

Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness



S5M-15609: A Connected Scotland - The Scottish Government's Strategy for Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness

Introduction

Age Scotland welcomes this debate and believes the Scottish Government's new strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness is an important step to help empower Scottish communities to fight loneliness. Age Scotland has campaigned tirelessly on this issue and are proud that the call for a national strategy has been taken forward and delivered by the Scottish Government. As one of our strategic aims is to tackle loneliness and isolation we have several strands of work to achieve this such as our community connecting service, good day calls, our Freephone helpline, and extensive community development work across Scotland which supports and enables older people's groups to flourish like the Men's Sheds movement.

Key facts about loneliness

The sad truth is – loneliness kills. **Research has likened the impact of loneliness to smoking 15 cigarettes a day** while also increasing the risk of stress, anxiety and depression, and doubling the risk of dementia.

Loneliness can occur at different ages and stages; however, many of the triggers tend to congregate in later life due to life changes such as:

- bereavement
- retirement
- moving to a new area
- illness
- children moving away from home.

Navigating these transitions can be overwhelming if someone does not have a support system in place, which is the case for **100,000 older people who say they feel lonely all or most the time** - the equivalent to one older person on every street in Scotland.

Our research has also found that **200,000 older people in Scotland go half a week or more without human contact.**

In fact **half of all over-75s say their main form of company is their television or a pet.**

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We are a registered charity (#SC010100), and company limited by guarantee (#153343), in Scotland at the above address.

Loneliness and social isolation is a public health crisis, so it is more important than ever that this strategy is used to tackle the problem, and that we work together to end loneliness.

Positive aspects of the strategy

There is much to welcome in this strategy, in particular:

- The strategy recognises that loneliness is related to numerous policy areas such as transport, housing and poverty and, therefore, a cross Government approach is needed to tackle it, and that local solutions are central to the solving this public health crisis
- The recognition that loneliness can affect anyone at any age, and that certain transitions in life can make a person more vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation such as growing older
- The fact the Scottish household survey will now have a question on loneliness is an important step to measuring the scale of the problem in Scotland- something that Age Scotland has previously called for in our consultation response to the draft strategy
- Veterans are recognised as a distinct group who will need tailored solutions, that the strategy links with the recently published ‘Strategy for our Veterans’
- People with dementia, their families, and unpaid carers are also highlighted as a vulnerable group at risk of loneliness and isolation, and that this work will be linked with National Dementia Strategy
- The Scottish Government’s National Implementation Group will include key stakeholders, including those from the Third Sector, and develop the plans to deliver the strategy
- The establishment of a Ministerial Steering Group, chaired by the Minister for Older People and Equalities and comprising Ministers from key portfolios to maintain oversight of activity, will drive forward progress and tackle emerging issues

Areas for further development

Whilst there is much to be celebrated in ‘A Connected Scotland’, there is still room for further development:

- £1million investment over the next two years to tackle the problem is of course welcome, but we believe the scale of the challenge is so large that more investment, for long term projects will be required
- We also feel more clarity is needed over how the Scottish Government intends to measure what impact the strategy has had in reducing loneliness and isolation. It is important that clear timeframes and indicators are developed in order to inform the delivery of the strategy.
- In order to measure the strategy’s impact, knowing the full picture is essential and this could be done, for example, by linking with numerous data sets such as Information Service Division of the NHS Scotland. This would help to gather information from health and social care professionals who work with lonely and isolated people every day.

What Age Scotland is doing to tackle loneliness

As well as raising awareness of the impact of loneliness and isolation, Age Scotland also tackles it on a practical level through a range of projects such as our **Freephone helpline** which provides information, friendship and advice to older people, their families and carers. It is free to call on 0800 12 44 222 [Find out more here](#)

Our **Community Connecting Service** which links older people to local organisations that offer friendship, social activities, health and fitness groups and events in their area. Our volunteers will keep in touch with calls of encouragement and friendship should people need some extra support. They will provide people with opportunities to discuss any other services available and where relevant, make contact with local services on their behalf. Older people can call the team for free on 0800 12 44 222 to get connected. [Find out more here](#)

Age Scotland's **Community Development team** have the important role of identifying opportunities and support for our 1,100 member groups to develop new initiatives which encourage health and wellbeing and tackle loneliness and isolation, including Men's Sheds, Walking Football and Intergenerational projects. Allowing people to come together on their own terms, and pursue their own goals is key to community development work and it is vital community groups such as Men's Sheds are supported to develop and tackle loneliness and isolation in way that has a strong local presence, and is developed for and by the people who will benefit from the service. [Find out more here](#)

Through our independent living service, **Age Scotland's 'Good Day Calls'** provide a daily phone check-in service to older people which also aims to tackle loneliness and provide older people and their families security and support so that they can live well and independently in their own home. The new service named Good Day Calls is run from Orkney and provides reassurance to older people, and their family, that someone will call to speak with them 365 days a year as a check-in ensuring they are well, offer support and a friendly chat. [Find out more here](#)

We believe that all of these community focused initiatives are scalable solutions and have an important role to play in tackling loneliness amongst older people in Scotland.

About Age Scotland

Age Scotland is Scotland's leading charity advocating on behalf of older people. Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life. Our mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that people in Scotland can enjoy better later lives.

Age Scotland's Strategic Aims are to promote positive views of ageing and later life; help older people to be as well as they can be; and to tackle loneliness and isolation.

For more information:

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