

NC Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Aging

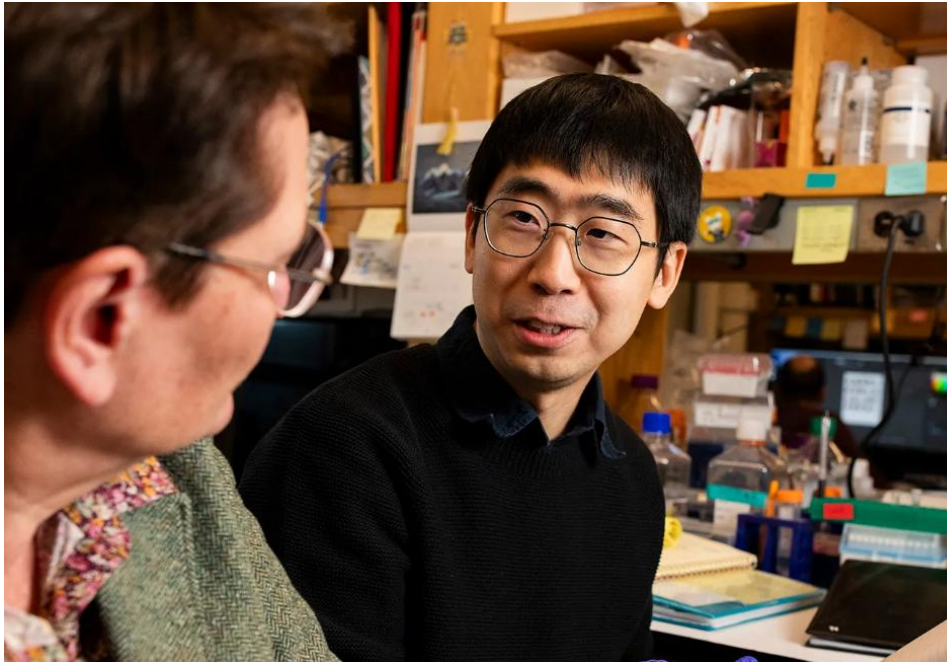
Improving Social Connectedness: The Social Bridging NC Toolkit

Louise Noble, MSW

November 19, 2025 | 11:15 to 11:30 am



Social Connection: A Fundamental Need



HEALTH

Food, water — and a friendly face

Health professionals view social contact as basic human need. Now researchers have tracked neurological basis for it.

Clea Simon | Harvard Correspondent

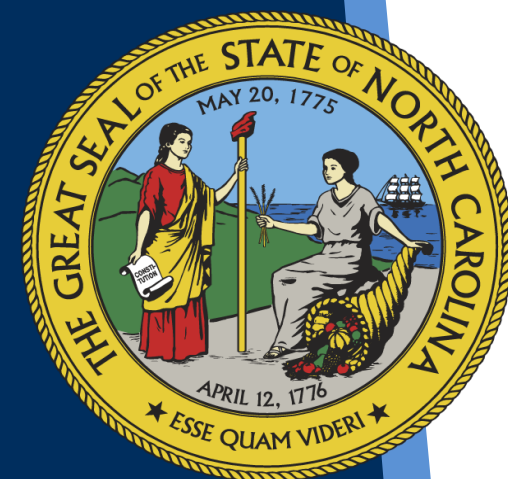
February 26, 2025 ■ 5 min read

- Neural circuit architecture that encodes social need similar to that of physiological needs

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2025/02/is-social-connection-a-basic-need-like-food-water/>

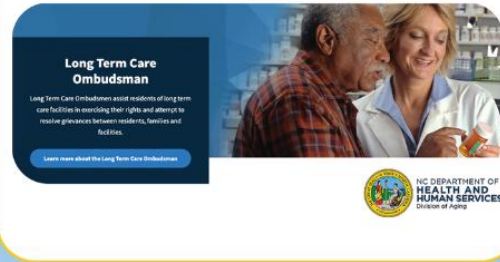


SOCIAL
BRIDGING **NC**



Local, State and National Resources

NCDHHS DIVISION OF AGING



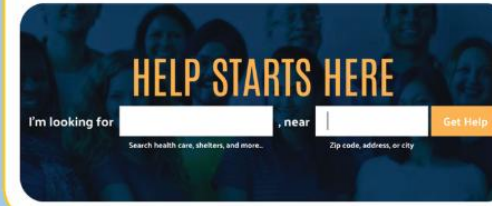
NCDHHS Division of Aging

The Division of Aging works to promote independence and enhance the dignity of North Carolina's older adults, persons with disabilities and their families through a community based system of opportunities, services, benefits and protections.

