

RBC Wealth Management partners with experts to help women plan today for the possibility of solo living later

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Women's life expectancy is several years longer than men and many will end up living solo at some point later in life. RBC Wealth Management has partnered with experts to examine this issue and also focuses on helping clients plan for this potential event so they are financially prepared if it happens.

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The average life expectancy for women in Canada is still several years longer than men, meaning many women have a higher chance of spending their later years living on their own. But planning for this eventuality – something RBC

Wealth Management helps its clients focus on – can stave off some significant challenges, including economic hardship and isolation.

Longer life expectancies, smaller families and higher rates of divorce have resulted in more women living alone in their later years. In fact, according to Statistics Canada, 27.9 per cent of older Canadian throughout 2017-18 lived alone, compared with 14 per cent of the general population. Of these, more than half were women.

“I think one of the biggest challenges that we’ve identified for those living alone is the risk of becoming socially isolated or disconnected from one’s community,” says Dr. Madison Brydges, a health policy researcher at the National Institute on Ageing (NIA). RBC Wealth Management has been a lead partner of the NIA since the onset of the pandemic, supporting their mission to enhance successful aging and to make Canada the best place to grow up and grow old.

As you age, there are significant costs associated with living alone that you may need to consider, including purchasing mobility aids or renovating your home to make it more accessible and safer and additional home care services outside of those provided by the public sector.

“I think we definitely can acknowledge that living on one’s own may be quite expensive,” says Dr. Brydges. “Particularly if you’re living on your own with other challenges or you’re socially isolated; that may become quite costly. People need supports in these years, but some people may not know how to access these resources, which is why it is important to start planning and finding out what kinds of supports are available for you.”

There are growing trends reflecting the ways those who wish to age at home can find community affordably. Some older Canadians are embracing the concept of home sharing whereby they rent out space in their house to post-secondary students who dedicate a set amount of hours of help in exchange for lower rent. The NIA also recently released a report that proposed

introducing a system in Canada that has already gained popularity in France, Japan and the United Kingdom through which postal workers check on older persons who are aging in place.

Naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs) are a phenomenon happening across Canadian communities when older adults begin to cluster together in apartment buildings or neighbourhoods. Dr. Brydges explains that bringing supports and socialization opportunities to these settings can allow older adults living solo to foster relationships and help them age in their location of choice.

“I think there’s a really great case to be made for bringing people more resources to help them age in the right place, and usually it is looking across services offered in different sectors,” says Dr. Brydges, who studies NORCs. “Successful NORCs provide accessible physical environments that foster social gathering and engagement. They offer better access to health and social services and other programs that encourage aging in place.”

RBC Wealth Management partnered with Audrey Miller, MSW, RSW, CCLCP, founder of Elder Caring Inc., a national company dedicated to healthy aging and care management, to bring awareness to the importance of planning for your care needs in later life, including what support is available for the care recipient and care giver. She notes it’s important that older women have the choice to stay in their own homes in their later years but cautions that this takes some forethought and financial planning to ensure it’s done in a healthy and sustainable way.

“Home isn’t necessarily all that we think it’s going to be,” she says. “Home can be a very lonely place, being in a house, especially in the Canadian winters. It can be very isolating.”

No matter the circumstances that see you living solo in your later years, there are unique financial challenges that must be addressed, and the most satisfied solo agers are those who feel prepared by way of a comprehensive health and

wealth plan, says Tony Maiorino, head of RBC Family Office Services at RBC Wealth Management.

“As part of this process of planning for those later years, we dig into looking at the inevitability of one spouse pre-deceasing the other and what does that look like,” he says.

Through this process, Mr. Maiorino says he puts together plans with his clients and then stress tests them to ensure they will hold up under life’s unexpected events.

“We look at how much money they would need if they lived to 95 as our baseline,” he explains. “Because it’s about making sure that we have a really good understanding of what some of the expenses will be in those years – whether that’s things like in-home care or living in a retirement community – and running that stress test on the portfolio to ensure it meets those needs.”

Ms. Miller advises that women start taking steps today – no matter what their age – to make a health and wealth plan for this future to enable them to age in the right place safely and securely for as long as possible and mitigate their risk of isolation or prohibitive costs in those later years.

“Ask yourself, ‘what supports are needed to facilitate more socialization? Will I need to invest in mobility aids, a ramp, a grab bar for the shower? Will I need to take public transit? Is where I live too isolated, too far away from amenities or help?’ ” she says.

“There’s a big difference between being alone and being lonely, so it’s important to think about those years and make a cost-effective plan. If you haven’t included the likelihood of living alone at some point in your later years, it’s worth reaching out to an advisor to make sure you’re covered for these eventualities.”

*You can learn more about the topics discussed in this article by listening to the [*Matters Beyond Wealth* podcast episodes, “Aging at home, safely and](#)*

securely" featuring Audrey Miller and "Planning for life beyond 100" featuring Bonnie-Jeanne MacDonald, director of Financial Security Research at the NIA.

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