Study findings: Perceptions of Online Fitness Programming: SeniorFit and HeartStrong

- **Purpose:** To examine perceptions of online fitness programming at the Brock-Niagara Centre for Health and Well-Being in older adult and cardiac rehabilitation members.

- **Participants:**
  - **19** individuals expressed interest in the study and completed a one-on-one interview:

  7 males

  12 females

  All Caucasian
  Aged
  62-82

  13 online members

  6 non-online members

3 themes emerged throughout the analysis of participant interviews:

1) Perceived Needs of Exercise Programing

- Participants' perceptions of the online programming were shaped by individual preferences for structured or non-structured exercise, class or machine-based exercise, and social versus physical motives for exercise.
- Those who preferred structured, class-based exercise, and placed a lesser importance on social benefits of exercise in an in-person setting perceived more benefits of online programming.
- Perceptions of the online programming (positive and negative) were influenced by whether individuals perceived their needs could be met via the online platform.

2) Attitudes & Preconceptions of Online Exercise

- Participants differed in their perceptions of the value the online programming in relation to cost, exercise needs, and social experiences, which were shaped by previous experiences and preconceptions towards online exercise and technology.
  - Those with more experience and access to technology were more likely to use the online platform and viewed it as a valuable tool to remain active.
  - For some, technology and perceptions of technology were a barrier which prevented them from using the online programming
- Participants who engaged in the online programming reported a positive shift in attitude towards online exercise programming, and an ability to adapt to perceived barriers (technology, equipment).

3) Home Environment

- Participants expressed both perceived barriers (e.g., technology, limited social interaction) and advantages (no travel, comfort of own home) to exercising in a home environment.
- Many perceived that the home environment allowed them to exercise more frequently and efficiently compared to a face-to-face setting, and expressed that they would like the online programming to continue
- For some, particularly those who did not enrol in the online programming, the home environment was not perceived as an effective or preferred place to exercise

  The home environment influenced participants' perceptions of the exercise instructor compared to a face-to-face environment
  - Importance of concise, clear verbal cues
  - Initiating social interactions that may be hindered with online programming

Overall online exercise programming may be a valuable tool to promote physical activity and well-being for older populations in place of, and in addition to, face-to-face programming. Training in technology and free trials of online programs may encourage more older adults to try online exercise.