



DEBATE PACK

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Effect of Loneliness on local communities

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Summary

This debate will take place on 15 November 2017 in Westminster hall at 4:30pm. The debate is sponsored by Rachel Reeves MP. This is a digital debate – between 11 and 14 November, members of the public are invited to share their thoughts on the effects of loneliness on local communities on [Facebook](#).

The [Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness](#) was established after her death to “expose the growing crisis of loneliness and find ways to overcome it.” The Commission is co-chaired by Seema Kennedy MP (Con) and Rachel Reeves MP (Lab).

The Commission’s website notes that “loneliness can affect anyone at any stage of their life.” Throughout 2017 the Commission is working with a number of charities to “shine a light on different aspects of loneliness and the positive steps we can all take to combat it.”

The [Commission’s website](#) lists a number of research reports which have identified loneliness as an issue for refugees; carers; disabled people; parents; young people; and the elderly.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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1. Loneliness statistics

The latest official figures on loneliness suggest that just over one-third of adults in England experience loneliness occasionally or more often. In The Cabinet Office's *Community Life Survey* for 2015/16 31% of respondents said they never felt lonely; 34% hardly ever; and 35% occasionally/some of the time/often/always.

How often people felt lonely, 2015-16

England - adults aged 16 and over

How often do you feel lonely?

	%	
Often/always	4	} 35
Some of the time	12	
Occasionally	19	
Hardly ever	34	
Never	31	

Respondents 3,007

Table excludes respondents who answered 'don't know' and those with missing answers.

Cabinet Office [Community Life Survey 2015 to 2016](#)

Broader factors underpinning loneliness have been considered by the Office for National Statistics in its recent work on measuring subjective wellbeing. The following is taken from the ONS' work in this area.

Over 8 in 10 people (84.1%) aged 16 and over in the UK had a spouse or partner, family member or friend to rely on if they had a serious problem in the financial year ending 2014; a deterioration from 3 years earlier (86.4%). Having someone to rely on varied by age – in the financial year ending 2014, 88.7% of people aged 65 and over had someone to rely on compared with 76.3% of those aged 16 to 24.

(Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Survey).

Loneliness has an impact on a person's well-being and a range of personal circumstances such as poor health, living alone and a lack of a support network are factors contributing to feelings of loneliness.

ONS [Measuring national well-being: Life in the UK: 2016](#)

- In 2014/15, 97% of adults in the UK reported having at least one close friend.
- 84% of adults reported having a spouse/partner, family member or friend they can rely on "a lot" if they have a serious problem.
- 61% of people meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least once a week; for 39% meeting socially was less frequent.

1.1 Data tables

Proportion of adults with close friends by number of friends

Definitions:

Adults aged 16 and over across the United Kingdom were asked how many "close friends" they would say they have. Those reporting having at least one close friend is used as the indicator.

United Kingdom	Percentage	
	2011-12	2014-15
At least one close friend	95.4	97.0
<i>Lower Confidence Interval</i>	95.2	96.8
<i>Upper Confidence Interval</i>	95.7	97.2
0	4.6	3.0
1	6.8	6.4
2 to 6	68.1	71.5
7 to 10	13.8	13.0
More than 10	6.8	6.1
<i>Sample</i>	<i>45,713</i>	<i>36,637</i>

Source: Understanding Society: UK Household Longitudinal Study

<http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk>

Proportion of people who meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least once a week

Definitions:

Persons aged 15 and over were asked how often they meet socially¹ with friends, relatives or work colleagues ranging from "Never" to "Everyday". Meeting socially at least once a week is used as the indicator.

¹ 'Meet socially' implies meet by choice rather than for reasons of either work or pure duty.

United Kingdom	Percentage						
	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014
At least once a week	71.1	68.8	69.8	67.7	68.9	63.3	61.0
<i>Lower Confidence Interval</i>	68.8	66.4	67.7	65.5	66.5	61.0	58.5
<i>Upper Confidence Interval</i>	73.2	71.1	71.9	69.8	71.2	65.5	63.3
<i>Sample</i>	<i>2,048</i>	<i>1,894</i>	<i>2,393</i>	<i>2,352</i>	<i>2,420</i>	<i>2,283</i>	<i>2,263</i>

Source: European Social Survey

www.europeansocialsurvey.org

Percentage of people that have a spouse of partner, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem

Definitions:

This question is constructed from three separate questions answered by adults aged 16 and over across the United Kingdom, "How much can you rely on your spouse/family member/friend if you have a serious problem?". Those reporting being able to rely on a spouse/family member/ friend "a lot" is used as the indicator.

