

# 1 in 2 adults in America reported experiencing loneliness.<sup>1</sup>

## The Risks of Loneliness and Social Isolation

June 2025

Scope of the issue

Loneliness and the lack of social connection can result in significant costs to individuals, communities, and society at large. Social isolation among older adults in the U.S. accounts for an estimated **\$6.7 billion in excess Medicare spending annually**, largely due to increased hospital and nursing facility spending. On the other hand, young adults are almost twice as likely to report feeling lonely than those over 65. **The rate of loneliness among young adults has increased every year in America between 1976 and 2019.**<sup>1</sup>

**37%** of older adults in the U.S. feel socially isolated and over **50%** of adolescents experience loneliness.<sup>2,3</sup>

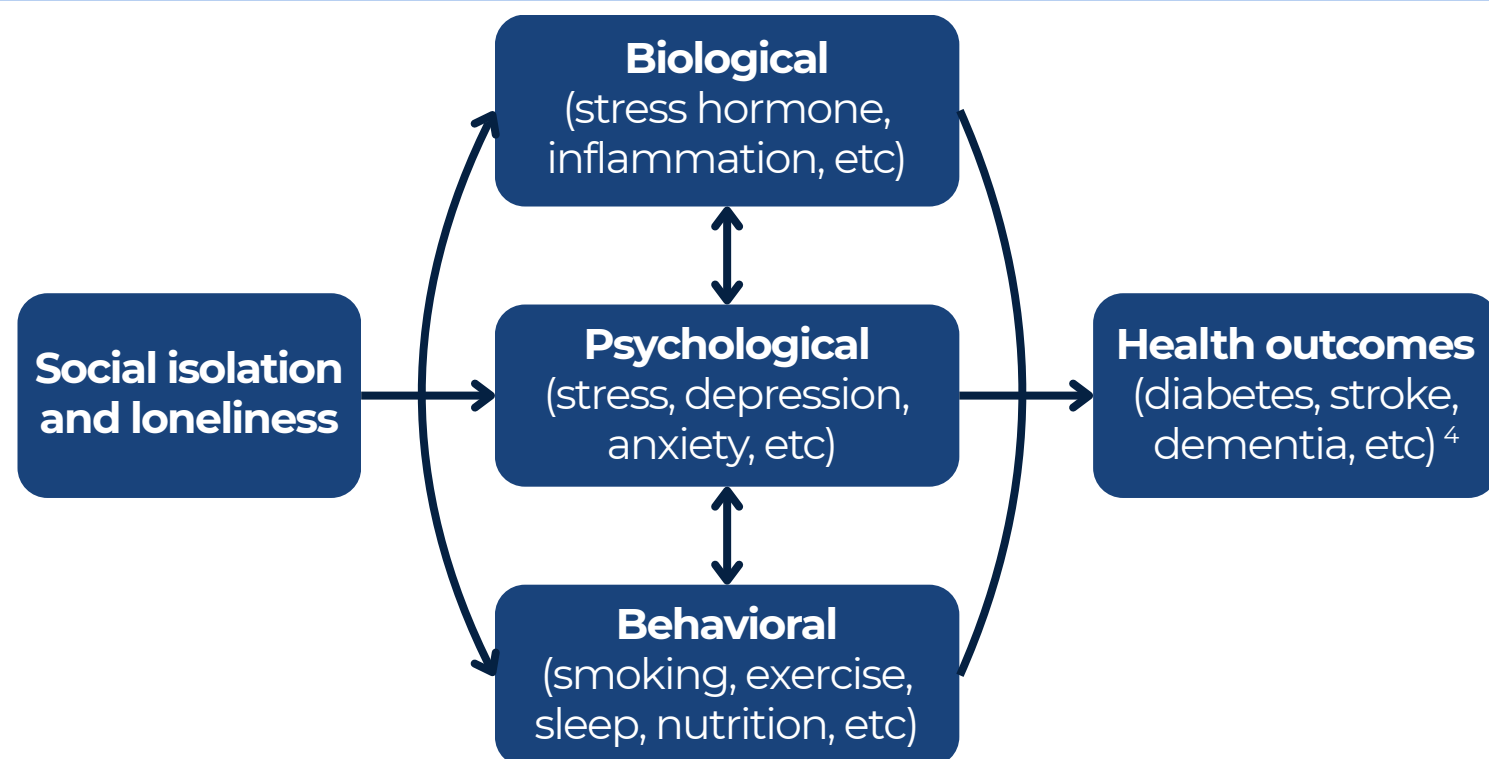
Loneliness & Social Isolation



Social isolation and loneliness have been identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as significant **social determinants of health (SDOH)**, which are non-medical factors that significantly influence a person's health, including their physical and mental well-being.<sup>4</sup>

While people often discuss the two concepts together, social isolation and loneliness are distinct but related concepts. **Social isolation** refers to the objective state of having few and/or distant social connections, and infrequent interactions with other people. **Loneliness**, on the other hand, describes the subjective feeling that arises from the discrepancy between an individual's desired social connections and the actual interactions they have with others.<sup>5</sup>

Health Outcomes



Research shows that social connections are positively associated with longevity, as well as better physical, cognitive, and mental health. Social isolation and loneliness are found to be **predictors of premature deaths, chronic conditions, dementia, and overall worse well-being and quality of life.** Among older adults, those who experience loneliness are found to be more likely to take sleep medications, anti depressants, pain medications, and other medicines that in turn put them at higher risk of cognitive impairment, drug dependency, and accidents.<sup>4,6</sup>

### Interventions and Programs

To combat isolation across age groups, **evidence-based programs** including therapy interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and social skills training, and community building initiatives such as intergenerational befriending programs have shown promises. **Systemic solutions** are equally important. Investments in accessible infrastructure can create more age-friendly environments. **Policy reforms** addressing structural barriers, including age discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, and technology gaps, are essential for sustainable change. By fostering meaningful connections at individual and societal levels, communities can cultivate resilience and well-being for all generations.<sup>1,7</sup>

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