



National Summit to Increase Social Connections



National Summit to Increase Social Connections

The Summit will begin soon.

Accessibility and Support:

- ASL/CART services will be provided for this event. To access CART live transcription of the event, click on the CC Live Transcript button in the control bar at the bottom of the Zoom window.
- To get our attention if you need technical assistance: Raise or Lower Hand: Alt + Y
- The Summit will be recorded and shared on our website: www.committtoconnect.org/virtual-summit.



National Summit to Increase Social Connections

Welcome to Day 2!

Summit Housekeeping

Recording and Slides

- The recording and slides from both days of the Summit will be shared following the event on our website:
www.committtoconnect.org/virtual-summit

Q&A

- You can submit questions for the speakers at any time. On the Zoom module on the bottom of your screen, click the Q&A icon, type your question in the box and submit.

Chat

- Engage in the chat to connect with other attendees and conveners.



Accessibility and Support

ASL/CART Services

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- To access CART live transcription of the event, click on the CC Live Transcript button in the control bar at the bottom of the Zoom window.

Technical Assistance

- To get our attention if you need tech assistance: Raise or Lower Hand: Alt + Y

Screen Reader Users: Reduce unwanted chatter

- Request speech on demand: Insert, Spacebar, "S"



Health Promotion and Physical Activity: Perspective from the Move Your Way Campaign and Physical Activity Guidelines

- Malorie Polster, Physical Activity Advisor, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services





Health Promotion and Physical Activity: Perspective from the Move Your Way[®] Campaign and Physical Activity Guidelines

Malorie Polster, MPH, CHES

Wednesday, June 24th, 2026





ODPHP's Physical Activity Portfolio



Guidelines and Recommendations



Educational Materials and Tools



Why Physical Activity Matters



Benefits of Physical Activity



Boost your mood



Sharpen your focus



Reduce your stress



Improve your sleep



Benefits of Physical Activity and Sports for Youth

Physical activity benefits

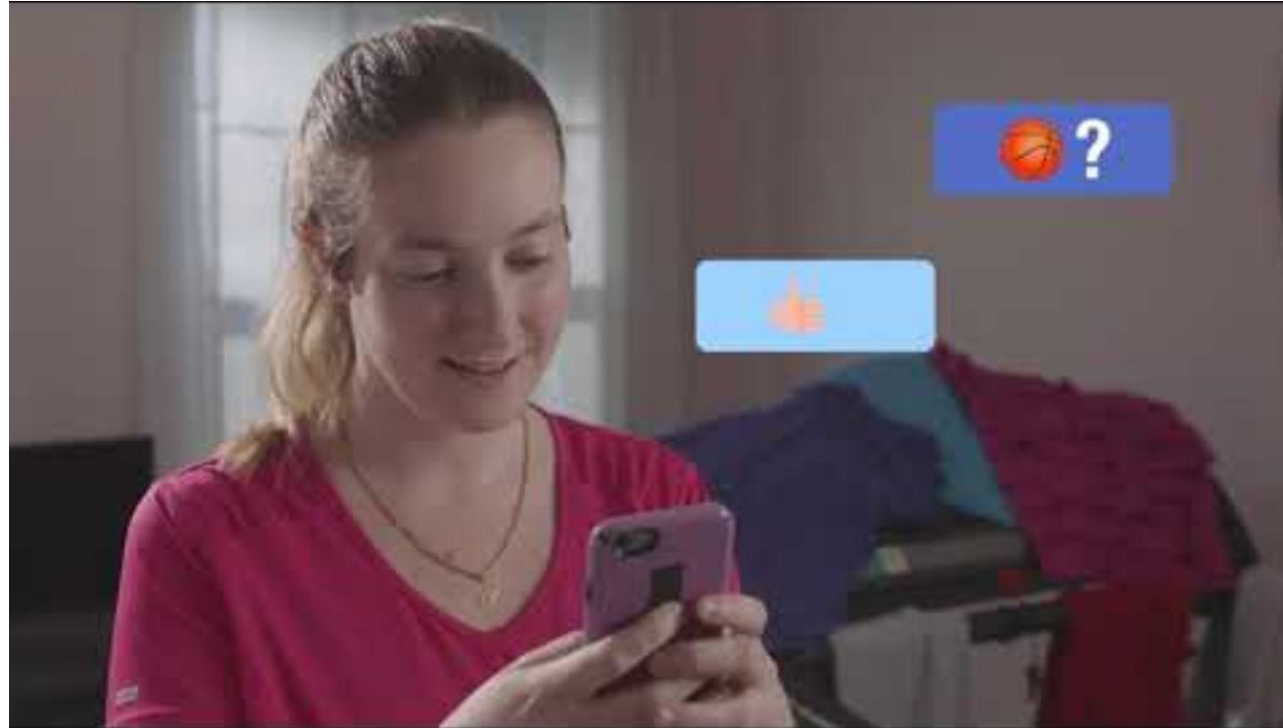
- Improved bone health
- Improved heart health
- Improved weight status
- Improved fitness
- Improved cognition
- Reduced risk of depression

Sport-specific benefits

- Opportunities to build social skills
- Improved life skills
 - Goal setting, time management, and work ethic
- Higher levels of self-esteem
- Reduced risk of suicide
- Less substance use and fewer risky behaviors



Move Your Way: Find a Partner



[Watch Video](#)



How Our Resources Connect to Your Work



Office of
Disease Prevention
and Health Promotion



Physical Activity Guidelines Midcourse: Implementation Strategies for Older Adults

- Emphasizes that **it's never too late** to start being physically active
- Highlights **strategies to increase physical activity** among older adults **in key settings**





The National Youth Sports Strategy

- Has a vision that one day, all youth will have the **opportunity, motivation, and access** to play sports
- Based on **research and best practices**
- Offers **actionable ideas** for parents, coaches, organizations, communities, and policymakers





The Move Your Way® Campaign

- Translates the Physical Activity Guidelines into easy-to-use information
- Shares motivating messages
 - Lots of things count
 - It all adds up
 - Find what works for you





Move Your Way[®] in Action



80s Dance Party
Pennsylvania



Winterfest
Iowa



Mall Walking
New York



5K and Fun Walk
Nevada



Explore Resources and Learn More



[Physical Activity Guidelines](#)



[Move Your Way® Campaign](#)



[National Youth Sports Strategy](#)



Thank you!

Malorie Polster, MPH, CHES

Physical Activity Advisor

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Email: Malorie.Polster@hhs.gov



Office of
Disease Prevention
and Health Promotion

Fireside Chat: Preventing Falls and Building Connections: Social connection as a strategy for delivering evidence-based falls prevention programs

- Dr. Matthew Lee Smith, Professor, Indiana University – Bloomington, School of Public Health
- Jill Renken, Executive Director, Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging



Preventing Falls and Building Connections: Social Connection as a Strategy for Delivering Evidence-Based Falls Prevention Programs

Matthew Lee Smith, PhD, MPH, CHES, FGSA, FSBM, FAAHB

Professor: Department of Applied Health Science

Director: Center for Health by Design (CHxD)

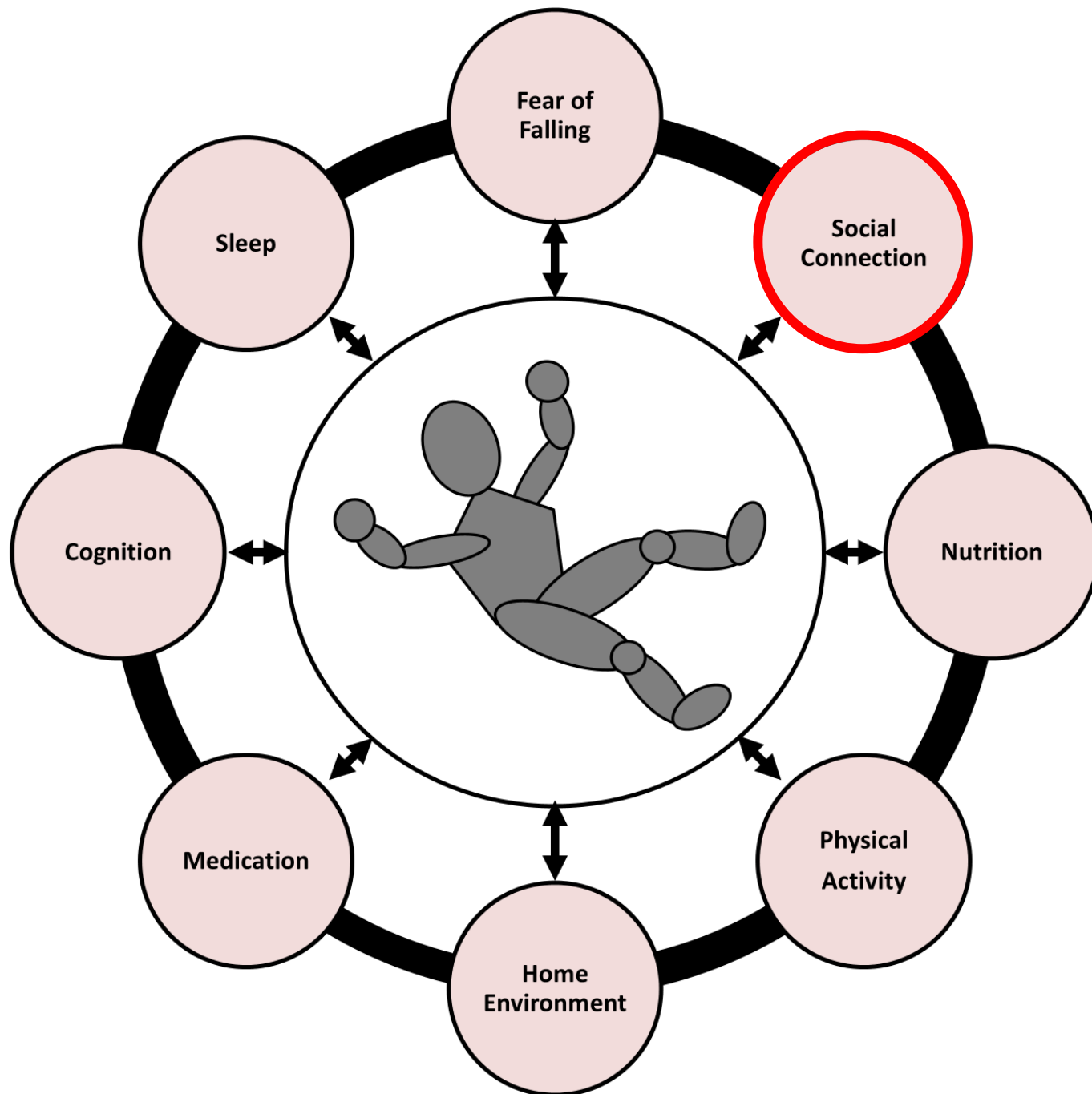
Director: Healthy Aging Writing Lab (HAWL)

