

SOCIAL ISOLATION IN WASHINGTON STATE



Building Connection Now and Beyond

PROJECT TEAM

This paper is a collaborative endeavor between the Department of Social and Health Services, Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA), Home and Community Services (HCS) division; the Department of Health (DOH); Area Agencies on Aging (AAA); and private organizations serving the state's older population and individuals with disabilities. This group brought insight into what works best in Washington State to mitigate social isolation's adverse effects. We hope this insight will be relevant in addressing isolation and loneliness post-pandemic and in the years to come.

We want to thank all who have contributed to this report. Our thanks also go to the many organizations that have worked with us throughout the years.

The purpose of this document is to share best practices and interventions that have been implemented in Washington State and nationally to address social isolation and loneliness.

Some of the programs listed are offered only in specific counties, but many others are available statewide and nationally. All have accompanying links or points of contact so you can find out more about the programs. This document is intended to be a living document, and updates will occur twice a year to capture new programs and add to the list of resources to help older adults feel more connected.

Bea Rector, Director, HCS

Catherine Kinnaman, Deputy Director, HCS

Montana Salvoni, Facilitator, HCS

Dawn Shuford-Pavlich, Project Lead, HCS

Susan Engels, Office Chief, HCS

Jacqueline Cobbs, Office Chief, HCS

Lynne Korte, Dementia Care Program-Policy Manager, HCS

Georgiann Dustin, State Council on Aging

Cathy MacCaul, AARP

Christina Clem, AARP

Amanda Frame, AARP

Heather Jurzcak, CDM Caregiving

Eric Erickson, Executive Director, Washington Home Care Coalition

Cathy Knight, Director, W4A

Lori Brown, Director, AAA

Larry Robinette, Director, AAA

Laura White, Director, AAA

Jon Rudicil, Director, W4A

Jon Morrison Winters, Senior Planning a development Specialist, Aging and Disability Services

Kristy Dunn, WA Association of Senior Centers

Rena Ferretti, Full Life Care

Patricia Hunter, Long-Term Care Ombudsman

Cheryl Farmer MD, DOH

Marci Goetz, DOH

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WHY FOCUS ON SOCIAL ISOLATION NOW?

Based on the 2020 American Association of Retired Persons AARP study, we know that social isolation and loneliness create a range of severe health issues, especially for older adults. Experts predict that even with the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, new coronavirus cases will continue well into 2021, with another surge potential in the winter of 2021. Continued social distancing, wearing face masks and diligent handwashing to protect all citizens' health, especially our most vulnerable citizens, is necessary, particularly for those who have not yet received full COVID-19 vaccination.

Social isolation and loneliness certainly predate the COVID-19 pandemic. Older citizens experience isolation and loneliness at high rates. The COVID pandemic brought with it an urgency for organizations and providers to address social isolation. The sudden reorganization of priorities in the response to COVID allows us to move urgently to develop solutions that combat isolation and loneliness.

Recommendations are urgently needed to combat social isolation and loneliness which have been exacerbated during the pandemic. However, we hope these recommendations will continue to be applicable under more normal circumstances as social isolation is not an issue created solely by the pandemic. This work focuses on those directly served by ALTSA and the broad network of Aging and Disability providers represented on the committee. This includes an emphasis on underserved and marginalized populations.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Social isolation refers to being alone and having infrequent or no social contacts. However, loneliness is defined differently and refers to subjectively feeling alone or not having the level of connection that one desires. Studies show that a significant portion of the US population was already socially isolated, lonely, or both before the pandemic. Surveys indicate that loneliness has increased by 20-30% since the first month of COVID in March 2020. Loneliness also occurs across ages, income levels, living situations, and gender; however, those with lower incomes and chronic health conditions are at higher risk. (1)

The Impact of Isolation and Loneliness



Decades of research show that the risk of mortality due to isolation and loneliness is comparable with or exceeds the risks associated with obesity and air pollution problems.

