



Centre de recherche  
sur le vieillissement  
Research Centre on Aging

# Encrâge

**NEWSLETTER**

On current research projects



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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE

*“Nothing about us, without us!”*  
*(Latin: “Nihil de nobis, sine nobis”)*

Dear readers,

The fruits of our research only make sense if they are shared with the community that we are dedicated to. We are therefore very excited to share this new edition of L’Encrêge with you.

As a research center on aging, we are committed to building a future where each older person will feel valued and included. As a key player in the community, our research covers all dimensions of aging, from biology to society. By producing innovating knowledge, we work to influence policies and practices, with and for older people, to support fulfilling aging.

We are looking to create a proactive society, focused on well-being for all. Innovation is at the heart of this transformation, and we firmly believe in a close collaboration with older people to achieve this. The saying “Nothing about us, without us” is a perfect reflection of our philosophy, where active participation of older people is crucial in any initiative focusing on better aging.

In this new edition of L’Encrêge, we had the pleasure of working with older citizens who contributed to writing some of the articles, a first! You will also discover, through your reading, the diversity of themes that we are working on. Finally, you will be able to learn more about our senior committee as well as about our biannual event of Échanges Citoyens, both playing a key role in research to meaningfully focus on the needs of older people.

We hope that this edition of L’Encrêge will inspire you and offer you a clear vision of our efforts and commitment towards fulfilling and inclusive aging.

**KARL FERNANDES,**  
ACTING SCIENTIFIC CO-DIRECTOR



# INTERVAL TRAINING: FROM THE OLYMPICS TO GLYCEMIC CONTROL

**Renaud Tremblay**, master's student; **Alexis Marcotte-Chénard**, postdoctoral researcher; **Eléonor Riesco**, researcher

And what if I told you that high intensity interval training, or HIIT, is not only for elite athletes who want to compete in the Olympics? Indeed, our research results show that this type of training could be a promising therapeutic approach for improving the management of type 2 diabetes!

But what is HIIT? It is performing periods of high intensity exercise, separated by periods of rest. For example, walking fast for 1 minute, followed by light walking for 1 minute, and then repeating the cycle several times.

A single session of HIIT will reduce blood sugar, thus improving glycemic control. Good glycemic control is important to reduce the risk of developing other health complications, including cardiovascular issues.

Just as a physically active person who uses HIIT to perform in competition, we can use HIIT to perform in diabetes management. It is not just for athletes! However, there is no single way to do HIIT. The length of intervals and rest periods can be quite variable.

## So, what is the best method?

According to Diabetes Canada, 30-second to 1-minute exercise intervals are a good choice. However, current scientific data do not clearly show that this interval length is the most efficient to improve glycemic control. Currently, there are two types of HIIT under investigation. The first one consists of short, high-intensity intervals, namely 1 minute with 1 minute of rest, and a second type with longer intervals, namely 4 minutes followed by 3 minutes of rest.

Strangely, these two types of HIIT have never been compared to determine which one is more efficient for diabetes management.

Our laboratory thus made a direct comparison between these two types of HIIT in older women living with Type 2 diabetes. Participants performed three sessions: one session without exercise, one HIIT sessions with 10 x 1-minute walking intervals, and one HIIT session with 4-minute walking intervals. At each session, participants wore a device that enabled to constantly monitor their blood sugar levels: the DEXCOM G6.

## What type wins the race to control diabetes?

Good news! Both types of HIIT are equally efficient and help to reduce blood sugar for up to 40 minutes after the exercise. In people whose diabetes was less under control, the effect was even greater!

In these people, the benefits lasted for 24 hours. It is important to note that all the participants managed to complete both types of HIIT. So, if you want to win the gold medal in glycemic control, speak to your doctor to find out how exercise, whether high or low intensity, can help you in your glycemic performance!

