



Exploring the legacy of the

Campaign to End Loneliness

A report by Kate Jopling
April 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Campaign to End Loneliness was launched in 2011 to bring focus and attention to an issue that had long been recognised, but never seriously addressed. In April 2024 it will close in its current form. This report reviews the Campaign's impact over its 13 years of operation and considers the legacy it leaves to those interested in taking action on loneliness in future.

Over the years, the Campaign has helped to galvanise action to address loneliness, locally, nationally and internationally. It did this by:

- **Acting as a trusted and expert voice for loneliness**, bringing together a movement of individuals and organisations behind the work to address the issue, whose impact was greater than the sum of its parts
- **Creating a hub for expertise and endeavour on loneliness** which brought together researchers, practitioners, funders and policy makers operating locally, nationally and internationally, enabling learning to be shared, inspiration to flow and voices to be amplified
- **Marshalling and growing the evidence base on the nature, causes and impact of loneliness and how it can be addressed** and ensuring this evidence reached policy makers and practitioners who could use it

The Campaign's work created the conditions for the UK Government to become a world leader on loneliness, appointing the world's first Minister for Loneliness and launching a national strategy to address it. It has continued to inform and inspire local, national and international action on loneliness since that time, to convene and develop a growing movement, and to provide authoritative and expert input to it.

It helped to carve out a space for loneliness in the local and national policy landscapes, which in turn inspired action across the globe. It facilitated the growth of the evidence base on loneliness, making the case for loneliness to be measured at national level, encouraging investment in evidence-building, and supporting the flow of learning between academic experts and practitioners and policy makers. It also successfully built out from its initial focus on loneliness in later life, to contribute to an all-age agenda for loneliness which continues to develop.

For over a decade, the Campaign to End Loneliness has been the go-to place for those looking to learn about loneliness, to develop their practice, and to connect with others – a link for local organisations to a larger national scene, and an anchor for national bodies working on loneliness among other agenda. It leaves a proud legacy which can be seen in the significant profile loneliness still attracts on these stages.

However, the Campaign also faced some challenges, made missteps, and missed opportunities. At times it allowed itself to be deflected from its core strengths and it has struggled for sustainable funding. This made it hard to maintain the freedom and fleet of foot enabled by its founder funder the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch). These ongoing challenges in the funding landscape have now led to the decision to close the Campaign to End Loneliness in its current form, along with its most recent host, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

However, the loneliness agenda remains live, and there is much to be done in the years ahead. As we have explored the Campaign's legacy with stakeholders, we have also identified a range of areas for ongoing action. These include:

Sharing learning internationally and building the global community on loneliness:

The World Health Organization (WHO) has just made a major commitment to the loneliness agenda, launching a two-year Commission on Social Connection. There is much for the UK to share and learn as leaders come together across the globe to identify an agenda for action. There will also be fresh opportunities to galvanise action in the UK, as Ministers come together as part of the global movement.

Building and sharing the evidence on loneliness:

As the Campaign to End Loneliness and What Works Centre for Wellbeing's recent review demonstrated, there has been significant development in our understanding of what works to address loneliness in recent years, but there is more to do to build upon and refine this evidence-base; creating new tools to enable more organisations to understand and articulate their impact and to share their learning; and refining our understanding of who is affected by loneliness, how, and how it can be addressed. There will also be an ongoing need to ensure new research reaches policy makers and practitioners in formats they can quickly grasp and act upon.

Making the case for national action:

With a General Election on the horizon, work is needed to keep loneliness on the agenda for the next Government. Advocating for policy makers to pay attention to reducing loneliness, as a key contributor to wider health and wellbeing, rather than a “nice to have”, and demonstrating the linkages and synergies between loneliness and other policy objectives, will be vital as an incoming Government juggles competing pressures. This work will need regular injections of “fuel” in the form of new evidence and insights to inspire and inform action.

Supporting local action:

Equally vital will be supporting the many organisations – including charities and community groups, local businesses and statutory bodies – working to address loneliness in places, across systems and within combined authorities. This is where the real action happens on loneliness. However, many of those working on loneliness are small and relatively isolated. Bringing this community together, building its capacity and enabling collaboration, particularly in the face of a hostile funding climate will be another vital area for action.

There are many organisations which will continue to play a role in driving this agenda. However, many of these have looked to the Campaign to End Loneliness to bring them together, and relied on it to provide a consistent voice for loneliness in the media and with policy makers. Without this hub, home, and voice for loneliness, there is a risk that this agenda will be lost. However, there is also potential for a new, more distributed model of leadership to emerge in the next phase of the work to address loneliness.

The green shoots of a next movement are starting to show:

- The Centre for Loneliness Studies at Sheffield Hallam University will take ownership of the Campaign to End Loneliness’ website and wider intellectual property creating an ongoing home for the Campaign’s trove of learning and insight
- The Centre is also exploring with stakeholders how it can revitalise the wider work of the Campaign to End Loneliness, keeping the website fresh and playing an ongoing role in the work to drive action on loneliness
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) intends to maintain the Tackling Loneliness Hub, and will tender for a new provider
- Stakeholder organisations and Parliamentary champions are continuing to share the joint Call to Action on Loneliness setting out an agenda for the next Government
- The Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection continues to share learning from the Campaign to End Loneliness, and others, with the World Health Organization as its work continues

However, to thrive these efforts will need funding and commitment across the long term.

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This report charts the story of the Campaign to End Loneliness from its founding in 2010, to its closure in April 2024. It explores the impact of the Campaign to End Loneliness and the legacy it leaves, and considers the agenda it bequeaths to the next generation of campaigners against loneliness.

It is based on a review of documentation from the Campaign to End Loneliness, including the evaluation reports covering previous phases of the Campaign to End Loneliness' work¹; a series of interviews with stakeholders who worked with the Campaign in different ways and through different phases of its life; and responses to an online survey.

It is not an attempt to formally evaluate the Campaign to End Loneliness' work over the past 13 years, but rather to reflect on the Campaign's work. The author has sought to provide a balanced account of the Campaign's work over this period, and to reflect the views of a range of stakeholders, for whose insight and wisdom she is enormously grateful. However this account remains subjective and informed by the author's own perspectives – having worked with and alongside the Campaign in a range of ways over the course of its life. Any and all inaccuracies are the author's own.

A brief history of the Campaign to End Loneliness

Founding the Campaign to End Loneliness

“ I think there was something really farsighted about the seed of the idea, really early on, that ‘Gosh, somebody ought to be talking about this’ [...] It is so obviously part of the human condition that is important. And why on earth aren't people talking about real things rather than, I dunno, income tax? ”

Nancy Hey,
Executive Director
What Works Centre for Wellbeing

The Campaign to End Loneliness was founded in 2010, when four charities (Age UK Oxfordshire; Counsel and Care and Independent Age (which later merged); and WRVS (now Royal Voluntary Service)) working on ageing agreed to come together to create a new campaign that would put the issue of loneliness among older adults onto the UK public policy agenda.

The germ of the idea was seeded in discussions across the ageing sector convened by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch) to explore key challenges facing older adults. Through their discussions, leaders identified a need for a campaign to galvanise expertise and energy to address loneliness.

