Changing attitudes in your local authority

Campaign with us!
For the last five decades, the proportion of people experiencing chronic loneliness has remained unchanged.\(^1\) We believe it’s essential that local authorities take a leadership role in reducing loneliness to ensure that this state of affairs doesn’t continue into a sixth successive decade.

You may decide that taking the Campaign to End Loneliness’ message to your local authority is the best way to make a difference in your community. If so, we agree! Thanks for taking part. In this section we’ll provide you with some context so you can gain a better understanding about what we’re trying to achieve in your local area, and we’ll also make some suggestions as to how you might want to take your own activities forward.

### Changing attitudes in your local authority

Experiencing loneliness and isolation in later life is an equivalent risk to health as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day.\(^2\) It has a destructive impact on quality of life and there are significant links between a lack of social interaction and the onset of degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s, an illness which costs the NHS an estimated £20 billion a year.\(^3\) As our population ages, the sad fact is that the number of people experiencing the ‘terrible poverty’ of loneliness in our society is only going to increase.

Despite this, many councils and NHS bodies are not adequately taking into account the nature or scale of the problem when planning care and support for older people.

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In 2012, responsibility for improving the population’s health was given to local forums called ‘health and wellbeing boards’. These boards bring together senior representatives of the local council and the local NHS to work together to map their community’s health and care needs, and set priorities for action for the coming year.

Consequently, health and wellbeing boards have the power to influence major decisions about allocating resources (which is called commissioning) in health and social care.

For three years, the Campaign to End Loneliness has worked alongside our supporters to make sure that these boards take loneliness and social isolation into account when planning for the health and wellbeing of their communities.

We believe that health and wellbeing boards should make informed decisions about services and activities that can help reduce loneliness. The boards will be better informed when making these decision if they:

- Recognise the negative health consequences of loneliness
- Include loneliness and/or social isolation in their strategic plans for the health and wellbeing of the community
- Have an action plan with measurable targets in place
- Identify those most at risk of loneliness and are measuring the extent of the problem in their local population.

Since we started to lobby for change in local authorities in 2012, over 50%

“...We’ve got (loneliness) referenced in the health and wellbeing approach and a specialist topic paper on it for the JSNA. It’s got into the strategy mainly because of the [local] campaign. We haven’t specifically addressed loneliness and isolation as an issue (before)...”

Senior Commissioning Officer
of health and wellbeing boards have at least recognised the negative health consequences of loneliness. Many of these have gone much further and have taken significant steps to reduce loneliness.

However, this means that nearly half of all health and wellbeing boards are not even recognising the issue as a health risk, and many more do not have satisfactory plans in place to address it.

This is where you come in. We’re asking people up and down the country to work with us on this issue. Your health and wellbeing board should listen to you. If you’re passionate about making the third age the best age, then contact your local health and wellbeing board to demand that it makes tackling loneliness a priority in its commissioning plans.

The next few pages will take you why health and wellbeing boards are the right strategic organisation for you to lobby, and how you can get loneliness on their radar.