

General Health

HIGHLIGHTS

- According to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 73% of Canadian seniors reported their health as being good, very good or excellent. In Peel, 65- to 74-year-olds were more likely (76%) than seniors aged 75 years and older (72%) to report their health as being good, very good or excellent.
 - In 2003, 10% of seniors in Ontario reported having a hearing problem.
 - In 2003, 23% of Peel seniors reported being diagnosed with cataracts according to the 2003 CCHS.
 - Access to dental care may be dependent on the ability to pay for dental services through dental insurance. More than one-third of seniors in Peel (36%) and Ontario (35%) reported that they had dental insurance in 2003.
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INTRODUCTION

Life expectancy has increased for seniors and many have the perception that their general health is good or better than good. Despite this, many seniors suffer from sensory impairments. As individuals grow older, the sharpness of their senses diminishes. This can affect their ability to live independently in the community. Sensory loss can have serious consequences on several aspects of daily living such as reading a bottle of medication or hearing the voice of a loved one. While seniors generally describe their health as being good, they still face issues such as vision, hearing and dental health.

According to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 73% of Canadian seniors reported their health as being good, very good or excellent.¹² This finding was similar for seniors in Ontario (73%) and Peel (74%). In Peel, seniors aged 65 to 74 years were slightly more likely (76%) than seniors aged 75 years and older (72%) to report their health as being good, very good or excellent. The difference in age groups in Ontario was greater than in Peel (77% of 65- to 74-year-olds and 67% of seniors aged 75 years and older). Regardless of their high rating of self-reported health, seniors still face other health issues and health barriers which are described in further detail in this report.

HEARING LOSS

In 2003, 11% of Canadian seniors reported that they had a hearing problem. Self-reported hearing problems among seniors increased with age from 5% of 65- to 69-year-olds to 23% of those aged 80 years and older. Hearing problems were more prevalent among male seniors (12%) than females (9%).¹³ In 2003, 10% of seniors in Ontario reported having a hearing problem. Data were not available for hearing problems among seniors living in Peel.

VISION LOSS

By 50 years of age, people begin to notice vision changes such as:

- A decline in the ability to see small print or focus on close objects;
- A decrease in the sharpness of vision;
- A need for more light in certain activities;
- Trouble distinguishing subtle colour differences; and
- Double vision or haloes around bright lights.¹⁴

In 2003, 82% of Canadian seniors reported having a vision problem. A similar proportion was reported for Ontario. Although 78% of Canadian seniors with vision problems reported that their difficulties had been corrected (e.g., with glasses or contact lenses), 4% had “uncorrected” problems, which include those not amenable to correction. Having a vision problem was reported by a higher proportion of Canadian female seniors (84%) than male seniors (79%).¹⁵ Data were not available for Peel.

Twenty-five per cent of falls causing injury among seniors are attributed to vision problems.¹⁶

As we age, our eyes are also at greater risk for other health problems such as dry eyes, excessive tearing and other problems (e.g., cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration).¹⁴

Cataracts are caused by a clouding of the eye lens leading to visual impairment. The prevalence of cataracts increases with age and has increased over time in Canada. In 2003, 20% of Canadian seniors reported being diagnosed with cataracts by a physician.¹⁵ Twenty-three per cent of Peel seniors also reported being diagnosed with cataracts according to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey.

Glaucoma is another condition which is caused by changes in eye pressure which can cause vision loss or blindness. It is more common among women than men. In 2003, 6% of Canadian seniors reported being diagnosed with glaucoma by a physician.¹⁵ The prevalence of glaucoma increases with age. Data were not available for Peel.

Macular degeneration is the most common cause of blindness in Canada. According to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) statistics for 2002, more than 74% of new CNIB clients were aged 70 years and older.¹⁷ The most common diagnosis of vision loss among these clients was macular degeneration (65% of all those aged 70 years and older).¹⁷ This vision loss may occur in one eye or both eyes and is caused by damage or breakdown of the macula, the part of the retina that provides clear, sharp central vision.¹⁸

DENTAL HEALTH

Oral health plays an important role in general health and quality of life. Canadians are entering old age with more of their natural teeth than previous generations due to improved access to dental care and increased fluoridation of the water supply. Untreated tooth and gum problems may lead to other health conditions such as heart attack and strokes, lung problems, diabetes complications, oral cancer and poor diet. Individuals who have missing teeth may also experience loneliness or isolation because they are embarrassed by how their teeth look.¹⁹

According to the CCHS, in 2003, more than half (55%) of seniors in Peel reported that they had visited a dentist within the past year. More than half (54%) of seniors in Peel also reported that they wore dentures or false teeth. A slightly higher proportion of female seniors reported wearing dentures (55%) compared to males (53%). Comparable data for Ontario were not available.

Access to dental care may be dependent on the ability to pay for dental services through dental insurance. Only one-third of seniors in Peel (36%) and Ontario (35%) reported that they had dental insurance in 2003. This included any private, government or employer paid plans.

SUMMARY

A similar proportion of seniors in Peel (74%) and Ontario (73%) reported their health as being good, very good or excellent.

In 2003, self-reported hearing problems among Canadian seniors increased with age from 5% 65- to 69-year-olds to 23% of those aged 80 years and older. Ten per cent of seniors in Ontario reported having a hearing problem. Data were not available for hearing problems among seniors living in Peel.

In 2003, 82% of Canadian seniors reported a vision problem. A similar proportion was reported for Ontario. In 2003, 23% of Peel seniors also reported being diagnosed with cataracts according to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey.

According to the CCHS, in 2003, more than half (55%) of seniors in Peel reported that they had visited a dentist within the past year. More than half (54%) of seniors in Peel also reported that they wore dentures or false teeth. A slightly higher proportion of female seniors (55%) compared to male seniors (53%) reported wearing dentures.

Access to dental care may be dependent on the ability to pay for dental services through dental insurance. Only approximately one-third of seniors in Peel (36%) and Ontario (35%) reported that they had dental insurance in 2003.