“**Gulbenkian were just so open as funders.**”

Laura Alcock-Ferguson
Founder Director
Campaign to End Loneliness

Crucially the idea was that the new campaign would be a collaborative programme, rather than a standalone charity. The founders agreed that progress on loneliness required organisations to set aside their organisational “egos” and pool their energy, resources and voices. Support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation enabled the appointment of a small, dedicated staff team to lead the campaign, but they were to draw in wider resources from its founders and supporters.

The fundamental insight behind the Campaign to End Loneliness was that, while loneliness was often spoken of as a cause, or consequence of the issues faced by older people – for example, as a consequence of inadequate social care, or a cause of increased hospital attendance – it was seldom addressed head on. It was “always the bridesmaid and never the bride”. The founders’ conviction that loneliness merited greater focus was based both on the insights gained through their own organisations’ work, but also the growing academic evidence around the impact of loneliness – in particular Julianne Holt-Lunstad’s formative meta-analysis which equated the impact of loneliness on mortality to that of smoking 15 cigarettes a day² in the US, and the pioneering work of academics including Christina Victor, Thomas Scharf and Mima Cattani in the UK. The founders saw the potential for this evidence to influence policy makers and inform practitioners.

The new campaign held a conference in 2010 which brought together leading researchers with an interest in loneliness. Then, in 2011, the group launched to the wider public, publishing *Safeguarding the Convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*.³ The Campaign’s aims were to raise awareness of loneliness and to galvanise action to address it from a range of actors, including national government.

The Campaign was not launched onto a blank canvas. There had been growing public policy attention to the issue of loneliness, including commitments to address it in government papers on reform of social care⁴, and on social exclusion among older adults.⁵ There was also work going on in other charities, for example the Mental Health Foundation’s 2010 report on *The Lonely Society*.⁶ However, the Campaign aimed to drive this agenda forward at pace.

The early years

2011-2016

The Campaign to End Loneliness was never intended to be a large organisation, but rather a gathering point for action on loneliness. However, the founders recognised that they needed a leader to shape and drive its work. They advertised for a founding director. Laura Alcock-Ferguson, an experienced and thoughtful campaigner, was appointed to the role and set about shaping the vision of the founders into a deliverable programme.

Laura worked to develop a theory of change for the Campaign, focussed on enabling more people to access support with loneliness. This was to be achieved through work to put loneliness on the national policy agenda as a public health issue, and to encourage action at local level, leading to the commissioning and funding of more and better services.

The Campaign had **four key areas** of work:

1 Building links with the wider community of organisations working on loneliness – creating a Learning Network, and bringing them together for conferences

2 Working with academics to share research with practitioners and policy makers – hosting a Research Hub to support networking across the research community

3 Influencing local authorities (specifically Health and Wellbeing Boards) to include commitments to addressing loneliness in their strategies

4 Influencing national government and other key national bodies including the newly formed Public Health England

“Those first three years, they were diligently focused and yet had this kind of joyous, this is a bit of a juxtaposition, but a joyous base of hard evidence.”

Laura Alcock-Ferguson
Founder Director
Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign team extended to three staff during this period, with the founder organisations forming an informal “management group” to steer its work and coordinate their own inputs and support for the Campaign’s activities. The Campaign was hosted within Independent Age for the purposes of finance and HR.

Two new organisations joined the Management Group: the disability charity, Sense, and a local authority, Manchester City Council. However, a much wider group of organisations joined the Campaign as supporters, and started to form a wider community around the loneliness agenda.

The Campaign focussed its work on loneliness among older adults, but started to develop its understanding of the wider risk factors – exploring loneliness among disabled people through its partnership with Sense, and publishing essays on loneliness among LGBT+ people, and carers.

“We borrowed people... I was very happy to borrow media colleagues from various partner organisations.”

Laura Alcock-Ferguson
Founder Director
Campaign to End Loneliness

Notable publications in this period included:

- *Safeguarding the Convoy* (2011)⁷
- *Listening to You* (2012), a report on social connectedness in older people based on survey of older adults⁸
- *Loneliness – The State We’re In* (2012)⁹
- *Alone in the crowd: loneliness and diversity* (2013), a collection of essays on different communities affected by loneliness¹⁰
- *Promising Approaches to reducing loneliness and social isolation in later life* (2015), jointly published with Age UK¹¹

The Campaign also published regular research bulletins sharing the latest academic evidence in bitesize form, and making links with emerging policy and practice.

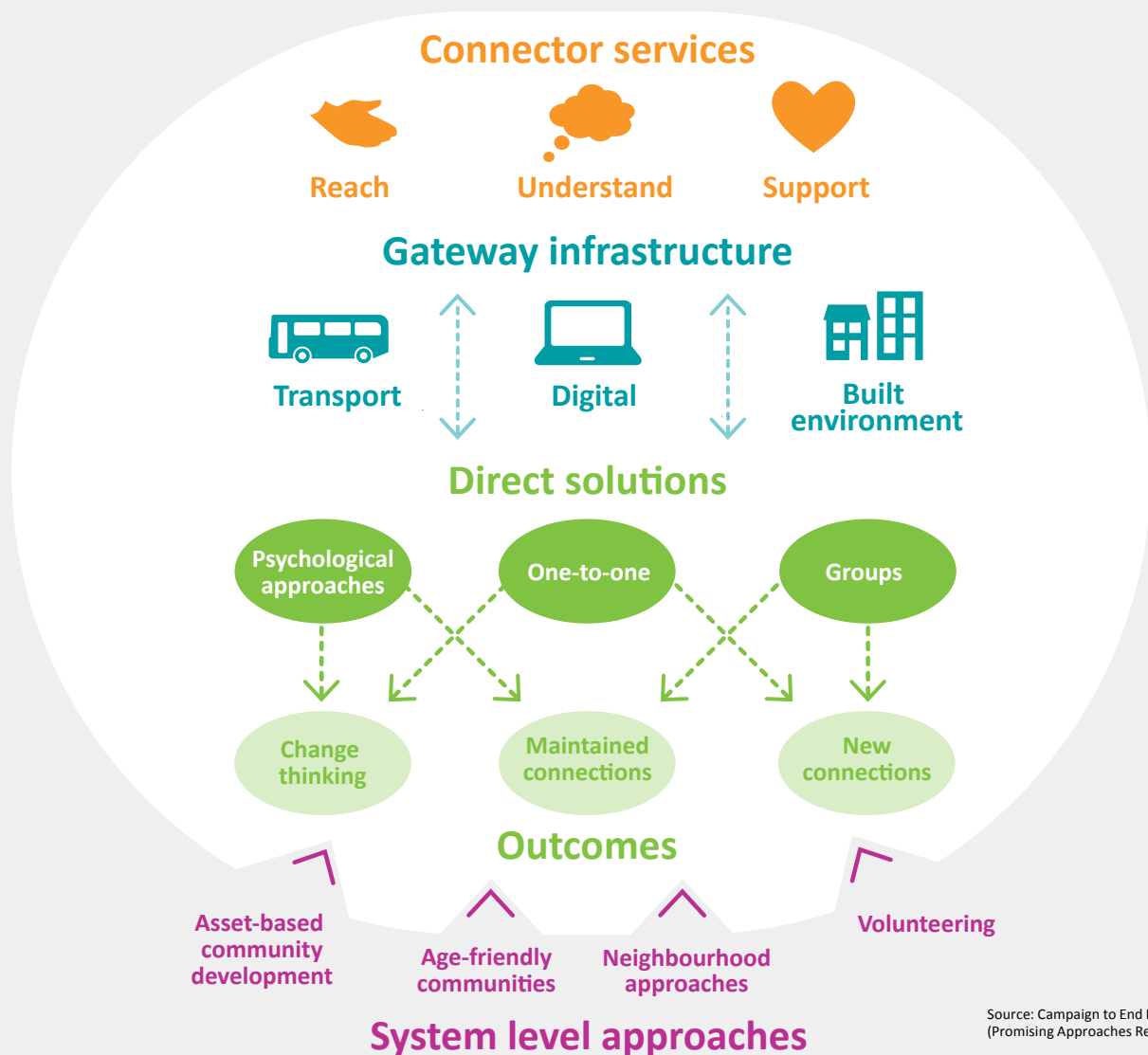
The Campaign also published a series of tools/guides for action during this period. These included:

