

About Connect2Affect

AARP Foundation is developing innovative ways to address social isolation through Connect2Affect, a platform to help end isolation and build the social connections older adults need to thrive. A collaborative effort, Connect2Affect (connect2affect.org) features research, tools and resources to help people evaluate isolation risk, reach out to others who may be feeling lonely and disengaged, and find practical ways to reconnect to the community.

Connect2Affect (connect2affect.org) is working to foster a deeper understanding of loneliness and isolation, draw much-needed attention to the issue, and catalyze action to end social isolation among older adults.

About AARP Foundation

AARP Foundation works to ensure that low-income older adults have nutritious food, affordable housing, a steady income, and strong and sustaining bonds. We collaborate with individuals and organizations who share our commitment to innovation and our passion for problem-solving. Supported by vigorous legal advocacy, we create and advance effective solutions that help struggling older adults transform their lives. AARP Foundation is the affiliated charity of AARP.

Staying connected to the people and things that matter to us is fundamental to physical and mental well-being. We need social connections to thrive — no matter our age. But recent research shows that the negative health consequences of prolonged isolation and loneliness, while harmful at any age, are especially so for older adults.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Why is isolation a health concern?

Isolation in older adults is a fairly new research topic, but data indicate that the health risks of prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Subjective feelings of loneliness can increase the risk of death by anywhere from 26 percent to 45 percent.

How does isolation affect health?

Isolation can impair mental performance, compromise the immune system, and increase the risk for vascular, inflammatory and heart disease, as well as depression. Simply holding a loved one's hand has been shown to lower blood pressure and reduce pain.

Aren't loneliness and isolation the same thing?

Not exactly. According to researchers, loneliness refers to how people perceive their experience and whether or not they feel isolated. Isolation is objective, with measurements such as the size of a person's social network, availability of transportation, and ability to access resources and information.

If both loneliness and isolation have negative health consequences, why draw a distinction between them?

Because research in this area is still emerging, and there's disagreement among scientists as to whether one has a greater impact on health than the other. What we do know is that the negative effects of each require different solution sets, making it important to maintain the distinction.

1 in 5 adults 65 and older are socially isolated, putting them at risk of poor health.

The health risks of prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

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What are the factors that cause isolation?

There are many, and they frequently overlap. Some of the most common are reduced mobility, hearing or vision loss, lack of access to affordable transportation, the death of a spouse, retirement, geography, and linguistic and cultural barriers.

Are older adults who struggle financially at greater risk of isolation?

Yes. Lack of affordable, accessible transportation and other financial challenges can limit crucial social interactions, as well as the ability to get medical care or healthy food. Low-income older adults from underrepresented communities face additional barriers that contribute to isolation, including disparities in access to services or culturally appropriate care.

Executive Council

Lisa Marsh Ryerson President, AARP Foundation

Lisa Marsh Ryerson is president of AARP Foundation, AARP's affiliated charity. At the helm since the fall of 2013, she sets the Foundation's strategic direction and leads its social impact initiatives. She is also a member of AARP's Executive Leadership Team, which directs the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working on behalf of the 50+ population. Bringing over 30 years of local, national and global experience to the table, Lisa has built new links between the Foundation and community colleges to increase employment opportunities for older adults. In support of that effort, during her first year at AARP Foundation, she helped procure a \$3 million federal grant from the Social Innovation Fund to expand the Foundation's Back to Work 50+ retraining program for the long-term unemployed age 50 and older.

James Appleby, B.S.Pharm, M.P.H. Executive Director & CEO, Gerontological Society of America

James Appleby is an innovator and entrepreneur adept at transforming organizational cultures. Since joining the GSA staff in 2008, he has focused the organization on advancing innovation in aging and has built multiple non-dues revenue generating initiatives, including projects related to adult immunizations, over-the-counter medication-taking behaviors, pain management and several new publications. James currently serves as vice chair of the District of Columbia Board of Pharmacy, and he formerly was the Gerontological Society of America (GSA) representative to the Institute of Medicine Forum on Aging, Disability, and Independence. He also is the chief staff member leading the development of the 21st IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics, which GSA will host in San Francisco in 2017.

Barbara Van Dahlen, Ph.D. Founder and President, Give an Hour™

Barbara Van Dahlen, Ph.D., named to TIME's 2012 list of the 100 most influential people in the world, is the president of Give an Hour™, a nonprofit she founded in 2005 to provide free mental health services to the military and veteran community. A licensed clinical psychologist practicing in Washington, D.C., she received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Maryland in 1991. Currently, the Give an Hour network has nearly 7,000 providers, who collectively have given more than 200,000 hours of care valued

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*6 million adults 65 and
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at over \$20 million. Give an Hour now also leads the Campaign to Change Direction™, a collective impact effort to change the culture of mental health in America. Barbara has received numerous awards, and in 2014 was honored by the Chief of Staff of the United States Army as an outstanding civilian who has made significant voluntary contributions to our military and the United States Army. She also recently received the 2016 American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Lifesavers Gala Public Service Award.

Terry M. Clark
President, Senior Vice President, Marketing & Brand
UnitedHealth Group

Terry M. Clark oversees and coordinates UnitedHealthcare and Optum branding, marketing and advertising efforts on a functional basis enterprise-wide. He also has direct responsibility for direct-to-consumer marketing for UnitedHealthcare Medicare & Retirement, the nation's largest business dedicated to the health and well-being needs of seniors and other Medicare beneficiaries. In this role, Terry develops initiatives to engage with the 10 million — or one in five — Medicare beneficiaries who enroll with UnitedHealthcare. He also works to grow new membership through strategic plans and programs designed specifically to meet the unique needs of the more than 70 million baby boomers in the United States.

Sandy Markwood
CEO, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Sandy Markwood has more than 30 years of experience in the development and delivery of aging, health, human services, housing and transportation programs in counties and cities across the nation. As CEO, she is responsible for the overall management of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a). She sets the strategic direction for the staff and oversees the implementation of all policy, grassroots advocacy, membership and program initiatives. She also leads n4a's fundraising efforts and engages corporate sponsors to support critical initiatives, including an aging awards/best practices program and the Leadership Institute for Area Agencies on Aging staff. Externally, Sandy forms strategic partnerships with federal agencies and organizations in aging, human services and health care arenas to enhance the role and recognition of Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI programs.

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