



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United Way Healthy Aging connects B.C.'s seniors through the Digital Learning Pilot Project

Burnaby, B.C. – United Way Healthy Aging launched the year-long Digital Learning Pilot Project that aims to increase digital literacy among seniors and older adults in British Columbia.

When the pandemic forced everyone into social isolation, many turned to technology to stay connected. This is true for seniors as much as for anyone. [Research](#) shows that device ownership and usage among older adults has grown markedly and 65% of Canadians over 65 now own a smartphone and 83% of them use it daily. As the rate of seniors and older adults using technology increases, so does their need for education, training and other technology resources. The Digital Learning Pilot Project will address this gap.

This one-year pilot project is comprised of two funding streams: Active Aging Plus (AA+) and ITech Packages. Twenty-nine non-profit service agencies in B.C. have received AA+ grants to promote digital learning and develop virtual activities for older adults in their communities. The ITech packages are kits of five tablets from Best Buy Canada (along with technical support from Geek Squad) and data plans. United Way Healthy Aging has delivered ITech packages to 20 community agencies who will make tablets and accompanying services available to local seniors. Overall, the Digital Learning Pilot Project represents over a \$500,000 community investment.

"It's important for people to maintain their independence and stay connected as they age, and digital technology has such an important role to play," said Kahir Lalji, Provincial Director of United Way Healthy Aging. "Devices, data and the right skills are increasingly necessary for seniors, like all of us, to carry out the daily activities of our lives – things like banking online or ordering groceries. Today, we use apps to download and read library books or play card games, and technology is essential to staying socially connected. More and more community centres are developing virtual programs for seniors so they can join from home when they can't get there in person."

This pilot is unique because of its supported learning approach. Local service agencies from across B.C. will receive support and training from United Way Healthy Aging and [HelpAge Canada](#), a national charitable organization supporting seniors in Canada and around the world. In turn, the local agencies – bolstered by training opportunities and collaborative learning sessions – will work directly with seniors in their community.

"Venturing into the digital world can be a daunting experience. It's not easy to get started, and it's often unaffordable – but in today's world it's a necessity," said Nicole Perry, Director of National Programs for HelpAge Canada. "We are pleased to be able to share our digital literacy expertise in support of older adults who want to learn how to incorporate technology into their lives".

The Digital Learning Pilot Project will deliver a scalable way to provide older adults with devices and data – along with the confidence and skills to use them. Active Aging Plus, in particular, will support the creation of virtual programming, helping agencies reach older adults province-wide. Progress will be evaluated during the pilot year, with the hope of developing it further. Bridging this digital divide is an important way for older adults to stay active, engaged, and connected.

A list of participating agencies follows:

DIGITAL LEARNING PILOT PROJECT AGENCIES

Agencies that received an Active Aging+ Grant	Community
Abbotsford Association for Healthy Aging	Abbotsford
Burnaby Neighbourhood House	Burnaby
Century House Senior Citizens Activity Association	New Westminster
Collingwood Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Desert Valley Hospice Society	Osoyoos
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society	Surrey
Earthwise Society	Delta
Enderby & District Community Resource	Enderby
Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Gluu Technology Society	Vancouver
Hornby and Denman Community Health Care	Vancouver
Lillooet Area Library Association	Lillooet
Literacy Now Cowichan	Duncan
Logan Lake Wellness, Health & Youth Society	Logan Lake
Maple Ridge / Pitt Meadows Community Services	Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows
Metchosin Seniors' Association	Victoria
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Oceanside Building Learning Together	Parksville
Presentation House Cultural Society	North Vancouver
Prince George Native Friendship	Prince George
Robson Valley Support Society	Valemount
Seniors Come Share Society	Surrey
Sooke Region Communities Health Network	Sooke
South Vancouver Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Stroke Recovery Association of BC	Vancouver
S.U.C.C.E.S.S. (United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society)	Metro Vancouver, Various Locations
Wavefront Centre for Communication	Vancouver
Westside Health Network Society	West Kelowna
Wrinch Memorial Foundation Society	Hazelton

Agencies that received an ITech Package	Community
Abbotsford Association for Healthy Aging	Abbotsford
Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Chilliwack Community Services	Chilliwack
Collingwood Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Gordon Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
Hornby and Denman Community Health Care	Vancouver
Kitimat Seniors Association #129	Kitimat
Lillooet Area Library Association	Lillooet
Literacy Now Cowichan	Duncan
Logan Lake Wellness, Health & Youth	Logan Lake
Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House	Vancouver
People for a Healthy Community on Gabriola Island	Gabriola
REACH Community Health Centre	Vancouver
Robson Valley Support Society	Valemount
Sechelt Public Library Association	Sechelt
Seniors Come Share Society	Surrey
Seniors Services Society of BC	New Westminster
South Okanagan Seniors Wellness Society	Penticton
Stroke Recovery Association of BC	Vancouver
Tri-Cities Seniors Action Society	Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody

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CONTACT:

Carolyn Rohaly
 Public Relations, Marketing & Communications
 United Way of the Lower Mainland
CarolynR@uwlm.ca
 647.235.8448

About United Way Healthy Aging

United Way Healthy Aging is delivered across B.C. through the United Way of Lower Mainland (UWLM).

United Way Healthy Aging develops and manages programs that provide exceptional quality-of-life benefits to seniors throughout the province, helping them stay *Active, Connected and Independent!* Healthy Aging provides grants and other resources to community-based, volunteer-driven, non-profit agencies who provide services to and for seniors. Healthy Aging's specialty is programs that help seniors living at home to maintain their independence while staying active and engaged in their communities.

Healthy Aging's network of over 125 Agencies who currently provide 195 programs that strengthen vital connections and support seniors in local communities across B.C.



About United Way of the Lower Mainland

United Way of the Lower Mainland strengthens vital connections in our local communities and ignites the desire in everyone to improve this place we call home. Through United Way, you can mobilize to address a local issue in your neighbourhood, collaborate with a network of partners to solve a problem, or donate to support our programs that create life-saving connections for local kids and seniors. To learn more, visit uwlm.ca.