- *Combating Loneliness: A guide for local authorities* (2012) produced jointly with the Local Government Association¹²
- *Loneliness and Isolation: A toolkit for health and wellbeing boards* (July 2012)¹³
- *Tackling Loneliness in Older Age – The Role of the Arts* (2012), produced by the Campaign and the Baring Foundation¹⁴
- *Campaigning Action Pack* (2012) was produced for MPs to help them lobby their Health and Wellbeing Boards¹⁵

- *Loneliness Harms Health Action Pack* (2013) a guide for local activists, helping them lobby their Health and Wellbeing Boards to address loneliness¹⁶

As the Campaign’s first strategic phase drew to a close it started to explore the next challenges ahead. New funding opportunities were opening up, as the Big Lottery Fund (now the National Lottery Community Fund) was increasingly working on social isolation and taking an interest in loneliness and the Campaign had an eye to expanding its work.

Promising Approaches Framework



Source: Campaign to End Loneliness (Promising Approaches Revisited)

The Lottery-funded years 2016-2020

In 2017 the Campaign to End Loneliness secured a significant grant from the Big Lottery Fund and embarked on a new strategic phase, enabled largely by this significant input of funding. The work towards this grant had started in 2015 and had been negotiated over an extended period. The new strategy envisaged a continuation of the Campaign's previous ways of working, but the Lottery funding enabled **two key new areas** of activity:

- 1 **An expansion across the four nations of the UK** with campaign leads located in each country working with specific communities - Cambridgeshire, Pembrokeshire, Glasgow and Belfast – to support action on loneliness.
- 2 **A move into public-facing behaviour-change campaigning**, with the development of a new campaign designed (initially) to inspire acts of kindness, and later launched under the banner "Be More Us".

Notable publications during this period included:

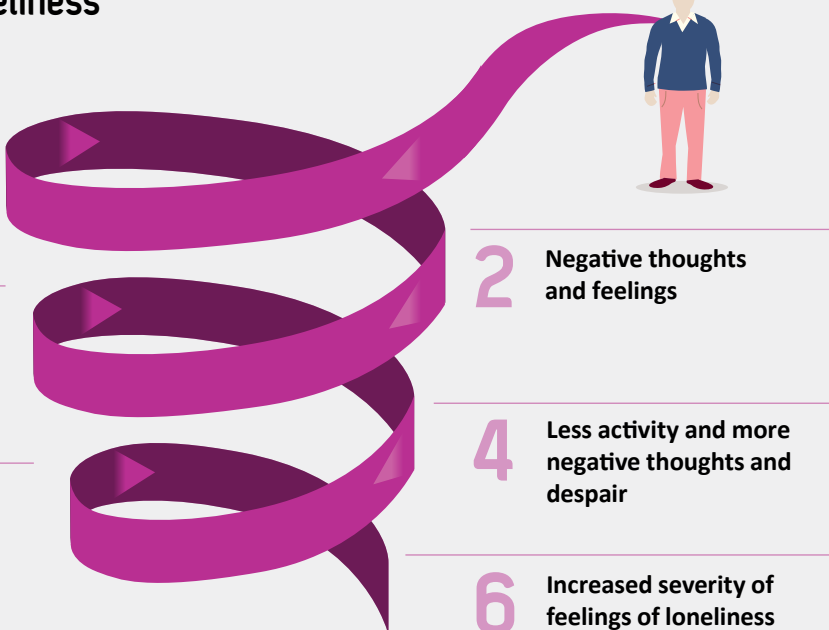
- *Measuring your impact on loneliness in later life* (2016) – a guide to measuring loneliness including a new tool for evaluating loneliness interventions which had been developed with older people and practitioners¹⁷
- *The Missing Million: In search of the loneliest in our communities* (2016). A practical WWWut loneliness¹⁸
- *Combating Loneliness: A guide for local authorities* (2016) an updated guide, produced jointly with Age UK and the Local Government Association¹⁹
- *Making the economic case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review: A briefing paper* (2017)²⁰
- *The Psychology of Loneliness: Why it matters and what we can do* (2020)²¹

Downward spiral of loneliness

1 Personal circumstances, a precipitating event, or both

3 Influences behaviour and leads to withdrawal from contact with others

5 Further withdrawal



2 Negative thoughts and feelings

4 Less activity and more negative thoughts and despair

6 Increased severity of feelings of loneliness

Source: Campaign to End Loneliness (The Psychology of Loneliness)

During this phase the Campaign's management group was refreshed with new organisations joining the Board. While Independent Age continued to offer in kind support, with more resources of its own, the Campaign drew less on the wider resources of its management group, and became more self-sufficient in areas such as communications.

In this period, the Campaign to End Loneliness Research Hub expanded to become a Research and Policy Hub and the Campaign's Learning Network morphed into a far wider supporters' group, which expanded significantly through the work to bring partners into the Be More Us campaign.

The Campaign also saw significant personnel change in this period, with a large number of new appointees to the team straight after the award of the Lottery funding and the departure of the Campaign's founder director in the summer of 2019.

The pandemic years 2021-2024

As the Campaign's significant Lottery funding came to an end, changes were afoot within its host organisation Independent Age, with new leadership in post and a strategic review underway. A decision was taken to find a new host for the Campaign to End Loneliness.

The change of host enabled the Campaign to review its strategic intent. It took the opportunity to extend its remit to align with the growing understanding of and interest in loneliness across all ages (driven largely by the work of the British Red Cross and Co-op Partnership and the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness). In recognition of the growing alignment between the interests of the two organisations, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing generously offered to host the Campaign to End Loneliness, and the transfer

of the Campaign's intellectual property and a slimmed down staff team was completed at the very end of 2020.

“Our programme became much more heavily skewed to social connection, in that sense. And so it made lots of sense to partner.”

