

# Social Disconnection

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering,  
and Medicine

**Addressing the Rising Mental Health Needs  
of an Aging Population**

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JOHNS HOPKINS  
MEDICINE

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# Disclosures

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**Advisory:** Edenbridge Healthcare

# Basic Needs



# Basic Needs



**FOOD**



**WATER**

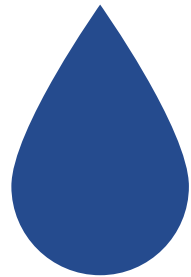


**SHELTER**

# Basic Needs



**FOOD**



**WATER**



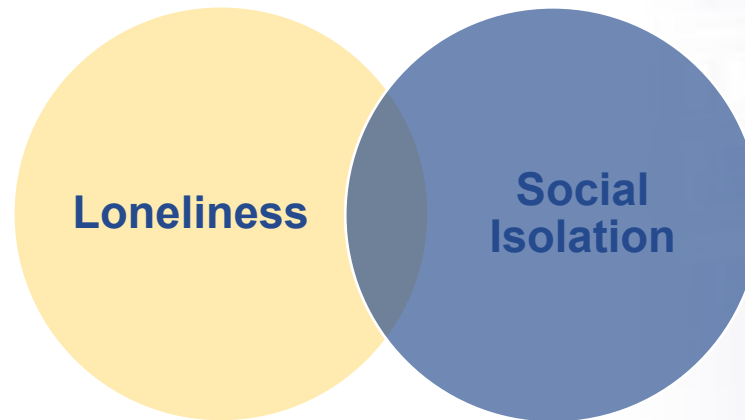
**SHELTER**



**SOCIAL  
CONNECTION**

# Social Disconnection

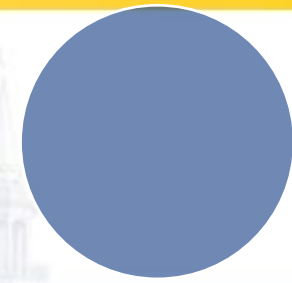
Subjective or objective deficits in social connection, including deficits in relationships and roles, their functions, and/or quality



# Loneliness

A subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connections, where inadequate refers to the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual's preferred and actual experience.

# Social Isolation



Objectively having few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction.



# How many older adults are socially isolated?



National Health & Aging Trends Study

how daily life changes as we age



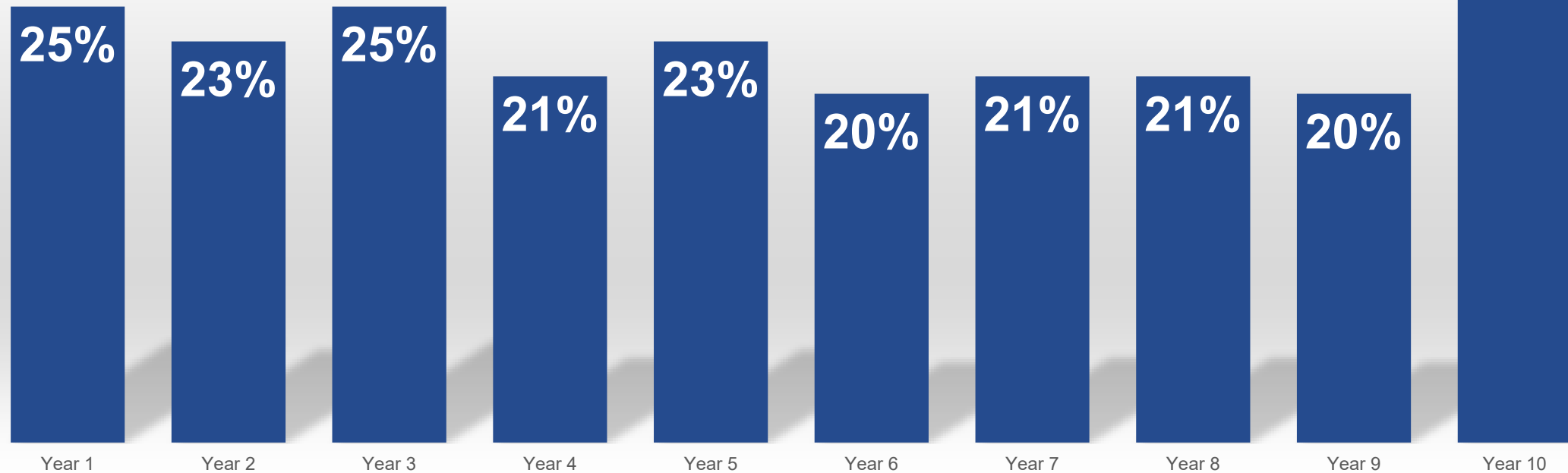
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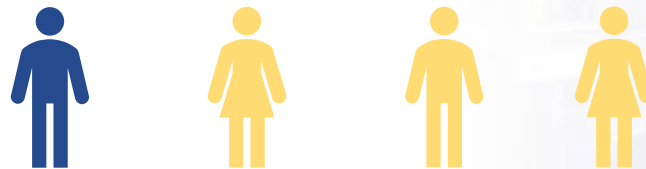
## Prevalence of Social Isolation in the National Health and Aging Trends Study (2011-2020)



