

Loneliness: has Covid made a difference?

Alison Ingram, Age UK



Loneliness in the UK (pre-pandemic)

- 5% of adults (16 years and over) in England reporting feeling lonely “often/always”
- 16% of adults reported feeling lonely sometimes and 24% occasionally (stats from 2016-2017)
- Two fifths of older people say the television is their main company (3.9 million people)
- The number of over-50s experiencing loneliness is set to reach two million by 2025/6. This compares to around 1.4 million in 2016/7 – a 49% increase in 10 years
- Disconnected communities could be costing the UK economy £32 billion every year.

(ONS, Age UK, Eden Project)



Loneliness in the UK (in Covid)

- Almost half (45%) of the UK population had felt anxious or worried in the previous two weeks, which rose to 64% of respondents who have a pre-existing mental health condition
- A quarter of people (25%) reported feeling lonely in the previous two weeks
- Feelings of loneliness were higher in younger people too, with 38% and 34% of people aged 18-24 and 25-34 respectively
- Seeing family freely (25%) or seeing friends freely (16%) were highlighted as ways that would help alleviate people's feelings of loneliness
- Almost one in five (18%) of the population reported feeling hopeless and half (49%) reported feeling frustrated in the last two weeks

(Mental Health Foundation)



Looking beyond Covid

- We know that some people who weren't lonely before Covid are now lonely
- We know that some people who were lonely before Covid are now more lonely
- We don't know how people are going to recover post-Covid:
 - Will some aspects of people's loneliness be solved as a result of Covid restrictions being lifted, enabling them to see family and friends?
 - Are the systems and structures that were in place before Covid still going to be available to people? Will services/organisations have closed?
 - Will services that have gone solely online return to other channels? Will greater numbers of people what to access online services?
 - Will there have been a deterioration of people's mental/physical ability that will make it more difficult for people to access the support they formerly relied upon?
 - Will Covid continue to deter people from leaving home, even if the virus is at a safe and controlled level?



What can we do?

Points to consider:

- Data – what do we need to know to inform our thinking? How has the situation changed in the last 12 months?
- Engagement – how can we identify and connect with the people who are in need of support? Where relevant, how to do this in a Covid-safe way?
- Approaches – are pre-Covid models and approaches still valid?
- Resourcing (financial and otherwise) – what resources will be available and where will they come from?
- Partnership – how can we coordinate what we are doing and avoid duplication?
- Impact – how can we capture and track the difference we are making, collectively?