Evidence also shows that social isolation and loneliness contribute to diseases such as cardiovascular disease and stroke. Isolation and loneliness contribute to substance use, sleep problems, and poor eating habits. (2)

In times of crisis, the most vulnerable and underserved are often disproportionately excluded from the response and recovery efforts. “Compared to White people, death rates are over three times higher among

Hispanic people and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander people, twice as high among American Indian or Alaska Native people, and over 50 percent higher among Black and Asian people.” (3)

Obtaining resources and support usually requires internet access, navigation ability and literacy in the English language. Lack of internet access combined with language barriers and citizenship requirements for benefits are severe obstacles for undocumented and seasonal workers.

Social isolation for older people who are LGBTQ has increased substantially as a result of the COVID-19 isolation requirements. Often disconnected from family, older people who are LGBTQ often have no one to call in an emergency. Studies show that “LGBTQ older people were half as likely to have life partners or significant others, half as likely to have close relatives to call for help, and four times less likely to have children to provide care. And now, as COVID-19 sweeps across the country, many remain estranged from family and religiously affiliated institutions on which others rely.” (4)



Loneliness and Health Care Costs

While older individuals who report loneliness are not admitted to the hospital more frequently than those reporting strong social connections, those hospitalized need more treatment, and their care costs more. They also have more extended hospital stays.

A study from 2018 indicates that socially isolated older adults come to the hospital sicker and lack a social network to help them transition back home faster. Isolated older adults also spend more time in skilled nursing facilities since they lack support for an earlier release back home. (5)

This paper focuses on what works to reduce the impact on social isolation amongst older adults. However, many recommendations will benefit other populations as well.

REDUCING ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

Resources | Connection for Seniors

Homage Senior Center Telephonic Check-Ins (Snohomish County)

Offers services for older adults and people with disabilities. Homage Senior Services utilizes a free phone reassurance program funded by County CARES Act dollars in Lynnwood, WA.

- Website: <https://homage.org/>
- Number: 800-422-2024
- Email: seniorinfo@homage.org

Check and Connect (Spokane County)

This program offers a telephone reassurance program where clients get wellbeing check-in calls from volunteers (recruited in partnership with RSVP). They refer individuals who would benefit from the “Stay Connected” program to their Area Agency on Aging (1-800-994-9422) or Center for Independent Living Program.

- Website: <https://www.rsvpspokane.org/>
- Number: 509-344-7787
- Email: rsvp@ymcainw.org



Washington State Community Living Connections (Statewide)

Washington State's Community Living Connections is part of a national collaborative effort of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Veterans Administration and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services designed to help individuals of all ages, disabilities and income levels, their caregivers, legal representatives and families get the right home and community-based supports and services at the right time, in the right place.

- Website: <https://waclc.org/consite/>
- Number: 1-855-567-0252
- Email: https://waclc.org/consite/connect/email_LOD.php

Home-based services and supports help seniors stay independent and safe in their home. Services vary based on one's level and type of need. Services can be short-term while recovering from an injury or illness or long-term for many years.

Services range from simple checks to make sure an individual is OK to more in-depth services.

Lifetime Connections Without Walls by Family Eldercare (Nationwide)

Telephone activities program providing opportunities for older adults to connect with others in their community and across the country using a telephone conference call system.

- Website: <https://www.familyeldercare.org/programs/lifetime-connections-without-walls/>
- Number: 888-500-6472
- Email: lcww@familyeldercare.org

Reminders/Coaching (King County)

Caregivers provide support to elders and adults with disabilities to help them live independently and provide services such as Medication Management and Treatment Reminders/Coaching (King County) as well as many other services.

- Website: <https://www.fulllifecare.org/>
- Number: 206-467-7033 or 206-224-3752
- Email: <https://www.fulllifecare.org/contact-us/information-request-form/>

Medication Management and Treatment Reminders/Coaching (Clark County)

Caregivers provide support to elders and adults with disabilities to help them live independently.

- Website: <https://cdmcaregiving.org/>
- Number: 360-896-9695
- Email: info@cdmcaregiving.org

Friendship Line by Institute on Aging (Nationwide)

The Friendship Line is both a crisis intervention hotline and a warmline for non-emergency emotional support calls. It is a 24-hour toll-free line and the only accredited crisis line in the country for people aged 60 years and older, and adults living with disabilities.