## AN UPCOMING COMIC STRIP

The jury awarded this text first prize for the CdRV outreach by comic strip contest in collaboration with Québec Sciences and cartoonist Martin Patenaude-Monette.

The outreach contest was launched during the winter of 2024 at the CdRV. Graduate and postgraduate students, as well as research professionals submitted their outreach projects to the contest. An evaluation committee composed of two scientists and two older people selected the best candidate.

The winner then worked with illustrator Martin Patenaude-Monette to complete the project. You can read the result of this collaboration on the [Québec Science](#) magazine website.

# LONG COVID: REST OR EXERCISE, THAT IS THE QUESTION

**Sarah-Eve Lord**, master's student; **Marie-Noëlle Fontaine**, master's student; **Isabelle Dionne**, researcher

We have all heard the phrase: "If you are sick, you need to rest!" before. This bit of advice, often recommended by well meaning loved ones, is of good intention. It could be applicable to many situations, but what about people with long COVID who present with severe fatigue?

This complication is diagnosed when symptoms persist twelve weeks after a COVID-19 diagnosis. It manifests through a variety of symptoms of light to moderate intensity, such as fatigue, shortness of breath and headaches. After fighting the infection for several weeks, the sick person's body can be out of shape, i.e., the person will be weaker, less flexible and suffer from decreased muscle mass because of prolonged rest.

## Where is the solution?

Since long COVID affects approximately 10 to 20% of people infected with COVID-19, it goes without saying that a huge part of the population is affected by this complication. However, to date, few treatments have shown improvement in infected persons. One of the feared consequences of long COVID is aggravated fatigue after physical activity, which usually limits possible treatments.

Researchers have asked if, as opposed to rest, exercise could be a potential treatment to improve physical condition and symptoms in people with long COVID, particularly by increasing muscle mass and reducing fatigue.

## A small-dose prescription

To test this hypothesis, an 8-week research project was implemented. As a precautionary measure, and to avoid increased fatigue, the training program was adapted to the reality and physical condition of the participants. Fifteen people aged 27 to 73 years, suffering from long COVID

took part in low-impact training sessions. Sessions were divided in two: one part on a treadmill or bicycle for 20 minutes and one part lower and upper body strength exercises. The results from this group were compared with those of a no-exercise group.

The exercise group has improved their leg and arm strength more than the group with no exercising. In addition, contrary to initial fears, their symptoms and fatigue did not worsen. Also, many participants reported feeling better in general and improving their ability to perform their daily activities.



Dosage and intensity of exercise, as well as supervision by kinesiologists specializing in physical activity are the key! This helps to avoid increasing fatigue in people with long COVID and to mitigate, if not avoid, the effects of prolonged rest. It's the end of total rest. Let's make place for well-dosed exercise for people with long COVID!

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# GOODBYE SUGAR, HELLO HEALTH: THE CULINARY ADVENTURES OF OLDER PEOPLE IN RESIDENCES

**Camille Vandenberghe**, research professional on Pr. Stephen Cunnane's team

A balanced diet plays a crucial role in maintaining our long-term health. It is important to watch the level of carbohydrates in our diet to prevent eventual complications such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dementia.

Carbohydrates can be naturally found in the diet (for example: milk, starches, legumes, fruits) or added to it (for example: cookies, sweet drinks, candy, cake). Reducing our intake of carbohydrates, particularly added sugars, can make a difference to our health.

Meals offered in senior's residences, like most of the North American diet, usually contain high proportions of carbohydrates. Reducing carbohydrates intake could be an interesting way to maintain good health in aging populations.



## The SAGE project: Less sugar for balanced blood sugar

In Sherbrooke, 24 people living in a private senior's residence agreed to participate in a two-month intervention aiming at reducing one third of their carbohydrate intake.

Before and after the intervention, a device called DEXCOM G6 continuously measured blood sugar for 10 days. The research team also analyzed different blood markers to better understand the effects in the body.

