

# Loneliness has been on the rise

The U.S. Surgeon General released a report in 2023 called "[Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](#)". Nationally, there has been an increase in reported loneliness and isolation.

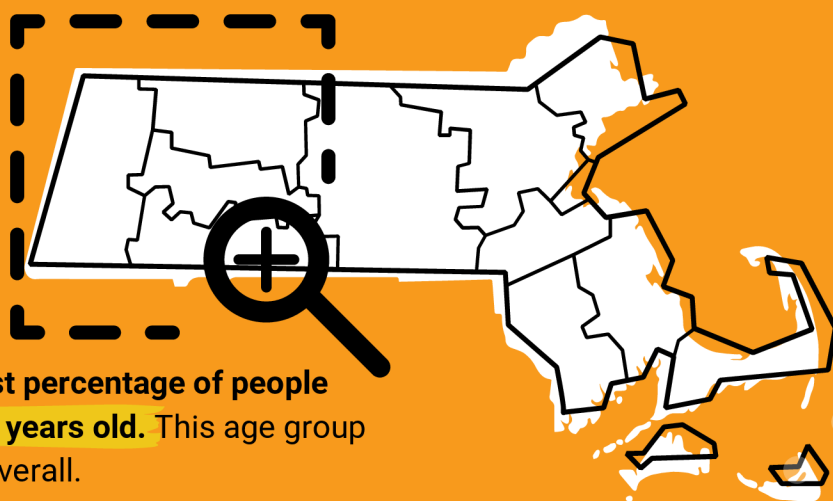
## Loneliness and isolation are impacting communities in Western MA.

What did we learn from 2023 Community Health Equity Survey (CHES) respondents ages 18+?

**16%** reported feeling isolated 'usually' or 'always'

The age group with the **highest percentage of people reporting isolation was 18-24 years old**. This age group was also the highest for MA overall.

**29%**



Other data sources show **older adults also struggle with isolation**. An estimated **1 in 4 adults aged 65 and older are socially isolated** (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine).



## Why does it matter?

Loneliness has real health impacts.



**High levels of social connectedness** are associated with...

- better health
- greater preparation and resilience to natural disasters
- lower levels of community violence
- greater economic prosperity
- increased levels of civic engagement
- more representative government

cardiovascular disease  
dementia  
stroke  
depression  
anxiety  
premature death

Lacking social connection is **as dangerous as smoking** up to 15 cigarettes per day.

## What can we do as individuals?

- ✓ Participate in social and community groups.
- ✓ Seek out opportunities to serve and support others. [Find volunteer opportunities through the United Way of Pioneer Valley's volunteer portal.](#)
- ✓ Reduce practices that lead to feelings of disconnection from others, such as excessive screen time and unhealthy relationships.
- ✓ Seek help during times of struggle by reaching out to a friend, family member, counselor, healthcare provider, or the 988 crisis line.

## Let's work together!

Government, community-based organizations, health care, education, media, philanthropy, researchers — **we all can play a role in strengthening social connections.**

### Additional recommendations & information

- U.S. Surgeon General, [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation](#)
- PHIWM, [Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western Massachusetts](#)
- MA DPH, [CHES 2023 Mental Health Report](#)

### Sources

- MA Department of Public Health, [2023 CHES](#)
- U.S. Surgeon General. [Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. 2023.](#)
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. [Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System](#)