Building regional health ecosystem capacity: Post-hackathon learning circles to support early co-design of social isolation solutions for older adults

**Objectives:**
Explore post-hackathon learning circles (LCs)\(^1,2\) to expedite the development of health & social technology solutions & startup ventures through early exposure to domain experts

**Background:**
- Hackathons are time-limited, hands-on opportunities for “hackers” to identify novel solutions to intractable societal problems\(^3\).
- LCs have four phases — reflection, learning, planning, and action — and provide structure to a meeting, embody the collective wisdom of a group, equity of participants, a sense of shared community\(^4\).
- The lean startup concept\(^5-7\) uses agile methods to connect prototypes with a business model, and involvement of stakeholders early and often. But it is not clear how to best facilitate the transition from health hackathon group to startup in practice.

**Methods:**
Transcripts of 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with pitch team members, and event field notes, were analysed using NVivo 11.

**Findings:**
Three themes emerged from our analysis:

1. **Building a shared understanding:** LCs bridge interdisciplinary teams engaged in different phases of the development life cycle
2. **Stakeholder culture clash:** The older adults were less encouraging of entrepreneurship and more focused on whether the solutions solved problems they understood
3. **Mentor preferences:** Although participant equity was assumed in LCs, teams prioritized certain mentors’ time over others.

**Conclusion:**
- Post-hackathon LCs may be effective in ideation and product-market validation stages of the start-up life cycle. Multidisciplinary pitch teams built critical teamwork skills; however participation was not predictive of intent to form a start-up.
- Sensitizing community members to the “appreciative rather than critical” role of mentors in hackathon culture may improve perceived value of input.
- Future research might explore an extended hackathon format and use of LCs to reduce development time, startup acceleration, and contribution to innovation ecosystem capacity