

Tackling loneliness & connecting our communities together

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Why do we care?

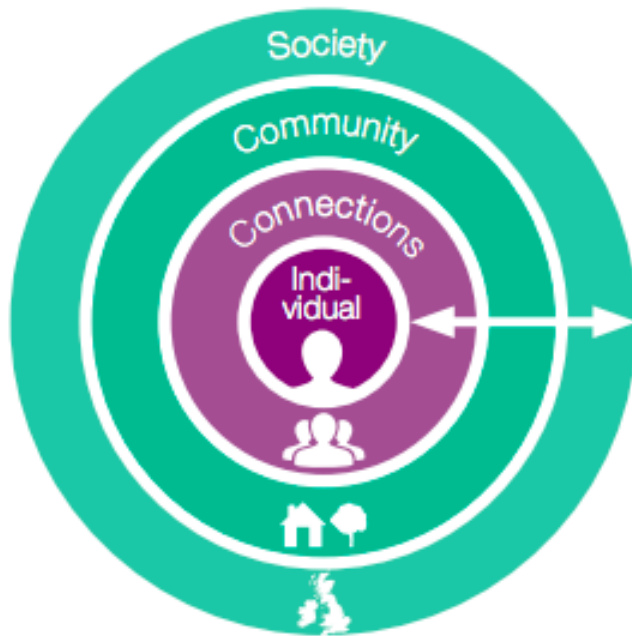
- Connected communities and individuals are more resilient
- Devastating impact across our services – e.g. for
 - refugees
 - victims of terrorist attacks
 - people with health / mobility issues
- The most common underlying issues for people using our health & social care services
- **A personal crisis can cause loneliness... and loneliness can make the crisis worse**



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The drivers of loneliness

Drivers of loneliness and barriers to connection



Social and cultural norms, work/life balance, stigma, digital age, insular communities, political landscape, financial hardships



Social activities, funding cuts, statutory services, transport, neighbourhood safety



Friends and acquaintances, family, colleagues



Sense of self, health, income, energy, confidence, emotions, perceptions

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Loneliness before Covid-19

Millions of adults often or always lonely



An increased risk of a range of **health conditions**

200,000 older people not had a conversation with a friend/relative for more than a month



Affected **people of all ages**

Major life events or **transitions** can be key triggers for loneliness, as can **discrimination** and **not feeling a sense of belonging**



Can't be eliminated... but can **do more to stop becoming chronic**

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Loneliness during Covid-19

Loneliness during lockdown

“I ain’t got nobody. I’ve just got me and my dog. It’s a blooming nightmare... I feel lost.”

(Connecting Communities service user)

“I’m feeling even more isolated than I did before, and just trying to hold everything together. I’m on quite a bit of medication anyway. Feeling totally lonely and totally vulnerable, and worried about how long I can cope. All the support I’ve had for anxiety, panic attacks and agoraphobia has been put on hold.”

(Connecting Communities service user)

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“Sometimes I just sit here and I’m thinking, it ain’t worth living. The more I’m isolated the worse it is.”

(Connecting Communities service user)

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Moving out of lockdown



Before, it was mainly face to face or over the phone. Now I've been talking more by phone during the lockdown, but recently that has stopped...it's like if someone is calling them to have a conversation, why would they do that when they can have a conversation in person with someone else.

Female, 65+, County Down



I want to get out, and then when I'm out I feel anxious. It makes me feel lonelier because I can see people out with other people enjoying themselves.

Female, 65+, Manchester



% of UK adults who felt uncomfortable doing the following activities:



65%

per cent felt uncomfortable taking transport

58%

felt uncomfortable socialising in public indoor spaces with people not from their household

42%

felt uncomfortable having friends or family inside their home

26%

felt uncomfortable socialising in their own or other people's gardens

29%

felt uncomfortable shopping for essential items

36%

felt uncomfortable socialising in public outdoor spaces with people not from their household

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Tackling loneliness during recovery together



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Barriers to connections

The APPG inquiry found:

- There are too many barriers preventing people from connecting – such as a lack of safe, welcoming and accessible green spaces, parks and gardens, public toilets, playing areas, local bus services, and ramps for disabled people.
- Too many people face barriers to digital connection as a result of lack of access to mobile technology and the internet, as well as a lack of digital skills and confidence.
- Poorly designed or unsuitable housing and neighbourhoods can make it hard for people to meet each other, maintain social connections and develop a sense of belonging.
- Some communities and groups were highlighted as facing particular disadvantage (for example in relation to transport and mobility).

National leadership



Recommendation:



The Prime Minister should commit to a “Connected Recovery” from the COVID-19 pandemic, recognising the work needed to rebuild social connections following periods of isolation and the importance of connection to resilience to future shocks.

