

No one should have no one

tackling loneliness and isolation in Wales



Creating an age friendly Wales

Loneliness and isolation are a daily reality for many older people; 75,000 older people in Wales have reported 'always or often' feeling lonely.

Feeling lonely has many detrimental effects on older people, and there is increasing evidence of the negative impacts on physical and mental health. There is strong evidence that loneliness can increase the pressure on a wide range of local authority and health services. Equally, there are practical actions that can be taken to address the issue.

Poor transport, an inaccessible built environment, a lack of local amenities and facilities and digital exclusion can cause isolation and feelings of loneliness. Removing these barriers to create an age friendly Wales will increase opportunities for older people to pursue an interest, join in and have a role in their communities.

Older people in Wales have told us about the ways they would seek to ease loneliness in local communities.

- 70 per cent said lunch clubs and social clubs for older people.
- 70 per cent said free or subsidised transport to and from social events.
- 70 per cent said regular visits from a friendly face.
- 58 per cent said a regular weekly phone call.

"You need to feel wanted - we all need to be needed ... and we have a lot to offer whatever our age."

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Age Cymru believes loneliness should be recognised and treated as a public health priority. We propose that local authorities take the following steps.

- Create safe, accessible built environments with places to meet that are easily accessible by integrated local public and community transport.
- Involve older people in identifying and developing solutions to isolation.
- Work with housing, transport, health, care, voluntary sector organisations and GPs to deliver practical and emotional help to tackle loneliness.
- Provide services that prevent or manage loneliness and isolation at life stages which are likely to increase loneliness, such as bereavement, having to stop driving, or moving to a new home or residential care.
- Agree specific local actions to reduce loneliness and monitor and evaluate their impact.

“You are cautious in case you fall down because there will be no one to pick you up.”

Olwen

Olwen is 86, single and has no children. Until recently, she would walk her dog every day and enjoyed catching the bus to the local shopping precinct, library and café.

Olwen suffers with arthritis which can limit her mobility. Cuts to local bus services mean that the bus no longer travels along her street and she now has to walk further to a bus stop. Since falling near her home, she has become worried about going out and is increasingly struggling with personal care. The onset of the winter months has made things worse as the pavements have become wet and icy. Olwen is concerned that another fall could lead to admission to hospital or to a care home and she is increasingly isolated in her own home.

“Sometimes it’s too much trouble to get dressed. Sometimes I get up in my pyjamas and I don’t get changed.”

What can the local authority do?

Ensure an accessible and inclusive built environment that enables older people to take an active part in their communities.

- Prioritise safe, walkable neighbourhoods with well-maintained pavements and good street lighting.
- Provide public seating along walking routes and in community areas.
- Ensure pedestrian crossings allow sufficient time to cross roads safely.
- Provide enough clean and accessible public toilets.

Provide vital public and community transport services to help keep older people independent, linking up communities and making sure older people can get to the facilities and amenities they need to lead fulfilling lives.

Work with individuals and groups that have strong community connections, such as hairdressers, shopkeepers and faith groups to identify people who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing loneliness and link them to appropriate forms of support.

Provide access to strength and balance classes for people who have fallen or who are at risk of falling.

Bill

Bill, a Welsh speaker, is 82 and lives in a city. Bill was recently bereaved and his family live too far away to visit regularly.

Bill is an active member of his local 50+ Forum and attends a weekly adult community learning course to improve his computer skills. Despite all his daily activities, when Bill goes home and shuts the door every evening, he feels lonely. He is reluctant to talk to his family about his feelings as he doesn't want to add another pressure to their already busy lives. Bill's local authority is considering withdrawing funding for his adult learning class and the 50+ Forum. He has also witnessed the closure of local libraries.

What can the local authority do?

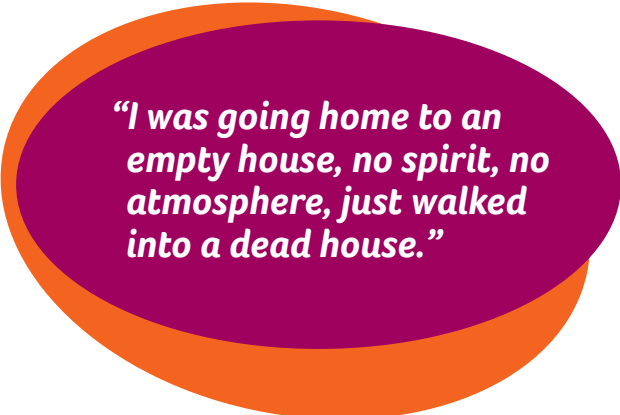
Provide vital opportunities for older people to participate in their local community and wider society, for example by way of learning, social activities, paid work or volunteering.

Support older people and community groups to develop and deliver local solutions to counteract loneliness and isolation.

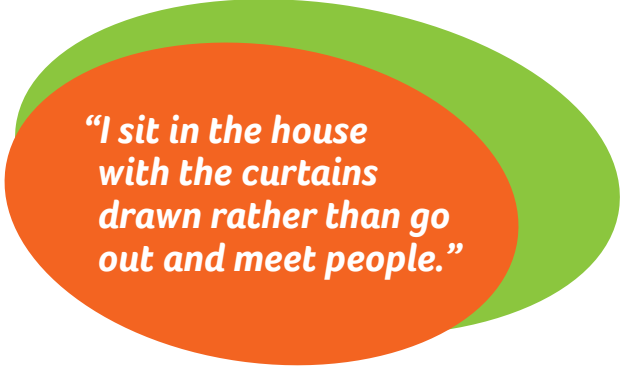
Work with communities across the generations, to foster informal structures that enable people to participate in society on their own terms.

Increase the availability of facilities and activities in communities by working in partnership.

Provide adequate public library services and continue to ensure that libraries support digital inclusion.



"I was going home to an empty house, no spirit, no atmosphere, just walked into a dead house."



"I sit in the house with the curtains drawn rather than go out and meet people."

Amra

Amra is 76 and lives in south-east Wales. She was born in Pakistan and moved to Wales in her twenties.

Amra's children are adults and have moved away from the area. Although she is the primary carer for her husband who recently suffered a stroke, Amra has no knowledge of her rights as a carer. Amra's lack of awareness of her benefit entitlement and available support from social services has left her struggling to cope financially and feeling increasingly socially isolated. As Amra's knowledge of English is limited, she lacks confidence and is unaware of where to go for advice.

What can the local authority do?

Commission good quality information and advice to help older people and carers to make informed decisions, plan ahead, access services and entitlements and contribute to society. Caring roles can cause isolation from family and friends, which can have implications for the health and well-being of the carer.

Work in partnership to make information and advice available in a range of formats and languages and in locations where older people live their daily lives.

Ensure that every older person throughout Wales has access to a free independent advocacy service should they wish to use it.

Ensure that carer's assessments are available to all carers and are followed up with relevant services and support.

Commission person-centred care services that support individuals to maintain their independence and dignity.