- Website: <https://www.ioaging.org/services/all-inclusive-health-care/friendship-line>
- Number: (800) 971-0016
- Email: <https://www.ioaging.org/contact-us>

Department of Health Care Connect WA (Multiple Counties)

Care Connect Washington is a program for people who have either tested positive for COVID-19 or been exposed and need support to isolate or quarantine at home. The state Department of Health, working with local health jurisdictions and their partners, will introduce Care Connect Washington on a region-by-region basis.

Each region will set up a network of community-based partners who will connect people to services they are eligible for, such as medication delivery, health care, help applying for unemployment, local housing agencies, food banks, childcare providers and more. Help will be made based on need. At present, six additional regions are providing Care Connect Washington services to people who agree to isolate or quarantine at home, but need help doing so.

- Website: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/CareConnectWashington>
- Number: 800-525-0127
- Email: <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/opinio/s?s=DOHFeedback>

“The importance of technology has been demonstrated by the COVID-19 health crisis, which shifted many in-person services to virtual environments to comply with social distancing protocols and reduce the likelihood of disease spread. Sixty-seven thousand households in King County (7.5%) have no internet access.” (5)

Stay Connected (Multiple Counties)

In response to increasing COVID-related isolation, AIMS Center members and UW faculty in partnership with organizations participating in an Archstone Foundation-funded project known as Care Partners (see Care partners list below), developed a program called Stay Connected.

Delivered via telehealth, Stay Connected is a program that employs evidence-based behavioral strategies for older adults experiencing loneliness, anxiety, or depression symptoms. Case managers, community health workers, and others working in senior service settings make structured phone calls to a caseload of clients in which they ask targeted questions and provide specific tools and guidance to ward off stress, loneliness, and anxiety. Callers are trained and supported by licensed behavioral health clinicians and psychologists.

- Website: <https://newsroom.uw.edu/postscript/stay-connected-program-helps-isolated-seniors>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: alacrity@uw.edu

Community Based Care partners:

- Phinney Neighborhood Association Home (phinneycenter.org)
- India Association of Western Washington India Association of Western Washington (iaww.org)
- SeaMar Community Health Centers Sea Mar (<https://www.seamar.org/>)
- Chinese Information and Services Center CISC (cisc-seattle.org)
- Kin On Kin On | Healthcare solutions for Asian elders in Seattle (<https://kinon.org/>)
- Pike Market Senior Center Pike Market Senior Center - Serving seniors in downtown Seattle (pikeplacemarket-foundation.org)



Resources | Connection and Entertainment

Grandpads (Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties)

The Lewis-Mason-Thurston AAA is conducting a pilot program for GrandPads. This program can offer a range of benefits around social connections. Phone, video, email, telehealth, zoom, transportation, games, music, internet are included in this pilot. It has various security features to ensure that older adults are not victimized, limiting only specific incoming and outgoing calls. The product is easy to use and has someone who works with the client to help set up different websites.

- Website: <https://www.grandpad.net/>
- Number: 503-706-2351
- Email: patrick.trank@consumercellular.com

Robotic Pets (Statewide Pilot)

Robotic pets benefit older adults in reducing the feeling of loneliness and social isolation. A pilot project is beginning here in Washington to measure the impact that the product has on seniors who are feeling lonely and isolated. Joy for All Companion Pets are designed to bring comfort, companionship, and fun to elder loved ones. Interactive cats and pup are all about an ease-of-care and convenience that pairs with technology for the best possible experience.

- Website: <https://joyforall.com/>
- Number: 866-532-8531
- Email: support@agelessinnovation.com

Sage Connect (Nationwide)

Join other LGBT elders across the country who are seeking to reconnect with the greater community, talk about their day, and build an authentic friendship! SAGEConnect is a safe and easy way to meet someone new while staying safe. By signing up, you will receive casual, weekly phone or video calls from a SAGEConnect volunteer. SAGE has teamed up with Mon Ami to create a simple, one-step call line that allows you to connect with your SAGEConnection without ever giving away your personal information.