Nancy Hey
Executive Director
What Works Centre for Wellbeing

The Campaign's strategy for this period represented, in many ways, a return to its original ways of working across **three key areas**:

-
- 1 **Building the evidence**

 - 2 **Convening and supporting the loneliness community**

 - 3 **Making the case for action**

Once it was no longer funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the Campaign to End Loneliness continued its work by drawing together funding from a range of sources. Increasingly the Campaign took on project funding and started to explore new revenue streams. Significant funding for the Campaign came from contracts with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which led on loneliness across Government, with much of its work delivered in partnership with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.

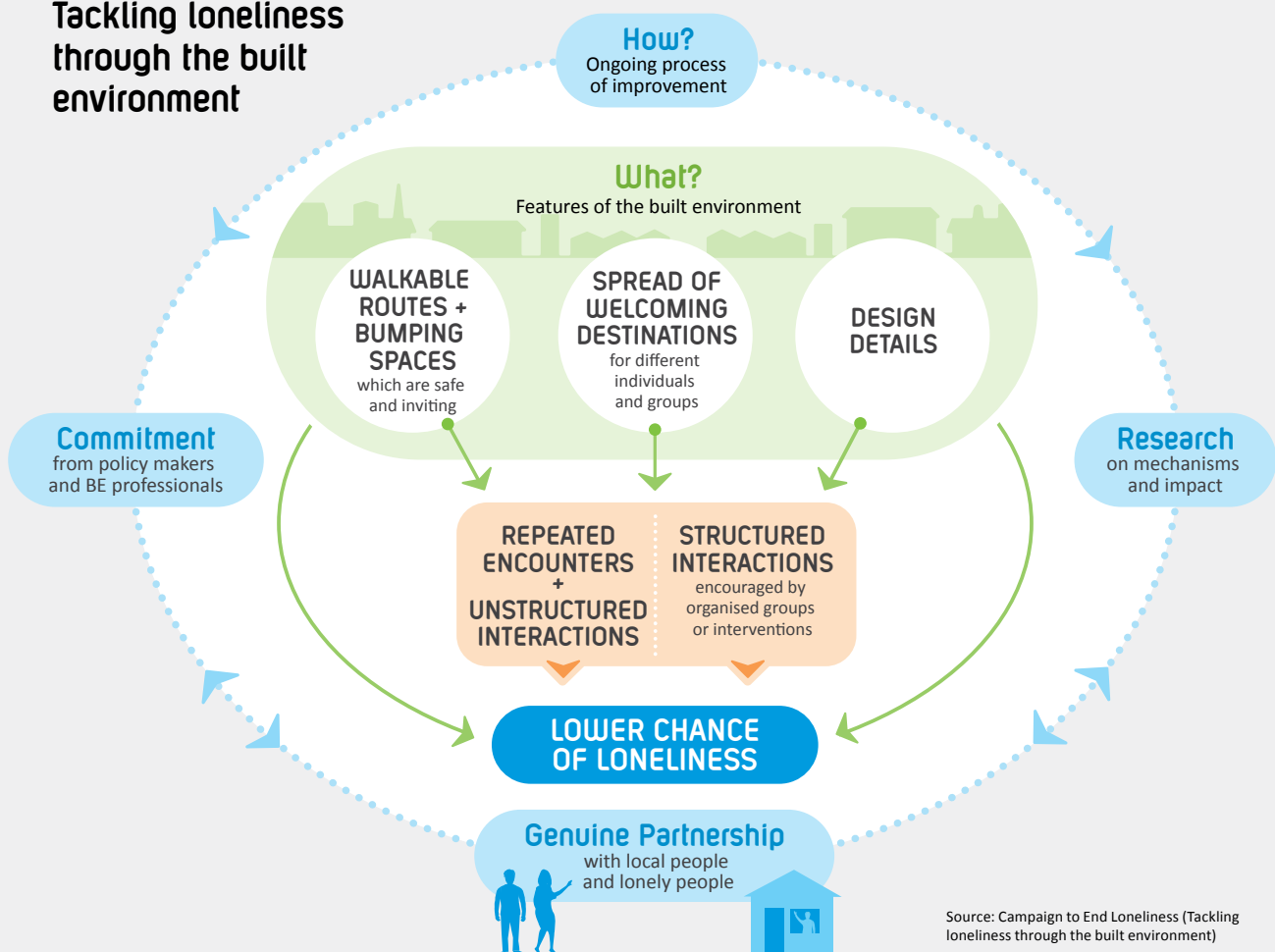
One of these DCMS contracts was for the Tackling Loneliness Hub, which the Campaign to End Loneliness and What Works Centre for Wellbeing delivered jointly with a Community Manager appointed as part of the Campaign to End Loneliness team. The Hub grew into a thriving community over the three years of its operation.

The Campaign has also continued to bring together stakeholders from research, policy and practice together in meetings and conferences outside the Hub.

Notable publications in this period included:

- *Promising Approaches Revisited: Effective action on loneliness in later life* (2021)²²
- *Employers and loneliness* (2021) A guide published by the DCMS²³
- *Loneliness beyond Covid-19: Learning the lessons of the pandemic for a less lonely future* (2021)²⁴
- *Reconceptualising Loneliness in London* (2022) a report published jointly with Neighbourly Lab and What Works Centre for Wellbeing²⁵
- *Tackling loneliness through the built environment* (2022)²⁶
- *Loneliness at work: A report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Tackling Loneliness and Connected Communities* (2023)²⁷
- *The State of Loneliness 2023: ONS data on loneliness in Britain* (2023)²⁸
- *Evaluation of interventions to tackle loneliness* (2023)²⁹ a report exploring insight from research and practice on evaluating loneliness initiatives – a companion piece to a rapid systematic review of loneliness interventions across the life course conducted by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, updating their previous review from 2018³⁰

Tackling loneliness through the built environment



Other highlights of this period were the Campaign's online conferences, which brought together high-quality speakers and presentations from across the globe, spanning research, policy and practice.

“ I certainly remember people like Vivek Murthy speaking at the conference. Really inspiring speakers, at the time, which has really helped us in terms of placing what we're doing in the wider context of, UK wide and international side of things as well. ”

Jeremy Sharpe
National Director
Linking Lives UK

This period also saw the Campaign to End Loneliness move into offering training – developing courses tailored to a range of audiences. A commissioned training programme for NHS Property Services' reception staff was especially highly regarded. The Campaign had also started to branch into the provision of e-learning modules, and was exploring the potential for these to generate revenue in future.

2024 and beyond

In 2024, as part of a wider discussion about the future of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, a decision was made to close the Campaign to End Loneliness in its current form. The Centre's trustees had made a strategic decision that, without core funding, the Centre could no longer operate effectively. While the Campaign had maintained its own brand, structurally it remained a programme of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing. With insufficient secured income to step out as an independent organisation, the decision was taken for the Campaign, in its current form, also to close.

At the time of writing, agreement has been reached to transfer the website of the Campaign to End Loneliness and its other intellectual property to the Centre for Loneliness Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. The Tackling Loneliness Hub will continue with a new provider to be appointed by the DCMS. Consideration is also being given to how to continue wider work to address loneliness. This report is intended to inform this process.