School of Public Health – Bloomington

Indiana University



Image courtesy of NCOA



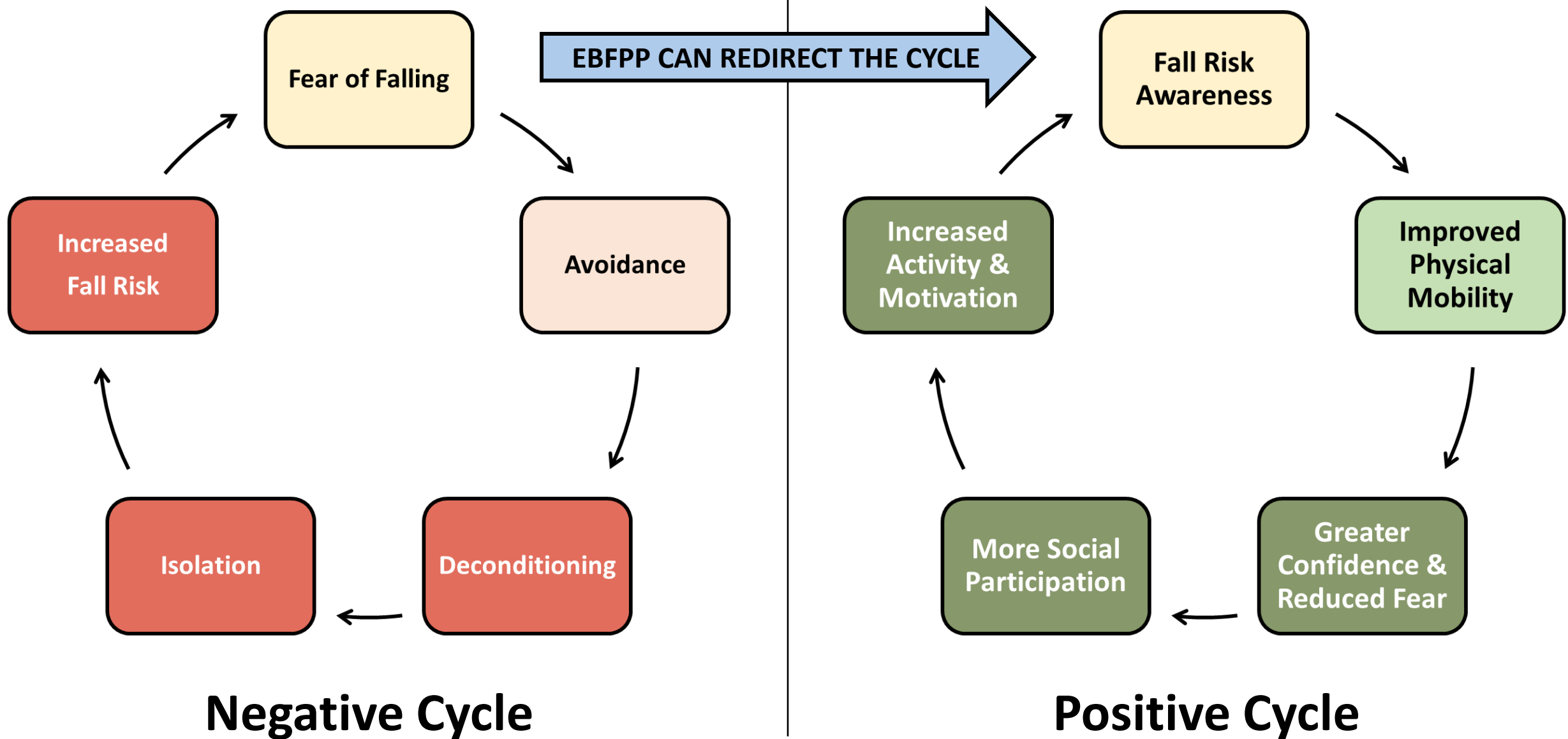
Falls are complex and multi-directional

Important to consider the context, circumstance, and outcome of every fall

Social disconnection can cause falls...

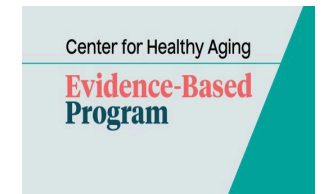
And, falls can disrupt social engagement and optimal connection

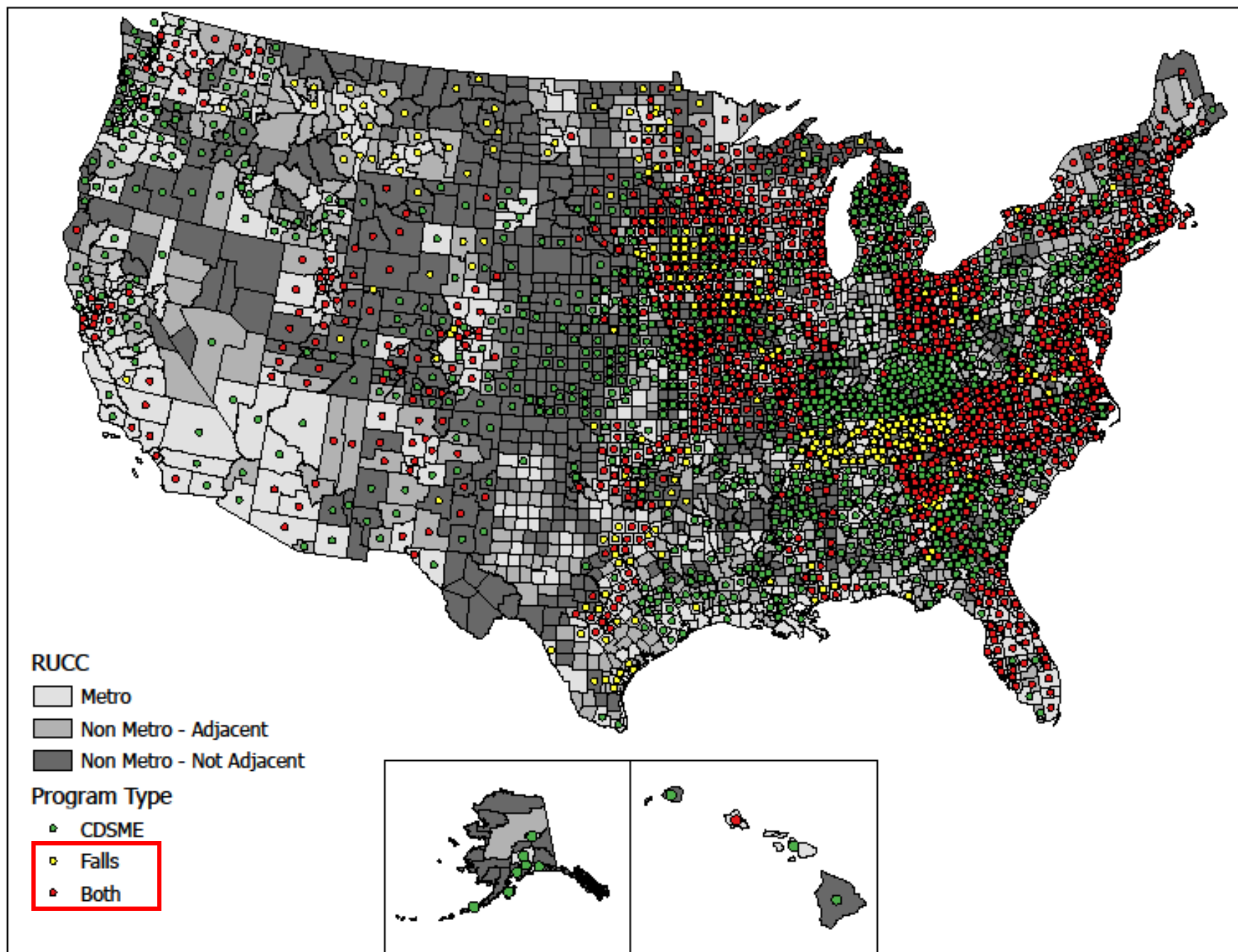
Source: Smith, M. L., & Ory, M. G. (2023). Multi-directional nature of falls among older adults: A rationale for prevention and management. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11, 1117863. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2023.1117863



Evidence-Based Fall Prevention Programs

- Programs deemed to effectively improve health and well-being and/or reduce disease, disability, and injury among older adults
 - Rigorous design
 - Demonstrated effectiveness
 - Peer-reviewed publication
 - Community translation





January 2014 to December 2025

~21,900 workshops delivered

~290,000 participants

Widely available across diverse settings and reach millions of older adults

Expanding the Evidence Toward Connection

- Although the *direct benefits* of EBFPP are well documented, research is emerging about the indirect benefits of workshops in terms of social connection
 - **Regular, facilitated interaction** (often in small-group formats)
 - **Focus on common goals** (reducing risk, improving physical mobility, overcoming challenges)
 - **Provide collaborative mechanism for social support** (brainstorming, problem solving)
 - **Link to healthcare providers and other community resources** (navigation support)



Image courtesy of NCOA

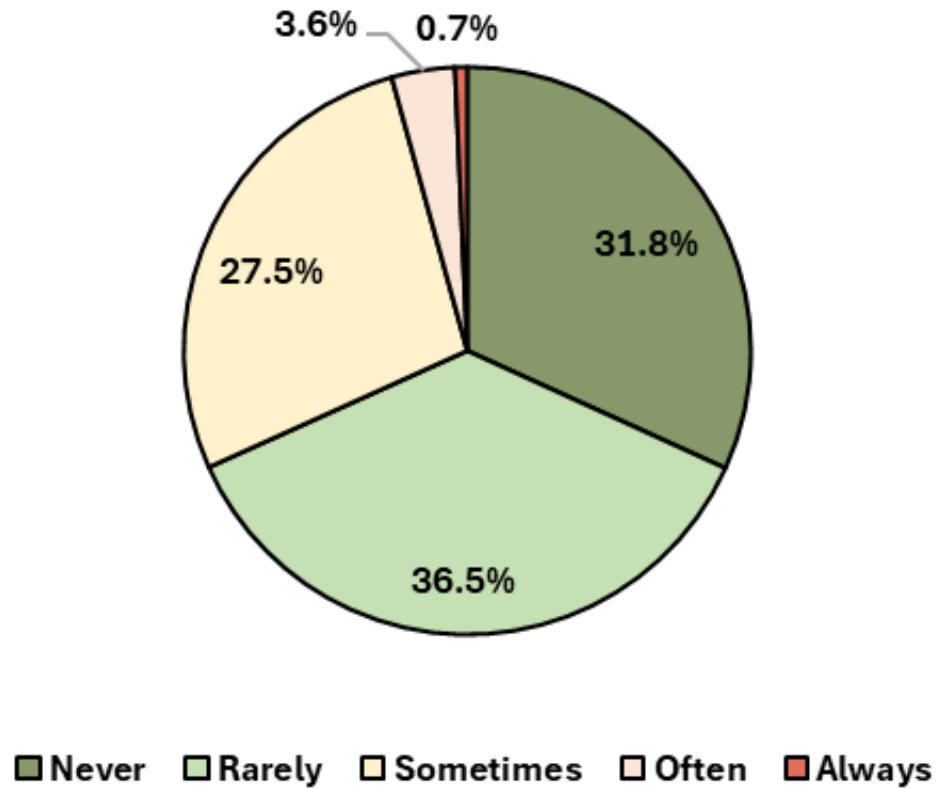
Source: Smith M. L., & Han, G. (2024). Effectiveness of evidence-based fall prevention programs to reduce loneliness in the United States. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, 1459225. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2024.1459225

Promoting the Positive Cycle

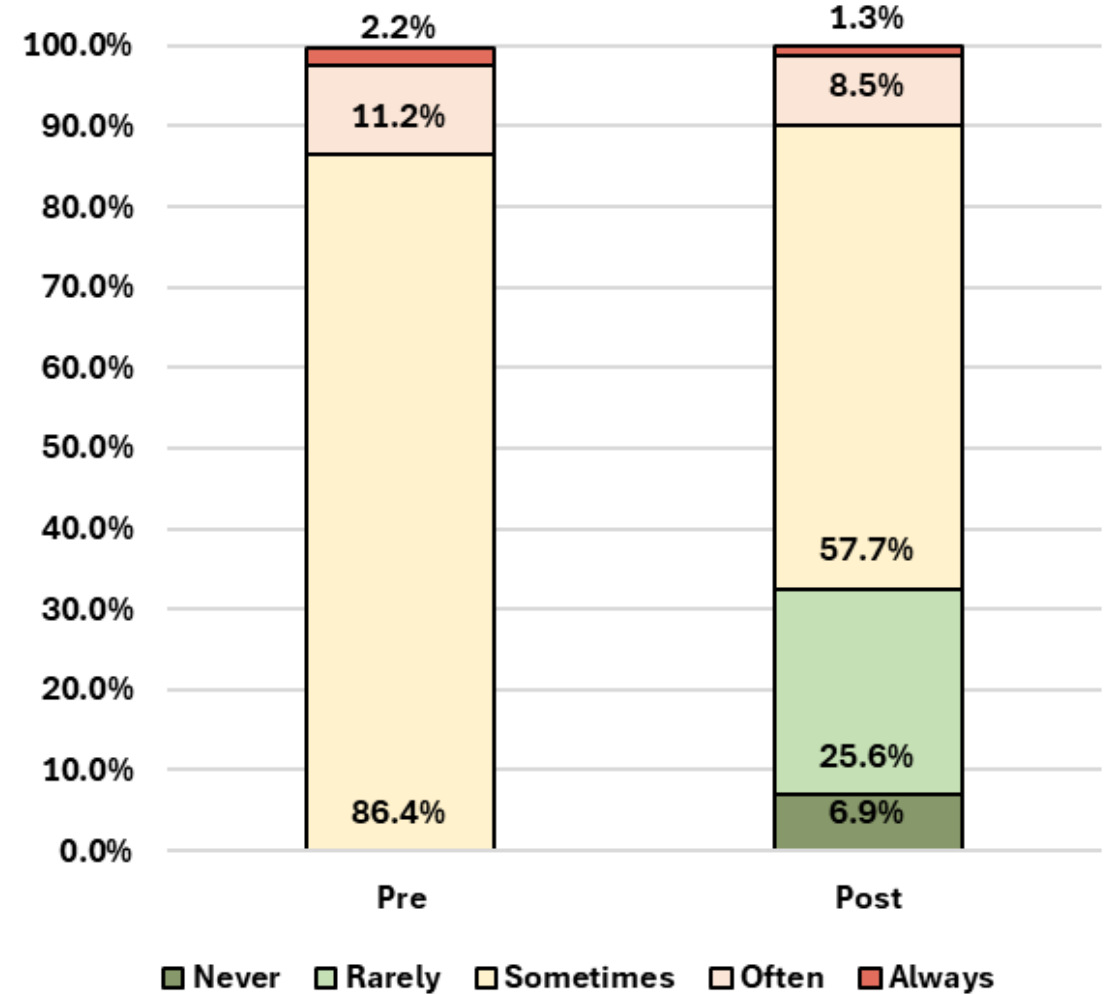
- Enhanced personal *mobility* and confidence result in *mobility* within communities
- Fosters richer and sustained social connection
 - Quantity
 - Quality
 - Duration
 - Meaning