United Kingdom	Percentage	
	2010-11	2013-14
A lot	86.1	84.0
Somewhat	10.6	12.5
A little	2.4	2.5
Not at all	0.5	0.6
No friends, family or spouse	0.5	0.4
A lot	86.1	84.0
<i>Lower Confidence Interval</i>	<i>85.7</i>	<i>83.5</i>
<i>Upper Confidence Interval</i>	<i>86.5</i>	<i>84.5</i>

1. In 2010 the British Household Panel Survey sample was incorporated into the Understanding Society sample. Although these are longitudinal surveys, the data have been weighted from cross-sectional analysis. Comparisons can be made but caution needs to be taken.

Source: Understanding Society: UK Household Longitudinal Study

www.understandingsociety.ac.uk

ONS [Social Capital Headline Indicators](#)

2. Some examples of innovative approaches

Most of the innovations in this area have, to date, focused on the elderly, although it is recognised that loneliness affects all age groups.

Several publications in the further reading section below also summarise possible interventions to alleviate loneliness: these are clearly indicated.

Homeshare

Homeshare is an intergenerational housing scheme which looks to match an older person with living space with another person, who provides an agreed amount of support in exchange for a low rent level. The other person is often a student, or a younger person undertaking an unpaid (or low paid) internship. Specific and qualified care is not provided. Rather, companionship and general help are the primary means of support offered.

Homeshare originated in the USA, where Maggie Kuhn (founder of the 'Gray Panthers' – an elder rights movement) established the first programmes in 1972. The first UK programme was launched in 1993 and similar arrangements are currently in place across Europe, with pilots beginning in Japan in 2013.¹

In the UK, the Homeshare Association is administered by [Shared Lives Plus](#) who maintain a record of all programmes running across the UK.² According to the Homeshare international website:

- Householders are typically in their 80s, though the ages range from 70 to well over 90.
- Most are women and most live alone, though some have a family member living with them.
- Some of these older people have other helpers or carers, paid or informal, and for some, homesharing is part of a package of support.
- Homesharers generally have to be 23+ years old and the average age is 27. A high proportion of UK homesharers are from Australia, New Zealand, Eastern Europe and other countries and are visiting the UK to broaden their experience. Some are mature students but many are working. For them, homesharing offers low-cost accommodation in expensive cities like London.
- Most householders need help with domestic tasks like gardening, shopping, cooking, or cleaning.
- Increasingly older people like to use computers for communication to far-flung family, but need technical support to get online.
- Many need companionship.

¹ Homeshare international, [The history of homeshare](#)

² Homeshare international, [United kingdom and Ireland](#)

- For significant numbers, the real benefit of homesharing is the security of having someone in the house at night.³

Both parties are expected to pay a small monthly fee to the Homeshare programme, with each programme setting its own charge scales.⁴

In 2016 NHS England invested £1.75 million in Shared Lives Plus in order to take forward a project to scale up the Shared Lives Model of Care.

Co-housing Schemes

Co-housing communities are intentional communities created and run by their residents. Each household has a self-contained private home as well as shared community space. More information can be found on the [UKCohousing](#) website. Claudia Wood, CEO at DEMOS, commented on co-housing schemes in an evidence session for the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into housing for older people:

Claudia Wood: Co-housing is self-starting. If you start with the mission statement that you want to create something truly intergenerational, you would look to make sure you have a mixture of families and older people. A lot of co-housing has an overall mission statement that everyone goes back to the community. It may be that the older people there—those who are over 50 or 60 and are retired—will be providing childcare for families that are out work. There will be more concerted efforts to create intergenerational opportunities. As with all co-housing, there is no regulated set of rules. Every group makes up their own mission.⁵

Befriending

Age UK define this as:

an intervention that introduces the client to one or more individuals, whose main aim is to provide the client with additional social support through the development of an affirming, emotion-focused relationship over time'. The intervention differs between programmes, but usually involves volunteers or paid workers visiting an individual in their own home (or place of care) or telephoning on a regular basis. There is good evidence that befriending can have positive outcomes, including reducing depression.⁶

As well as Age UK's service, examples of befriending services include [Friends of the Elderly](#) and [Contact the Elderly](#). [Silverline](#) offers "telephone and letter friendship schemes".

