



WHITE PAPER

Combating Senior Loneliness and Social Isolation



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The rising tide of a new epidemic

For America's older adults, loneliness is all too common: **43% of adults aged 60+ say they feel lonely regularly, and 1 in 4 older adults struggle with being socially isolated.**¹ This lack of connection can have life threatening consequences, and **seniors who regularly feel alone have a 45% increased risk of dying sooner than their socially connected peers.**² In fact, loneliness is more of a health risk than obesity, physical inactivity, excessive alcohol consumption, or even smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day.³ Significant research shows that feeling lonely, or being socially isolated, significantly increases the risk for:

- **Heart disease, stroke,⁴ and high blood pressure⁵**
- **Type 2 diabetes⁶**
- **Cognitive decline,⁷ dementia and Alzheimer's disease⁸**
- **Greater stress and depression⁹**
- **Slower wound healing¹⁰ and susceptibility to viruses¹¹**
- **Future falls¹²**
- **Poorer sleep¹³**

With those risks in mind, it's no surprise that loneliness and isolation contribute to higher costs of care and frequent visits to doctors' offices and emergency rooms — **A socially isolated senior costs over \$1,600 more in annual Medicare spending than their less-isolated counterpart.** Additional monthly Medicare costs associated with social isolation (\$134) are even comparable to those associated with arthritis (\$117) and high blood pressure (\$163).¹⁴ Another study found that lonely patients visit the ER 60% more per year than patients who are not lonely.¹⁵ Even more, older adults who live alone are 50% more likely to access emergency care services and 40% more likely to have more than 12 primary care appointments within a single year.¹⁶



43%

Adults 60+ report feeling lonely on a regular basis

\$1,600

Additional annual Medicare spend on socially isolated seniors

How does this all happen?

If people are socially connected, it helps them cope with stress, stay committed to healthy activities, and provides a sense of meaning to their lives, all of which contribute to good health. Unfortunately, older adults have an increased risk for loneliness and social isolation because they're more likely to live alone, manage chronic illness, struggle with hearing loss, deal with the inevitable loss of family or friends, and be on the receiving end of ageism. It's possible to be alone and not feel lonely, just as it's possible to be surrounded by people yet feel alone. Loneliness is the feeling of being alone or separated, while social isolation is the actual physical separation from other people.¹ Loneliness, social isolation, and living alone are all equally important health risks, and each on its own increase the possibility of premature death.¹⁷

Papa is proven to reduce loneliness and unhealthy days among older adults

The good news is that, unlike other risk factors, it's possible to modify loneliness and isolation. Papa pairs older adults and families with Papa Pals for companionship and assistance with everyday tasks. Papa members can have a Papa Pal fulfill several different essential needs, but 65% of members join Papa seeking companionship. These daily interactions with Papa Pals provide meaningful connection and practical support to older adults who need a connection to others.

In a randomized controlled study conducted by Humana, chronically ill members who received Papa saw significantly greater improvements in loneliness over six months compared to others who received a loneliness resource guide. While all members felt lonely or severely lonely when the study began, **after participating in Papa, 69% felt less lonely, and 39% were no longer lonely.** As far as the health of the study participants, **Papa members reduced the number of days they felt physically unhealthy by 4.5 days and mentally unhealthy by four days**, while the control group saw the same measures reduce by only 1.8 days and 0.7 days, respectively.¹⁸ The outcomes experienced by Papa members significantly improved their quality of life, but the potential for lower costs of care is also important to consider. Through their Bold Goal initiative, Humana found that just one unhealthy day a month is associated with a \$16 increase in monthly medical costs and an increase of 10 hospital admissions per thousand patients.¹⁹

69%
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Papa's book of business results reveal similar improvements across all users of any health status. For example, in an analysis of more than 1,000 Papa members, **45% of members reported an increase in the number of days they felt physically and mentally healthy.**^a Among members who were considered lonely when they first started using Papa, 68% reported reductions in loneliness.^b Most importantly, members love Papa, and 82% are satisfied with their experience. Members even credit their Papa experience as a major reason for staying with their current health plan.^c

a: Internal analysis of Papa members who provided at least one follow up assessment (CDC Healthy Days questionnaire) between December 2020 and March 2021.
b: Internal analysis of Papa members who provided at least one follow up assessment (UCLA three-item Loneliness Scale) between December 2020 and March 2021.
c: Papa internal satisfaction survey results.



It's critical to address senior loneliness and social isolation now

Loneliness and social isolation are associated with a diagnosis of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes within as little as five years.⁶ This fact alone highlights the immense potential to reduce the burden of illness, lower healthcare costs, and improve the quality of life among seniors. Loneliness was already a major concern for older adults and their families, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only added to the burden of isolation, depression, and stress. While things are returning to normal, the harmful effects are expected to endure, and older adults face the possibility of continued poor health and increased frailty. Papa can help you make a difference and provide much-needed companionship and support for your members who need it most.

For more information, contact learnmore@joinpapa.com.



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