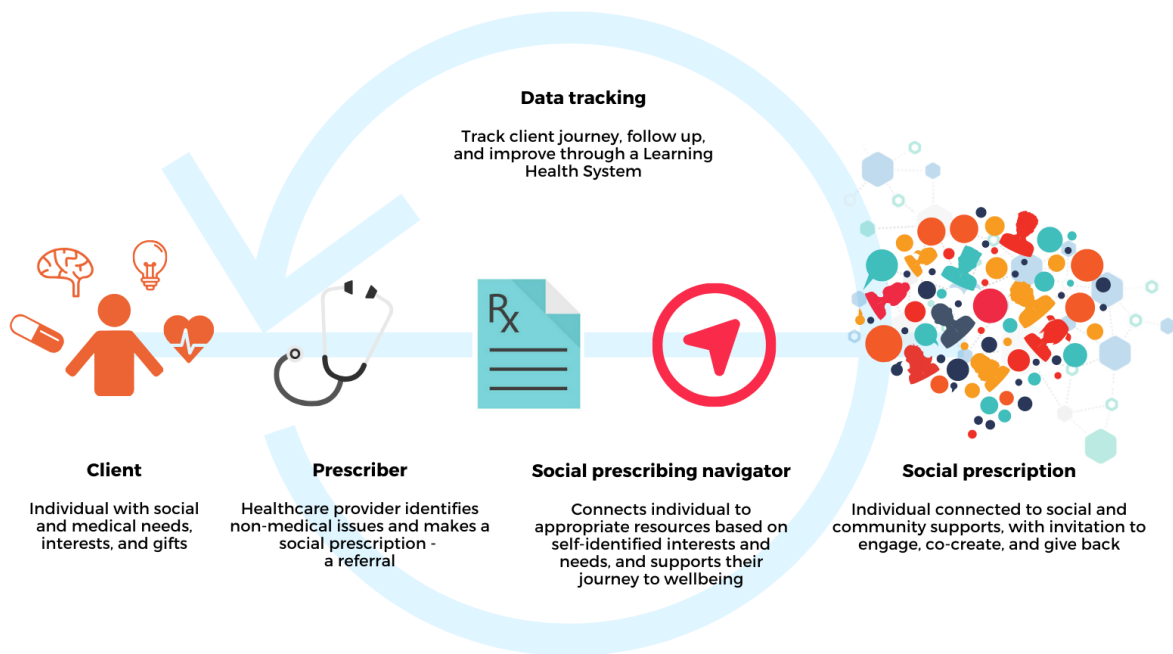
5 Essential Elements of Impactful Social Prescribing

1. **A person or client who is experiencing social and health challenges;**
2. **A prescriber, who appreciates the impact of social determinants on a person’s health and wellbeing and uses the social prescribing tool.**
3. **A navigator (sometimes referred to as a link worker, community connector or health advisor in other jurisdictions¹) who receives the referrals and, in collaboration with the client, connects them to appropriate non-clinical supports based in the community.**
4. **Social prescriptions, non-medical and co-created community-based supports.**
5. **A data pathway that allows for the regular collection of meaningful data that can be used to monitor outcomes and for quality improvement.**

Social prescribing models are designed to support people with various social, emotional, and practical needs¹. However, many models are focused on supporting people to improve their mental health and physical wellbeing¹. Social prescribing can be beneficial for individuals with mild or long-term mental health issues, complex needs, multiple chronic health conditions, and those who are socially isolated¹.

There is growing evidence that social prescribing can lead to positive impacts on health, wellbeing and wider outcomes¹. For example, social prescribing evaluations have demonstrated improvements in anxiety, depression, health-related quality of life, mental and general wellbeing, isolation, social connectedness and self-care^{3,4,5,6}. Advances in the evidence base for social prescribing is still required. For further information, refer to the *Additional Resources* section.