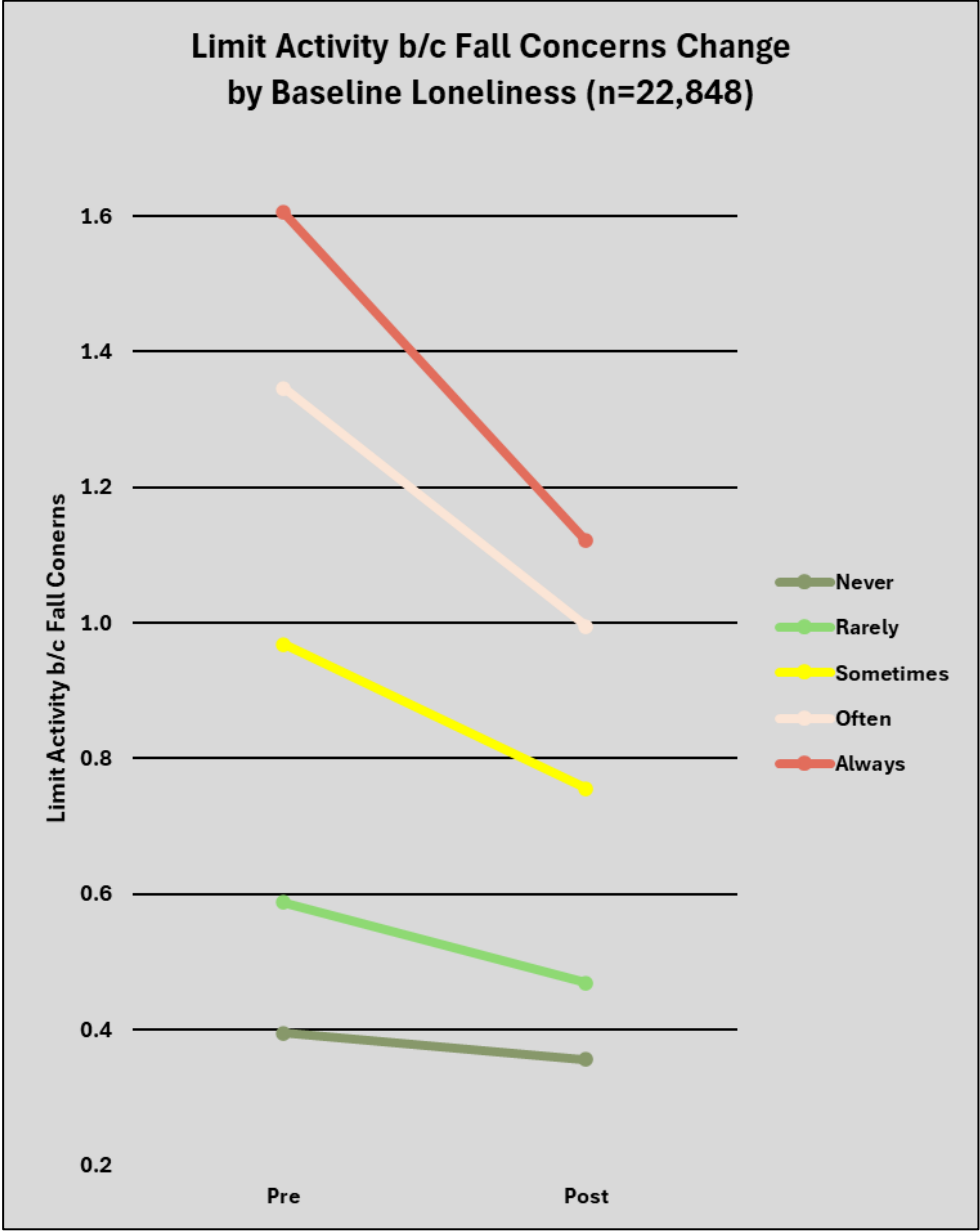
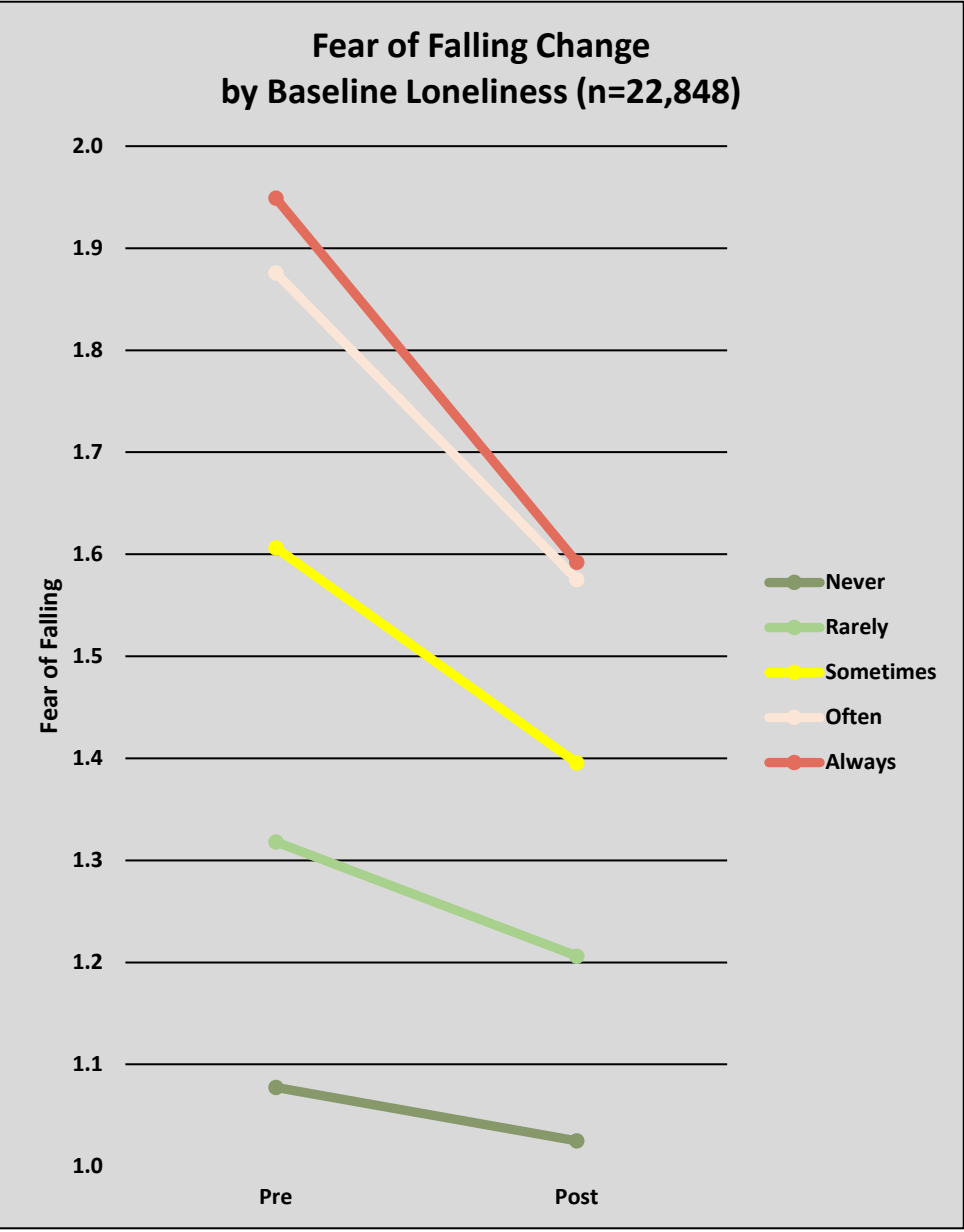


Loneliness at Baseline (n=22,848)



Loneliness Change among Participants At Risk at Baseline (n=7,260)





Source: Smith, M. L., Brach, J. S., Vincenzo, J. L., Lassell, R., & Han, G. (unpublished). Associations of loneliness on evidence-based fall prevention program effectiveness in the U.S.



Thank you!

Matthew Lee Smith

MATLSMIT@iu.edu



Wisconsin Institute
for Healthy Aging

*Mission to improve the health and
well-being of all people as we age*

Evidence Based Health Promotion Programs

Curriculum development, facilitator engagement & training, quality assurance monitoring and coaching

Statewide Healthy Aging Initiatives

Awareness building, advocacy, education, resources, & coalition coordination



Evidence-Based Falls Prevention

Stepping On & Pisando Fuerte



Delivery virtual or
in-person (in-
person preferred)



2-hour sessions
every week for **7/8**
weeks



2 facilitators
(1 certified+1 peer)



Guest experts
(physical therapist,
pharmacist, vision,
community safety)

Researched & proven to reduce falls by 31%



Social Connection through Falls Prevention Programs

Falls Prevention classes naturally increase social connection

- Group based classes provide socialization opportunities (new people or deepen existing relationships)
- Facilitators trained to create a social environment (make it fun, music, call people by name, jokes)

Specific to Stepping On (behavior change curriculum)

- Adult learning principles (peer learning and support)
- Preventive Framework (storytelling + problem solving)
- Intentional breaks (with snacks)
- Group activities (home hazards, footwear audit)
- Connect participants with community resources (guest experts)
- Encouragement to join other community-based exercise class at completion

"I got so much out of it. Knowledge of how to communicate with health care providers about health. Knowledge of how to get more active, and workouts at home, which has improved my physical and mental health. I gained a community, friends, and people that I get to help."

Jan S, Past Participant and Peer Facilitator of Stepping On





Contact:

Jill Renken, Executive Director, WIHA

Jill.Renken@wihealthyaging.org





Questions and Discussion

Please submit your questions or comments through the Q&A.