2

The impact of the Campaign to End Loneliness

Despite its name, the Campaign to End Loneliness did not aim to end all loneliness.

Drawing on the broad academic consensus, the Campaign to End Loneliness adopted an understanding of loneliness based around Perlman and Peplau's definition of loneliness as a painful emotion linked to a mismatch between the relationships and connections that we want and those we have.³¹

It also drew on John Cacioppo's work in understanding that while loneliness could be painful it was a normal human emotion and a helpful trigger to connection.³² It therefore recognised that ending all loneliness was not a desirable goal, but instead sought to address chronic loneliness – loneliness that is sustained or experienced repeatedly, over a period of time – which it understood as harmful to wider health and wellbeing.

While the Campaign's theory of change adapted over the years, it always recognised the limits of its own capacity to directly end chronic loneliness among individuals, seeking instead to inspire effective action to address loneliness in communities, by changing policy and practice nationally and locally.

For the most part, the Campaign focussed on supporting the provision of services and support to people affected by loneliness. However, it was regularly called upon to offer advice to individuals in the media and, as noted above, during the Lottery-funded years the Campaign also sought to directly influence individual behaviour.

The Campaign's work between 2011 and 2014 and between 2017 and 2020 was the subject of external evaluations by the Charities Evaluation Service and NDTI respectively. These reports provide a full and detailed assessment of the Campaign's impact.³³ In this section, we offer a few observations on the highlights, particularly as seen through the "rearview mirror".

The Campaign's impact can be understood at **three levels**:

Local impact



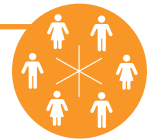
National impact



Global impact



Local impact



The Campaign to End Loneliness was effective in encouraging action on loneliness by local authorities, and in supporting local organisations working on loneliness.

During the Campaign's early years, it identified an opportunity to influence the new Health and Wellbeing Boards which were being established in England with a remit to work across health and local government to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.

The Campaign developed a range of tools to support local organisations and campaigners to use evidence on the health impacts of loneliness to encourage Health and Wellbeing Boards to prioritise action on loneliness. The idea was that by securing strategic commitment to addressing loneliness from these local bodies, additional funds would be allocated to effective support.

The Campaign engaged directly with authorities and advocates in a small number of areas, and then developed tools which could be shared with campaigners and advocates in other authority areas – these included local organisations working on loneliness including local Age UKs and local older people's advocacy groups.

“Public health messaging was probably one of our biggest successes.”

Laura Alcock-Ferguson
Founder Director
Campaign to End Loneliness

The work with local authorities was in turn bolstered by the Campaign's work at national level – for example the Department of Health funded the Campaign's toolkit for local authorities, which was launched in July 2012.³⁴



“ I think particularly around the time of the launch and the research on loneliness and its detriments to health, that it’s equivalent to 15 cigarettes a day was really powerful and made a few shockwaves. ”

Sarah Hale
Astra Foundation

The Campaign’s work was successful – by 2013 half of the Health and Wellbeing Boards that had published strategies had included pledges around loneliness.³⁵

The Charities Evaluation Service, in their evaluation of this work, concluded that the hand of the Campaign to End Loneliness could be seen in these local decisions.³⁶

With growing interest in action on loneliness, the Campaign recognised a need for a clearer steer for local areas on what to do about it. In 2015, Age UK and the Campaign to End Loneliness commissioned a project to respond to concerns that local work on loneliness was being held back because leaders didn’t know “what works” to address it. With a relatively weak formal evidence base, the decision was taken to identify “promising” approaches by drawing on the understanding of experts working in the field.³⁷

Since its publication, the *Promising Approaches* framework which emerged from this project has been used in several local areas as a tool for understanding the strengths of existing provision around loneliness and identifying gaps. For example, in 2017 the Director of Public Health for the London Borough of Hounslow, having identified loneliness as an issue of concern, commissioned a review of provision in the Borough against the *Promising Approaches* framework.³⁸ More recently the framework was used to inform a system-wide approach to loneliness in East Sussex.³⁹

The *Promising Approaches* framework has also been adapted for use in other countries including Canada.⁴⁰

During the Lottery-funded years the Campaign to End Loneliness moved somewhat away from its previous approach of working through local organisations in its supporter network and towards working directly in selected local areas, specifically Cambridgeshire in England, Belfast in Northern Ireland, Pembrokeshire in Wales and Glasgow in Scotland. Campaign Managers were recruited in each of these areas with a remit to build links with local organisations and play a role in galvanising local action, drawing on the wider expertise of the Campaign to End Loneliness, and supporting the Campaign’s emerging public facing campaigning work with local activity. However, as this work struggled to take root, a decision was taken to pivot away from such intensive work in communities, with Campaign leads in the devolved nations increasingly focusing on national influencing.

The Campaign continued to influence and support local action in this period, but more so from its national stage – including through the joint publication with the Local Government Association and Age UK of a refreshed guide for local authorities to addressing loneliness, which drew heavily on *Promising Approaches*.⁴¹ Then in 2021 the Campaign published an updated version of its *Promising Approaches* report which recognised the growing significance of digital interventions and the burgeoning interest in addressing loneliness through adaptations to the built environment.⁴²

The Campaign has also continued to support local leaders, through Research and Policy forums and specific forums and events for those working in local authorities within the Tackling Loneliness Hub.

National impact



“ Kickstarting the conversation I’d say is a big success in those early days. ”

Sarah Hale
Astra Foundation

Eight years after a group of charity leaders came together to seek to put loneliness on the national policy agenda, the UK Government became the first in the world to appoint a Minister for Loneliness, and to start developing a national strategy for addressing loneliness. *A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness* was published in October 2018.⁴³ It confirmed the UK Government’s commitment to addressing loneliness and included over 60 pledges to action from nine government departments. The Campaign to End Loneliness played a pivotal role in creating the conditions for this to happen.

“ They pushed loneliness onto the agenda ahead of its time as a major public health issue. [...] that journey was hugely empowering because ultimately its work did lead to minister for loneliness. ”

Richard Kramer
CEO, Sense

In its early years the Campaign to End Loneliness’ influencing and advocacy work was focussed firmly in the public health space – emphasising the need to view loneliness as a public health issue. The strong relationships it built with the newly forming Public Health England – established in 2013 – were a crucial component of its early influencing, bringing prominent support to its agenda.

Public Health England included loneliness among the social determinants of health and its CEO, Duncan Selbie, made several high-profile statements on the importance of addressing loneliness.⁴⁴

“ In quite a short period of time, the Campaign had achieved a huge part of its initial objective, which was to get the issue on the agenda, both politically, locally and nationally, and with agencies that could do something about it. They need to be credited with starting all that then led to. ”

Gregor Henderson
Former Head of Mental Wellbeing
Public Health England

The Campaign was also effective in building relationships with the Department of Health, and particularly with Paul Burstow MP, who was Minister of State for Care within the coalition Government and had a long track record of working on ageing issues.