- Website: <https://www.sageusa.org/sageconnect/>
- Number: 877-360-LGBT
- Email: connect@sageusa.org

Resources | Meal Services

Meals on Wheels (Nationwide)

This network serves virtually every community in America and, along with more than two million staff and volunteers, delivers the nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks that enable America's seniors to live nourished lives with independence and dignity. By providing funding, leadership, education, research and advocacy support

- Website: <https://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/find-meals>
- Number: 1-888-998-6325
- Email: info@mealsonwheelsamerica.org



Meal Delivery and Dining (Colville Tribal members)

Senior Breakfast at 9:30am, and Senior Lunch at 11:30am. Each district has a van for transporting seniors to the senior meal centers, senior activity center and for delivering meals to home bound clients.

- Website: <https://www.colvilletribes.com/meal-sites>
- Number: 509-634-2200
- Email: No email at this time.

Food and Other Assistance Programs (Statewide)

Washington Connections offers a fast and easy way for families and individuals to apply for a variety of services such as food, cash, child care, long-term care and Medicare Savings Program.

- Website: <https://www.washingtonconnection.org/home/>
- Number: 877-501-2233
- Email: No email at this time.

Resources | Education and Training



AARP Presentations (Statewide)

AARP provides twice a month presentations

and has a large email distribution list (listserv) broader than AARP members but encompasses adults ages 55 and over. Presentations available: Brain Health, Fighting Fraud, Living Longer; Living Smarter, and HomeFit.

- Website: <https://states.aarp.org/washington/events-wa>
- Number: 1-888-687-2277
- Email: <https://help.aarp.org/s/contactsupport>

CDM and AARP Washington are part of a Social Isolation Work Group that was formed in response to the pandemic. It was launched to determine what's working to fight loneliness and isolation and whether it can be replicated, even after the coronavirus crisis ends.

Continue Reading: <https://states.aarp.org/washington/aarp-washington-looks-for-new-solutions-to-social-isoc>



AARP Virtual Community Center (Statewide)

AARP provides free interactive online events and classes designed for learning, self-improvement and fun. All events are live to encourage more human connection.

- Website: <https://local.aarp.org/virtual-community-center/>
- Number: 1-888-687-2277
- Email: <https://help.aarp.org/s/contactsupport>

Volunteer With AARP

Join AARP's community of 60,000-plus volunteers and donate your time and talent — in person or from home — to improve the lives of older Americans and their families.

Learn More: www.aarp.org/volunteer



Dementia Action Collaborative (Statewide)

People with dementia and their family caregivers may experience social isolation as the disease progresses. The Dementia Action Collaborative (DAC), established in 2016, is a group of public-private partners committed to preparing Washington State for the growth of the dementia population. DAC partners work together to increase awareness of existing education and engagement supports, and to promote dementia-friendly communities and programs that increase opportunities for social engagement. DAC partners such as the Alzheimer's Association, the UW Memory and Brain Wellness Center, and more offer many opportunities for engagement and education.

- Website: <https://bit.ly/3aiDFIT>
- Number: None at this time.
- Email: None at this time.

General Fitness (Statewide)

Enhance Fitness, an evidence-based fall prevention program for older adults.

- Website: <https://projectenhance.org/> or <https://www.washingtoncommunitylivingconnections.org/consite/index.php>
- Number: 1-855-567-0252
- Email: <https://projectenhance.org/contact-us/>

GetSetUp IO (Nationwide)

Washington will have a GETSetUp tailored older adult clients beginning May 2021. This is a place for active older adults to learn, connect and share with peers in small intimate classes.

- Website: <https://www.getsetup.io/>
- Number: 1-888-559-1614
- Email: help@getsetup.io

Education and Peer Support (Nationwide)

The National Council on Aging's Aging Mastery Program (AMP) provides a 10-class journey to aging well. Participants learn to set goals in all aspects of their lives and to inspire one another in the process. This class is available online through participating senior centers and local sponsors and will be available in person around Washington state post-COVID. A shorter program, the self-directed Aging Mastery Playbook, addresses gratitude, wellbeing, creativity, and purpose. The playbook can be used individually or in a book club format.