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## Less sugar, more benefits

The intervention improved blood sugar control. Blood sugar levels were reduced after two months of intervention, especially in participants who had abnormally high blood sugar levels prior to the intervention. With a reduced carbohydrate diet, blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels also decreased. At the end of the intervention, we also observed an improvement in quality of life, that could be reflected by less anxiety and fatigue.

In conclusion, after a survey at the residence, the dining room meals served will contain less sugar from now on. This project shows that it is possible to improve older people's health in residence in a safe manner, by reducing their sugar consumption, one packet at a time.

Here are a few tips to reduce your dietary carbohydrate intake:

- Use almond flour instead of wheat flour in your favorite desserts.
- Choose fiber-rich whole-wheat breads for breakfast, such as St-Méthode 100% whole-wheat bread with 17g of carbohydrates per 2 slices.
- Prefer grapefruit, berries (raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries) and cantaloupe over other fruits for their low sugar content.
- Replace rice with al dente cauliflower in your recipes.
- Eat your bananas when they are not as ripe and contain less sugar.

# A ROBOT COMPANION TO FIGHT ISOLATION FOR OLDER PEOPLE: POSSIBLE?

**Mélanie Levasseur**, researcher; **Marika Lussier-Therrien**, research coordinator;  
**François Michaud**, researcher

Older people, including those living in residences and long-term care facilities (CHSLD), are at greater risk of isolation. This isolation is reflected by interactions that are limited in number, duration and frequency. With their more heterogenous profiles and complex and growing needs, many of these people require stimulation, learning or assistance during interactions inside and outside the CHSLD.

This is the case for Mrs. Tremblay, 86 years old, who presents a gradual loss of functional autonomy and hearing problems. These limitations increase her risk of isolation. T-Top, a table robot developed at Université de Sherbrooke, could help reduce her isolation by suggesting activities to encourage her social participation.

## Innovative strategy

"Hello Mrs. Tremblay! It is nice to see you again. What activities would you like to do today? I see that you have a book with you. Would you like to sign up for the mobile library?" These words from T-Top show that this robot has unequalled verbal and non-verbal communication skills. For example, T-Top can see, hear, move, display information on a touch screen, understand and synthesize speech, interrogate ChatGPT and act as a telepresence platform to communicate with family members.

Thanks to its technological advances, T-Top is an engaging companion that can be personalized to its users' preferences.

Following a research-action project by and for older people, and supported by an intersectoral team, a project is currently underway to develop T-Top's conversational abilities to encourage social participation of older people living in CHSLD. To achieve this, we are documenting how older people living in CHSLDs use the robot and we are questioning them about their experience when interacting with T-Top.



Our study is conducted with 12 older people living in CHSLD, where interviews and observations are carried out to better understand their interactions with T-Top. Before interacting with them, T-Top questions each one of them to learn their social participation interests and needs. Kept in memory, these answers will guide deeper and personalized exchanges during the interaction session with T-Top.

## Practical impacts for society

This project will benefit individuals, research and society as a whole. This project will particularly benefit older people who need stimulation, learning, or assistance during their interactions.

More specifically, T-Top's unique ability to converse and personalize interactions will enable older people to forge new ties with

others, encourage them to take part in an activity, and offer them companionship or psychological support, all with a view to helping them break out their isolation.

[See a demonstration of the T-Top robot's capabilities on IntRoLab's YouTube page](#)

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# THE JOY OF BEING ALIVE

**Diane Lesage**, long-time advocate for people's well-being and currently involved at CdRV as a citizen collaborator

## Body acceptance and respect

Our relationship with our body is shaped through various stages of our life. For you, it may have been positive or, on the contrary, more or less difficult. How is it now? What would be desirable for a healthier perception of our identity as aging individuals? These are some of the themes we discussed during the Échanges citoyens sur le vieillissement organized by the CdRV and the Sherbrooke city libraries on April 16, 2024.