Move to Connect: Adaptive Movement for Whole-Person Health

- Moderator: Katie Clark Wheeler, Program Analyst, ACL
- Heang Tan, Director, Baltimore County Department of Aging
- Hunter Leemon, Chief Executive Officer, Sportable
- Matthew Stepaniak, Director/Co-founder, Limitless Cycling





Commit to Connect:

Baltimore County
Department of Aging

June 24, 2026

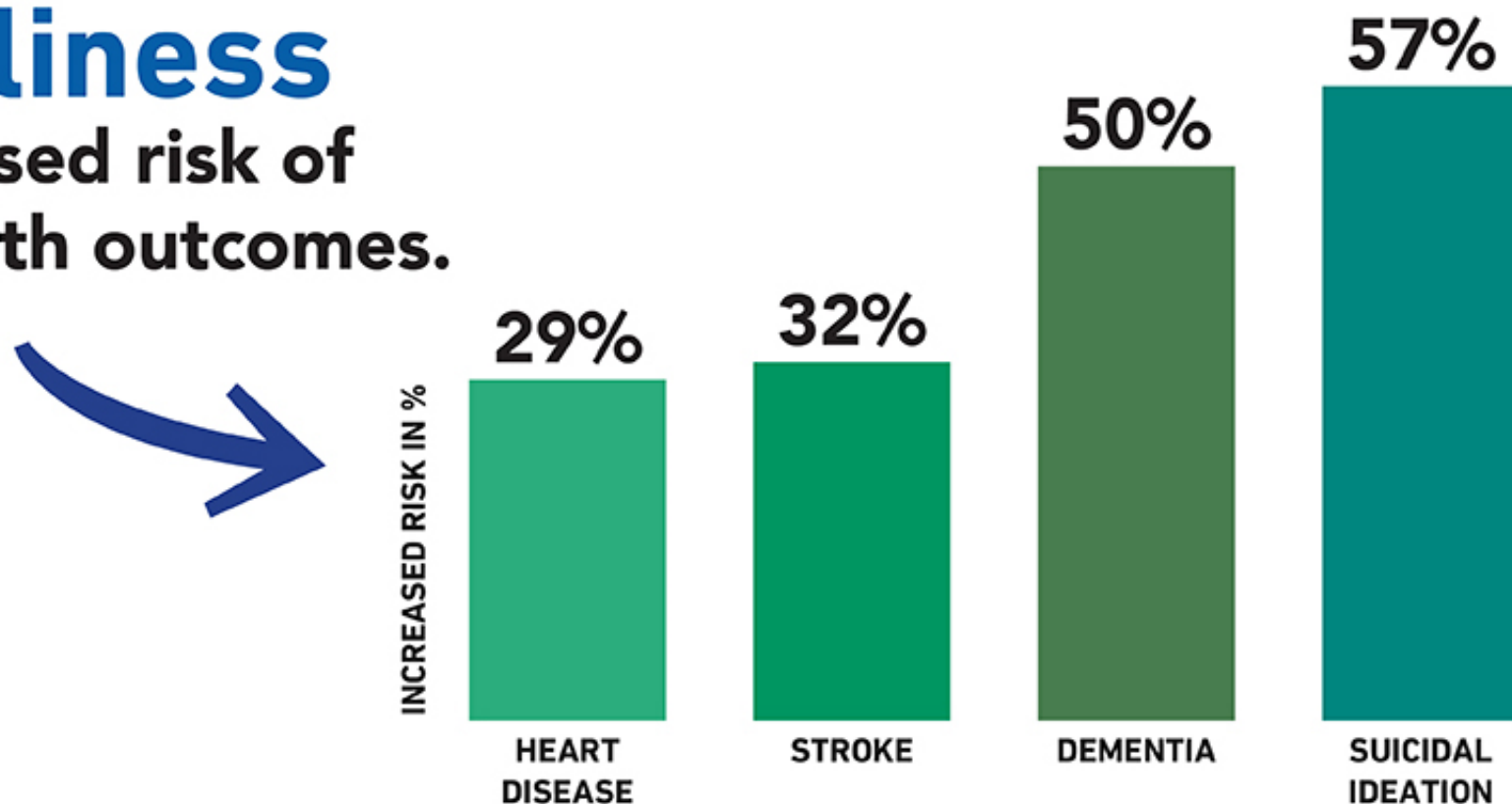








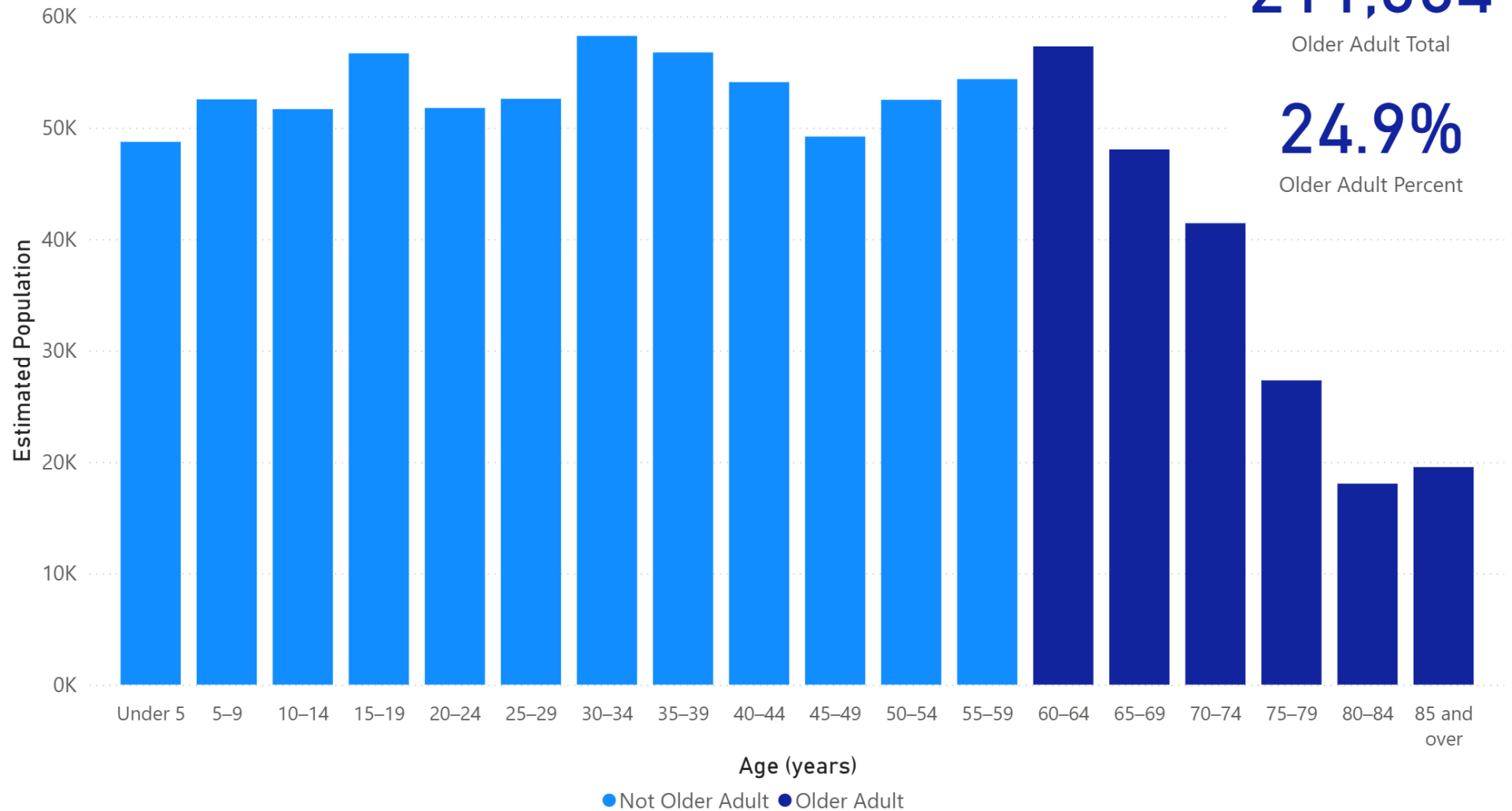
Older adults experiencing **social isolation and loneliness** have an increased risk of numerous health outcomes.



Older Adults in Baltimore County

Estimated Older Adult Population in Baltimore County

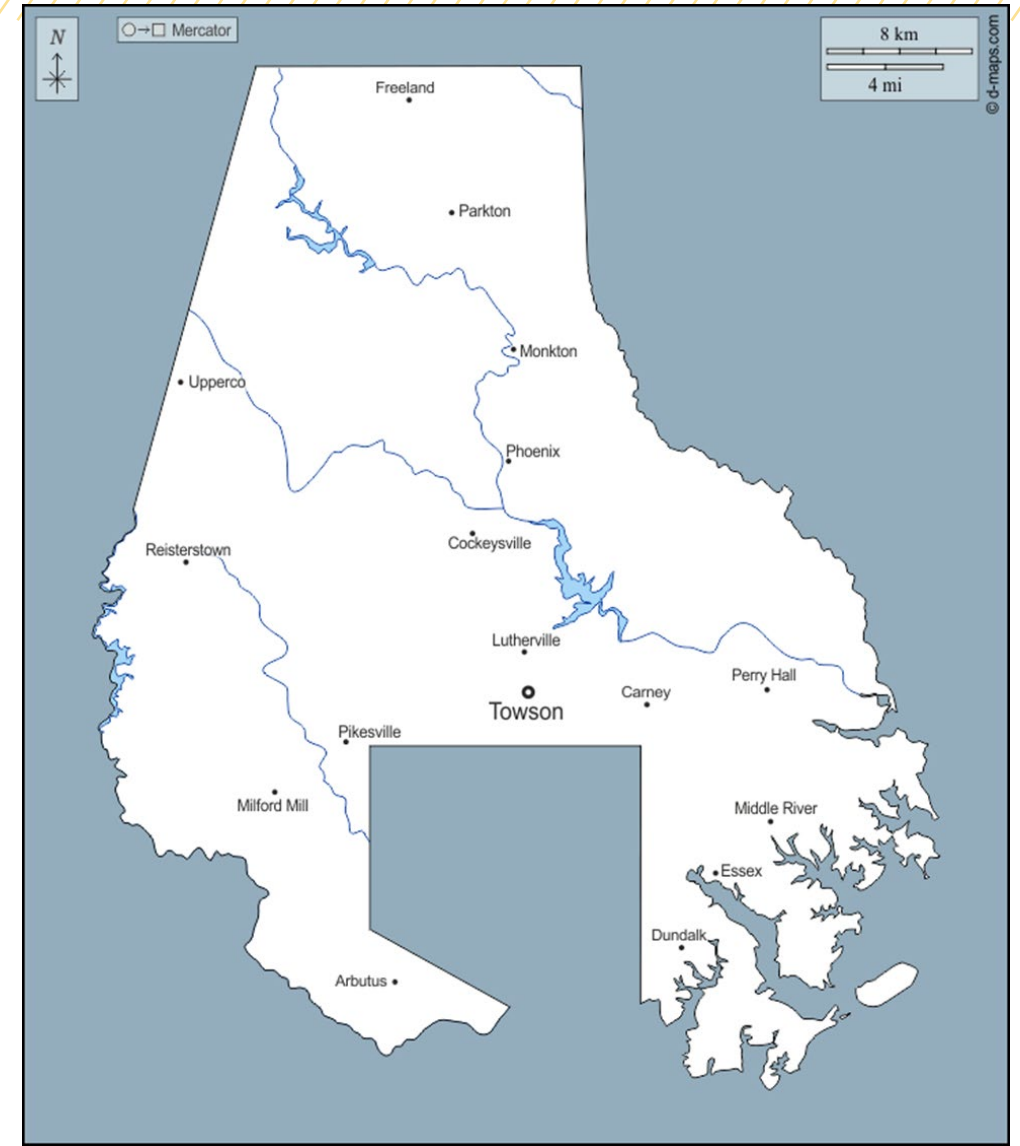
2020-2024 5-year ACS, table S0101



Older Adult Population Projections

Year	# Older Adults	Total Population	% Older Adult
2030	236,825	862,592	27%
2035	242,741	880,105	28%
2040	244,776	894,336	27%
2045	249,808	905,424	28%
2050	256,583	919,449	28%
2055	259,770	933,690	28%

Prepared by the Maryland Department of Planning, State Data and Analysis Center, November 2025.



Senior Centers



National Senior Fitness Day



National Senior Fitness Day



National Senior Fitness Day



No Senior Eats Alone Day



No Senior Eats Alone Day





HEART & MIND COMMUNITY

2026 BALTIMORE COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF AGING

THANK YOU



LIMITLESS CYCLING



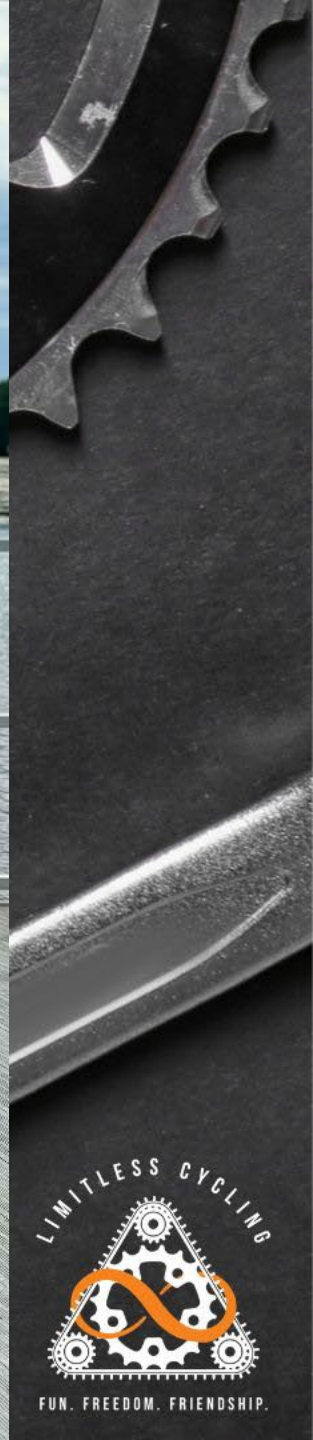
FUN. FREEDOM. FRIENDSHIP.