Men in Sheds

This began in Australia and now has groups in the US, Canada, Ireland, and the UK:

The core elements of Men's Sheds are that they are voluntary and social organisations providing hands-on activities for men aged 50

³ Homeshare international, [United kingdom and Ireland](#)

⁴

Ibid.

⁵ [HC 370 2017-19](#), 23 October 2017, Q58

⁶ [Age UK Loneliness evidence review](#), 2014, p10

years of age and older who are co-participants in a defined space. Sheds provide a space for older men to meet, socialise, learn new skills and take part in activities with other men. Most Sheds are equipped with a range of workshop tools. Shed programmes aim to improve men's physical, emotional, social and spiritual health and well-being. The role of a Shed in encouraging and engaging men in informal adult learning activity is thought to be particularly important. Some Sheds also provide health related information and 'signpost' men to relevant services. In almost all cases, they are tailored to their local context, rather than being standardised.⁷

Evaluation by the UK pilots found:

- A number of older men noted that prior to coming to the Shed they were predominately sedentary.
- Participation helped raised health awareness through formal presentations by external people and informal chats amongst the older men.
- Participants indicated that it provided vital support, provision of connect to other men, mental and cognitive stimulation.
- participants indicated that it returned a sense of purpose, achievement and self-worth.⁸

Digital reach scheme

The Nominet Trust launched a Digital Reach programme in July 2017. This is aimed at supporting "the UK's efforts to increase digital skills amongst some of the UK's most disadvantaged young people." Digital reach will "demonstrate how they are perfectly placed to steer isolated young people towards positive futures."

£600,000 is being invested in the following six initiatives:

- Action for Children: Action for Children (ACF) will digitise their current paper-based content across three employability programmes in severely deprived urban areas in Scotland.
- Carers Trust: Carers Trust will work with Good Things Foundation to develop an e-learning resource for young adult carers as an extension to Learn My Way (the most widely used tool for digital skills delivered through libraries and community organisations). Eight Carers Trust Network Partners will use the resource to help young adult carers gain the basic digital skills they need to achieve their aspirations.
- Home-Start and #techmums: Home-Start and #techmums will collaborate to help 500 young mothers acquire basic digital skills to overcome the challenges they face in their daily lives, helping them become more confident and to achieve their personal and professional goals.
- The Children's Society and City & Guilds Group: The Children's Society and City & Guilds will engage 550 young people across the Midlands and the North of England by

⁷ Ibid., p12

⁸ Ibid., p13

helping them to improve their digital skills through accredited course development.

- UK Youth: UK Youth will use the investment to create Digital Hubs in 10 member organisations, training a youth worker and three young people to become Digital Champions. They will then work with referral and outreach partners to support the most isolated young people that are engaged with the Digital Hubs.
- Wales Co-operative Centre, YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA: Wales Co-Operative Centre will work with YMCA Swansea, Llamau and GISDA to engage 375 of the hardest-to-reach young people across Wales through a series of workshops and by incorporating digital literacy into existing life skills programmes.⁹

⁹ [Nominet Trust Press Release](#), 6 July 2017

3. Written Questions

Mental Health

Asked by: Walker, Thelma

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to reduce loneliness in (a) England, (b) West Yorkshire, (c) Kirklees and (d) Colne Valley.

Answering member: Mr Marcus Jones | **Department:** Department for Communities and Local Government

Through our policies, including the Supported Housing programme and Disabled Facilities Grant programme, my department is helping those in society get the help and support they need to live independently and be part of their communities.

Our Near Neighbours, and Community-based English Language programmes will also help to reduce loneliness in target populations through their work.

16 Oct 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 106750

Mental Health

Asked by: Brake, Tom

To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, what guidance he is providing to local authorities on incorporating loneliness reduction strategies in strategic planning.

Answering member: Mr Marcus Jones | **Department:** Department for Communities and Local Government

With the support of the Department of Health, the Campaign to End Loneliness developed a toolkit for Health and Wellbeing Boards to help them better understand, identify and commission interventions for the issue of loneliness in older age. This was published in 2013 and can be found here:

<http://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/>

In 2013-14, the Department of Health also added a measure of loneliness to the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework and to the updated Public Health Outcomes Framework. Local authorities can use this as guidance in identifying local needs.