A consensus was easily reached that today's world focuses on appearance and performance. The gaze of others can sometimes lead to a certain devaluation of our reality as older people. So how do we navigate this context to accept and respect our aging bodies? It was thus an invitation in the different groups to have a positive perception of aging. Together, we reflected on the accomplishments and joys that our body, as it is, allow us to enjoy.



We agreed that despite some slowdowns, limitations, or pain, we can feel very much alive. Proof of this is that many testified that they can still engage in numerous enjoyable activities. Many mentioned the joy of moving softly, easily and safely, far from competition. We realized that our senses, always alert, give us access to many pleasures. It is through our bodies that we have a presence, that we can be in relation with each other as we fully experience today, according to the testimony of one participant.

## A valuable lesson

My personal vision of aging inspired me to contribute to the realization of these fruitful and welcoming exchanges, experienced with respect and empathy. Early in my life, I had to transform my perception of my body. As a person of naturally high weight, my self-esteem was low in a world where women's physical appearance determines their social value and their love life. The desire to fully live my life and have my taste of joy was the driving force behind a new vision of my entire person. This lesson is currently very precious to serenely welcome the transformations of my aging body and to taste the joy of being alive.

To conclude, I shared these last thoughts with the groups: through our body, our antenna to the world, we have the immense joy of existing. We are here, in this life, and it is a fantastic chance; we must celebrate it. I am confident that serene aging prepares us to live the end of life as a time for peace, for affection given and received, and to leave peace and dignity. This is what I wish for all of us.

*"This is my creed: For man, the vast marvel is to be alive. We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh and part of the living incarnate cosmos."*

David Herbert Lawrence

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR OLDER WOMEN: LIVING UP TO YOUR POTENTIAL DESPITE CHALLENGES

**Katherine Boisvert-Vigneault**, PhD candidate; **Isabelle Dionne**, researcher

The benefits of physical activity for health are numerous and widely recognized — disease prevention, improved quality of life, reduced risk of falls, and promotion of social inclusion.

And yet, lack of activity is highly prevalent in our society, especially in older women. They have often spent their lives taking care of their family while juggling a professional career, setting physical activity aside when they were younger.

The good news is that it is never too late to start being active! Committing to a change of lifestyle has its challenges, but also offers worthwhile opportunities. It is therefore essential to find lasting ways to encourage and support regular physical activity.

## Studying the sustainability of the benefits of physical activity

To determine if engaging in physical activity through a structured and supervised exercise program could have lasting benefits for women, Katherine Boisvert-Vigneault, a PhD student in gerontology at University of Sherbrooke, conducted interviews with 12 women who took part in such a program, several years ago.

These interviews, conducted 10 years after the program ended, provided valuable information on what the program brought to the participants' daily lives and how it influences their active lives today.

- **Improved health and wellbeing:** Participants reported less shortness of breath when climbing stairs, more ease when getting up out of a chair without using their hands, better endurance in household chores, and increased energy and vitality in daily life.

- **Well-established personal resources:** Participants acquired know-how related to physical exercise, in addition to strengthening their confidence and autonomy. These resources have been useful to maintain regular physical activity in the 10 years following the end of the program.
- **A different perception of physical activity:** Rather than considering physical activity as a chore, participants made it part of their lives as an opportunity to take time for themselves, socialize, connect with nature, or recharge physically and mentally.



## Every step counts!

By participating in this research activity, these women not only improved their physical condition, but they also developed valuable knowledge and personal resources. These gains can be reinvested later in other areas of their lives, thus, demonstrating the lasting impact of a positive experience in physical activity on their lives. Through their journey, these women remind us that every step towards an active life is a victory not only for the body but also for the mind!

Originally posted on [cdrv.ca/sante-femmes](https://cdrv.ca/sante-femmes).

