

Social Isolation & Loneliness in LTC

Jennifer Williams-Woods, MPH
Education Coordinator
Nevada Geriatric Education Center



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Objectives

- Describe the health challenges posed by social isolation and loneliness
- Explain best practices for combatting social isolation and loneliness for long-term care residents



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Definitions

- **Social Isolation** - Objectively having few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction.
- **Loneliness** - A subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connections, where inadequate refers to the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual's preferred and actual experience.



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine



- 25% percent of Americans over age 65 are considered socially isolated.
- 43% of Americans over age 65 report feeling lonely
- One study found that **more than half of all residents** in nursing homes suffer from loneliness.
- Social loneliness and isolation was

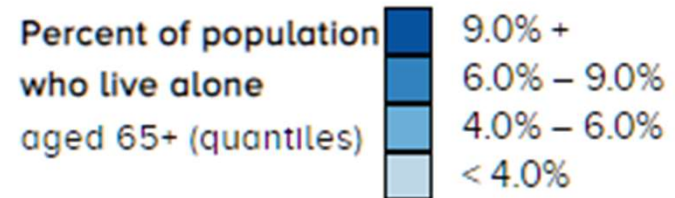
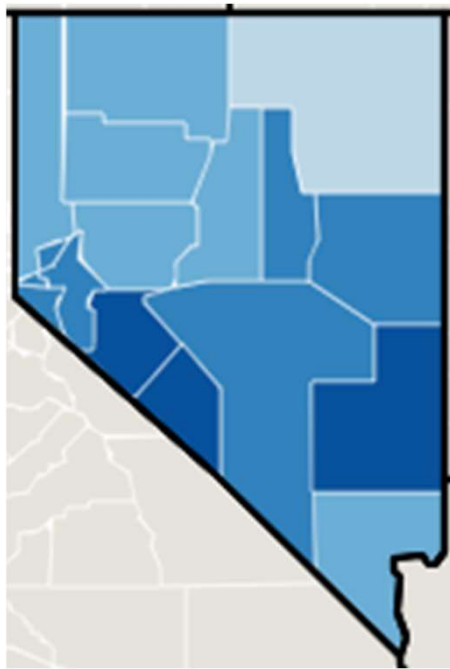


University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Isolation in Nevada



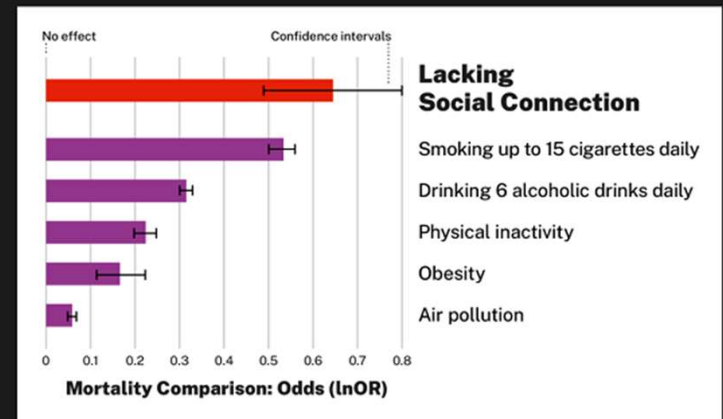
<https://connect2affect.org/isolation-map/>

Impact of Social Isolation

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Weakened immune system
- Anxiety and depression
- Suicidal ideation or attempts
- Stroke

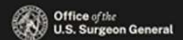
From the National Institute on Aging

Lacking social connection is as dangerous as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.



Comparison groups: Complex measures of social integration: high v. low; not smoking v. smoking < 15 cigarettes daily; alcohol abstinence v. drinking > 6 alcoholic drinks daily; physical activity v. inactivity; low BMI v. high BMI; low air pollution v. high air pollution.

Source: Holt-Lunstad J, Robles TF, Sbarra DA. Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States. *American Psychology*. 2017;72(6):517-530. doi:10.1037/amp0000103. This graph is a visual approximation.



Warning Signs

- Tiredness, low energy and lack of motivation
- Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Change in appetite or sudden change in weight
- Increased alcohol consumption, smoking or use of drugs/medication
- Difficulty connecting with others or maintaining close friendships
- Efforts to engage socially make you feel exhausted
- Overwhelming feeling of isolation even when around others
- Negative feelings of self-doubt and self-worth
- Feelings of not being seen or heard
- Thoughts of suicide



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Factors leading to loneliness

- Lack of mobility
- Physical limitations
- Poor vision and hearing
- Depression
- Financial concerns



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

MDS 3.0

- New item D0700

D0700: Social Isolation

D0700. Social Isolation

Enter Code

How often do you feel lonely or isolated from those around you?

0. **Never**
1. **Rarely**
2. **Sometimes**
3. **Often**
4. **Always**
7. **Resident declines to respond**
8. **Resident unable to respond**



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

MDS Example 1:

The resident, upon being admitted to the facility, is asked about how often they feel lonely or isolated from those around them. They state that because they don't have many family members left who live close by and they see their friends only a couple of times a month, they often feel isolated. They are hoping that being in the facility will help them feel less isolated and plan to attend activities regularly.



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

MDS Example 2:

During the observation period of resident F's annual assessment, they are asked how often they feel lonely or isolated from those around them. Resident F responds that, even though they go to activities and have a few friends, they still feel alone. When asked how often they feel alone, Resident F responds every day.



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Best Practices

- Regular social activities
- Intergenerational programs
- One-on-one visits
- Family involvement
- Outdoor activities
- Technology access
- Pet therapy
- Cultural and spiritual activities
- Support groups
- Person-centered care
- Staff training
- Assessment and screening
- Environment and design
- Family support and education



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Questions



University of Nevada, Reno

Sanford Center for Aging

School of Medicine

Contact Information

Jennifer Williams-Woods, MPH

Education Coordinator

jenniferw@unr.edu