LIFT BRIDGE











LIMITLESS CYCLING



FUN. FREEDOM. FRIENDSHIP.











Arbor Glen Senior Living

Senior Living • Assisted Living • Memory Care

CHAT



ST. CROIX VALLEY FOUNDATION

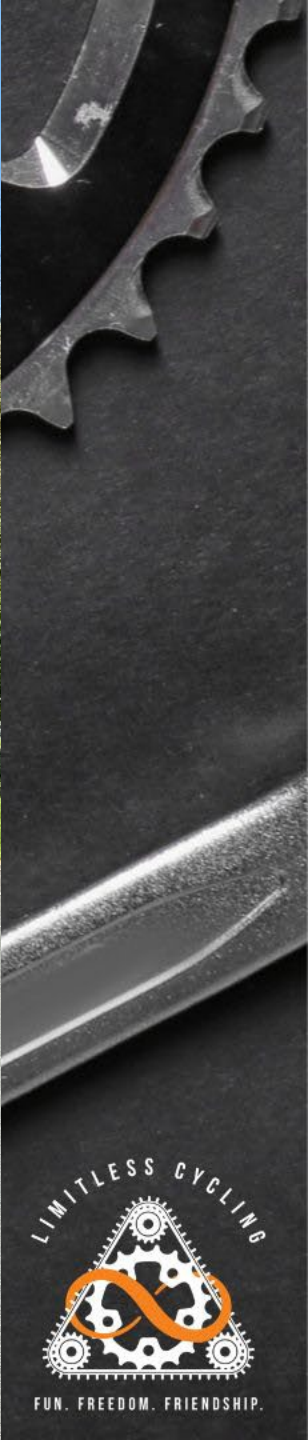


STILLWATER AREA
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION



RIVER VALLEY TRAILS





















LIMITLESS CYCLING



FUN. FREEDOM. FRIENDSHIP.





MAKING SPORTS ACCESSIBLE & INCLUSIVE



What is



sportable?

Last year, we served more than 400 individuals with disabilities through our programs

- Richmond based non-profit founded in 2005
- MISSION: to create opportunities and transform the lives of individuals with physical disabilities, visual impairments, and those requiring physical accommodations through sports, recreation, and wellness programs
- Currently offers 22+ adaptive sport, recreation and wellness programs as well as...
 - Local tournaments and competitions
 - Camps and clinics
 - Community events



ACCESS  INCLUSION 
IMPACT

A man wearing a blue and red cycling jersey, a black helmet, and orange sunglasses is riding a red and black recumbent trike on a paved road. He has his arms raised in a celebratory gesture. The background shows a grassy field and a line of green trees under a clear sky.

ACCESS

Sportable provides accessible facilities and custom adaptive equipment so athletes like Army Veteran Michael Brooks can compete in local and regional cycling events.

Luca Watkins is one of 150 kids who play team and individual sports in a welcoming environment. “Sportable allows me to participate in activities I normally cannot do at school.”

INCLUSION





IMPACT

Marine Corps Veteran Josh Burch is drawn to wheelchair rugby for the adrenaline rush and camaraderie. "Finding Sportable has improved my quality of life."



This world was not made for people with disabilities. But Sportable has **given me access** to any sport I want to try. It has opened doors to things I didn't know were possible.



People look at me differently since my stroke. They assume 'I can't.' Sportable has introduced me to individuals just like me. **I feel included.** This community encourages me and tells me "Yes, you can."



Sportable has **given me the confidence** to say and do whatever I want. If I can ride a bike, if I can surf, if I can ride a 4-wheeler, why can't I learn to drive? Why can't I live alone? Why can't I get a job?

My personal Sportable Story

97%

of our athletes say they
could not participate in
sports and recreation
without Sportable





We do sports,

WE CREATE COMMUNITY

Connecting with others and being in community was the number one thing people reported enjoying about Sportable, ranking almost 10% higher than participating in sports. Stakeholders see Sportable as a natural conduit to help facilitate community.



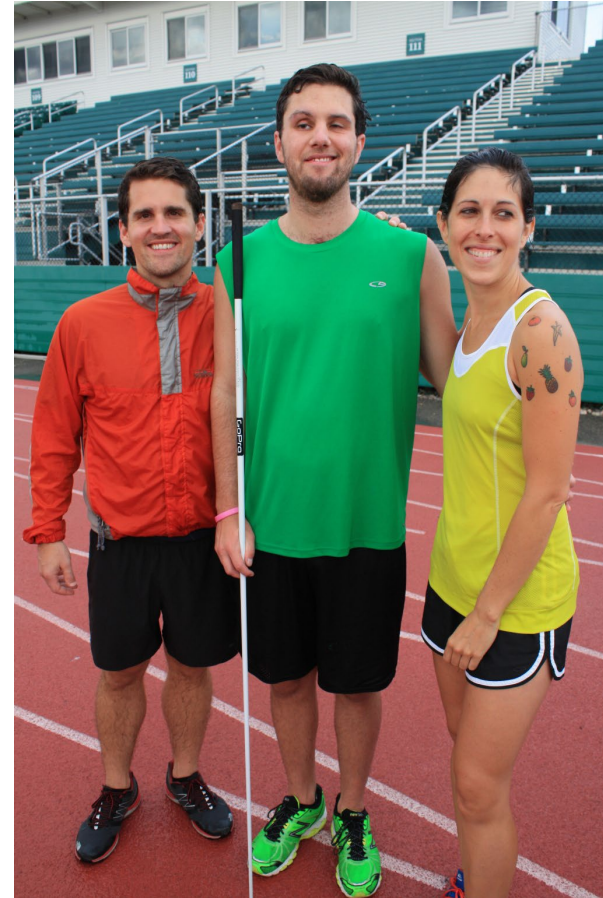












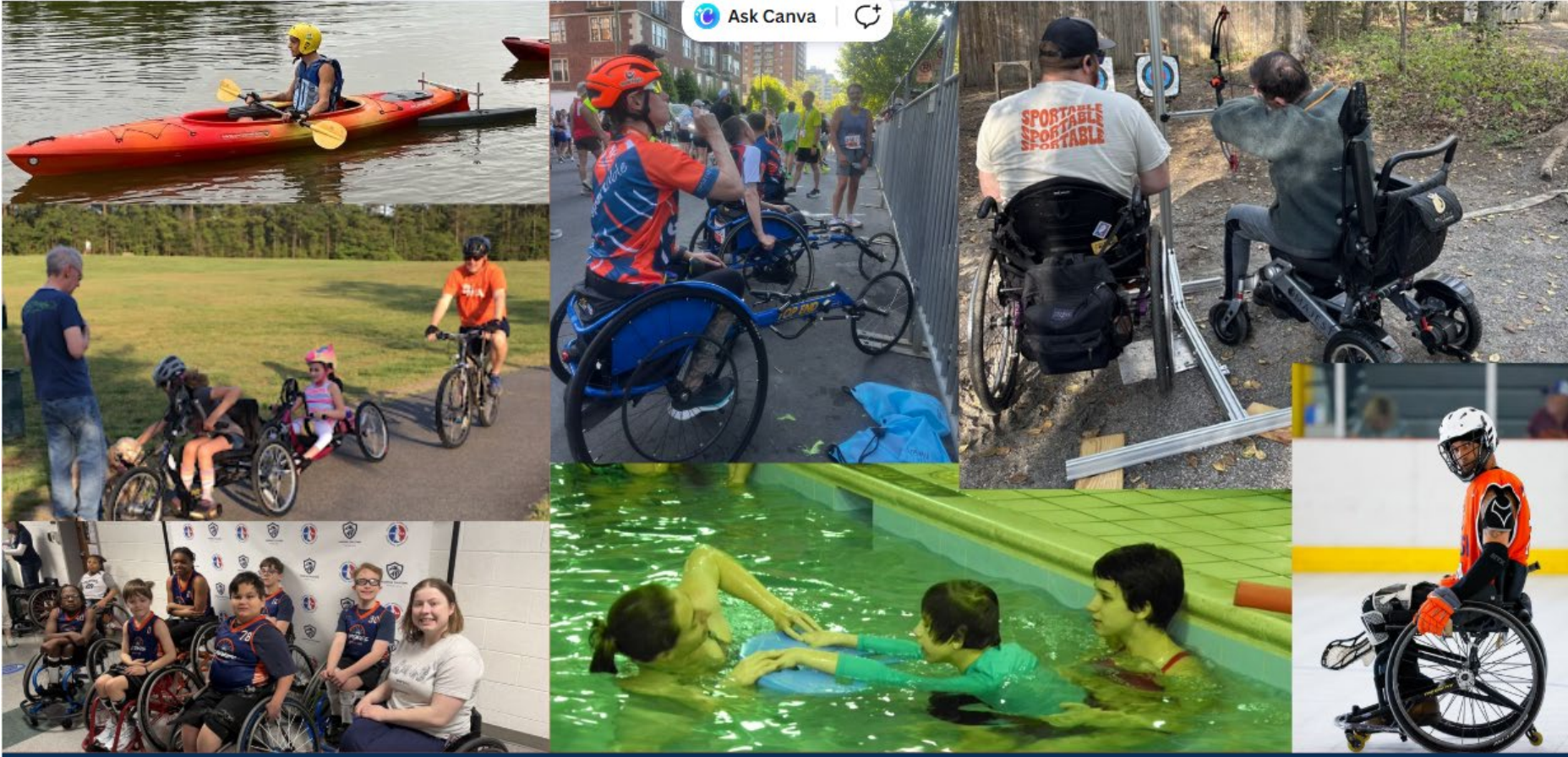




















"Being part of a team is something that I thought I had lost forever. I feel like an athlete. Sportable gives me an outlet to be competitive on the playing field."



"Soccer was a life changing positive experience for our son. We now have hope on movement and coordination while enjoying a sport, when he used to only do therapies. He is happier, much more confident, and sociable because of his experience at Sportable."



"Participating in sports is my social time. I live alone and enjoy the camaraderie of doing activities like cycling, kayaking, rock climbing, and archery."

Questions?

(804) 340 - 2991
info@sportable.org
www.sportable.org
@SportableRVA





Questions and Discussion

Please submit your questions or comments through the Q&A.



National Summit to Increase Social Connections

Please enjoy a brief break.

Spotlight: Assistive Technology Resources to Support Community-Based Exercise

- Moderator: Robert Groenendaal, Assistive Technology Program, ACL
- Terri Wofford, Speech Language Pathologist and Manager, Wyoming Assistive Technology Resources
- Jileesa Irwin, Assistive Technology Specialist for Outdoor Recreation, Michigan Assistive Technology Program





Commit to Connect

Assistive Technology Panel
June 24, 2026





Wyoming Facts

- 10th Largest State
- 97,814 square miles
- 48% Federal Public Land
- 5.6% State of WY
- 108,000 Miles of Rivers
- 1st National Park
- 1st National Monument
- 1st National Forest



Wyomingites

2025 Population 589,000

19.8% of population age 65 or older

15.3% citizens with disability

Chronic Health Conditions among 65+

Hypertension, Arthritis, High Cholesterol,
Ischemic Heart Disease, Diabetes.



Importance of Accessible Outdoor Recreation



- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Report (Spring 2023)
 - Documented Health & Wellness as one of the many benefits of outdoor recreation.
- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Summit in 2025
 - Luis Benitez, Keynote Speaker “Outdoor spaces drive physical and mental well being”.
- Adaptive Adventures 2025 Impact Report
 - 100% participants reported feeling a “greater sense of belonging”
 - 88% Improved Mental Health
 - 84% Improved Physical Health
 - 75% Increased Confidence
 - 75% Expanded Social Connections

WATR's Interest in Building Outdoor Recreational AT Portfolio

- Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference (ATIA)
 - MonTECH, Feb. 2023 Over the River and Through the Woods: Montana's Focus on Accessible Outdoor Recreation.
 - Also, a WATR colleague with lived experience and desire to increase recreational opportunities in WY
- WATR team started planning ways to increase Recreational AT within WY
 - AT Advisory Council Input
 - Training
 - Funding
 - Collaboration for increased awareness

Training: ECHO AT Fall 2023 Series on Recreation

Sept. 7, 2023, Over the River and Through the Woods: Montana's Focus on Accessible Outdoor Recreation.