[DIVISION OF AGING WEBSITE](#)

2-1-1

North Carolina

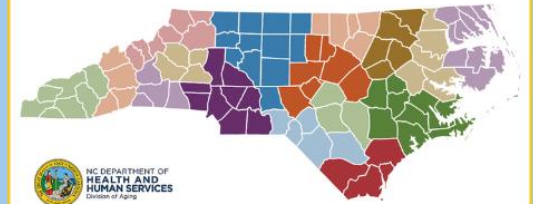


NC 211

NC 211 is an information and referral service provided by United Way of North Carolina. Families and individuals can call 2-1-1 or 1-888-892-1162 to receive free and confidential information on health and human services within their community.

[VISIT NC 211](#)

AREA AGENCIES ON AGING



Area Agencies on Aging

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) were established through the Older Americans Act to facilitate and support programs addressing the needs of older adults across the nation. Area Agencies on Aging receive federal Older Americans Act funding through the [NCDHHS - Division of Aging](#). Check out the [interactive map](#) to find the AAA covering your county!

[FIND YOUR LOCAL AAA](#)

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS FOR HEALTHY LIVING



Evidence-Based Health Promotion Programs (HANC)

Healthy Aging NC (HANC) is North Carolina's statewide resource center for evidence-based health programs and healthy aging resources. [Find resources](#) for meal delivery services, transportation assistance, and evidence-based programs for managing chronic conditions, arthritis, falls prevention, living a healthy life, and more.

[HEALTHY AGING NC WEBSITE](#)

ELDERCARE LOCATOR



Eldercare Locator

The [Eldercare Locator](#) is a nationwide service that connects older Americans and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources. Find help with services such as meals, home care or transportation, caregiver needs, training, and education, and more. Visit their [website](#) or call to speak with an information specialist at: 1-800-677-1116.

[ELDERCARE LOCATOR WEBSITE](#)

IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL & CRISIS SUPPORT



Immediate Crisis Support

National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline - the [988 Lifeline](#) provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones. NCDHHS provides numerous [suicide prevention resources](#) including action plans, statistics and toolkits for individuals, providers, and the community.

[VISIT THE 988 LIFELINE WEBSITE](#)

Virtual Events

Find fun and engaging virtual events offered throughout the state of North Carolina.

Our platform is easy to use, accessible from any device with an internet connection, and free of charge to you. Simply browse our events, choose one you're interested in, and follow the registration/join instructions on the event page



Education
Welcome to Medicare!
Thursday, October 2nd from 6pm – 7:30pm



Social
Phantoms & Fantasy Concert
Thursday October 9th from 11am – 12pm



Education
Zoom: How to Participate and Host
Tuesday, November 18th from 2pm – 3pm



Education
Dementia & Incontinence Discussion
Tuesday, November 18th from 2pm – 3pm



Education
Senior Essentials Series: Senior Legal
Friday, November 14th from 11am – 12pm



Education
Senior Essentials Series: Medicare (Bilingual Seminar)
Friday, October 10th at 11am – 12pm



Education, Social
Virtual Bible Study
Weekly on Thursdays at 10am



Health Promotion/Wellness
Virtual Qi-Gong
Every Saturday at 9:30am



Health Promotion/Wellness
Virtual Qi-Gong
Every Tuesday at 6:15pm



Education
Pet Ownership – What to expect with a new pet
Tuesday, September 30th at 2pm



Education
Fire Safety in Your Home
Thursday, October 16th at 10am



Health Promotion/Wellness
Cardio Drumming
Tuesdays at 10am



Health Promotion/Wellness
Strength and Balance
Every first and second Monday of the month at 10am



Health Promotion/Wellness
Line Dancing for Beginners
Every Thursday at 1pm



Social
"Strong Women in Books" Virtual Book Club
Every fourth Friday of the month at 10am



