



"We can't underestimate the power that we have as individuals to provide the support people need to transition from a place of pain to a place of possibility."

– Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General

Silent Mode Lifted on Loneliness Epidemic

As the sun was setting on the COVID-19 pandemic, a "silent" public health crisis was emerging on the horizon – an epidemic of loneliness.

The loneliness epidemic harms individual and societal health, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, M.D., M.B.A., said while releasing a [comprehensive advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community](#). The advisory provides the framework for a national intervention strategy, including the proposed use of community health and well-being metrics to help identify and alleviate root causes of loneliness.

"Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being hiding in plain sight that can help us live healthier, more fulfilled and more productive lives," Dr. Murthy said. "Given the significant health consequences of loneliness and isolation, we must prioritize building social connections the same way we have prioritized other critical public health issues such as tobacco, obesity and substance use disorders. Together, we can build a country that's healthier, more resilient, less lonely and more connected."

According to the surgeon general's report, health consequences of insufficient human connection include higher risk for heart disease (29 percent higher), stroke (32 percent), dementia (50 percent) and premature death (60 percent) for adult Americans. Loneliness also has been shown to lower immunity and increase the risk for anxiety and depression in adults and children.

In addition, the epidemic is costly in social and financial terms. Loneliness and isolation are associated with higher medical costs, lower academic achievement and poorer performance at work. Stress-related absenteeism attributed to loneliness costs employers an estimated \$154 billion annually.

Prevalence

Feelings of loneliness and isolation are widespread. For example:

- In a 2023 [University of Michigan national poll](#) on healthy aging, 34 percent of adults age 50 to 80 reported feeling isolated from others in the past year; 37 percent cited lack of companionship.
- A February 2023 [Gallup Survey](#) found that 17 percent of respondents representing an estimated 44 million American adults felt lonely "a lot of the day yesterday;" respondents under the age of 30 (24 percent) and those in lower-income households (27 percent) experienced more daily loneliness than older, higher-income adults.

- In a 2021 [American Perspectives survey](#) of adults across all age groups, a significant percentage of respondents reported having fewer close friendships than they had prior to the COVID pandemic and relying less on friends for support.

What Can You Do?

The national strategy proposed by Dr. Murthy includes recommendations for employers, with an emphasis on cultivating connections based on the core values of kindness, respect, service and commitment to each other. They include:

- Make social connections a strategic priority in the workplace at all levels.
- Train and empower leaders to implement programs that foster connection.
- Leverage training, orientation and wellness resources for workplace well-being.
- Encourage employees to connect holistically, not just based on their skill set.
- Adopt policies that support relationships and responsibilities outside of work.

Here are some ways to help minimize personal loneliness:

1. **Connection:** Many people have not fully recovered from COVID-induced social isolation. Maintaining social contact with friends, co-workers and family members is critical to well-being.
2. **Participation:** Get involved in community outreach activities, clubs, teams, classes, spiritual pursuits or hobbies that interest you. Volunteerism has health benefits.
3. **Pet ownership:** Consider adopting a pet that suits your lifestyle and provides companionship. Caring for a pet can provide a sense of purpose.

4. **Self-care:** Engage in exercise, eat healthy foods, get enough sleep and practice relaxation techniques to support your physical and mental health.
5. **Reach out:** Speak with a therapist, counselor or other trusted adviser if you are having difficulty with loneliness or sustaining relationships.

Alone, But Not Lonely

Spending quality time alone differs from loneliness. Some people need alone time to rest and recharge, or they may simply prefer their own company. The advantages and disadvantages of living and/or working alone vary depending on individual circumstances, personality traits and personal preferences.

It's possible to feel lonely while in a relationship or in a group setting when you feel misunderstood or unseen. In such cases, it may be necessary to find ways to safely express your feelings in order to be heard and allow others the opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns. Solutions tend to emerge with non-judgmental, open communication.

Did You Know?

In 2022, there were about 38 million one-person households representing 29 percent of the total population, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). By comparison, in 1960, single-person households represented only 13 percent of all households.

The Census Bureau also reports that nearly half of U.S. adults are not married, continuing a persistent downward trend, and that 19 percent of men and 12 percent of women age 25 to 34 shared a household with their parents in 2022.