## TESTIMONIAL

A participant's thoughts on what research brings to her life

Francine Chiasson, research participant



### The pleasure of being and remaining active over time

In my youth and prime, without ever achieving exceptional feats, I enjoyed moving and being active, every day. Throughout all these experiences, the body is in movement, the muscles are engaged, the breathing is full. These are precious sensations that fill up the body, the heart and the spirit.

As time passes and we age, little by little, without realizing it, it was easy for me to let go of the potential of mobility and the freedom that it brings.

When I heard about a research project on aging, physical activity and the training they offered, it immediately caught my attention. Taking the time to move under the attentive supervision of kinesiology students was tempting. Being part of a research program with responsible and trustworthy people is a privilege. Training and feeling the progress in my body, in endurance and mobility, was like a gift to me. Since the program lasted for a year, I was able to feel the positive and tangible effects over days and weeks. Thus, I wanted to continue and invest in it.

Training with women who, like me, are getting back into walking, running, pedaling, pulling, pushing, sweating and laughing, a lot and often, was pleasant. I discovered another source of motivation that made me want to go back.

When the program ended, I understood that all the measurable benefits on my body, endurance and muscular strength were due to the movements, consistence and regular trainings. The research team's encouragement and support helped me give sense to the activities, which has remained to this day. It's so important!

I now wish to continue in any way possible to move, and smoothly remain in action every day.

Life goes by quickly, and aging is a constant thing. I can feel it. As I age, I must pay more attention to remaining active and engaged in physical activity. I am not looking for great challenges or feats. I want to remain active in my daily life, alone and with others, and find the beautiful freedom of the body!

Through interviews and questions, research made me rethink, ponder and try to continue this commitment to myself to maintain mobility and physical activity as I age. This process has had very positive resonances for me.

## HIP SURGERY: REHABILITATION BEFORE SURGERY

Hassiba Chebbihi, CdRV researcher

With the aging of the population, the number of people requiring hip replacement surgery because of osteoarthritis has increased. Osteoarthritis of the hip is characterized by the degradation of the hip cartilage, and is particularly disabling, as it limits the ability to walk and to function on a daily basis.

Before considering hip replacement surgery with a prosthesis, less invasive treatments are used to relieve the pain associated with osteoarthritis. Among others, non-pharmacological measures such as applying heat and cold, massages, aerobic exercises and muscle strengthening can be used. Painkiller medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®), anti-inflammatory drugs and cortisone injections are also useful to relieve pain. Surgery to replace the hip with a prosthesis is considered only when non-pharmacological measures and painkillers no longer work.

However, wait times for surgery can be long, and while they wait, people with osteoarthritis can develop other health problems that affect their quality of life: anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, reduced physical capabilities, etc.

The solution? Researcher Hassiba Chebbihi and her team think that they have found it! She is a researcher and professor at the CdRV and University of Sherbrooke who has set up a research program giving the opportunity to users to take part in a pre-adaptation program during the wait time before surgery. This program, which includes preparatory workshops for surgery, could improve quality of life and reduce post-operative complications.

### How does it work?

As part of the research project, people who need hip surgery will first be evaluated by a physiotherapist and a nurse from the orthopedic clinic. Based on the results of this evaluation, users can be referred to geriatrics, for optimization of their capacity, or toward pre-adaptation workshops that will be led by Sercovie, a community organization in the Sherbrooke area.

Pre-adaptation workshops will be adapted to their needs, and will include information on their condition and upcoming surgery, as well as preparation for convalescence, adapted physical exercise, pain and anxiety management strategies, and tips for a healthier diet.

### Positive outcomes

Although the project is still at the research level, this new program is very promising and suggests numerous benefits, including:

- Improving user experience;
- Optimizing and harmonizing services and processes;
- Allowing a faster recovery after surgery;
- Reducing post-operative complications linked to hip surgery;
- Increasing the citizens' sense of being part of their community.

Ultimately, the implementation of a program outside of Sherbrooke is being considered, aiming at improving its accessibility for older people living far from the rehabilitation centers, by offering them the option of taking the program online.