Education
Introduction to the Air Fryer – Cooking Breakfast
Tuesday, September 16th at 10am



Health Promotion/Wellness
Chair Yoga with Rutherford County Senior Center
Tuesdays at 9:30am



Social
Caregiver Virtual Support Group
Every 4th Monday of the month at 6pm



Health Promotion/Wellness
Chair Yoga
Wednesdays at 10am



Education, Social
Genealogy Club Zoom Group
Every second and fourth Tuesday of the month from 1:30pm – 3:30pm



Health Promotion/Wellness, Education
The Art of Aging
Tuesdays at 10am

Calls, Conversations, Connectedness: The Social Bridging NC Toolkit



Calls, Conversations,
Connectedness

The Social Bridging NC Toolkit



<https://socialbridgingnc.org/toolkit>

Primary Aims:

1

raise awareness about how social isolation and loneliness negatively impact health

2

share lessons learned, practical tips, and evidence-based practices for improving social engagement and connectedness

3

provide resources and guidance to help others create similar phone-based reassurance, wellness or social call programs for older adults

Health Impacts

Social Isolation & Loneliness Facts & Numbers



16%

In 2018, only 16% of Americans reported feeling very attached to their local community.

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



15

50%

Chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50% in older adults.

Widespread and specific studies on rates of social isolation and loneliness in NC have not been done, but, using data from NC's 2023 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), we can estimate* that:



24% or
439,000

NC adults aged 65+ are lonely (sometimes, usually, or always feel lonely)

14% or
268,000

NC adults aged 65+ are socially isolated (sometimes, rarely, or never get the social and emotional support they need)

*By multiplying the rates of social isolation and loneliness found in NC's BRFSS respondents aged 65+ with NC's total 65+ population, we can estimate how many older adults are affected by social isolation or loneliness.

Social Isolation & Loneliness: It's Not Just an Aging Issue



79%

Of young adults aged 18 to 24 feel lonely

42%

Of young adults aged 18 to 34 always feel left out

2X

Young adults aged 21 to 30 report twice as many lonely days and almost twice as many days isolated compared to older adults aged 50 to 70.



Studies on NC rates of social isolation and loneliness rates have not been done, but, using the national rates from the 2023 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, we can estimate that:

26% of NC adults aged 18 to 34 are socially isolated (sometimes, rarely, or never get the social and emotional support they need)