Key roles for government include:



Setting strategic direction and a sense of priority around tackling loneliness.



Ensuring that national policy supports connection.



Funding – including for community and social infrastructure and to support local authority activity.



Growing the evidence base and sharing best practice.



Encouraging culture change – for example by tackling the stigma of loneliness.

Translating national policy into local action

In responses to our survey, we heard about a range of important ways in which local authorities and their partners (such as health authorities, fire and rescue, etc.) could lead action on loneliness. These included:



Working with local people to develop local strategies.



Commissioning and funding community responses.



Providing key public services including housing, transport and community infrastructure.



Shaping the places people live.



Local authorities have a number of important roles to play in developing strategies for addressing loneliness including:



Understanding local need and working with populations at risk of loneliness to identify barriers and develop solutions.



Coordinating activity across sectors in a local area, and mapping assets and gaps.



Convening and brokering relationships between statutory and community organisations.

Recommendation:



The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should incentivise and support all areas to develop a local loneliness action plan, which should

encompass action on place-making and on delivering the activities needed for social prescribing. As part of this:

- National funding should be distributed locally in line with local action plans for loneliness.
- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should share examples of best practice and learning.

Investing in the community and social infrastructure needed to connect

Respondents highlighted the importance of:



Libraries – which are increasingly acting as community hubs but are nevertheless still under threat of closure in many areas.²⁶



Outdoor spaces, such as parks.



Public transport – which was recognised not just as a means of getting around but as a space in which people could connect.



Pubs and cafes.



Recommendation:



The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should build commitment to tackling loneliness into regeneration and recovery programmes for communities, including the Towns Fund and other key initiatives, such as the Levelling Up Fund, Shared Prosperity Fund and Future High Streets Fund.

Recommendation:



The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport should work across government, including with the Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as well as with arm's-length bodies and other funders, such as The National Lottery Community Fund, to create a sustainable fund to support VCFSE sector action on loneliness.

Loneliness proof transport & residential spaces

Recommendation:



The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government should take steps to ensure people living in existing homes

are supported to build and maintain connections, by:

- Reviewing its housing support policies to ensure the role of good housing in supporting social connection is taken into account.
- Ensuring that all communities have access to support with minor repairs and adaptation to enable people to remain living independently in their own homes for longer.

Recommendation:



As part of the changes to the design code being made in response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, the Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government should ensure new housing developments and neighbourhoods promote and increase social connections. To support this work it should:

- Work with private and public sector housing developers, and experts on loneliness, including the Loneliness Lab, to develop a charter for “loneliness proofing” new developments.

Recommendation:



The Department for Transport should “loneliness proof” its strategies for transport and mobility – requiring explicit consideration of how new transport routes,

and infrastructure can be designed to maximise social connection.

The Department for Transport should require local transport authorities to:

- Factor in the need to travel to leisure and social activities in local transport planning.
- Consult those with expertise on local needs in relation to loneliness and social isolation – including groups at risk of loneliness and providers of social prescribing schemes – when developing local transport plans.



Closing the digital divide

Recommendation:



The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport should adopt the recommendation of the Good Things Foundation to invest £130 million over four

years to support four million people cross the digital divide, including by increasing digital skills and confidence.



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A Connected Recovery



A connected recovery

Findings of the APPG on Loneliness Inquiry



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Loneliness: 'Alone is ok, but being lonely - it hurts'

By Helen Catt & Christina McSorley
BBC News

24 March

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New housing developments and public transport should be 'loneliness proofed'

There are 'too many barriers' preventing people from reconnecting when Covid restrictions start to ease, according to a report from MPs and peers.

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Loneliness

This article is more than 1 month old

Action needed to tackle post-Covid 'loneliness emergency', MPs say

Investing in more benches, public toilets and street lighting will encourage people to reconnect, says parliamentary group

The Guardian UK edition ▾

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A connected recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated loneliness and isolation for those most vulnerable in our communities. Rebuilding connections following the pandemic will be vital not only to individual wellbeing but to the long-term resilience and prosperity of our society.

The Government must therefore ensure that rebuilding connection is a core objective of its COVID-19 recovery plans and investment. This should include:

- Support for local places to develop and deliver cross-sector recovery plans to tackle loneliness, including:
 - Targeted support for those shown to be at greatest risk of loneliness.
 - Support for social prescribing services.
 - Investment in community infrastructure to support social connection.
- Additional investment in mental health support to meet needs exacerbated by the pandemic.
- New long-term resourcing to support the VCFSE sector as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, including through local VCFSE infrastructure bodies.



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Thank you

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#TacklingLoneliness



Get help: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-help-with-loneliness/support-and-resources-for-adults>