There are various statutory requirements on local authorities to develop strategic planning documents. Local authorities are encouraged to make use of the best available data in developing these documents. Local authorities must also have regard to their public sector equality duty, which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

The Housing White Paper set out two ways in which the planning system will be used to deliver more suitable homes for older and disabled people:

Paragraph 1.16 confirmed the strengthening of the National Planning Policy Framework so that local planning authorities are expected to have clear policies for addressing the housing

requirements of groups with particular needs, such as elderly and disabled people; and,

The Neighbourhood Planning Bill introduced a new statutory duty on the Secretary of State to produce guidance for local planning authorities on how their local development documents should meet the housing needs of older and disabled people. Guidance produced will place clearer expectations about planning to meet the needs of older people, including supporting the development of such homes near local services.

06 Jul 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 1955

[General Practitioners: Training](#)

Asked by: Brake, Tom | Party: Liberal Democrats

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what steps the Government is taking to ensure that training and development opportunities are available to staff in GP surgeries to help them to recognise loneliness and know where to refer people for help.

Answering member: David Mowat | **Department:** Department of Health

The General Practice Forward View (GPFV), published by NHS England in April 2016, listed 10 High Impact Actions that help general practitioner practices to release time for care and provide more accessible and innovative care for their patients which includes social prescribing.

Social prescribing commonly addresses needs relating to social isolation, long term mental health issues and other personal challenges are not best addressed through medical treatment.

The GPFV implementation programme is continuing to gather evidence about successful ways to use social prescribing. Evidence to date indicates that both clinicians and patients welcome this approach, and interest among practices is growing steadily.

27 Apr 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 71737

[Mental Health](#)

Asked by: Berger, Luciana

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment his Department has made of the implications for its policies on tackling health inequalities caused by loneliness of the number of people who spent some of the Christmas period alone.

Answering member: Nicola Blackwood | **Department:** Department of Health

Social isolation is one of several factors that affects people's health throughout their lifetime and drives health inequalities. The strategic health inequalities review led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot of University College London (UCL) (Fair Society, Healthy Lives, 2010) reported that low levels of social integration, and loneliness, significantly increase mortality. The earlier Acheson report (Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health, 1998) noted the importance of maintaining mobility, independence and

social contacts as a way of reducing health inequalities among older people. We have taken a coherent approach to addressing these issues at different stages of life and through key transitions. Practical guidance on the issue has been developed by Public Health England and the UCL Institute of Health Equity (Reducing Social Isolation across the Life course, 2015), as part of a wider effort to reduce local health inequalities.

19 Jan 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 59734

[Life Expectancy](#)

Asked by: Shannon, Jim

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what discussions his Department has had with medical organisations on addressing the effect of (a) loneliness and (b) broken sleep on longevity.

Answering member: Alistair Burt | **Department:** Department of Health

My Rt. hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets regularly with medical organisations to discuss a wide range of issues, including loneliness and how feeling lonely can have a significant impact on a person's health and wellbeing. The Secretary of State addressed this issue in a keynote speech he made in 2013 at the National Children and Adult Services Annual Conference. The text of the speech is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-forgotten-million>

Evidence is still limited for effective interventions which address loneliness. Public Health England's (PHE) Behavioural Insights Team in collaboration with local government, clinical commissioning groups, general practitioners (GPs), and the third sector have designed a low cost, scalable and evidence-informed intervention. This helps to identify older people in primary care who are at risk of social isolation and loneliness and support them through services that draw on the best available evidence of 'what works'. PHE will pilot this intervention, engaging GPs.

There have been no discussions held with medical organisations on the effect of broken sleep on longevity.

26 May 2016 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 38109

4. Press articles

[How Tower Hamlets council is tackling loneliness](#)

BBC News, 12 November 2017

- According to this article, Tower Hamlets Council “is so concerned it has started to treat the issue as a public health priority”

[Parenthood leaves half of mother and fathers feeling lonely](#)

Telegraph, 6 November 2017

[Yorkshire MP talks about loneliness 'crisis'](#)

Yorkshire Post, 23 October 2017

- Rachel Reeves MP talks about the work of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

[Loneliness is harming our society. Your kindness is the best cure](#)

Guardian, 13 October 2017

[Loneliness as bad for health as long-term illness, says GPs' chief](#)

Guardian, 12 October 2017

[Vulnerable people left to suffer chronic loneliness as services 'underfunded and overwhelmed', Labour warns](#)

Independent, 12 October 2017

[Loneliness is deadlier than obesity, study suggests](#)

Telegraph, 6 August 2017

[When loneliness at work drives employees to quit their jobs](#)

Financial Times, 8 June 2017 [Access via Library subscription]

