



NEWS RELEASE

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A NEW CAMPAIGN TO END LONELINESS: THE HIDDEN KILLER OF OLDER PEOPLE

Five organisations are joining forces to fight isolation and loneliness in older people, which research suggests is as great a threat to health as smoking and as much of a threat as obesity.

The Campaign to End Loneliness is being launched on February 1st by Independent Age, Age UK Oxfordshire, Counsel and Care, and WRVS and is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

A YouGov poll carried out by the Campaign's launch found that fewer than 1 in 5 people have ever seen or heard information about loneliness as a health risk and fewer than 1 in 3 who work in the health and social care professions have. This hidden public health threat often goes untreated and it is vital that health professionals are alert to the two-way links between poor health and loneliness and are able to make connections in diagnosis and treatment.

The Campaign is also today publishing *Safeguarding the Convoy – A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*, inviting others to join the Campaign and take action to end loneliness and future proof forthcoming generations of older people against it.

Andrew Barnett, Director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Campaign's founder funder, said: "Loneliness is something which affects us all but older people are particularly vulnerable to becoming isolated, through loss of friends and family, loss of mobility or reduction in income. We need to consider not just the practical but the emotional and psychological implications of growing numbers of older people within our communities."

Laura Ferguson, Director of the Campaign, said: "As we launch the Campaign to End Loneliness today, we want to raise awareness of the serious risks of loneliness. These risks are not being treated as an important enough problem for public health.

"Ending loneliness requires mutual responses: responsibility shared whether we are simply acting as individuals, or as part of the wider civil society, or are in authority at a national or local level.

"The problems of loneliness and isolation need to be put on an equal footing with any other condition associated with ageing. Ending loneliness should be part of the solution to the challenge of reforming care and support.

"Action is needed now to end loneliness. We look forward to developing strong partnerships with other committed groups to tackle this blight on society that is threatening the lives of older people today."

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Campaign

The Campaign to End Loneliness will launch on 1 February 2011. The Campaign aims to maintain and create connections in older age and was started in 2010 by four founder partners:

Age UK Oxfordshire, Counsel and Care, Independent Age and WRVS. It is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. More information can be found at:

www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

Loneliness is bad for your health. Researchers rate loneliness and social isolation as a higher risk than lifelong smoking (Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB (2010) 'Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review', *PLoS Med* 7(7): e1000316). It is closely associated with depression and it has been shown that loneliness makes it harder to regulate behaviour, rendering people more likely to drink excessively, have unhealthier diets or take less exercise.

In some cases a health condition may trigger greater isolation and loneliness. Decreasing mobility and chronic pain can also inhibit people in keeping up with their family and friends. Loneliness increases with greater limitation in people's ability to undertake activities of daily living. Indeed physical limitation is the largest single predictor of loneliness.

For an electronic copy of the report *Safeguarding the Convoy – A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*, contact lillian.hoag@counselandcare.org.uk

About the poll: All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,238 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th-11th January 2011. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

The launch event takes place on Tuesday 1 February in London. For a media pass, contact Lillian Hoag at lillian.hoag@counselandcare.org.uk

The four founder members also make up the management group of the Campaign to End Loneliness and recognise the importance of working together and with others to end loneliness: a complex, very personal and often hidden issue which has knock on effects across health and wider society. These organisations are:

Counsel and Care is a national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support. VitalLinks is Counsel and Care's new national network of befriending schemes for older people that aims to help older people, their families and carers to locate a nearby scheme and assists befriending schemes to connect with each other. The goal is to reduce loneliness and

isolation by raising the profile of befriending for older people and filling the gaps in provision across England and Wales. For more information visit www.counselandcare.org.uk/vital-links or contact the VitalLinks coordinator, Kathleen Gillett, on 0207 241 8535 or email VitalLinks@counselandcare.org.uk

Independent Age is unique in providing lifelong support to older people on very low incomes. We provide information and advice, practical help and emergency financial aid through our network of staff and dedicated volunteers across the UK and Republic of Ireland. Just as importantly, we offer friendship and the chance to socialise to those who are lonely and isolated. Supported by Independent Age, thousands of older people are able to maintain their independence, contribute to their communities and enjoy a good quality of life, secure in the knowledge that our help lasts as long as they need it. To find out about volunteering with Independent Age visit www.independentage.org.uk/volunteer

WRVS provides practical help through the power of volunteering, so older people can stay independent and live the way they want. WRVS is one of the largest volunteering charities in Britain powered by 45,000 volunteers who regularly provide practical help to over 100,000 older people in their homes, communities, hospitals and during emergencies. To find out about volunteering with WRVS visit www.wrvs.org.uk

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity with over 40 years of experience in promoting the well-being of older people throughout the county of Oxfordshire, and helping to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. To find out about volunteering with Age UK Oxfordshire visit www.ageconcernoxon.org.uk/volunteering.htm

The Campaign is supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, scientific and social interests. Based in Lisbon with offices in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support national and transnational work tackling contemporary issues. The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to connect and enrich the experiences of individuals, families and communities, with a special interest in supporting those who are most disadvantaged. It currently focuses its work on developing and supporting innovative projects and partnerships across the themes of cultural understanding, fulfilling potential, environment and maximising social and cultural value. www.gulbenkian.org.uk