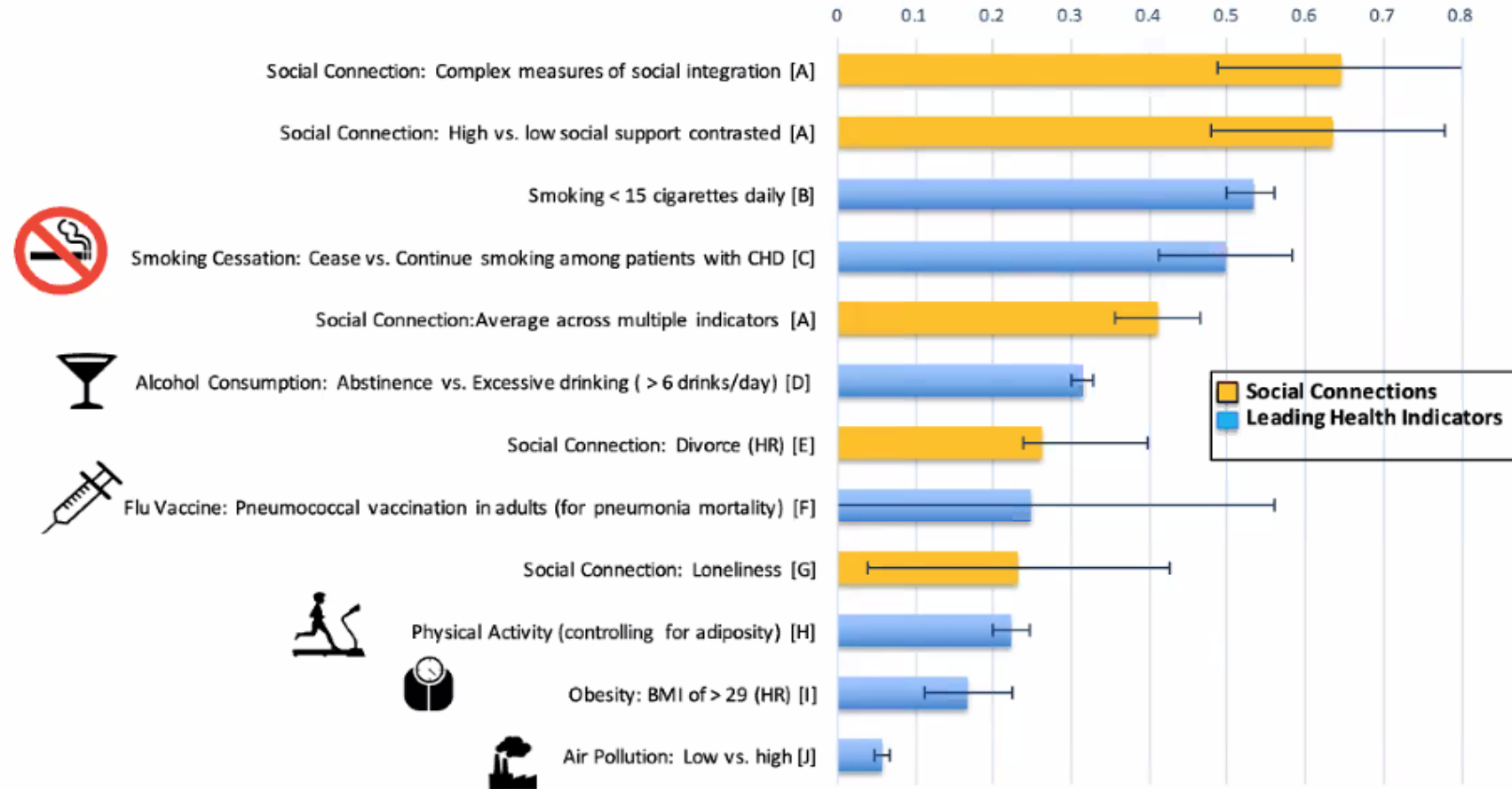
Cudjoe TKM 2023, in press

# Epidemiology of social isolation & loneliness in last years of life

- Data for Health and Retirement Study
  - Representative cohort (N=3,613)
- Measures of social isolation and loneliness
- Age >50 and older, interviews from last 4 years of life
- Found 1 in 4 were socially isolated or lonely in last 4 years of life