[Shed heaven: The workshops turning men's lives around](#)

BBC News, 11 May 2017

- An article about 'Men's Sheds' (see section 2 for more details)

[How social media is leading to loneliness for people in their 20s and 30s](#)

Manchester Evening News, 20 March 2017

[Loneliness 'forces older people into hospitals' and strains services, say senior doctors](#)

Guardian, 1 February 2016

[Workplace loneliness is a real problem. For 45 hours a week I feel isolated](#)

Guardian, 1 February 2016

- A personal piece with links to further studies

[Not just a problem for old people: Why the young are lonely too](#)

Telegraph, 4 January 2016

5. Press releases

[Charity reveals 'devastating impact' of loneliness on UK parents, children](#)

Action for Children, 6 November 2017

[Living with loneliness as a refugee](#)

British Red Cross blog, 31 October 2017

[Blog: Loneliness is a health issue needing a human response](#)

Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, January 2017

[Combatting loneliness and social isolation – how the workplace can help](#)

Fit For Work blog, 15 August 2016

[Loneliness and isolation: Social relationships are key to good health](#)

Public Health England blog, 8 December 2015

6. Further reading

[Loneliness teaches us that it's good to let students talk](#), TES, 3 November 2017

[What research tells us about social work's role in tackling loneliness](#), Community Care, 25 October 2017

- Relate summarises this report in a corresponding [press release](#), highlighting that issues of loneliness and close friendships can be found across age groups.

["Someone cares if I'm not there": Addressing loneliness in disabled people](#), Sense & Jo Cox Commission on loneliness, July 2017

[You're not alone: the Quality of the UK's Social Relationships](#), Relate, March 2017

[The cost of loneliness to UK employers](#), New Economics Foundation, February 2017

Snell, K.D.M, [The rise of living alone and loneliness in history](#), *Social History*, January 2017, 25 (1), pp2-28

[Social isolation and loneliness in the UK - with a focus on the use of technology to tackle these conditions](#), Internet of Things UK, 2017

[It starts with Hello: A report looking into the impact of loneliness in children, young people and families](#), Action for Children, 2017

[Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK](#), Kantar Public (in conjunction with the Red Cross and Co-op), December 2016

- As well as looking at causes, this publication looks at that the support available for people experiencing loneliness (as of December 2016).

de Jong Gierveld, J. et al., [Chapter 27: Loneliness and Social Isolation](#), August 2016 (The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, second edition, edited by Anita Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman, Cambridge University Press)

Valtorta NK, et al., [Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke: systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal observational studies](#), *Heart*, 2016, 102, pp1009-1016

[Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life](#), Age UK, January 2015

- This publication describes many case studies and provides links to find out more information.

Qualter, P. et al., [Loneliness Across the Life Span](#), *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2015, 10(2), pp250-264

Holt-Lunstad, J. et al., [Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review](#), *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2015, 10(2), pp227-237

Dalhberg, L & K. J. McKee, [Correlates of social and emotional loneliness in older people: evidence from an English community study](#), *Aging and Mental Health*, 2014, 18 (4)

[Interventions for loneliness and social isolation](#), Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, University of York, June 2014

- Features useful bibliography of evidence for successful interventions as of 2014, but finds that “the quality of the evidence is poor.”

[Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life](#), Age UK, 2014

- Chapter 5 of this paper also considers the evidence underpinning certain interventions

Step toe, A. et al., [Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women](#), *PNAS*, 9 April 2013, 110 (15)

Lykes, V.A. and M. Kimmelmeier, [What Predicts Loneliness? Cultural Difference Between Individualistic and Collectivistic Societies in Europe](#), *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 2013 1-23

[Alone in the Crowd: loneliness and diversity](#), Campaign to End Loneliness, 2013

- A document looking at loneliness amongst those with alcohol problems, cancer, mental health problems and dementia, as well

as those who are carers, part of an ethnic minority, living in a care home, or are lesbian, gay and bisexual.

[Loneliness – the state we’re in](#), Age UK: Oxfordshire, 2012

- A paper that looks at both the causes of loneliness and as well as the impact on health and quality of life. Chapter 5 look lists some of the possible interventions to alleviate loneliness and considers some of the evidence behind them.
- Age UK Oxfordshire has also published [Safeguarding the Convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness](#) (2011), which considers intervention strategies, and suggests roles for individuals, Government, local authorities and the third sector

[Tackling Loneliness in Older Age – The Role of the Arts](#), Baring Foundation, October 2012

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