Sept. 21, 2023, Accessibility in WY National Parks

Oct 5, 2023, I Can Play Too: Creating Inclusive Environments for Blind and Low Vision Individuals to Participate in Sports & Leisure

Oct 19, 2023, Wyoming Disabled Hunters

Nov. 2, 2023, Special Olympics Divisioning

Nov. 15, 2023, Adapting Board Games for All

Nov. 30, 2023, Accessible Gaming

Dec. 14, 2023, Go Baby Go WYO

ECHO AT Spring 2024 Series on Recreation

Feb. 1, 2024, Adaptive Winter Sports with Teton Adaptive and JHMR Adaptive

Feb. 15, 2024, Tennis for All

Feb. 29, 2024, Access, Action, and Attitudes: Helping Clients Engage (Recreational Therapy w/ VA)

March 14, 2024, Hippotherapy and AAC: Are we going to the Zoo?

March 28, 2024, Arts education for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

April 11, 2024, Casper Mountain Adaptive Biathlon/Paralympic Club and Outdoor Center.

April 25, 2024, Accessibility Efforts in WY State Parks

May 9, 2024, Adaptive Adventures

Wyoming Outdoor Program-Training

- University of WY
 - Provides rental recreational items for students, faculty, staff.
 - Bikes, kayaks, paddleboards, tents, backpacks, etc.
 - Also, provide recreational experiences at the University and in community.
 - WATR did a training on disability etiquette and ways to provide adapted recreational experiences.
- Continuing to collaboration
 - Program added adapted bikes and adapted kayak to their inventory
 - Share WATR program with others

David Rodman Titcomb Foundation Grant Funds

- Fall 2023
 - Garden Scoot, Adaptive Spinning Rod, Kayak King Cast Rod, Fish Winch, Trekking Poles, Wheelchair blades, Pediatric Tryke, Scooters (2), Freeloader Child Backpack Carrier, Fly fishing and EZ knot tool kit.



DRTF Grant Funds 2024

- Fall 2024
 - Buddy Bike, and Bi-Unique Bi Ski



DRTF Grant Funds 2025

- Fall 2025
 - E Trike
 - Kayak with Outriggers



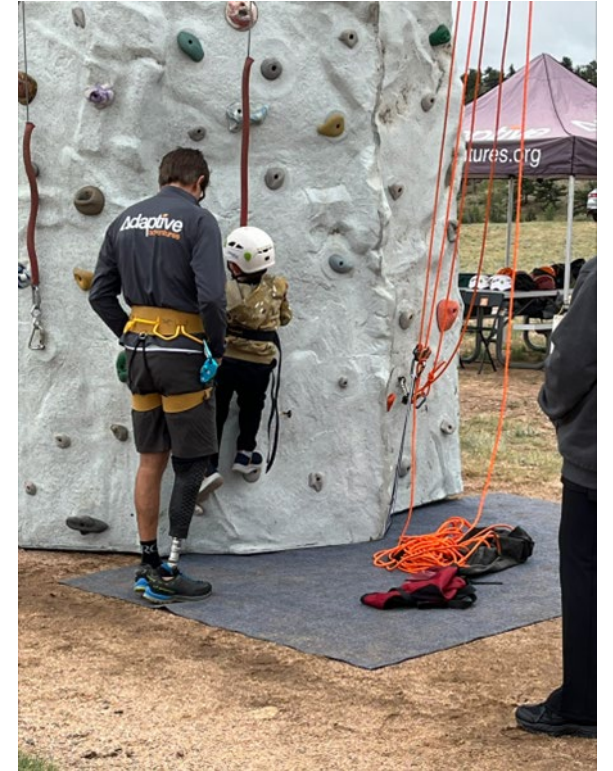
Adaptive Adventures Collaboration

- Serve children, adults, veterans with physical disabilities and their families
- WATR Vendor Participation and Continuing Education
 - August 2024 & 2025
- Increased awareness of WATR program
 - Physical Therapy Clinic
 - Veteran's Administration
 - Senior Groups



Adaptive Adventures Event

Adaptive
adventures



Wyoming Outdoor Recreational Summit

- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality (WORTH) Institute and Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation.
- May 2025, Presenters and Vendor
 - Breaking Barriers: Expanding Accessibility in Wyoming's Outdoor Recreation Communities
 - Great, welcoming experience. Participants shared that they appreciated the accessibility tools during presentation (captioning) and there was strong interest in trail mapping, recreational items.



Collaborations



State Park Assessments



- Hired Altura Solutions to conduct Accessibility Assessments
- Site visits with AT Council Members & WATR staff in 2024
- Valued our input
- Looked at surfaces, parking, building/water access, signage, playgrounds, campsites, picnic areas, and programs.

High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process (HeTAP)

- August 2025
- 10 participants Trained
- Collaboration with WATR and State Parks
- Creates a robust data set that will provide trail users with important information such as typical grade, typical cross slope, average elevation gain and/or loss, surface type and trail uses.
- To assist hikers with knowing the trail specifics to make informed decisions.
- Expanding to hiking groups, clubs, et.



Curt Gowdy Accessible Kayak Launch & Pier



- Accessible Kayak Launch currently in Design Phase of Development
- Onsite visit resulting in changing location due to grade
- Fishing pier is nearing completion





Lake Owen Fishing Pier



- Collaboration with Trout Unlimited and Wyoming Game and Fish
- WATR to provide Technical Assistance with accessibility features, input from members with lived experiences
- Support with recreational AT items
- Location is good for adapted kayak launch and other recreational sports-adaptive biking.



Success Stories

WY Vision Outreach & Wyoming Disabled Hunters Scope



Bikes and Trikes



Information & Assistance

- Email: watr@uwyo.edu
- Phone Number: 307-766-6187
- WATR Website: uwyo.edu/wind/watr
- Device Loan Website: wy.at4all.com
- Terri Wofford (twofford@uwyo.edu)

References

- Wyoming Center on Aging

<https://healthyagingdatareports.org/wy/wyoming-healthy-aging-data-report/>

- <https://www.researchondisability.org/resource/2025-disability-statistics-compendium-adsc/section-1-population-prevalence-compendium-2025#table-1.3-civilians-with-and-without-disabilities-living-in-the-community-for-the-united-states-and-states-2023>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity-basics/health-benefits/older-adults.html>
- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Tourism and Hospitality
- <https://www.uwyo.edu/worth/events/wors.html>

References page 2

- Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Report 2026

<https://wyoscholar.uwyo.edu/items/62d333a7-d4fb-4b9c-b860-403f49bf1251>

- The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation. An Element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning. Program. National Park Service. (March 2005), from,

https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/management/upload/1536_ca-health_benefits_081505-2.pdf

- <https://adaptiveadventures.org/>

- Trout Unlimited

<https://www.tu.org/>

- Wyoming State Parks

<https://wyoparks.wyo.gov/>

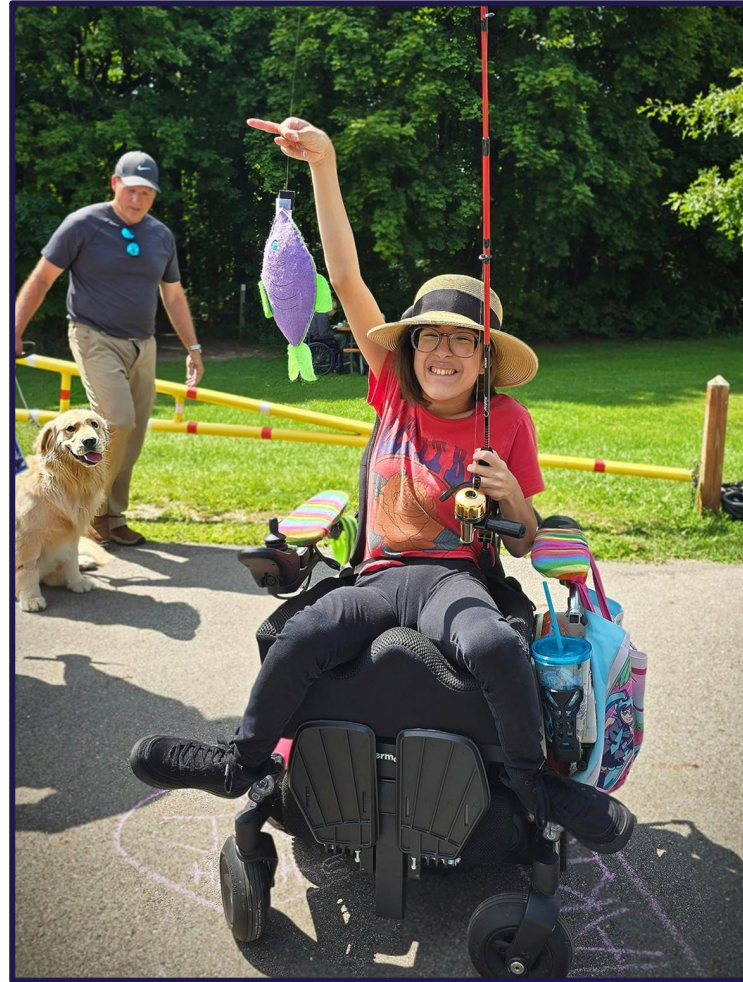
Michigan Assistive Technology Program

**Jileesa Irwin- Outdoor Recreation
AT Specialist**

iPads and Companion Pets



Automatic Fishing Reel



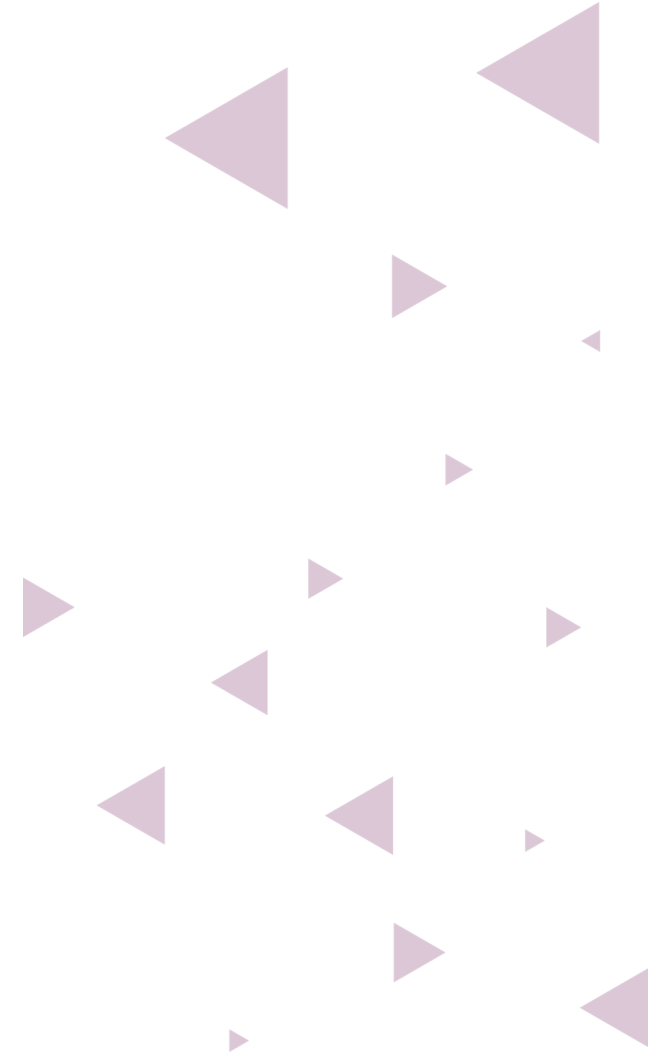
AT for Gardening



E-Bikes and Trikes!



Trikes





Questions and Discussion

Please submit your questions or comments through the Q&A.

Call to Action and Commit to Connect Resources

- Katie Clark Wheeler, Program Analyst, ACL
- Alice Kelsey, Deputy Director, Administration on Aging, ACL





Commit to Connect

COMBATting SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS IN ALL COMMUNITIES





Commit to Connect

www.committtoconnect.org

■ **Technical Assistance**

- Annual National Summit to Increase Social Connections (June 2026)
- Professional and consumer resources
- Webinars and Office Hours

■ **Communities of Practices on outcome evaluation**

- Impact of Chronic Disease Self-Management Education programs on social connection

■ **“Innovations Hub” to encourage replication**

- Clearinghouse of 150+ model programs, interventions, and solutions

■ **Engage an online Nationwide Network of Champions**

- 680+ leaders at local, state, and national levels



Professional Resources

www.committoconnect.org/resources

TOPICAL GUIDE

Intergenerational Engagement



Introduction to Social Isolation and Loneliness

Social isolation and loneliness are increasingly recognized as critical and growing public health issues impacting the lives of millions of Americans. While social isolation and loneliness are related, they are different. Loneliness is defined as a subjective feeling of being alone or separated while social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly.¹

In a May 2023 Surgeon General Advisory, United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy warned about the public health crisis that loneliness, isolation, and disconnection pose to the American public. Prevalence of social isolation and loneliness in the U.S. now surpasses smoking (13 percent), diabetes (15 percent), and obesity (42 percent).^{2,3,4} These are significant issues for older adults and people with disabilities. Although individuals of all ages and backgrounds can be lonely and isolated, groups at higher risk include people with poor physical or mental health, people with disabilities, those experiencing financial insecurity, those who live alone, as well as single parents, older adults, and adolescents.⁵



Social engagement improves quality of life and people with strong connections experience better physical and mental health outcomes.⁶ In addition, when people are socially engaged in their communities, they provide important contributions to their communities through sharing their knowledge, talent, skills, experience, and wisdom with others.