The Campaign made significant breakthroughs in its work with the Department of Health, particularly around securing commitment to measuring loneliness at the national level. An early win came in the form of a promise to include measures of loneliness within the outcomes frameworks for adult social care and public health.⁴⁵

The Campaign was also effective in building Parliamentary interest. In March 2012, Paul Burstow MP convened a summit in conjunction with the Campaign which brought together a number of (then) backbench MPs including Tracey Crouch and Jo Cox who later played key roles as the first Minister for

Loneliness, and instigator of the Commission on Loneliness respectively. The growing momentum on loneliness also saw Jeremy Hunt MP, the then Health Secretary, focus on loneliness in his 2013 keynote address to an important conference on care.⁴⁶

When, in 2016 Jo Cox MP started to develop plans for a year-long cross-party commission on loneliness, she came to the Campaign to End Loneliness for support. The Campaign were one of the Commission's partners, but Jo wanted her work to address all ages, and the Campaign was, at that point, still focussed on later life.

“ I don't think the Campaign to End Loneliness achieved what it did in isolation. It was part of that great big movement that came about following the tragic death of Jo Cox, and the government forming the Tackling Loneliness Unit. ”

Sophy Proctor
Former Head of Funding,
National Lottery Community Fund

The Campaign's sole leadership on loneliness was slowly overtaken during the 2010s, as more national players came onto the loneliness stage. In the latter part of the decade, the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership, played an increasingly important role, including in the Jo Cox Commission. The partnership had launched an all-ages campaign on loneliness in 2016 and continued to play a key role in the years that followed. However the Campaign's work in setting the territory was widely acknowledged.

“ It was all stepping stones. And I mean genuinely the Campaign were essential part of all of that. There's no doubt in my mind that that is the case. ”

Nancy Hey
Executive Director
What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Jo Cox's Commission was important in bringing together a range of stakeholders around loneliness, but it was her murder that ultimately created a galvanising force that “turbo-charged” the agenda, albeit in a way no one could have wanted. The desire to secure a legacy for Jo and the powerful allies, Seema Kennedy and Rachel Reeves, who took on this work in her memory delivered the political clout needed to see the Commission's recommendations⁴⁷ accepted in full.

With the Jo Cox Commission's recommendations accepted, the UK Government appointed Tracey Crouch MP to the new role of Minister for Loneliness in January 2018 and she and her small team set about developing the first national strategy, announcing a new fund for work on loneliness, and instructing the Office for National Statistics to start work to develop national measures of loneliness. The Campaign played a key role in supporting this work, inputting to various working groups which were convened including around measurement, and linking the newly forming loneliness team to leading academics and practitioners.

Over subsequent years the Campaign continued to form part of a small group of trusted national organisations – including the Jo Cox Foundation and British Red Cross – which supported and advised Ministers and the DCMS loneliness team as the strategy was developed and implemented.

The Campaign also continued to work in Parliament, primarily alongside the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership in supporting the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness which was initially chaired by Seema Kennedy and Rachel Reeves, and aimed to hold Government to account for implementation of the strategy. This work included publishing a shadow report, reviewing progress on the loneliness strategy after its first year⁴⁸ and a major inquiry that led to a call for a “Connected Recovery” following the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴⁹ The Campaign was a key route for the APPG into the wider expertise of the sector.

“ I think also the fact that we’ve got the Minister for Loneliness and the national strategy for loneliness must be in part due to the Campaign because I think without that campaigning and getting that on the policy agenda... ”

Andrea Wigfield
Director of the Centre for Loneliness Studies, Sheffield Hallam University

With Campaign Managers established in each of the devolved nations, the Campaign was also able to play an important role in supporting the development of strategies in Scotland⁵⁰ and Wales⁵¹, and in galvanising political buy-in in Northern Ireland (which has been sustained to date). For example, in Scotland, the Campaign Manager co-founded and coordinated the Action on Isolation and Loneliness Group which brought together key organisations to influence the development of the Scottish Government strategy.⁵²

“ There was work to influence the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly that continued our influencing of policy, which was where our strengths were at that point. ”

Laura Alcock-Ferguson
Founder Director
Campaign to End Loneliness

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the Campaign to End Loneliness supported Ministers in hearing from key stakeholders and in bringing together a Tackling Loneliness Network. The network brought together organisations working to address loneliness and was coordinated through a series of task and finish groups which were asked to look at different aspects of loneliness and make recommendations.

After the immediate pandemic period the Campaign to End Loneliness (in partnership with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing) worked with the DCMS to develop plans for an online hub to maintain the networks and spirit of collective action beyond the pandemic in what became the Tackling Loneliness Hub. The impact of the Hub is discussed in more detail below.

In the years since the publication of the loneliness strategy, the Campaign to End Loneliness continued to work across the national agenda, publishing influential reports and acting as a regular commentator in the media. In recent years it also undertook a number of pieces of work under direct commission from the Government, including work on loneliness and employers⁵³ and a recent review of evaluation of loneliness interventions.⁵⁴

Global impact



“ I would say that without the Campaign to End Loneliness being the groundbreaking organisation that they were in 2011, the world’s efforts to address loneliness on a broad level would be far behind where they are today. ”

Pete Bombaci
Founder and Executive Director
The GenWell Project, Canada

From its launch the Campaign to End Loneliness sought to network with academics and civil society organisations across the globe. Early links were built between the Campaign and those working on loneliness in the Netherlands and in Portugal (with links forged by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation).

“ I think on an international level as well, I think the Campaign has kind of set a good precedent for other countries to do the work and it’d be interesting to see how far along those other countries would be at now if it hadn’t have been for all the groundwork that the Campaign had done and all those conversations and discussions that so many others have been involved in the very early days and that knowledge sharing. ”

Mhairi Grant
Head of Content and Engagement
Campaign to End Loneliness

After 2018, when the appointment of a loneliness Minister cemented the UK’s status as a global leader, more and more global organisations – including Governments and national NGOs started to connect with the Campaign to share learning and expertise.

“ Loneliness New Zealand was formed in 2018 partially on the back of the work of the UK’s Campaign to End Loneliness and the status given to the issue by the UK’s Minister of Loneliness. ”

Dr Spencer Scoular, Co-Founder and Trustee, Loneliness New Zealand, Chair, Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection

This growing global leadership was showcased in the Campaign’s annual conferences and in a range of hosted visits, where the Campaign was seen as a go-to organisation, both to meet, and to support links into other key players in the loneliness space.

“ The Campaign’s annual conference and that ability to pull diverse speakers and build a really big audience, again, really diverse... And I’m like, ‘Whoa’, there’s so many different people here: from people running tiny little organisations up to, you’ve got CEOs, you’ve got academics, you’ve got people who are starting out on their research journey [...] The breadth of it, I think is really, really impressive. ”

Susan Hunter, CEO,
Befriending Networks

The Campaign developed close links with the US Surgeon General as his interest in loneliness grew, hosting him in person at their conference in 2018, and in subsequent years online.

“The UK’s Campaign to End Loneliness and the creation of the Minister of Loneliness had a catalysing effect on the US policy market in 2018. Leaders from the US health care market felt compelled to establish a movement in the US based on the success of the UK and launched the first ever national Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness to focus on advocating policy reforms and the hopeful instalment of our own national leader to address social disconnection. Shortly thereafter the US Surgeon General emerged as our informal national leader on this topic and has gone on to establish a national strategy through his Advisory released in May 2023.”