This is an excellent way to promote healthy aging!

Originally posted on [crchus.ca/arthritis](https://crchus.ca/arthritis).



# BETTER UNDERSTANDING VULNERABILITY TO PROMOTE INCLUSION OF OLDER PEOPLE

**Mélanie Levasseur**, CdRV researcher

Led by researcher Mélanie Levasseur, a team of researchers from the CdRV proposes a definition of vulnerability. This new definition emphasizes that vulnerability should be considered as an attribute linked to a situation, rather than a label to put on someone. This work aims at promoting the inclusion of older people by proposing less stigmatizing ways to assess their vulnerability, and by emphasizing the importance of the environment in these situations.

In government documents and in the language of specialists in the field, the concept of “vulnerability” is frequently used to describe older people. And yet, there is no consensus on the definition of this concept, which is often used interchangeably with other terms such as “frailty” that risk “labeling” these people, which can have major consequences on the interventions offered to them.

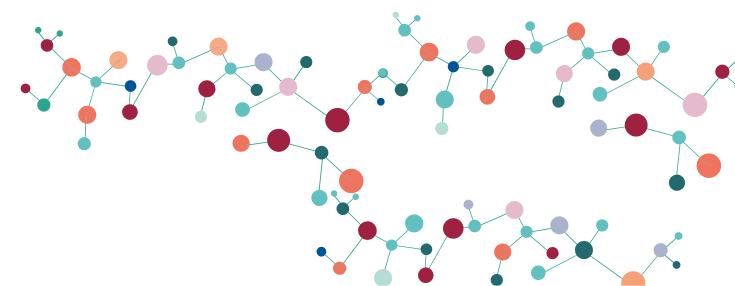
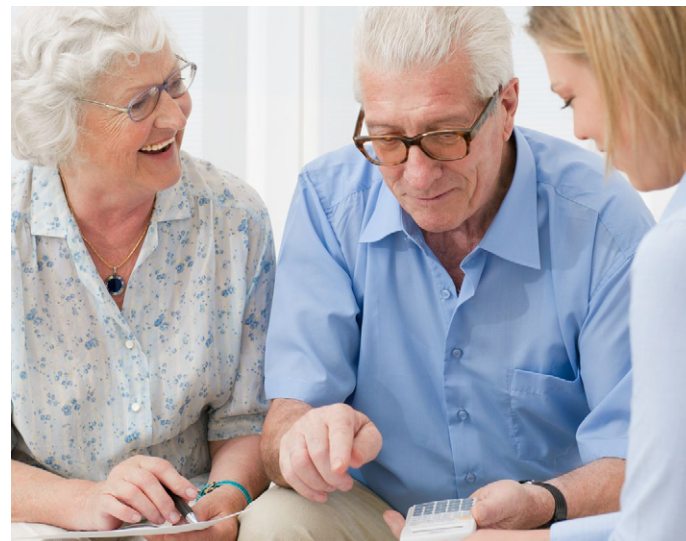
What does it mean to qualify a person as “vulnerable”? A team led by researcher Mélanie Levasseur and affiliated to Université de Sherbrooke has widely surveyed the literature on this subject to clarify the definitions and methods used to measure vulnerability. They then discussed these definitions with people who work with older persons.

As a result of this exercise, the proposed definition is: “a set of circumstances in which one or more individuals experience physiological, psychological, socioeconomic, social or environmental difficulties that increase their risk of being harmed or having coping challenges that have a negative impact on their life.”

One worrying aspect, highlighted by Mélanie Levasseur and her collaborators, is that vulnerability is often considered as an individual characteristic. However, the proposed definition considers vulnerability as an attribute linked to a situation, not as a label attached to someone.