Intergenerational Programming for Social Engagement

Intergenerational relationships between young and older people have the potential to promote social connection. Generations United (www.gu.org), a leading national organization on intergenerational strategies in the U.S. and a partner of Committo Connect, defines intergenerational programs as ones that "unite generations in ways that enrich participants' lives and help address vital social and community issues while building on the positive resources that young and old have to offer each other and to their communities."⁷ To be intergenerational, programs need to "bring people of different generations together for ongoing, mutually beneficial, planned activities that are designed to achieve specified program goals [to] promote greater understanding and respect between generations."⁸ Successful intergenerational programs center on "reciprocity, sustainability, intentionality, training, support, and viewing younger and older people as assets."⁹

Through either regular programming or informal encounters, intergenerational programs are an opportunity for individuals of varying ages to interact, gain social connection, and contribute to their communities.

Intergenerational Engagement Program Examples

Committo Connect convened a community of practice focused on intergenerational engagement aimed



TOPICAL GUIDE

Rural Communities and Building Social Connection for Older Adults and People with Disabilities



Introduction to Social Isolation and Loneliness

Social isolation and loneliness are increasingly recognized as critical and growing public health issues impacting the lives of millions of Americans. While social isolation and loneliness are related, they are different. Loneliness is defined as a subjective feeling of being alone or separated while social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly.¹

In a May 2023 Surgeon General Advisory, United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy warned about the public health crisis that loneliness, isolation, and disconnection pose to the American public. Prevalence of loneliness and social isolation in the U.S. now surpasses smoking (13 percent), diabetes (15 percent), and obesity (42 percent).^{2,3,4} These are significant issues for older adults and people with disabilities. Although individuals of all ages and backgrounds can be lonely and isolated, groups at higher risk include people with poor physical or mental health, people with disabilities, those experiencing financial insecurity, those who live alone, as well as single parents, older adults, and adolescents.⁵

Social engagement improves quality of life, and people with strong connections experience better physical and mental health outcomes.⁶ In addition, when people are socially engaged in their communities, they provide important contributions to their communities through sharing their knowledge, talent, skills, experience, and wisdom with others.

What Defines a Rural Community?

The U.S. Census Bureau considers areas that are not urban to be rural, and it defines the smallest urban areas (urban clusters) as having at least 2,500 people.⁷ The Federal Office of Rural Health Policy uses Census data and considers all non-metropolitan counties to be rural, whereas the Office of Management and Budget considers counties rural if they are micropolitan, with an urban core of at least 10,000 and fewer than 50,000 people, are not part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), or are not classified.⁸ Although federal agencies offer differing definitions of rural, professionals who work with older adults and people with disabilities in rural areas have their own practical definitions. Rural residents cannot easily access services such as transportation, health care, jobs, education, and groceries (S. Royster, personal communication, April 24, 2023; M. Willard, personal communication, April 24, 2023; L. Kaye, personal communication, April 10, 2023). Simply reaching a bus line to connect to services may require dozens of miles of travel.⁹

Challenges and Opportunities for Social Engagement in Rural Areas

Older adults and people with disabilities who live in rural communities face unique barriers to social connection. Distance and limited resources shape rural living. People living in rural areas are more likely to experience poverty and to be socially isolated.¹⁰ Yet the strength of rural communities may also help facilitate solutions.

TOPICAL GUIDE

Supporting Social Connection of People Living with Dementia



Introduction to Social Isolation and Loneliness

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Supporting Social Connection of People Living with Dementia

Dementia is the general term for loss of memory, language, problem-solving and other thinking abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life and activities.⁷ The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease. Other forms of dementia include frontotemporal dementia, vascular dementia, and Lewy body dementia.



People living with dementia are at risk of experiencing social isolation and loneliness for reasons that include cognitive changes, relinquishing driving or lack of transportation, and changes in employment or volunteer status. Dementia can make it more difficult for someone to communicate, and it can also change how a person interacts and connects with others. A person living with dementia may have difficulty remembering conversations, have trouble following new activities, or fear the ongoing stigma that is associated with dementia. As a result, people living with dementia may withdraw from social activities or connections leading to social isolation and loneliness.

Friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors can feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar when learning how best to interact and communicate well with someone living with dementia, further contributing to the person's feeling of isolation and loneliness.

Remaining socially connected is vital for people living with dementia and their care partners because it supports quality of life and enhances health and

Visit www.committoconnect.org for more on how to stay connected.



Visit www.committoconnect.org for more on how to stay connected.





Consumer Resources

www.committoconnect.org/connect-with-others/

Social Isolation: What's in a Name?

Although related, social isolation and loneliness are not the same thing.



SOCIAL ISOLATION is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly.

Social isolation is objective, with measurable factors such as the size of one's social network, the frequency of contact with that network, or the availability of transportation.



LONELINESS is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated.

Loneliness is subjective and more personal. It's the feeling of not having the connections, companionship or sense of belonging that we all need as humans.

You can live alone and not feel lonely or socially isolated, and you can feel lonely while being with other people. Both experiences – social isolation and loneliness – are harmful to overall wellbeing, which is why it's so important to build and maintain social connections.



SOCIAL CONNECTIONS are called many things:

- Social inclusion
- Social cohesion
- Social support
- Social integration
- Community connectedness
- Social networks



No matter what you call it, social connectedness is about the relationships we have with others – and how those relationships are helped or hurt by social, economic and political factors.



Never call people who are socially isolated "hermits" or "loners."

Such labels wrongly cast blame and suggest that someone experiencing social isolation is at fault due to their own decisions or traits.

Social isolation isn't a personal choice or individual problem, but rather an issue that's rooted in community design, social norms and systemic injustices.

Sources: The Social Isolation Learning Network; "Untethered: A Primer on Social Isolation" by David Hsu.

CommitToConnect.org

The Gift of Connection

Connecting with others is essential to our health and well-being. There are many ways we can connect, even if we're physically apart. Whether you're looking for the perfect present, or simply want to brighten someone's day, you can't go wrong with the gift of connection.



Send a Letter-Writing Kit

Gift a kit so you can keep in touch with someone you care about. Buy a ready-made kit or make one yourself. Include stationery and envelopes, postage stamps, and a pen. Make it even more personal with a list of monthly themes for your letters.



Share a Recipe

Make a batch of your favorite cookies or bake a pie using a family recipe. Send through contactless delivery with a copy of the recipe so they can recreate it.



Make a Keepsake

Share memories and celebrate special connections with a scrapbook, photo album, or keepsake box. Include cherished mementos, pictures, and news clippings.



Create a Video

Pass on memories, wisdom, and values through a video recording. Find websites and templates that can help, or just record and send on your phone.

Make Connecting Easier

- Improve someone's virtual experience by gifting accessories like a phone stand, webcam, or headphones.
- Check out free or low-cost conference call options that friends and family can use anytime.
- Connect with friends and family online through photo-sharing sites, private chat rooms, and social media groups.



Show You Care in Real Time

Simply reaching out can be a gift. Count down to a special event like a graduation or birthday with a series of calls, emails, or texts. Or gift a digital photo frame you can update from a distance, or pairs of lamps that light up in one location when touched in another.

Visit ACL.gov/CommitToConnect for more on how to stay connected.



10 Benefits of Social Relationships

People thrive when we get and give ample social support — that feeling of being cared for, listened to, and loved.

Having a good quantity and quality of social relationships enriches our lives in numerous ways.



Strong social connections can:

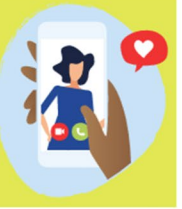
- 1 Increase your lifespan by 50%¹
- 2 Improve your physical health
- 3 Brighten your mental outlook
- 4 Boost your self-esteem
- 5 Facilitate greater empathy
- 6 Help you better recover from disease
- 7 Foster a sense of meaning and purpose in your life
- 8 Trigger the release of stress-reducing hormones²
- 9 Provide a heightened sense of security and belonging
- 10 Shape your health throughout the course of your life³

Sources: ¹Scientific American; ²Harvard Medical School; ³National Institutes of Health.

Discover the steps you can take to build and strengthen social connections at CommitToConnect.org.



Social ties affect our mental and physical health, as well as our mortality risk.



CommitToConnect.org



Webinars and Office Hours

www.committoconnect.org/events

- **Webinars**

- *The Impact of Falls Prevention Programs on Social Connectedness* (May 2026)
- *Capturing Data to Measure the Impact of CDSME on Social Connection* (February 2026)
- *Caregiver Social Connection through Peer Support* (September 2025)
- *Promoting Social Connection Among Veterans* (June 2025)
- *Social Connection as a Protective Factor for Fraud and Exploitation* (December 2024)
- *Outcome Evaluation in Social Connection Programming* (September 2024)
- *Advancing Social Connection Through Art and Creative Expression* (June 2024)
- *Strengthening Social Connection in Housing Communities* (April 2024)

- **Office Hours**

- Upcoming: [Supporting the Social Connection Needs for Individuals with Autism](#) (June 30)
- *Highlighting Innovative Social Connection Programs* (February 2026)
- *Highlighting Champions of Social Connection* (January 2026)
- *Social Connection and Engaging People with Disabilities in Rural Communities* (September 2025)
- *Social Connection and Assistive Technology* (August 2025)
- *Social Connection and Nutrition* (April 2025)

Community of Practice: Assessing the Retrospective Impact of CDSME on Social Connection



www.committtoconnect.org/communities-of-practice

- **Goal:** Assisting community-based organizations with measuring the social connection impact of Chronic Disease Self-Management Education (CDSME) programs through pre- and post-test measures
 - Build and follow an implementation plan
 - Collect outcome data from at least 20 clients (per program)
 - Receive secure data reports
 - Technical assistance and peer learning

Participating Organizations

Aging and Disability Services, Washington	Anne Arundel County Department of Aging and Disabilities, Maryland
Centralina Area Agency on Aging, North Carolina	Detroit Area Agency on Aging, Michigan
Peninsula Agency on Aging (PAA), Virginia	REAL Services, Inc., Indiana
Rush University System for Health, Illinois	Spirit Lake Senior Services Program, North Dakota



Innovations Hub

www.committtoconnect.org/innovations-hub

FilterSort

Caring Together, Living Better

ORGANIZATION NAME

AgeOptions

CITY, STATE

Oak Park, IL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Partnering with faith-based groups to offer social engagement activities for Black and Hispanic family caregivers.

INTERVENTION TYPE

IntergenerationalTechnology

POPULATION SERVED

Older AdultsCaregivers

GEOGRAPHIC POPULATION SERVED

SuburbanUrban

ORGANIZATION TYPE

Area Agency on Aging

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Aging and Disability Resource Ce...

FUNDING SOURCE

Private/philanthropic grant

DESCRIPTION

Program Description

AgeOptions, an Area Agency on Aging based in Oak Park, IL,

Friendly Phone Calling

ORGANIZATION NAME

Decatur Catholic Charities – Faith in...

CITY, STATE

Decatur, IL

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Older adults who are homebound received phone calls from friendly volunteers.

INTERVENTION TYPE

IntergenerationalVolunteerism

POPULATION SERVED

Older AdultsPeople with Disabilit

GEOGRAPHIC POPULATION SERVED

RuralUrbanSuburban

ORGANIZATION TYPE

Other Community-Based Organi...

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Area Agency on AgingFaith-base

FUNDING SOURCE

Older Americans ActPrivate/phila

DESCRIPTION

Program Description

Faith in Action of Macon County provides friendly phone calling

ONEgeneration Letters to O...

ORGANIZATION NAME

ONEgeneration

CITY, STATE

Van Nuys, CA

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

This letter writing program allows older adults and students to connect without using technology.