Eddie Garcia, Founder and Chair, Foundation for Social Connection, USA, Co-Founder Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection

The Campaign has also linked extensively with movements in Australia and Japan – now leading lights in global action on loneliness.

“Campaign to End Loneliness has been the most important hub, sharing expertise and championing partnerships both nationally and internationally. The importance of tackling loneliness with a governmental leadership and funding is ever increasing as we face a complex set of challenges, and the UK is in the unique position to have had a headstart.”

Koki Ozora
CEO Anata-no-Ibashi
(Ibashochat), Japan

“Australia’s national leading authority in the area of loneliness, Ending Loneliness Together, was developed because we were inspired by the work generated by the UK Campaign to End Loneliness.”

Professor Michelle Lim
Scientific Chair and CEO Ending Loneliness Together, Australia,
Co-Founder Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection

In recent years the Campaign has more explicitly stepped into a global role, for example as a founder member of the Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection (GILC) which was established in 2021 to foster international collaboration on the agenda.

“ At the international level, the UK Campaign to End Loneliness has played a critical and highly valued role in the establishment of the Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection (GILC). As one of the inaugural members of GILC, the UK Campaign has shared their extensive knowledge, expertise and leadership skills to help build a global movement to connect. In particular, the UK Campaign has fostered a commitment to evidence-based policy and practice, and championed the importance of understanding ‘what works’ (and what doesn’t) in addressing social isolation and loneliness, for the benefit of all nations now tackling these issues. ”

Professor Jo Badcock
Director of Evidence and Training,
Ending Loneliness Together, Australia,
Co-Founder, Global Initiative on
Loneliness and Connection

The Campaign’s global impact can perhaps most clearly be seen in the decision by the WHO to launch a Commission on Social Connection.

“ The UK Campaign to End Loneliness has played a critical and invaluable role in putting this long-neglected issue on the public health and public policy agenda, in the United Kingdom of course, but also in the wider world. In preparing to launch its Commission on Social Connection, WHO drew extensively on the many high-quality research, advocacy, policy, and communications materials the Campaign has produced and relied heavily on the advice of current and former members of staff of the Campaign. ”

Chris Mikton
World Health Organization

3

How did the Campaign achieve impact?

In our survey and interviews we asked people what three words they felt best described the Campaign to End Loneliness. The word cloud below gives a flavour of how the Campaign was perceived by its stakeholders.

The insights from stakeholders gathered for this piece, echoed the core themes expressed in evaluations from previous phases of the Campaign's activity, in locating the Campaign's core success in its ability to quickly establish itself as, and remain, a focal point for evidence and action on loneliness.

Words best describing the Campaign to End Loneliness



“ From my perspective, the greatest success was inspiring and informing much wider action on and awareness of loneliness, including by government. I think this was down to working in partnership with a wide range of organisations (e.g. in the Jo Cox Commission in 2017), supporting cross-party parliamentary activities, keeping up a publicity campaign over time, having a strong grip on the evidence around loneliness and being able to express that evidence clearly and compellingly. I think that Campaign staff had influence because of their expertise, their networks and their willingness to work constructively rather than as adversaries. ”

Stakeholder from a governmental organisation

The Campaign has never been a delivery organisation, and was never intended to be so, instead its role was to inspire, equip and enable.

It did this in **three key ways**:

- 1 Being a voice for loneliness
- 2 Creating a hub for action on loneliness
- 3 Grounding its work in evidence and making evidence accessible

“ I think their strengths were national policy to practice and then a huge amount of research that relied on huge networks of members who were part of something. So they were bigger than the sum of their parts and very much influencing the commissioning landscape. ”

Richard Kramer
CEO, Sense



A voice for loneliness

“ I saw them as the sort of trusted voice on loneliness policy where I could just go and find out a bit what the latest way of talking about things and a bit of how things are being measured. ”

Chloe Wright
Head of External Affairs
Age UK

One of the key roles the Campaign to End Loneliness has played has been to act as a consistent voice of expertise and insight on loneliness, particularly at the national level.

“ I think probably the main benefit is that single point of attention to the subject of loneliness and the opportunities that lead on from that. We’ve got a diverse membership as our own organisation, but just saying to people ‘Actually, on loneliness, if you want research, if you want stats, if you want to know what’s emerging, if you want to know what’s happening in other places, this is the site to go to and get those briefings’. ”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks

The loneliness “sector” is characterised by a large number of smaller organisations working at a hyperlocal, local, or regional level, and a small number of national organisations working on loneliness as part of a wider portfolio of interests.

There are few other national organisations with a sole focus on loneliness. The Campaign therefore played an important role as the go-to organisation.

This was a role it sought to cultivate. From its earliest days the Campaign worked to raise the profile of the loneliness agenda in the media and slowly to shift the narrative on the issue, drawing on the evidence. While there had always been media interest in loneliness, the Campaign sought to shift the focus away from loneliness being portrayed as an individual crisis, driven by neglectful families, towards seeing loneliness as a public health issue.

“ I couldn’t measure the column inches, broadcast minutes. I couldn’t mention the number of authorities who have said ‘This is a word: we’re going to have a policy on it’. ”

Paul Cann, Co-Founder,
Campaign to End Loneliness

There were a number of early successes in shaping the media agenda. In 2013 the Campaign to End Loneliness published the results of a survey of GPs exploring the extent to which loneliness fuelled visits to the GP. The findings were widely reported at the time and helped provide evidence to support the work being done to seed social prescribing schemes across the country.⁵⁵ In 2014, the Campaign to End Loneliness supported the Yorkshire Post to launch a campaign on loneliness which continued to deliver coverage of loneliness over several years, and backed the calls being made by charities for national action.⁵⁶

In the years that followed, the Campaign continued to be regarded as an expert by journalists and broadcasters and a major commentator on the issue, regularly being called upon to offer comment on stories around loneliness and to support journalists and broadcasters exploring the issue.

The Campaign's regular flow of publications, drawing together insights from academic evidence and practice (set out in the Brief History above) helped to keep its voice authoritative and fresh, creating regular opportunities for the Campaign to speak into the national agenda.

The Campaign's status as a national focal point was recognised by stakeholders across the field. Many stakeholders recognised that over time they had come to rely on the Campaign not only as a source of expertise, but also as a driving force in keeping loneliness in the public and political eye.

A hub for action on loneliness

“ It was much more than a campaign. One of the things that struck me was the network of activists, allies, and collaborators that it had across the space across England. ”

Gregor Henderson
Former Head of Mental Wellbeing
Public Health England

“ There's definitely a sense that the Campaign has been a gathering point for the issue. It has galvanised or created a bit of an anchor, [...] it's been an organiser in terms of quite diverse stakeholders who have an interest in loneliness and putting that into one space. ”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks

While the Campaign to End Loneliness became a trusted brand and expert in its own right, its original aspiration was not to build its own brand but rather to foster collaborative effort, offering those working on loneliness a home and hub for their activity.

The Campaign's initial set up was described by its founders as “egoless” – with a commitment to pooling resources without a requirement for brand recognition or the need to compete.

