

# Rapid Expert Consultation: *Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Social Isolation and Loneliness*

## Current Context

## Strategies:

- Community-based Supports
- Community Leadership


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### Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Social Isolation and Loneliness (2024)

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#### DETAILS

29 pages | 8.5 x 11 | PDF  
ISBN 978-0-309-72301-5 | DOI 10.17226/27874

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National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

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#### SUGGESTED CITATION


National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2024. *Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Social Isolation and Loneliness*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/27874>.

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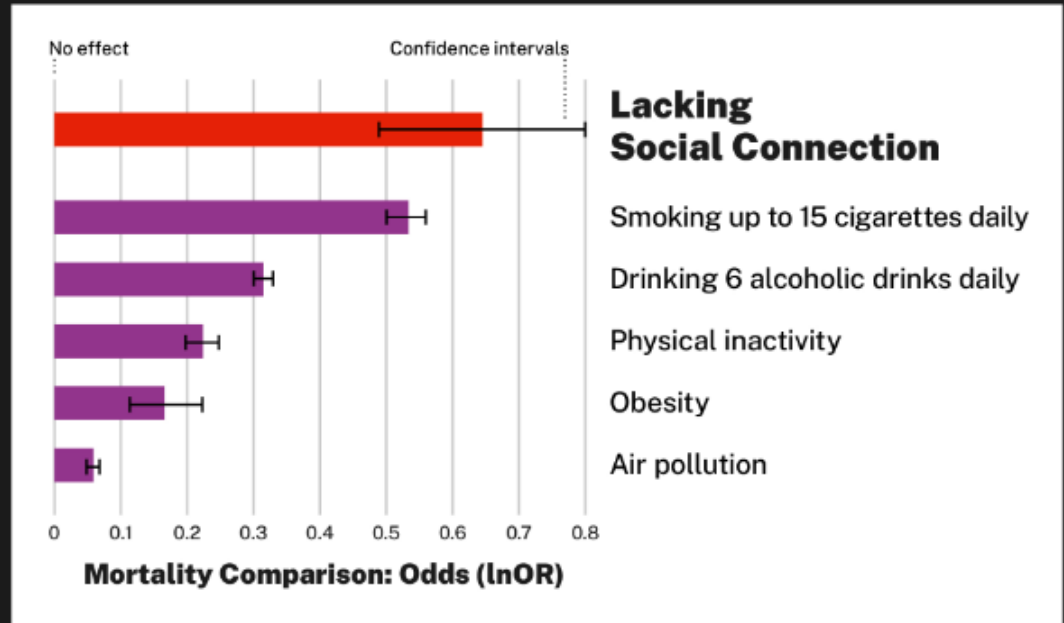
# Current Context

- Nearly 50% of Americans felt lonely before the COVID-19 pandemic
- COVID-19 exacerbates existing social isolation and loneliness across age groups
- Loneliness impacts all demographics, particularly older adults, youth, and individuals with preexisting health conditions

# Surgeon General Advisory 2023: Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation

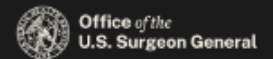
Adults across the globe rate their social relationships as the most important source of meaning, purpose, and motivation in their lives

## Lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.



**Comparison groups:** Complex measures of social integration: high v. low; not smoking v. smoking < 15 cigarettes daily; alcohol abstinence v. drinking > 6 alcoholic drinks daily; physical activity v. inactivity; low BMI v. high BMI; low air pollution v. high air pollution.

**Source:** Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States. *American Psychology*. 2017;72(6):517-530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103. This graph is a visual approximation.



# Current Context

The terms “loneliness” and “social isolation” are closely related yet distinct concepts. Strategies for addressing social isolation and loneliness need to encompass the multifaceted and interrelated nature of the two concepts. Most approaches do so by focusing on the goal of promoting social connectedness.

**Loneliness** - the subjective emotional experience of feeling disconnected or lacking meaningful social relationships, often due to a gap between the social interactions you have and what you desire

**Social Isolation** - the objective state of having few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction

**Social Connectedness** - a sense of connection that results from actual or perceived support or inclusion, and connection to others based on positive relationship qualities

# Community-based Supports

Community-based supports can significantly enhance social connectedness by leveraging existing infrastructure such as schools, workplaces, and community service networks. Tailoring these supports to meet the needs of specific populations is essential to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

## **Key Strategies:**

- Leverage existing community service networks to enhance opportunities for social connectedness and help individuals access care and support
- Foster peer relationships and community connectedness through mentoring and volunteer programs
- Engage older adults with community housing options that provide social, educational, and health activities

# Community Leadership

Community leadership thrives when grassroots organizations are empowered to address local challenges, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility. By actively engaging community members in decision-making processes, leadership can be distributed across the community, ensuring that local solutions are sustainable and relevant.

## **Key Strategies:**

- Codesign community spaces in collaboration with residents to create inclusive environments that meet local needs and encourage social interaction
- Empower communities by supporting grassroots organizations that address local issues and foster a sense of responsibility
- Forge inclusive, action-oriented coalitions that unite community members across age groups to work toward common goals
- Promote intergenerational programs to build bonds between younger and older community members and reduce loneliness