INTERVENTION TYPE

IntergenerationalArts and Creati

POPULATION SERVED

Older Adults

GEOGRAPHIC POPULATION SERVED

SuburbanUrban

ORGANIZATION TYPE

Aging Services Provider

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Intergenerational groupsNutritic

FUNDING SOURCE

Private/philanthropic grantOther

DESCRIPTION

Program Description

In a world where access to digital resources can improve overall social

COAST-IT (Connecting Olde...

ORGANIZATION NAME

University of Colorado Anschutz Mu...

CITY, STATE

Denver, CO

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Pairs college students studying health with older adults for intergenerational social phone calls.

INTERVENTION TYPE

Health and WellnessIntergenera

POPULATION SERVED

Older Adults

GEOGRAPHIC POPULATION SERVED

RuralFrontierSuburbanUr

ORGANIZATION TYPE

University

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Aging and Disability Resource Ce...

FUNDING SOURCE

Other

DESCRIPTION

Program Description

The University of Colorado (CU) Anschutz Division of Geriatrics and

Fairfax County Virtual Cent...

ORGANIZATION NAME

Fairfax County Department of Neig...

CITY, STATE

Fairfax, VA

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Virtual senior center developed in response to closures of in-person senior centers and adult day health centers due to the COVID-19 ...

INTERVENTION TYPE

Arts and Creative ExpressionHeal

POPULATION SERVED

Older AdultsPeople with Disabilit

GEOGRAPHIC POPULATION SERVED

Suburban

ORGANIZATION TYPE

Senior Center

PARTNERS INVOLVED

Aging and Disability Resource Ce...

FUNDING SOURCE

DESCRIPTION

Program Description

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, senior centers, adult day



Innovations Hub

www.committtoconnect.org/innovations-hub

- **Community-Based Wellness Programs**, Sportable (Richmond, VA)
 - Adaptive sports and recreation for adults with disabilities
- **Connecting Older Adults and Students Through Intergenerational Telecare**, University of Colorado (Denver, CO)
 - Pairs college health professional students with older adults for weekly phone calls
- **Caring Together**, Living Better, Age Options (Oak Park, IL)
 - Partnering with faith-based groups to offer activities for caregivers
- **PEARLS**, University of Washington (Seattle, WA)
 - Evidence-based program for older adults with clinical depression
 - Teaches problem-solving and activity planning skills



Innovations Hub: Submit for Consideration

■ Criteria:

- Intervention, program, or service aimed at promoting social connection or addressing social isolation and loneliness
- Serves older adults, people of all ages with disabilities, and/or caregivers
- Developed and administered by an organization
- Operation for 6 + months
- Innovative
- Measurable positive social connection outcomes
- Could be replicable by broad organizations

Share Your Innovations!





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Welcome to the Nationwide Network of Champions

Commit to Connect's Nationwide Network of Champions (NNOC) is a free, online platform for individuals and organizations interested in engaging with peers and sharing resources to advance social connections as a public health priority.

Community Highlights



Learn More About Commit to Connect
Commit to Connect (CTC) is a cross-sector initiative, launched by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, to fight social isolation and loneliness.

[About Our Work](#)



Benefits of Joining the NNOC
Learn more about how Champions utilize this network to strengthen their social connection work.

[About the NNOC](#)



Sign Up/Login to the NNOC
Log in to your account or sign up to become a member.

[Sign Up/Login to the NNOC](#)



Nationwide Network of Champions

<https://networkhub.committtoconnect.org/home>



Who are “Champions?”



Amy Ballinger, Community Engagement Manager at Independence, Inc. (Lawrence, KS)



Diane Cohn, Support Coordinator, Meals on Wheels of Loveland & Berthoud



Erica Carroll, Founder and CEO of StudentsCare (Philadelphia, PA)

<https://networkhub.committtoconnect.org/home>



Discussions



Insights on Reaching Those with Dementia



Beth Mastel-Smith in Open Forum 3 months ago

 Discussion

Hello all, What are some examples of successful programs that facilitate community engagement for people with dementia? Have you found any essential elements for success with these programs or activities? ... [Show more](#)

 Recommend

[2 replies](#)



Robert Lefkowitz 3 months ago

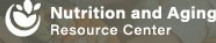
 Most Recent

We find that it is a matter of education, simulation, and the willingness to turn people away who are not good matches for the program. It is easy to teach people best-practices for interacting with ... [view reply](#)

<https://networkhub.committtoconnect.org/home>



Resource Library



The Benefits of Eating With Others: Connecting Nutrition and Socialization for Better Health

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF EATING TOGETHER

Studies show that people who dine with others regularly eat healthier and report a better quality of life. It provides a sense of structure and belonging while offering greater opportunities for improved nutrition. Coming together over a meal can also provide meaningful ways to connect with others over shared beliefs and cultural interests. Benefits may include:

Physical Health

- Improved nutrition
- Reduced risk of chronic conditions
- Better mobility

Mental Health

- Increased self-care
- Sense of well-being
- Reduced anxiety and depression

Social Health

- Opportunities to connect
- Stronger relationships
- Reduced loneliness

REDUCED HUNGER IS MORE COMMON AS WE AGE

As a result, some older adults skip meals or eat in an unbalanced manner when eating alone. When we eat with others, our nutrition intake improves. Examples may include:

Eating better overall
or certain food groups like protein and vegetables.

Consuming more calories
to provide needed energy.

Taking in more nutrients
like iron, calcium, and folate.

Sources cited

- Gender differences in longevity in free-living older adults who eat-with-others: A prospective study in Taiwan. 2017.
- A systematic review and meta-analysis of the social facilitation of eating. 2019.
- Social influences and eating behavior in later life: a review. 2011.
- "You've got to be old to go there:" psychosocial barriers and facilitators to social eating in older adults. 2020.
- Living alone but eating together: exploring lunch clubs as a dining out experience. 2017.
- Eating alone or together among community-living older people - a scoping review. 2021.



Funded by the Administration for Community Living, the Nutrition and Aging Resource Center builds the capacity of senior nutrition programs funded by the Older Americans Act to provide high-quality, person-centered services and enhance program sustainability and resiliency.

TOPICAL GUIDE

Six Considerations for Outcome Evaluation of Social Engagement Programs Serving Older Adults and People with Disabilities



Introduction to Social Isolation and Loneliness

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Social engagement improves quality of life and people with strong connections experience better physical and mental health outcomes.⁶ In addition, when people are socially engaged in their communities, they provide important contributions to their communities through sharing their knowledge, talent, skills, experience, and wisdom with others.

This topical guide is part of a series on themes critical to addressing social isolation and loneliness across the U.S. It is intended for staff and volunteer leaders interested in outcome evaluation of social isolation and loneliness programs and interventions supporting older adults and people with disabilities.

In addition to building an evidence base for health outcomes associated with social isolation and loneliness, it is also critical to collect data on effective programs and interventions. This document outlines key considerations and resources in measuring outcomes for programs promoting social connections.

1. Measure Program Outcomes.

Measuring outcomes is essential to demonstrating program impact on reducing social isolation or loneliness. Evaluations often measure program implementation (e.g., number of people who attended and satisfaction levels) or social participation (e.g., involvement in activities that provide interaction with others) rather than outcomes that show whether a program is achieving its goals (e.g., reduction in loneliness). While output measures provide important contextual information, outcomes demonstrate a program's impact. Outcome evaluations:



Visit www.committtoconnect.org for more on how to stay connected.



Administration for Community Living



Leaders in Aging Well at Home



Social Connection Awareness Week Summit 2024

Back to the Basics: The Building Blocks of Connection

Looking for ways to support those who are lonely and/or isolated in your community?

Join us for **FREE** lunch & learn webinars

- November 11 - 15th
- 12:00 - 1:30pm each day

Learn about state and local efforts to provide meaningful connections for older adults and people with disabilities.

Wisconsin Social Connection Awareness Week November 10 - 16, 2024

[Learn More](#)

[Register Here](#)

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 11
The Power of Connection

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12
Accessible Recreation

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13
Coalition & Community Building

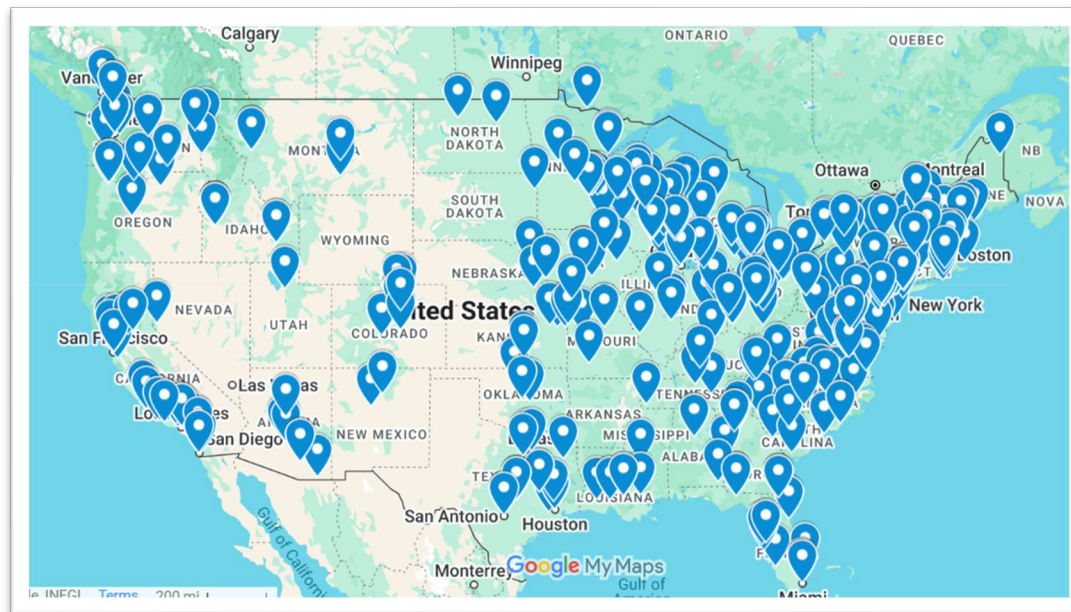
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14
Intergenerational Programs

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15
Technology for Connection

<https://networkhub.committtoconnect.org/home>



Directory



Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
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United States

Blooming Health Inc

Blooming Health Inc
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B'nai B'rith Senior Apartments

B'nai B'rith Senior Apartments
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Boone County Council on Aging

Boone County Council on Aging
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Other Features

- “Meet the Champion” Blogs
- Share and view events
- Polls
- Fact sheets
- Directly message and connect with other member Champions

Meet a Commit to Connect Champion: Coleen Samuels

ND

By Noelle D'Amato posted 12-30-2025 09:50 AM

Recommend

@Coleen Samuels serves as the Executive Director at the Denver Regional Mobility & Access Council (DRMAC) in Denver, Colorado where she works to promote accessible transportation to ensure people can access their community and meet their social connection needs.



Tell us about the work that your organization does. What is your mission and what population(s) do you serve?

Historically, Denver Regional Mobility & Access Council (DRMAC) has primarily served older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, individuals with low income and additional varied populations. We understand that many of these communities intersect but our programming should be as demographic-specific as possible.

Our organization's mission is to ensure people with mobility challenges have access to the community by increasing, enhancing, sharing, and coordinating regional transportation services and resources. The vision of DRMAC is to ensure people with mobility barriers have access to travel options across the region. DRMAC primarily serves Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Clear Creek, Denver, Douglas, Gilpin, and Jefferson counties.

<https://networkhub.committtoconnect.org/home>



National Summit to Increase Social Connections



Calls to Action

1. Join the Nationwide Network of Champions
2. Submit your social connection programs to the Innovations Hub
3. Sign up for our newsletter to stay engaged with our work



National Summit to Increase Social Connections



Calls to Action

4. Create a culture of connection
5. Establish, grow, and measure community connection programs
6. Invest and grow cross-sector partnerships

Calls to Action



CULTIVATING CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

PRIZE CHALLENGE

WHERE SUSTAINABILITY AND BELONGING TAKE ROOT

Phase 1: Accessibility Change Plan

- Up to 50 winners; \$4,000 awards
- Informational webinar: Thursday, June 25th at 3:00 p.m. ET
- Deadline: Wednesday, August 26 at 11:59 p.m. ET

Phase 2: Implementation and Rooting in Community

- Up to 50 winners; \$8,000 awards
- Winners notified in July 2027

Thank You!

- Follow up email containing:
 - Links to slides and recordings for both days
 - A survey evaluation link
- The slides and recording will be available soon:
www.committtoconnect.org/virtual-summit
- For further questions, contact the CTC team at:
info@committtoconnect.org