Figure 2: Social prescribing model/pathway implemented in Rx: Community²



Social Prescribing Pilot in Ontario

As mentioned above, in 2018, the Alliance for Healthier Communities developed and implemented Rx: Community, an 18-month social prescribing pilot research project across 11 Community Health Centres (CHCs) in Ontario². Results showed that:

- CHC clients who were given social prescriptions reported overall improvements to their mental health and a greater capacity to manage their own health. They also reported decreased loneliness and a greater sense of connectedness and belonging.
- Healthcare providers found social prescribing valuable for improving client wellbeing and reducing repeat visits.
- Social prescribing facilitated a deeper integration between clinical care, interprofessional teams, and social support. The co-creation aspect of social prescribing also enhanced the capacity of the community².

For further details read the [final report on social prescribing in Ontario](#).

The Global Social Prescribing Movement

Several countries around the world, including [Denmark](#), [Portugal](#), and the [Netherlands](#), are exploring and implementing social prescribing schemes in an effort to integrate health and social services.

In the UK, where social prescribing has a 25-year history, it has recently become a key component of NHS England's [Comprehensive Model for Personalized Care](#) and the [government's strategy for tackling loneliness](#). The UK government has invested in over 1,000 social prescribers (one per primary care network) and plans to connect at least 900,000 people with a social prescription by 2023/24. Link workers have become an essential part of the multi-disciplinary teams in primary care networks.

In Australia, The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Consumer Health Forum of Australia and Mental Health Australia are [urging the government](#) to invest in a national social prescribing scheme to address Australia's mental health and wellbeing crisis, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional Resources

The information above provides a high-level overview of social prescribing. The following resources may be helpful for exploring this topic in more depth.

- Husk, K., Elston, J., Gradinger, F., Callaghan, L. & Asthana, S. (2019). [Social prescribing: where is the evidence?](#) *British Journal of General Practice*, 69 (678): 6-7.
- Fancourt D, Finn S. [What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review](#). Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2019 (Health Evidence Network (HEN) synthesis report 67).
- Nowak, D.A. & Mulligan, K. (2021). Social prescribing: A call to action. *Canadian Family Physician*, 67(2), 88-91, <https://doi.org/10.46747/cfp.670288>. This commentary offers fundamental values that facilitate clinical discussions related to social prescribing as well as examples of social prescriptions in Canadian communities.
- [The Social Prescribing Network](#) supports research and evaluation of social prescribing and offers various supports, resources and opportunities for collaboration for people engaged in social prescribing.
- [The National Academy for Social Prescribing](#) is dedicated to advancing social prescribing through promotion, innovation, and the creation of partnerships across England to promote health and wellbeing.
- [NHS: Social prescribing and community-based support: Summary guide](#) (updated 19 June 2020).

- [Social Prescribing Roundtable, November 2019 Report: Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and Consumers Health Forum of Australia.](#)
- Book: “*Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*” by Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy (2020) wrote that social prescribing “reflects a recognition that loneliness affects our health, and we have a universal need to connect to one another.”
- [PaRX and Parks Canada: A Prescription for Nature Doctors can prescribe access to nature with the Parks Canada Discovery Pass to patients through the national nature prescription program, January 2022.](#)
- Hui, Ann. *Food as Medicine: Programs, doctors look to fill nutrition prescription.* Globe and Mail, February 26, 2022.

References

- 1 Buck D, Ewbank L. *What Is Social Prescribing?* Accessed September 21, 2021. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing>
- 2 Mulligan K, Hsiung S, Bhatti S, Rehel J, Rayner J. *RxCommunity_Final_Report_Mar2020_fullweb.*; 2020.
- 3 Grant C, Goodenough T, Harvey I, Hine C. British Medical Journal _ Enhanced Reader. *BMJ.* 2000;320(7232):419-423. doi:10.1136/bmj.320.7232.419
- 4 Dayson C, Leather D. *Evaluation of HALE Community Connectors Social.*; 2020.
- 5 Kimberlee RH. *Developing a Social Prescribing Approach for Bristol.*; 2013.
- 6 Vidovic D, Reinhardt GY, Hammerton C. Can social prescribing foster individual and community well-being? A systematic review of the evidence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* 2021;18(10). doi:10.3390/ijerph18105276

