



Risks of Loneliness and Isolation

How to support your residents during
COVID-19



The content of this health policy brief has been developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR #90RTHF0001). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This brief does not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Social isolation and loneliness are serious health concerns for adults with disabilities. COVID-19 has magnified the problem.

- 40 percent of adults with a debilitating disability or chronic condition report feeling lonely or socially isolated.
- The health risks of prolonged loneliness are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.
- Seniors who report feeling lonely or socially isolated have a 45 percent greater risk of mortality.
- Social Isolation is the objective state of being isolated from people and lacking meaningful contact with a social network or community. Loneliness is the perception of feeling isolated



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Significant risk factors for social isolation and loneliness include:



Living alone



Mobility disabilities

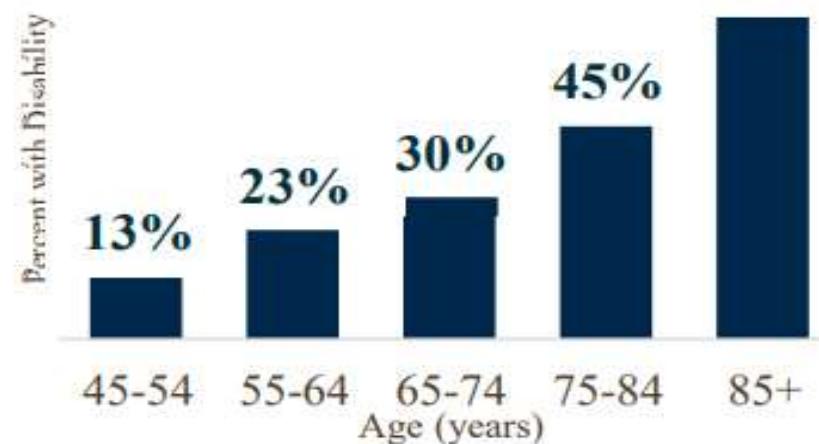


Major life transitions



Emerging health problems

The rate of disability, a key risk factor, increases with age



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Specific health risks associated with social isolation and loneliness include:



Increased mortality



Increased blood pressure and progression of Alzheimer's Disease



Depression, pain, and fatigue



Failing immune system, decreased restorative sleep

The health risks of prolonged loneliness are equivalent to smoking **15 cigarettes a day**

Seniors who report feeling lonely or socially isolated have a **45 percent greater risk of mortality**



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COVID-19 has exacerbated challenges for adults with disability.

- Social relationships encourage older adults and those with disabilities to seek preventive treatment plans, as well as to participate in less negative health behaviors, but without regular social support and communication, older adults with disabilities often experience negative health outcomes.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified poor health outcomes because of the closure of many ancillary services, and the shift to telemedicine – especially for adults whose disabilities prevent them from accessing online resources.



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COVID-19 social distancing has increased social isolation and loneliness

- COVID-19 Stay-at-Home orders and guidelines that call for social distancing have intensified the social isolation and loneliness faced by individuals with disability, who are usually home-bound and have limited physical functioning.
- Many individuals with disability already struggle with adequate self-care, mobility, and independent living. The additional physical restrictions demanded by COVID-19—especially for older adults who are at higher risk and often have one or more disabilities—exacerbate and amplify the impact of social restrictions, preventing individuals with disability from accessing social networks and connecting with others.



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How can you help support your residents?

Treat all residents with dignity and respect

- Everyone has strengths and the ability to express preferences and make choices.
- Residents' cultural background shall be recognized and valued in the decision-making process.
- Treatment and supports identified through the process shall promote maximum independence, least restrictive treatment modalities, community connections and quality of life.

How can you help support your residents?

Utilize Person-Centered Planning

- A process for developing treatment and supports for a person receiving services that builds upon the person's capacity to engage in activities that promote community life and that honors their preferences, choices and abilities. Person-centered planning involves families, friends and professionals as the person desires or requires.

How can you help support your residents?

Value your residents' right to freedom and choice

- Freedom:
Acting, thinking, or speaking without external imposition.
- Choice:
The freedom to make informed decisions regarding a course of action.