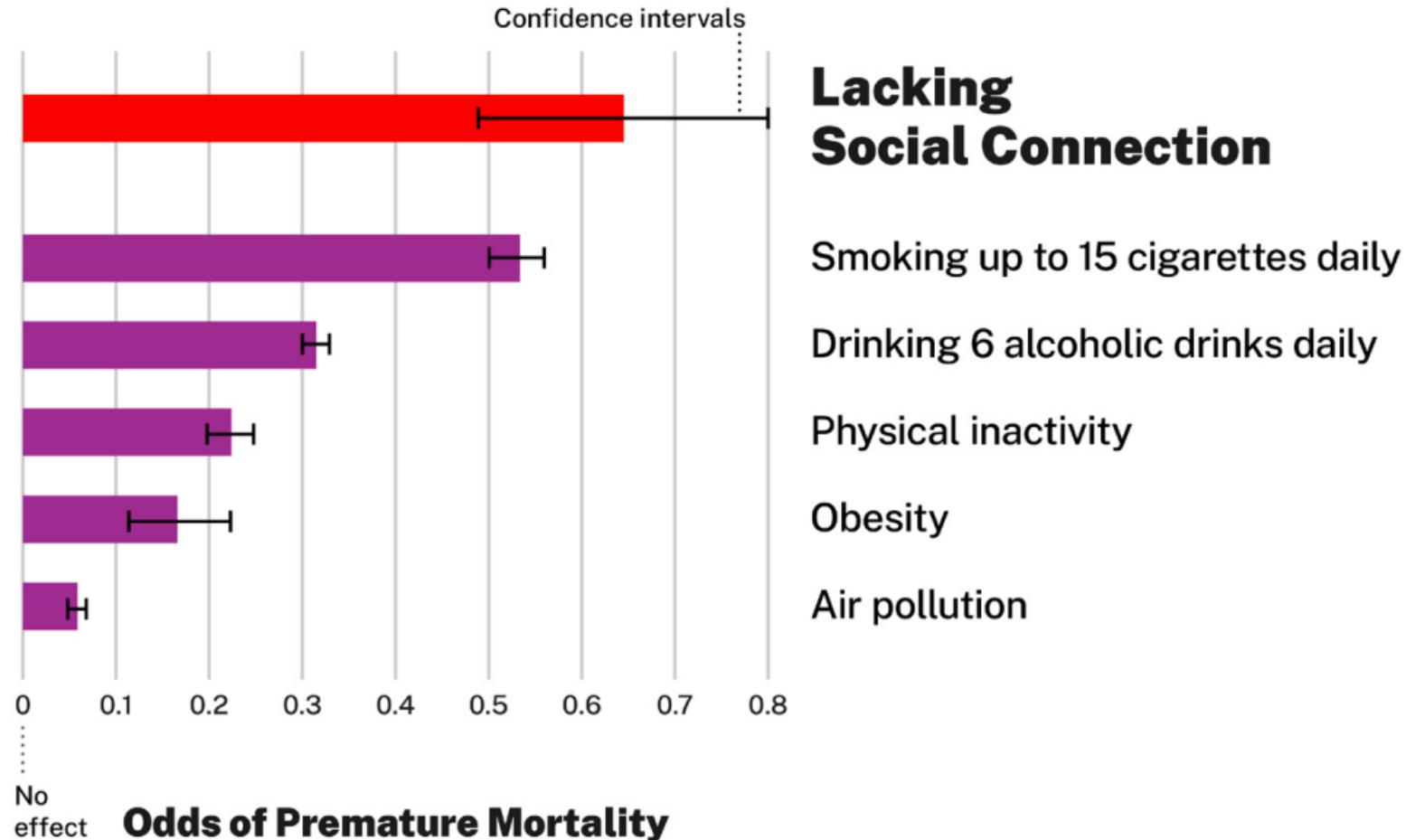


# Social Disconnection impact on premature mortality compared to other important factors



Holt-Lunstad J, et al, American Psychology 2017

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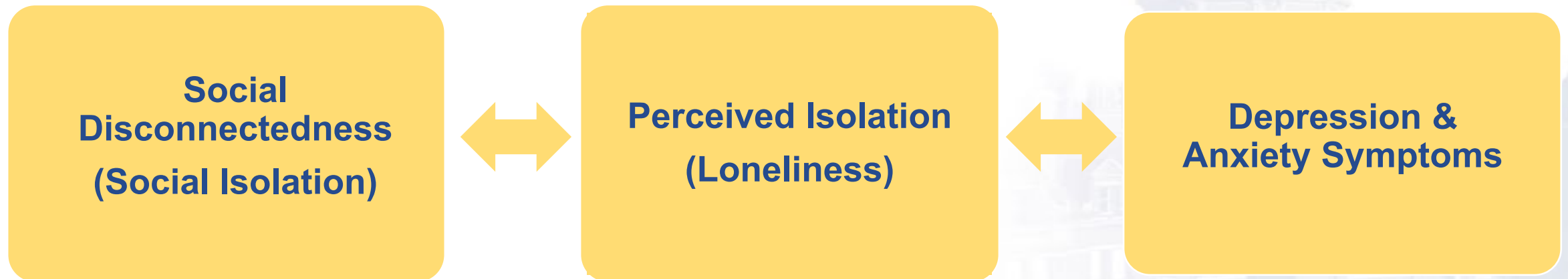


Holt-Lunstad J, et al 2017, US Surgeon General Advisory 2023

# Social Disconnection and mental health older adults



THE NATIONAL  
**SOCIAL LIFE**  
**HEALTH &**  
**AGING** PROJECT



Bidirectional, mediation by perceived isolation

Santini, Lancet Public Health, 2020

# Social Disconnection and mental health older adults

- Loneliness and Social isolation are significant contributors to mental health challenges
- Loneliness is associated with increased risk of self-harm and suicidal thoughts – independent of depression
- Social isolation and loneliness increase risk for developing depression and anxiety as well as worsens these conditions when they coexist

Wang et al BMC Psychiatry 2018, Mann et al Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology 2022, Troya et al Br J Psychiatry 2019

CONSENSUS STUDY REPORT

**Social Isolation  
and Loneliness  
in Older Adults**

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE  
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

**Develop a More Robust Evidence Base**

**Translate Research into Healthcare Practice**

**Improve Awareness**

**Strengthen Education & Training**

**Optimize ties b/w Health Syst. & Community Networks/Resources**

**NASEM, 2020**



# Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation



2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the  
Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community



**Strengthen Social Infrastructure**

**Enact Pro-Connection Public Policies**

**Mobilize the Health Sector**

**Reform Digital Environments**

**Deepen Our Knowledge**

**Cultivate a Culture of Connection**

**US Surgeon General Advisory, 2023**

# Challenges and Opportunities- Social Disconnection

**Awareness**

**Investment**

**Measurement**

**Intervention**

**Proximity**

**Equity**

**Assets**

Thank you!

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