642,000
people

1 million
people

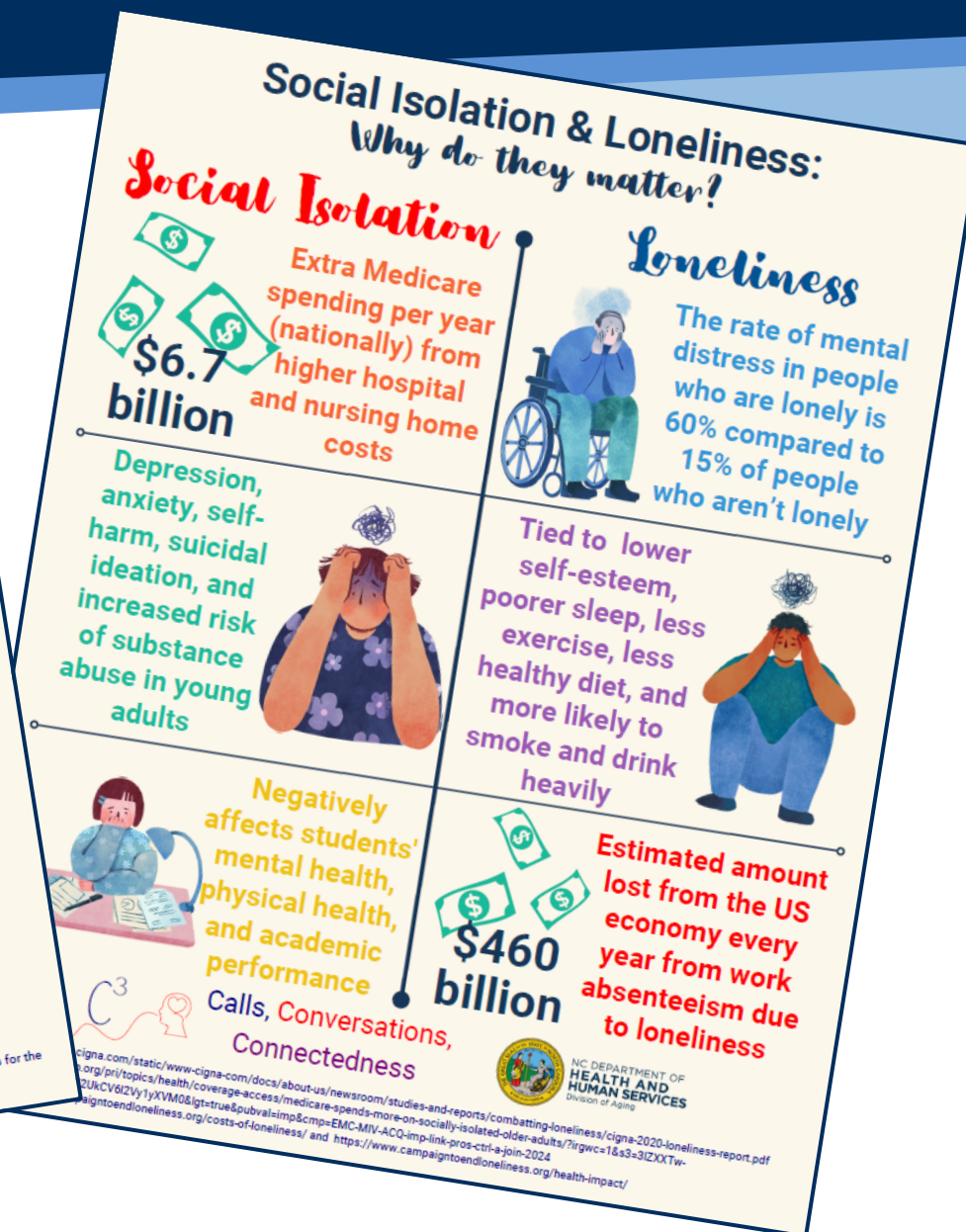
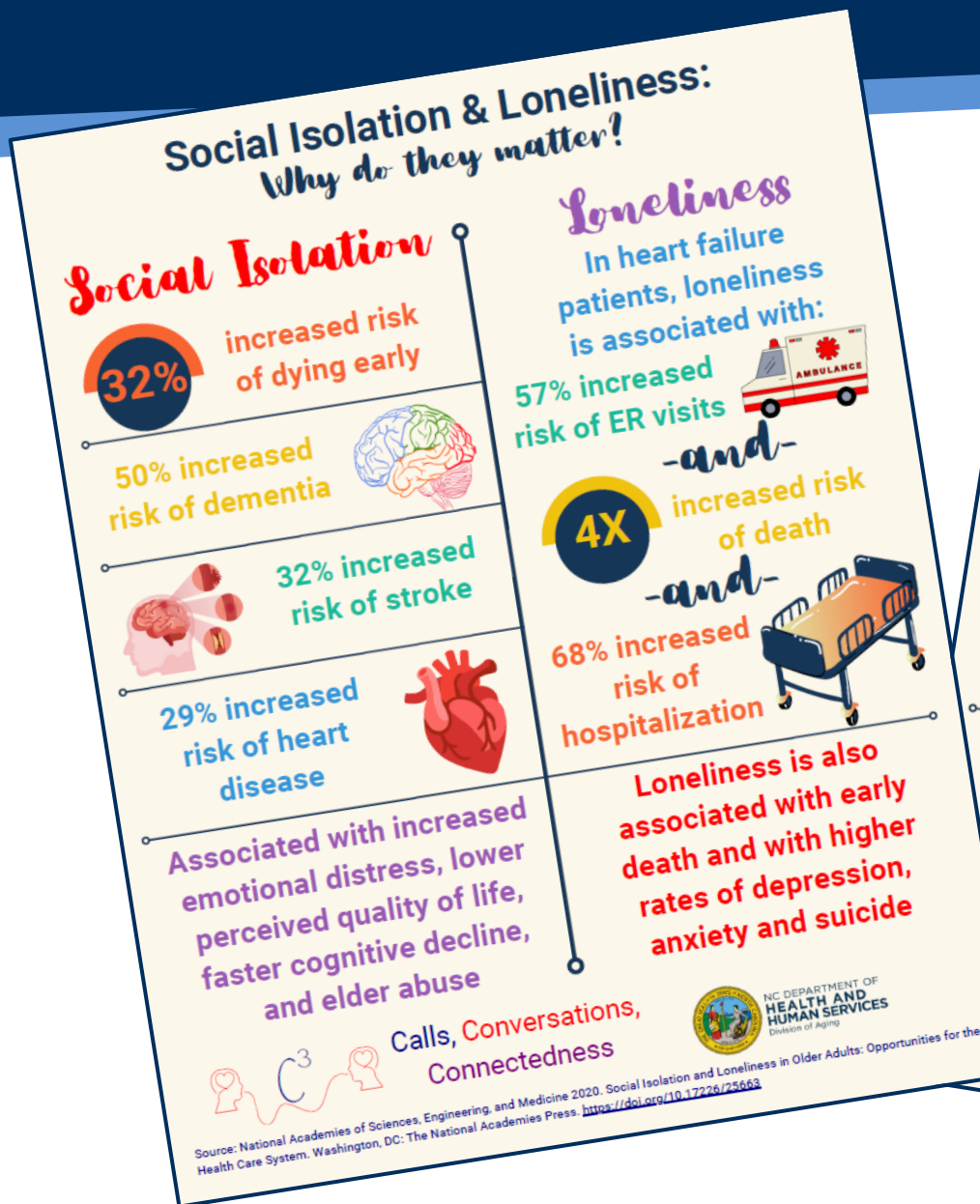
41% of NC adults aged 18 to 34 are lonely (sometimes, usually, or always feel lonely)



