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

Strategies:

- Digital Environments

- Social Infrastructure

- Comprehensive Policy Initiatives

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Digital Environments

Digital interventions, including online support groups and positive social media interactions, can effectively promote social connectedness, particularly for individuals with mobility or accessibility challenges. However, these interventions also come with risks that require attention, so it is essential that approaches be evidence-based.

Key Strategies:

- Provide tailored virtual connections through online and phone-based activities

- Utilize apps combining social networking with mental health resources

- Expand access to mental health professionals through telehealth, providing remote counseling and support

- Initiate digital literacy programs to help older adults learn to use digital platforms and stay connected

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Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure plays a crucial role in fostering social connectedness and reducing loneliness by designing inclusive and multifaceted public spaces. These spaces, such as libraries, community gardens, and community centers, along with diverse local destinations like shops, cafes, and restaurants, provide opportunities for social interactions that enhance community well-being.

Key Strategies:

- Develop mixed-use neighborhoods that are walkable with diverse amenities like libraries, parks, cafes, and shops that encourage spontaneous social interactions

- Create inclusive public spaces to foster socialization and community through green spaces and cultural events

- Provide accessible transportation for older adults and people with disabilities to improve access to social opportunities

- Support social engagement and intergenerational activities by creating communal spaces like community gardens

Comprehensive Policy Initiatives

Proactive policymaking can aid the development of legislation and policies to enhance social connectedness and provide ongoing support for community and social programs.

Key Strategies:

- Develop and implement policies that enhance social connections, such as legislation promoting social connectivity at local and national levels

- Support ongoing funding for community and social programs to ensure sustainability and address the unique needs of different groups

- Standardize data collection and sharing to improve service delivery, such as integrating social determinants of health into policy decisions

- Implement workplace policies that promote mental health and social interaction, such as flexible hours and paid leave

- Promote age-friendly policies that support aging in place by improving transportation, housing accessibility, and community engagement

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Comprehensive Policy Initiatives

Age-Friendly NYC: Enhances public transportation, housing, and social programs to improve accessibility and foster intergenerational connections

FAST Act (2015): Provides federal funding to improve public transportation, reducing isolation for older adults and people with disabilities

Nevada's NEST Collaborative: Increases social support for older adults through weekly volunteer phone calls, improving social outcomes

Older Americans Act (1965, amended 2020): Supports services that help older adults age in place, with adaptable housing and community environments

California Healthy Workplaces Act (2014): Provides paid sick leave, improving well-being and fostering social connectedness for employees

Minnesota Safe and Supportive Schools Act (2014): Promotes better social connections in schools through safety, staff training, and inclusive policies

The Gravity Project: Standardizes data collection on social determinants of health to improve service delivery and policy-making

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