- Website: <https://www.ncoa.org/professionals/health/aging-mastery>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: <https://www.ncoa.org/page/contact-us> | rebecca.matter.ctr@ncoa.org | virginia.adams.ctr@ncoa.org

Emergency Broadband Benefit (Statewide)

In 2019, the Washington State Legislature enacted Second Substitute Senate Bill 5511, recognizing that broadband access is critical to the residents of Washington. The bill directed three state agencies to work in collaboration to meet the goal of providing access to affordable broadband to all residents. The Department of Commerce is taking the lead on developing outreach and information related to the new emergency broadband benefit that low-income households may qualify for. The link below provides more information around this benefit, how to apply for the program, and the amount and type of support that is offered.

- Website: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/>
- Number: 360-725-4000
- Email: No email address at this time.



Emergency Broadband Benefit (Nationwide)

The Emergency Broadband Benefit is a Federal Communications Commission program to help families and households struggling to afford internet service during the COVID-19 pandemic. This new benefit will connect eligible households to jobs, critical healthcare services, virtual classrooms, and so much more.

The Emergency Broadband Benefit will provide a discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.

- Website: <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>
- Number: 1-888-225-5322
- Email: <https://www.fcc.gov/about/contact>

Wi-Fi Hotspot Locator (Statewide)

In response to the impacts of COVID-19, Drive-In WiFi Hotspots provide free temporary, emergency internet access for Washingtonians who do not have broadband service to their homes.

- Website: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-state-drive-in-wifi-hotspots-location-finder/>
- Number: 360-725-4000
- Email: No email address at this time.





Digital Navigators and Broadband: Increasing Broad Band Access in Washington (Statewide)

COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated digital access inequities negatively impacting Black, Indigenous, and Communities of Color, low-income communities, students, and elders. Digital access organizations statewide are working to close this digital divide. This new investment would create a Digital Navigator Program in ten regions across the state, with two navigators in each region. The digital navigators will provide one-on-one assistance to supply devices like laptops, tablets and Wi-Fi hotspots, connect families to existing opportunities, and administer basic digital skills support. Funding provided to the department will be granted to an entity that is capable of performing this work

- Website: <https://connect-wa.org/>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: No email address at this time.

Library Resources (Statewide)

Libraries have offered hot spots in their parking lots and digital learning opportunities.

- Website: <https://www.digitalinclusion.org>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: No email address at this time.

- Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/wa-digital-teachkit/tools>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: TeachKit@wla.org

Resources | Caregiver Support

National Council on Aging (Nationwide)

Nationwide resources to support caregivers and loved ones in socially connecting and preventing isolation and loneliness.

- Website: <https://www.ncoa.org/caregivers/health/behavioral-health/isolation-loneliness>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: <https://www.ncoa.org/page/contact-us>