Calls, Conversations,
Connectedness

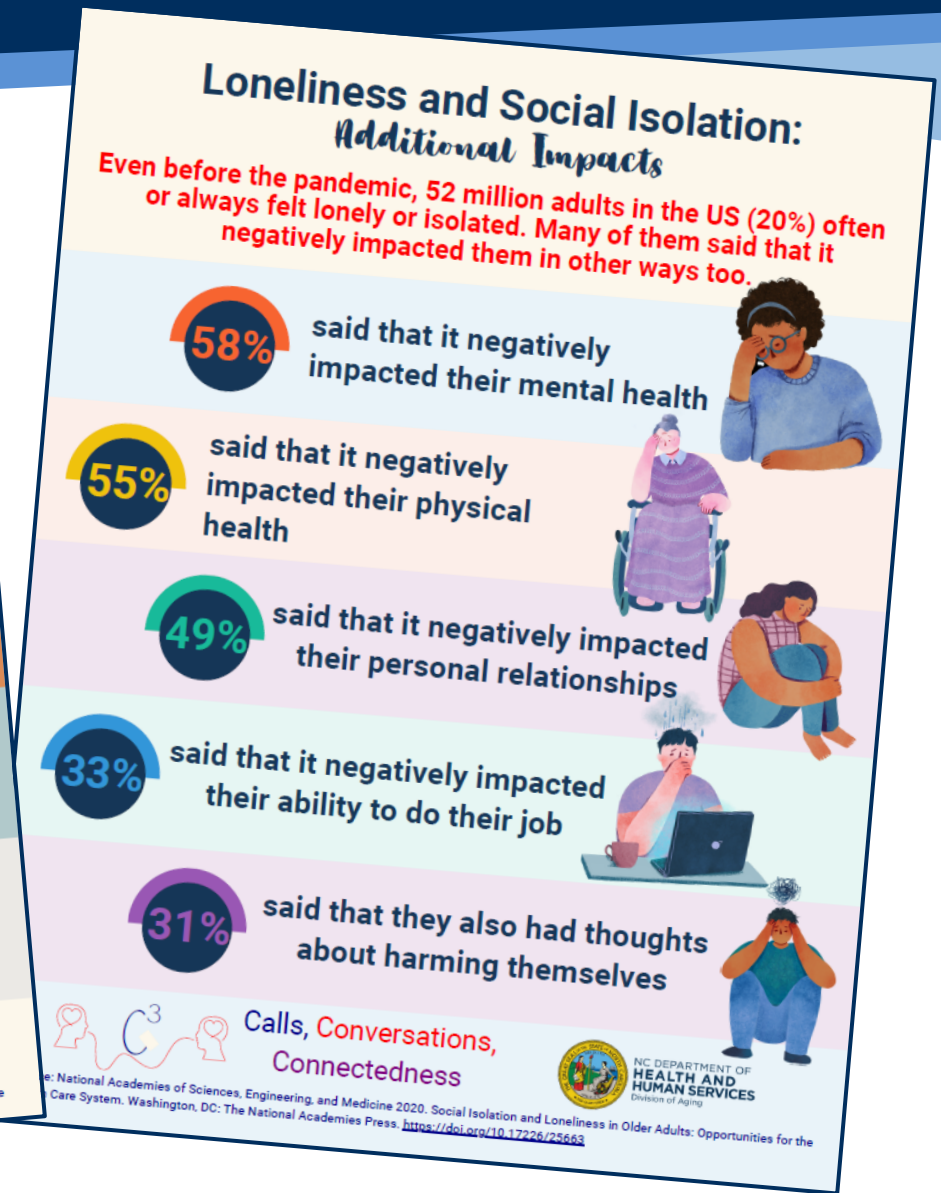
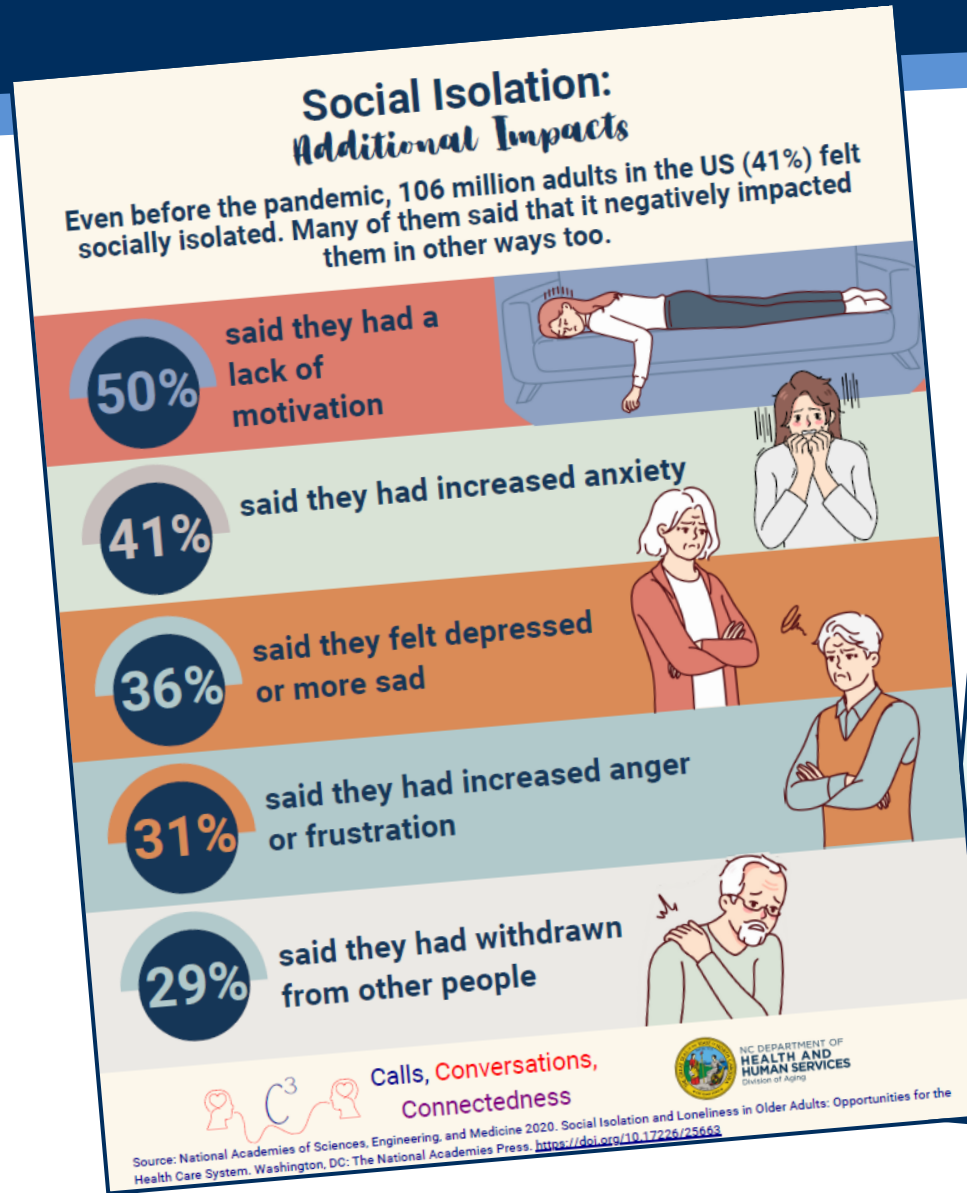


