



June 13, 2023

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker McCarthy, and Minority Leader Jeffries:

We write to urge you to include critical reforms in future legislative efforts that address the burgeoning crisis of social isolation and loneliness in the U.S. and ensure all Americans have the opportunities and supports necessary to be socially engaged in society. The negative health effects of social isolation and loneliness are profound and threaten the health and wellbeing of your constituents and communities across the nation. The evidence base for this crisis in our country has never been more clear; thus, we urge you to swiftly pass federal legislation to support the millions of individuals who struggle with isolation and loneliness in America.

### **Background**

The evidence is overwhelming: Tens of millions of Americans of all ages suffer from the effects of social isolation and/or loneliness, with more than half of U.S. adults and nearly one-fourth of older adults (65 and over) report suffering from social isolation.<sup>1,2</sup> Recent reports show that nearly 80 percent of young adults experience serious loneliness, with high rates among teenage girls in particular.<sup>3,4</sup> Furthermore, social disconnection threatens the physical, mental, and economic health of the nation. Health impacts are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, drinking too much alcohol, or suffering from obesity.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, lack of social connection is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, impaired immunity, and even premature death.<sup>6</sup> According to a recent survey, Americans with

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce LD, Wu JS, Lustig SL, Russell DW, Nemecek DA. *Loneliness in the United States: A 2018 National Panel Survey of Demographic, Structural, Cognitive, and Behavioral Characteristics*. Am J Health Promot. 2019;33(8):1123-1133.

<sup>2</sup> 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>.

<sup>3</sup> Cigna Corporation. *The Loneliness Epidemic Persists: A Post-Pandemic Look at the State of Loneliness among U.S. Adults*. 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Twenge JM, Haidt J, Blake AB, McAllister C, Lemon H, Le Roy, A. *Worldwide Increases in Adolescent Loneliness*. Journal of Adolescence. 2021;93: 257-269.

<sup>5</sup> Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. *Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States*. Am Psychol. 2017;72(6):517-530.

<sup>6</sup> Penninkilampi R, Casey AN, Singh MF, Brodaty H. *The Association between Social Engagement, Loneliness, and Risk of Dementia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*. J Alzheimers Dis. 2018;66(4):1619-1633.



mental health issues are more than twice as likely to be lonely than those without a history of mental health issues; a statistic difficult to ignore amidst the nation's ongoing mental health crisis.

The impact on the economy is also significant. Recent studies have shown that social isolation and loneliness cost the U.S. economy as much as \$406 billion a year<sup>7</sup> in addition to the \$6.7 billion Medicare spends annually and the \$154 billion employers across the nation lose each year in productivity due to absenteeism.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the 62 percent of employed adults who consider themselves lonely are associated with lower quality of work and higher risk of turnover.<sup>9</sup>

These deleterious consequences can be seen in communities across the nation, including schools, workplaces, civic and faith-based organizations, and individual family units. With the health and well-being of the nation at risk and increasing economic pressures only exacerbated by rates of isolation and loneliness, it is clear comprehensive action is necessary.

### **Federal Policy Solutions**

The Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness (The Coalition), launched in 2018, is the only organization that convenes a diverse set of national stakeholders including consumer groups, patient advocates, providers, health plans, community-based organizations, behavioral health groups, private sector innovators and start-ups, academic leaders, and many others in order to advocate for policy change to combat the adverse effects of social isolation and loneliness for all Americans.

As such, the Coalition has developed consensus-based, comprehensive federal policy recommendations to address this burgeoning public health crisis.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, our federal solutions augment and support coordination and collaboration with relevant state and local entities. We urge you to pass federal legislation that addresses the following overarching policy priorities during the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress:

1. **Increase public awareness regarding social isolation, loneliness, and social connection and their effects on health, belonging, well-being, and resilience.** Increasing public awareness will have a force multiplying effect on reducing the number of Americans suffering from social isolation and/or loneliness.
2. **Enhance social services and supports to address social isolation, loneliness, and promote social connection.** Solutions to address social isolation and loneliness should leverage existing social services and supports as well as promote community-based programs and interventions.
3. **Advance health services and supports to address social isolation, loneliness, and promote social connection.** Given the detrimental physical and psychosocial impact of social isolation and

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<sup>7</sup> Cost of loneliness for a lonely worker is calculated by multiplying the average additional days missed by lonely workers (15 days) by the average wages given an eight-hour workday and the average private-sector hourly salary (\$34.77) sourced from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Employer Costs for Employee Compensation, 2019 Q3).

<sup>8</sup> Bowers, A., Wu, J., Lustig, S. and Nemecek, D. *Loneliness Influences Avoidable Absenteeism and Turnover Intention Reported by Adult Workers in the United States*. Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance. 2022;9(2):312-335.

<sup>9</sup> Cigna Corporation. *Loneliness and Its Impact on the American Workplace: Understanding the drivers of workplace loneliness, the costs and the solutions*. 2020.

<sup>10</sup> The full policy priorities, including specific legislative recommendations, can be found at our website: [www.endsocialisolation.org/policy-priorities](http://www.endsocialisolation.org/policy-priorities).



loneliness, healthcare stakeholders must be positioned and supported to have a role in addressing this issue.

4. **Leverage innovative evidence-based technology solutions that foster connection and social integration.** Advances in technologies and innovation hold the promise to connect individuals with people, services, and programs.
5. **Advance research to enhance the prevalence of social isolation, loneliness, and connection.** The effects of social isolation and loneliness as well as potential interventions should be informed by a robust evidence base.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your ongoing leadership to improve our nation's health care system to ensure the highest quality health for all Americans. Strengthening the social connectedness of our communities is vital to protect the health and wellbeing of people across the nation and to improve our economy and thus must be a national priority. We urge you to seriously consider this issue in the 118th Congress on behalf of the estimated 44 million Americans experiencing significant loneliness. If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Coalition's Senior Policy Advisor, Daneen Sekoni, at [dsekoni@healthsperien.com](mailto:dsekoni@healthsperien.com).

Sincerely,

A Caring Voice For You, LLC  
ACTNow for Mental Health  
AgeGuide Northeastern Illinois  
AgeOptions  
Aging Dynamics  
American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work  
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention  
American Psychological Association Services  
American Society on Aging  
Art Pharmacy  
Barnes Family Foundation  
Chicago Hyde Park Village  
CoGenerate  
Depression Bipolar Support Alliance  
DOROT, Inc  
Elder Justice Coalition  
Eventbrite  
For All Ages, CT  
Forward Chicago  
Foundation for Social Connection  
Fountain House  
Front Porch Community Services  
Genworth Financial  
Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO)  
Healthy Places By Design  
Inclusivv  
Intuition Robotics



Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia  
LinkAGES Connects  
Lita Co-Op  
Long-Term Quality Alliance  
Lyft  
Meals on Wheels America  
National Alliance for Caregiving  
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
National Partnership for Hospice and Healthcare Innovation (NPHI)  
NeverTechLate  
Nextdoor  
Only7Seconds  
Papa  
Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health  
Psychotherapy Action Network  
Public Sector HealthCare Roundtable  
Pyx Health  
Resilient Georgia  
RRF Foundation for Aging  
Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness  
SCAN Health Plan  
Skyline Village Chicago  
Smarter Health Care Coalition  
Sunny LLC  
The Clowder Group  
The Coalition to Transform Advanced Care  
The Defensive Line  
The Foundation for Art & Healing  
The Gerontological Society of America  
The Grandmother Collective  
The Motion Picture & Television Fund  
Trust for America's Health  
UJA Federation of New York  
UPMC Health Plan  
USAging  
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