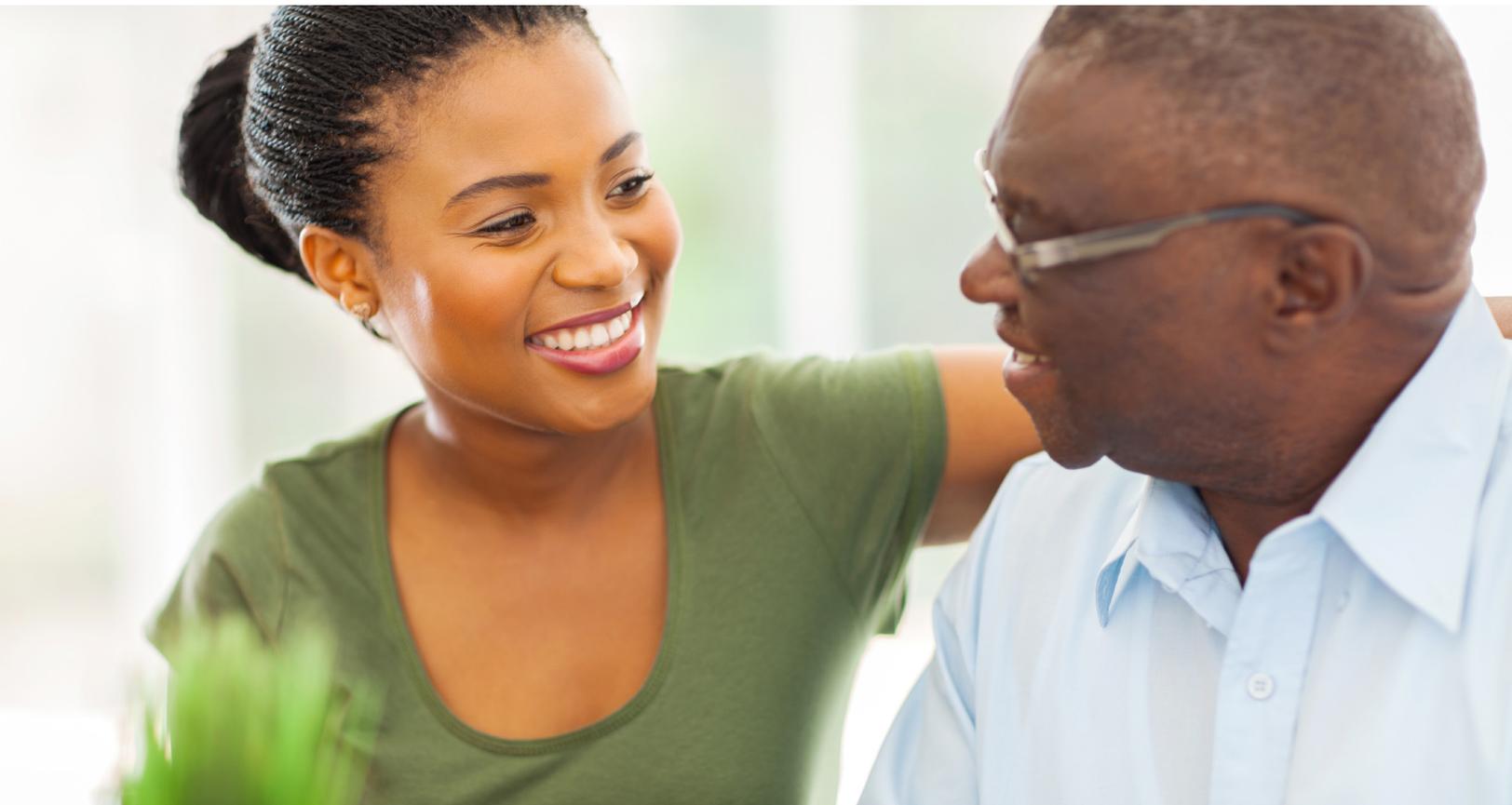
The Family Caregiver Support Program (Statewide)

Talk to caring people for practical caregiving information and help finding local resources/services by calling your local Community Living Connections/Area Agency on Aging or Home and Community Services Office. The Family Caregiver Support Program is a service available to unpaid caregivers of adults who need care. Staff at local offices throughout Washington can give you practical information and advice and connect you to local resources/services that meet your needs. Services are free or low cost.

MAC/TSOA (Statewide)

Offers free services for unpaid family caregivers of adults (age 55 and older) who need care, or to individuals without unpaid caregivers. Contact your local Community Living Connections/Area Agency on Aging or Home and Community Services Offices.

- Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/altsa/home-and-community-services/caregiver-resources>
- Number: No number at this time.
- Email: No email address at this time.



CONCLUSION

We know from research that there is substantial evidence that maintaining social connections significantly reduces early death risk. The lack of social connection substantially increases mortality risk similar to other public health concerns such as obesity, physical inactivity and smoking. As Washington’s aging population continues to grow, so will the risk of concerns related to social isolation.

“While many US health organizations have been slow to recognize this, the World Health Organization explicitly recognizes the importance of social connections. Indeed, many nations around the world now suggest we are facing a loneliness epidemic. The challenge we face now is what can be done about it. Sustained efforts, attention, and resources are needed to adequately address this important issue.” (6)

Contribute to This Resource

Together all of us can help reduce social isolation and loneliness that our aging population experiences not just during a pandemic, but even under normal circumstances. The Project Team welcomes your ideas and resources to for consideration in this publication.

- Email: ALTSAComms@dshs.wa.gov

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Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

Transforming lives

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