

Social Connection

Older Adults' Needs

To feel and be less isolated, older adults need both personal relationships and access to groups or programs at community sites that affirm their values.

Insight for Action

As the relationships and responsibilities provided by work and family roles recede, older adults who lack domestic companionship—human or animal—and other means of establishing community ties often experience a significant sense of isolation.

Policy Perspectives

Despite consensus that social isolation negatively effects health and well-being—particularly for older adults—our systems continue to prioritize medicalized interventions over services that facilitate social connection.

Public and private partnerships with community-based organizations can facilitate value-aligned, culturally concordant social programming that addresses isolation challenges and associated negative health outcomes. Policy refinements are needed to support the establishment, adoption, and administration of local programming that offers older adults the opportunity for domestic companionship, community participation, and intergenerational engagement. The mitigation of health risks resulting from these changes can result in savings to the health care system.

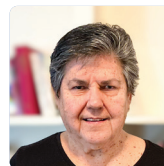
Hear from Older Adults

THEMES

- Many older adults experience a social void when work and family obligations change.
- Some face hurdles in their efforts to connect with others.
- What helps?

“If we didn’t have [the senior center], we wouldn’t have nowhere to go and no contact with people besides just whoever you see at home and when you go out. My daughter doesn’t like me go shopping by myself.... I try to live within her boundaries because she worries too much.”

Theme: Some face hurdles in their efforts to connect with others.



Jacqueline

76-80, Woman, Urban Alabama, 138-140% FPL, Medicare & Medicaid (Dual Eligible)

↗ [Video](#) ↗ [Profile](#)



Darcy

65-70, Woman, Rural Ohio, 138-400% FPL, Medicare Advantage

"Sometimes you feel lonely and it's not because people aren't around, it's just different. Your kids always needed you and now they don't so much and that's kind of hard to get used [to]."

Theme: Many older adults experience a social void when work and family obligations change.

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Ava

71-75, Woman, Urban Alabama, 138-400% FPL, Medicare & Medicaid (Dual Eligible)

"I have two neighbors, and I have a church member who is 100 years old.... We just try to do whatever we could in the neighborhood for each other, because we're all sitting inside there.... If I'm going to the store, and I ask who needs something from the store, you know, got a ride or something. If I don't have enough money, it's all right. If they don't have enough money, it's all right. If I have enough, I get it."

Theme: Many older adults experience a social void when work and family obligations change.

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Maxwell

65-70, Man, Suburban Texas, 138-400% FPL, Traditional Medicare

"I don't see anybody throughout the week. I have one best friend, and the only other people I see [are] the people I reach through the Resource Center. I just recently started going there about three or four months ago. So since I've been here for three years, I've pretty much been in my apartment by myself with my dog, and he keeps me sane.... [At the Resource Center] we go around and talk about... our lives,... interests, or questions. It's really good. The people there are very intelligent, sharing lots of different world viewpoints, which helps you look at things in a different way. You know, giving you suggestions on how to address problems or commiserate, like when pets die or friends."

Theme: What helps?

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Diana

65-70, Woman, Rural Texas, Below 138% FPL, Medicaid & Medicare (Dual Eligible)

People from the senior center will reach out if she does not make an appearance. "It feels pretty good to know that somebody else [cares] about me other than my family. Even some of my friends there, they call me, 'Why are you cutting a bingo today?... We do line dancing too. Yeah, a bunch of old people doing line dancing. We have pretty fun.... That center works with me. 'Cause... when I first got here [my daughter] found... someplace in Terrell, but excuse this expression, she said, 'Ma, that's too ghetto.'"

Theme: What helps?

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Cheung-yu

71-75, Man, Urban New York, Below 138% FPL, Medicaid & Medicare (Dual Eligible)

"While working, I didn't have much opportunity to spend time outside. I rarely had contact with the outside world. I was always focused on my own business, with the burden of a family, so I couldn't afford to be too extravagant or involved in other things.... After retirement, I started coming here to the senior center. It feels like a big family here. It gives us a very warm, very safe feeling.... I came here in 2012, so it's been about ten years."

Theme: Many older adults experience a social void when work and family obligations change.

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RELATED RESEARCH

"Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community [Internet]." National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2023. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37792968>.

"Loneliness." GOV.UK. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/society-and-culture/loneliness>.

"Social Isolation and Loneliness." World Health Organization. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness>.

➤ Visit thepeoplesay.org to watch videos of older adults sharing their aspirations for later life firsthand.

The People Say is a qualitative database designed to help policymakers hear the voices of the public when shaping policy. The database features first-hand insights from a diverse group of older adults and caregivers, as well as feedback from experts on policies affecting older adults. This initiative is a collaboration between the Public Policy Lab and The SCAN Foundation.