Health Impacts



National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>

Other Impacts



National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>

Benefits to Individuals

- Improved stress responses
- Minimization of negative health effects from stress
- Improved management of HTN and DM
- Increased life expectancy

In children and adolescents:

- Increased positive relationships with peers, parents and teachers
- Improved academic outcomes

Source: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-fact-cards.pdf>

NCDHHS, Division of Aging | Improving Social Connectedness and Client and Patient Outcomes | October 29, 2025

Social Isolation & Loneliness Facts & Numbers



Adults rate their social relationships with family and close friends as the most important source of meaning, purpose, and motivation in their lives.

A one-unit increase in the network of relationships among people in a given society increases the likelihood of self-reporting good health by 29%.



A study on community violence showed that an increase in social connectedness was associated with a decrease in the murder rate.

A study of 26 U.S. cities found that the cities with the highest levels of residents' love and passion for their community had the greatest growth in GDP.



A study on community violence showed that an increase in social connectedness was associated with a decrease in motor vehicle thefts.

Results from 148 studies indicate that social connection greatly increases life expectancy.



Calls, Conversations,
Connectedness



Source: Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community [Internet]. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services; 2023-. PMID: 37792968.

Benefits to Communities

- Increased participation in community-based activities increases likelihood of employment for unemployed
- Increased social connectedness associated with decreased murder rate & auto thefts
- Cities with highest levels of residents' love/passion for community have greatest growth in GDP

Source: Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* [Internet]. Washington (DC): US Department of Health and Human Services; 2023-. PMID: 37792968.

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Risk Factors

Factors That May Increase Your Risk of Being Socially Isolated or of Feeling Lonely



Cultural or language barriers

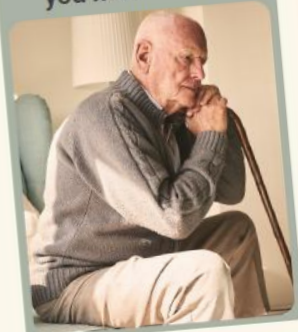


Having financial difficulties that affect the amount of time and resources you have for social engagement or that impact the choices you have about where to live and how safe you are.

Lack of social support or the loss or death of a close friend or family member



Lack of transportation or some other independent living difficulty that keeps you homebound



Having a hearing, vision or mobility loss or a disability that limits your ability to participate in daily activities and/or restricts your social functioning.



Calls, Conversations, Connectedness



Sources: National Institutes of Health National Institute on Aging, United Health Foundation's America's Health Rankings, and AARP Foundation's Framework for Isolation in Adults Over 50

Factors That May Increase Your Risk of Being Socially Isolated or of Feeling Lonely



Caring for a loved one who is unwell



Separation from your friends or family from a move or some other event



Living alone or in a rural, unsafe, or hard-to-reach neighborhood (Living alone can be a risk factor, but not everyone who lives alone is isolated.)

Experiencing discrimination based on your age, gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity



Having never married or being divorced, separated or widowed



Changes in or a loss of one of your roles, such as retirement or losing your job unexpectedly



Changes in your mental health such as loss of cognitive functioning



Feeling a lack of purpose



Validated, Standardized, Publicly Available

Upstream Social Isolation Risk Screener

The authors of this tool describe it as a combination of objective and subjective measures of the physical, emotional, and social support aspects of social isolation. It is intended to measure the **risk of isolation** among noninstitutionalized older adults **early**. It can be completed by the older adult alone or with a professional.

