Addressing Isolation Among Older Adults –
the Role of Social Connectedness in Healthy Aging
May 22, 2014

Improving the lives of 10 million older adults by 2020
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the Role of Social Connectedness in Healthy Aging

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Social isolation and loneliness

Two sides of one coin

• **Social isolation** refers to an *objective* state of having minimal contact with other people

• **Loneliness** refers to a *subjective* state of negative feelings associated with perceived social isolation
A growing issue

43% is one estimate for prevalence of social isolation.

29% (11.3 million) of older people live alone.

72% (8.1 million) of that group are women.

Over 16 million seniors will be living alone in 2020 based on current demographic trends.
Issues in specific populations

Urban areas

- Older people of color are disproportionately affected
- In neighborhoods of concentrated poverty
  - Higher crime rates
  - Less access to services
  - Less green spaces
  - Fewer public transportation options
  - More residential turnover
    - Loneliness decreases as time at current residence increases

“The image of confinement is still present in the city, notably with the fear of entering particular neighborhoods, or the danger of moving around areas at certain times of the day or night, or the threats posed by natural disasters.” – Prof. Chris Phillipson (2004)
Issues in specific populations

Rural areas
• Less access to other people and civic engagement
• Fewer transportation options beyond driving
  • Life expectancy exceeds safe driving years

LGBT
• Twice as likely than non-LGBT older people to live alone, twice as likely to be unmarried, and 3 to 4 times less likely to have children
• Higher disability rates, poverty rates, and mental health concerns from lifetime of discrimination and stigma
Why it matters

Older people without adequate social interaction are **twice as likely to die prematurely.**

The mortality risk is comparable to that from smoking 15 cigarettes a day or drinking 6 alcoholic beverages a day. It is twice as dangerous as obesity.
Senior Centers = Social Connectedness

- Senior Center Survey
- Importance of Senior Centers in preventing social isolation
  - Susan Getman, Wilmington Senior Center, DE
- Social Isolation Outreach
  - Erin McLeod, Senior Friendship Centers, FL
William Hodson Center

- Preventing Isolation since 1943
- Dr. Aday Study
Preventing Isolation

- Approximately 70% of senior center participants are women
- Half live alone
Senior Centers
Experts at Preventing Isolation

- Programs and Services
- Welcome Newcomers
  - Tour the center
  - Introduce to potential friends
  - Diversity training

Holiday Park, Wheaton, MD
Two Examples

- Multi-purpose senior center in an urban setting
- Approximately 2,000 clients annually, with majority African-American women
- Focus on enriching and sustaining the lives of older adults
- Positive impact on overall well-being
Senior Centers
Experts at Making Connections

Transportation

Meals
Senior Centers
Experts at Making Connections

The Three “B’s”
Senior Centers
Experts at Making Connections

Moving Beyond Bingo
Senior Centers
Experts at Making Connections

Special Populations
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren
- Caregivers
Senior Centers
Experts at Well-being

Mr. Murphy’s Story
Senior Centers
Experts at Well-being

Benefits of Integrated Programs and Services
Senior Centers
Experts at Well-being

Margaret’s Story
Senior Centers
Experts at Well-being

Welcome
Opportunity
Purpose

A Community for Life!
Senior Centers
Experts at Preventing Isolation

- Connections: transportation, meals
- Meaningful activities that promote social interaction
- New ideas, healthy lifestyle choices, engaging conversation
- Open relationships with professional staff and peers
- Integrated services
- Safe haven
- A reason to get up in the morning
Senior Centers
Experts at Preventing Isolation

Contact Information

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Senior Centers Reaching Out

- Local Fire and Police Department
- Outreach Social Worker
- Social & Faith Based Organizations
- Outreach via community newspapers & flyers
- Senior Housing
- Peer & Family identification
Outreach Programs

Senior Companions

Make Independence a Reality

Senior Companions are volunteers age 55 and over who make a difference by providing assistance and friendship to adults who have difficulty with daily living tasks, such as shopping or paying bills. We help these adults remain independent in their homes instead of having to move to more costly institutional care. Senior Companions give families or professional caregivers a much needed time off from their duties, run errands, and often provide friendship for their clients.

- Senior Companions
- Intergenerational Programming
- Support Groups – Seniors Without Partners
- Mobile Senior Center
  West Suburban Senior Services, IL
- “Home Tea” & “Simply Soup”
Since 1973, a Mission to promote health, dignity and quality of life throughout the journey of aging.

“Isolation and loneliness are the malnutrition of the aging.” — Brother William Geenen, CSC, Founder of Senior Friendship Centers, Inc.
People Helping People
It’s All About Connections
Friendship at Home – The Antidote for Isolation

- **Friendship at Home** matches caring volunteers with isolated seniors through:
  - Telephone Reassurance
  - Friendly Visitors
  - Supportive & Crisis Intervention

- Volunteers are offered orientation, training and continuing education classes.
Additional Ways Senior Centers Reach Out

- **Friendship** Meals on Wheels
- Case Managers – emergency preparedness
- Friendship Follows – caring for our alumni
- Integrated programs and services:
  - Adult day care
  - Caregiver Resource Centers
  - Volunteer programs
  - National model medical/dental clinics
  - Working with faith communities
Questions?
September is National Senior Center Month

2014 theme

Senior Centers: Experts At Living Well

Look for the program guide in June 2014 for September program planning.
Get Involved with NCOA

- Visit ncoa.org and sign up to receive news, resources, and opportunities to learn and act.

- Learn more about NCOA’s National Institute of Senior Centers at www.ncoa/nisc or Maureen.OLeary@ncoa.org

Share NCOA’s free, trusted tools with older adults.

- BenefitsCheckUp.org
- EconomicCheckUp.org
- MyMedicareMatters.org
- HomeEquityAdvisor.org
- RestartLiving.org