



Aging Forum: Understanding Isolation and & Depression in Older Adults

Loneliness is a growing health epidemic. We live in the most technologically connected age in the history of civilization, yet rates of loneliness have doubled since the 1980s.

(Dr. Vivek Murthy, Former U.S. Surgeon General, 2017)

- About 1 / 3 of Americans age 65+ live alone
- About 1 / 2 of Americans age 85+ live alone



Goals

- Examine Isolation, Depression and Loneliness and how these conditions affect older adults.
- Depression is NOT a normal part of aging.
- Identify resources to help combat/mitigate these conditions.

What Does Research Tell Us?

- More than 8,000,000 adults aged 50 and older are affected by isolation
- The health risks associated with prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day



Older Adults & Isolation and Depression

- Many older adults go through major life changes that make them more vulnerable to isolation and depression
- Aging may bring changes to social relationships and readjustment can be difficult
- Socially isolated seniors are more prone to depression
- A major risk factor for isolation is loss of a spouse
- Loneliness is contagious
- Lack of physical activity makes someone more prone to loneliness



Possible Causes of Depression

- Biological differences/physical changes to the brain
- Brain chemistry/neurotransmitters
- Hormones
- Inherited traits
- Traumatic or stressful events
- History of other mental health disorders
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Certain medications



Health Risks

Untreated depression is associated with:

- Higher risk of death
- Heart Disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Dementia and Alzheimer's
- Suicide
- Insomnia
- Rapid weight change



Ideas & Solutions

Isolation, loneliness and depression are not natural parts of aging. The need for social interaction - including intimacy continues throughout our lives. More broadly:

- Transportation should be a priority to help older adults main social connections.
- Incorporate assistive technology as a means to expand connections and community inclusion.
- Provide low-cost/no-cost in person interactive activities at centralized locations to encourage social connection.
- Expand Medicare annual depression screenings in primary care settings.
- Community education and outreach about the conditions and resources to prevent them.

Lived Experience Video



regional impact + local relevance