Instructions: The scale typically takes 5 to 7 minutes to complete and the total score is an equally weighted sum of the thirteen items. Detailed instructions for scoring and interpreting the results can be found at the bottom of the page.

- 1) I feel isolated from others.
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
- 2) I lack companionship.
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
- 3) I feel no one really knows me well.
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
- 4) I can find companionship when I want it.
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
- 5) In the past two weeks, how often have you attended: social clubs, residents' groups or committees?
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
- 6) In the past two weeks, how often have you attended: religious groups?
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often
- 7) I avoid socializing because it is hard to understand conversations, especially when there is background noise.
☐ Never ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often

Lubben Social Network Scale

The Lubben Social Network Scale is a validated instrument designed to gauge social support by measuring perceived social support received by family and friends. It consists of an equally weighted sum of six items that measure the number and frequency of contact with friends and family members.

Instructions: The scale typically takes 5 to 10 minutes to complete and the total score is an equally weighted sum of the six items. Each LSNS-6 question is scored from 0 to 5. The total score ranges from 0 to 30. Detailed instructions for scoring and interpreting the results can be found at the bottom of the page.

Consider the people to whom you are related by birth, marriage, adoption, or partnership (items 1, 2 and 3)...

How many relatives do you see or hear from at least once a month?

☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 or 4 ☐ 5 to 8 ☐ 9 or more

How many relatives do you feel at ease with that you can talk about private matters?

☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 or 4 ☐ 5 to 8 ☐ 9 or more

How many relatives do you feel close to such that you could call on them for help?

☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 or 4 ☐ 5 to 8 ☐ 9 or more

SHIPs: Considering all of your friends including those who live in your neighborhood (for questions 4, 5 and 6)...

How many of your friends do you see or hear from at least once a month?

☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 or 4 ☐ 5 to 8 ☐ 9 or more

How many friends do you feel at ease with that you can talk about private matters?

☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 or 4 ☐ 5 to 8 ☐ 9 or more

How many friends do you feel close to such that you could call on them for help?

☐ None ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 or 4 ☐ 5 to 8 ☐ 9 or more

To score responses and interpret the results: None = 0, one = 1, two = 2, three or four = 3, five through eight = 4, nine or more = 5. A score of 12 and lower delineates "at-risk" for social isolation.

Source: J. Lubben, E. Blozik, G. Gillmann, S. Iliffe, W. R. Von Kruse, J. C. Beck and A. E. Stuck, *Gerontologist* 2006, 46, 503-513.

Three-item Loneliness Scale

The Three-item Loneliness Scale is adapted from the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale and is an interviewer-administered scale comprised of three questions that measure three dimensions of loneliness: relational connectedness, social connectedness and self-perceived isolation. It is valid when self-administered by person and by telephone interview.

Instructions: The following phrasing is suggested as a lead-in before the questions are read to the respondent.

The next questions are about how you feel about different aspects of your life. For each one, tell me how often you feel that way.

- 1) First, how often do you feel that you lack companionship: Hardly ever, some of the time, or often?
☐ Hardly ever ☐ Some of the time ☐ Often
- 2) How often do you feel left out: Hardly ever, some of the time, or often?
☐ Hardly ever ☐ Some of the time ☐ Often
- 3) How often do you feel isolated from others? (Is it hardly ever, some of the time, or often?)
☐ Hardly ever ☐ Some of the time ☐ Often

To score responses and interpret the results:

Each question is rated on a 3-point scale: Hardly Ever = 1 point; Some of the Time = 2 points; Often = 3 points. All items are added together to give a total score that can range from 3 to 9. Researchers in the past have grouped people who score 3 to 5 as "not lonely" and people who score 6 to 9 as "lonely."

Citation: Hughes, M. E., Waite, L. J., Hawkey, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2004). A short scale for measuring loneliness in large surveys: Results from two population-based studies. *Research on Aging*, 26(6), 655-672.

Smith ML and Barrett ME (2024) Development and validation of the Upstream Social Interaction Risk Scale (U-SIRS-13): a scale to assess threats to social connectedness among older adults. *Front. Public Health*. 12:1454847. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2024.1454847

J. Lubben, E. Blozik, G. Gillmann, S. Iliffe, W. R. Von Kruse, J. C. Beck and A. E. Stuck, *Gerontologist* 2006, 46, 503-513.

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