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# Tackling loneliness: exploring opportunities and priorities for the national strategy

Kent County Council: Social Isolation Select Committee  
26 September 2018



# Background

- The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness released its manifesto in December 2017 with recommendations for central government
- Loneliness can have a substantial impact on people's health both mentally and physically:
  - In 2016, 5% of UK adults reported they always or often feel lonely (40% sometimes/occasionally)
  - Loneliness can increase the risk of early mortality by 26% (those under 65 at greater risk)
  - Loneliness is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and deadlier than obesity
  - Lonely people have a 64% increased chance of developing clinical dementia
- In response, in January 2018, the PM announced a Ministerial lead for loneliness, and plans to:
  - Develop a cross-government strategy on loneliness in England
  - Develop the evidence-base around the impact of different initiatives in tackling loneliness, across all ages and within all communities
  - Establish appropriate indicators of loneliness across all ages
  - Set up a dedicated fund



## Defining the problem we want to solve

*Our draft definition of loneliness:*

**Loneliness can be defined as a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want. (Perlman, D. and Peplau, 1981)**

*Our provisional aim:*

**Everyone feels lonely from time to time. Our aim is to preventing people feeling lonely all or most of the time.**

- Evidence shows that loneliness fluctuates over the life course.
- Research shows those feeling lonely all or most of the time are more likely to suffer ill health and to generate more significant costs for the public and private sectors.



## Our approach

- We want to prevent constant loneliness by supporting people to build relationships by:
  - **Embedding approaches across government policy** that support people's relationships and social connections;
  - **Improving the evidence base** so we understand who is at a greater risk of loneliness, its impacts and costs, and what works to tackle it; and
  - **Working with partners to build a national conversation** on loneliness and support a more connected society.
- A number of principles will guide the development of the strategy:
  - **Working in partnership** with businesses, the health sector, local government, the voluntary sector and wider civil society.
  - **An iterative approach** and a willingness to capture feedback and learn, recognising the limitations of the existing evidence base.
  - **Ensuring a truly cross-cutting and cross-departmental approach.**
  - **Focusing on the key trigger points** in and out of constant loneliness that increase the risk, and on preventative action.



## What increases the risk of loneliness?

- Academic research and Office for National Statistics analysis shows that loneliness fluctuates over the life course, and certain life events can particularly increase the risk:

Triggers	Risk Factors	Most at Risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leaving education</li><li>• Entering a period of poor health</li><li>• Being widowed (bereaved)</li><li>• Becoming unemployed (or retiring)</li><li>• Becoming a carer (or stopping a caring responsibility)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Age</b> - younger people (16-24)</li><li>• <b>Gender</b> - women</li><li>• <b>Marital status</b> - widowed people</li><li>• <b>Disability and ill-health (self reported)</b> - those reporting</li><li>• <b>Number of adults in the household</b> - those living alone</li><li>• <b>Caring responsibilities</b> - those caring</li><li>• <b>Neighbourhood connectedness</b> - those who do not chat to neighbours more than to say hello, or do not feel as though they belong to or satisfied with their neighbourhood</li><li>• <b>How often you meet up in person with family members or friends</b> - those who met up once a month or less</li></ul>	<p>ONS identified three profiles of people at particular risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions.</li><li>• Unmarried, middle-agers, with long-term health conditions.</li><li>• Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area</li></ul>



## Drivers and solutions

We are thinking about drivers and solutions in three categories:

- **The structural drivers of loneliness** - whilst social isolation and loneliness are not the same thing, removing physical barriers to social connections can improve people's ability to build strong relationships.
- **The institutional drivers of loneliness** - for example, the increased automation and digitisation of services, and the shift to more transactional relationships.
- **The cultural drivers of loneliness** - for example, the stigma of experiencing loneliness and a lack of understanding or resilience to its effects.



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## Effective action

We all have a role to play:

- Government - Strategy and policy action (eg planning, transport, health, education)
- Business - Supporting staff, vulnerable customers, and local communities
- Public Sector - Commissioning, services, use of assets, community empowerment
- Charities - Voice for lonely people, funding, services, volunteering, local action
- Media - Raising awareness, overcoming stigma, social media connecting people
- Communities - Neighbourliness, community events, social groups



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# Building Connections Fund

- £20m new funding for charities and community groups to help tackle loneliness:
  - £11 million 'Building Connections Fund' (£5m government, £5m Big Lottery Fund, £1m Co-op Foundation [young persons strand])
  - £5m People's Postcode Lottery funding to top up existing loneliness related grants.
  - £4m The Health Lottery for charities that improve social links in disadvantaged areas.
- The Fund will see government working with charitable trusts, foundations, and others to:
  - Stimulate innovative solutions to loneliness across all ages, backgrounds and communities.
  - Provide seed funding for communities to come together to develop activities which enable people to connect.
  - Scale-up and spread existing work offering practical and emotional support to help lonely individuals reconnect with their communities.





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## Next Steps

- Strategy launch expected Autumn 2018
- What Works Centre for Wellbeing loneliness evidence review due for publication Autumn 2018
- Loneliness measure and guidance expected Autumn 2018
- Announcement of successful bidders to the first round of the Building Connections Fund due December 2018
- Strategy implementation from Autumn 2018



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# Thank you

**Thank you for taking the time to share your expertise and knowledge with us.**

**If you have any further thoughts, including how we might work together, please get in touch by emailing: [loneliness@culture.gov.uk](mailto:loneliness@culture.gov.uk)**