Indeed, even if an individual presents certain characteristics that could qualify him as “vulnerable”, he/she may not be in a situation of vulnerability if the environment solves the difficulties by offering home support services, for example. In the current context of an aging population and the growing number of people suffering from isolation and loneliness, achieving a consensus on the definition of “vulnerability” and the less stigmatizing ways to measure it will help promote the inclusion and participation of older people in society.

*Originally posted on the [FRQ](#) website*



# THE SENIORS' COMMITTEE: A BEACON FOR THE CDRV SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

**Caroline Francoeur**, coordinator of the Laboratoire d'innovation par et pour les aînés

It's easy to imagine that life for research teams at the CdRV is a bit like being at the helm of a boat. Every day, the teams have to navigate between grant requests, piloting projects fulfilling the needs of older people and maneuvering to reach fruitful goals.

Far from being a long, calm river, research presents many obstacles to be avoided so that you don't sink. Just like the light from a beacon guiding the ships, the seniors' committee lights the path and guides research teams through the experience and insight of its members.

Indeed, the seniors' committee is comprised of about 10 citizens and members representing community organisations dedicated at improving the quality of life of older people in the Eastern Townships. The committee thus fulfills its mandates of consultation, facilitation, awareness and representation. It is through the diversity of voices represented on the committee as well as by the cross-fertilization of scientific and experiential knowledge that research can respond to the true needs of older people.

## Valuable help

Research teams that consult the committee can receive precious advice on how to adapt their work methods, interventions and data collecting tools. For example, a lifestyle questionnaire was submitted to the seniors' committee to get their opinion. In discussion with the research team, the members questioned the relevance of certain questions or proposed rephrasing to make questions easier to understand and help the researchers collect more accurate and appropriate data.

The seniors' committee can also suggest a method of communication by telephone rather than email, if this is perceived as being better suited to the target population. The committee could also highlight the importance of adapting the method of solicitation to consider cultural differences (the tone of the message, presentation of the project in groups or through a trusted organisation, etc.) or geographical considerations (reaching out to older people living in rural areas).

Through its natural network, the seniors' committee can facilitate the identification of community organisations, older people or family caregivers who can join the project as partners. This meshing puts older people at the heart of a co-construction process aimed at emerging sustainable solutions requiring a range of expertise.

Like a beacon, the presence of the seniors' committee provides direction to guide research. The committee's actions help strengthen the dialogue between older people from the Eastern Townships and the CdRV community to mobilise the population to the challenges of aging, to favour participative collaboration and to contribute to the development of innovative strategies to promote better aging for older people in every aspect of their lives.

## SENIORS' COMMITTEE - 2023 IN NUMBERS:

- 10 meetings
- 9 consultations in support of the research community
- 14 intersectoral projects supported (letter of support and partnership)
- Involved in 8 scientific and public events





## PARTICIPATE IN OUR PROJECTS!

### RESEARCH ON AGING IS AGELESS

We need you to advance knowledge on aging. All our research projects are governed by strict ethical protocols that guarantee patient consent and safety. Men and women of all ages are contributing to the development of programs to be used across many spheres of society to improve seniors' health, care, and living conditions.

#### How do you participate in a research project?

- By getting involved with a research team at the Laboratoire d'innovation par et pour les aînés. For more information on the living laboratory, visit [lippa.recherche.usherbrooke.ca](http://lippa.recherche.usherbrooke.ca)
- By signing up at the recruitment center for CdRV participants.

Provide your consent for a representative of the Research Centre on Aging to contact you if there is a research project that matches your profile.

You can sign up here:

**Telephone:** 1 819 780-1832

**Toll free:** 1 888 780-1832

**Website:** [cdrv.ca/participe-recherche](http://cdrv.ca/participe-recherche)



#### THIS EDITION'S REVIEW COMMITTEE:

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- Diane Lesage, community member
- Lucie Duquette, administrative officer
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**Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux de l'Estrie - Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke**



**Université de Sherbrooke**



**Centre de recherche sur le vieillissement**  
Research Centre on Aging

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