Loneliness has been on the rise

The U.S. Surgeon General released a report in 2023 called [“Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation”](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf). 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 at 29%. This age group was also the highest for MA overall.

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:

* Cardiovascular disease
* Dementia
* Stroke
* Depression
* Anxiety
* Premature death

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

High levels of social connectedness are associated with…

* Better health
* Greater preparation and resilience to natural disaster
* Lower levels of community violence
* Greater economic prosperity
* Increased levels of civic engagement
* More representative government

## 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.](https://uwpv40.galaxydigital.com/)
* 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](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf)
* PHIWM, [Youth Mental Health Roadmap for Western Massachusetts](https://www.publichealthwm.org/reports/ymh-roadmap)
* MA DPH, [CHES 2023 Mental Health Report](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/ches-2023-mental-health)

## Sources

* [MA Department of Public Health, 2023 CHES](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/community-health-equity-initiative)
* [U.S. Surgeon General, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf)
* [National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020 Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System](https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25663/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-older-adults-opportunities-for-the)