Over the years the Campaign was effective in convening the wider group of organisations with an interest in loneliness.

“ It did galvanise people. I think it's always hard when it's a distributed campaign - where you're not saying 'it's our brand or no brand' - to directly trace back the causality. But it was changing a zeitgeist within a sector. ”

Janet Morrison, Co-Founder,
Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign's network grew rapidly and by the end of its first strategic period it had gathered over 1000 supporting organisations. Its reach across the UK broadened during the Lottery-funded years as more organisations joined its Be More Us campaign.

“ As well as being quite strong on national messaging, I felt it had a really good group of very well activated and integrated local allies who were able to give some reality around what loneliness feels like. [...] What was impressive was that there were some clear, practical things that would make a difference that were being activated by the supporters of the Campaign, who had been campaigning locally for ages. It was good that the Campaign to End Loneliness picked up their voices. ”

Gregor Henderson
Former Head of Mental Wellbeing
Public Health England

By creating opportunities to connect into the latest evidence, and national policy initiatives, and with other organisations the Campaign helped build this disparate community into a movement.

“ The USP: It’s the links with academia, which is their strength, but not only that - because there’s obviously lots of academic organisations that are doing that kind of work - it’s also the nexus with government and with civil society. I think that’s quite unique to them, when you look at other thematic areas, there’s not many organisations that bring those three bits together. ”

Sarah Hale
Astra Foundation

Stakeholders saw the Campaign as highly collaborative and supportive of the wider movement. Stakeholders recognised the strength of the Campaign’s network across policy, practice and research and valued the way in which the Campaign acted as a conduit into these networks. Stakeholders also recognised that the Campaign’s networks gave it grounding and legitimacy.

During the Lottery-funded years, the Campaign to End Loneliness ceded some of the ground in convening the sector to the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership, which resourced a Loneliness Action Group bringing organisations together to support the development of the Government’s strategy. However, in the period beyond this partnership the Campaign once again stepped into the space.

“ In terms of engaging people in the issue, it’s been fantastic. Look at the Tackling Loneliness Hub - I know that’s run on behalf of government, but really it’s Mhairi within the Campaign who’s generated that huge network of people and people seem find that so useful. And the amount of inquiries that we get from people, just in terms of getting the message out there and generating interest and being a central point that people come to, it feels very successful and very energised. ”

Helen MacIntyre
Head of Evidence
Campaign to End Loneliness

During the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic, the strength of this community was demonstrated through the Campaign's "Loneliness in Covid-19" events which offered an open opportunity for organisations to come together to share their learning around different aspects of the loneliness experience and response during the pandemic.

In 2021 the Campaign to End Loneliness launched the Tackling Loneliness Hub – bringing together stakeholders across sectors. The work to build this to a thriving community of over 800 is further testament to the Campaign's success in convening and enabling the loneliness movement.

“ I think there's a gap in convening, especially small organisations and bringing people together, which they hold that role now and that will be missed. And I suppose although you might get academic organisations producing amazing resources, I feel like as a national charity, and I think more so as a local charity, that's a bit hard to pick up an academic report and really know whether that's the thing you should be looking at. Whereas nicely badged, well-communicated materials from a well-branded organisation is a lot easier to use. ”

Chloe Wright
Head of External Affairs, Age UK

A focus on evidence

“ The things that really have impressed me about the Campaign in the year that I've had interface with it is the ability to digest research and put that into the domain of effectively non-academic people. I think that's really, really impressive. And there's not many people doing that space actually in a lot of contexts. ”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks

“ The way I've asked, or encouraged, local Age UK's to engage with The Campaign to End Loneliness is as the go-to expert for finding out, sounding ideas out and reading what the data says and seeing if there's any evaluations worth engaging with. ”

Stakeholder
Age UK

The Campaign's rooting in the evidence on loneliness was another one of its core strengths and remained so throughout its work. Stakeholders valued the role the Campaign played in bringing academic evidence to bear in policy and practice.

“ Looking at loneliness as an issue, they are the go-to to look at the evidence base. ”

Sarah Hale
Astra Foundation

“ Their research is widely used and quoted to this day. [...] The strength was the evidence base and the impact and it did inform practice. People used their guides and toolkits because they were really helpful. They built the capacity of local organisations and that helped them in fundraising and helped them practice. ”

Richard Kramer
CEO, Sense

“ I personally think the stuff they’ve done around the psychology of loneliness has really, really been crucial and very important. I think it moves away from that passivity of loneliness that lots of people who don’t perhaps work in the field don’t get. [...] And also, I think some of the information around understanding risks, or risk factors, really contextualises and that’s been helpful. ”

Stakeholder
Age UK

From the earliest publications – the launch report *Safeguarding the Convoy*⁵⁷, and *Loneliness: The State We’re In*⁵⁸, which shared insights from the latest research – to the most recent publications on *Tackling Loneliness through the Built Environment*⁵⁹ and the authoritative reviews of the latest evidence and the state of evidence building for the DCMS⁶⁰ – the Campaign to End Loneliness has been at the forefront of making sure that the latest evidence on loneliness reaches the hands of policy makers and practitioners who can use it.

“ I think that’s the unique space that the Campaign has of using evidence in order to affect change that no one individual charity, organisation, academic could do alone. ”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks

Several stakeholders picked out specific Campaign reports as of particular value in their work – these included *The Psychology of Loneliness*⁶¹, *Promising Approaches*⁶² and the recent report on *Loneliness at Work*.⁶³

The Campaign was seen by many stakeholders as a vital bridge between academic research and practitioners. Stakeholders recognised that the Campaign played a role in “translating” research into formats that were digestible by policy makers and practitioners. Stakeholders also recognised that the Campaign had played a role in shaping the research agenda and supporting practitioners to find routes in, to inform research.

The Campaign was not just a passive observer of, or conduit for the evidence. From its early days it worked to convene researchers on loneliness, through its Research Hub, and this continued through its life and into Campaign’s embedding in the What Works Centre for Wellbeing’s wider network of research experts, its work to convene the research community on the Tackling Loneliness Hub, and its highly regarded conferences. It also played a role in advocating for action to address gaps in the evidence, contributing to the DCMS evidence group, and regularly advocating for additional funding for evidence building.

Its most recent work, in partnership with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, pooling evidence from research with practitioner insight has set out a compelling stall for the next stages of research on loneliness.⁶⁴

4

Learning the lessons

The Campaign to End Loneliness was a great success, but that is not to say there were not missteps along the way. Stakeholders had different views as to tactical errors the Campaign had made and the extent to which these contributed to its ultimate closure. A core message was that the Campaign was strongest when it stuck to its core role and purpose.

Several stakeholders highlighted the move into public facing work and activity across the four nations as a distraction from the core role of the Campaign. This “mission creep” was perceived by some stakeholders to have been driven by the desire to align the Campaign’s activities with the priorities of potential funders.

Until 2017, the Campaign’s work to raise public awareness of loneliness had been pursued primarily through the media. It had become a regular commentator on loneliness issues, and was often asked to advise individuals on how to respond to loneliness, but focussed its proactive media work mainly on delivering policy messages. However, in response to feedback from stakeholders and inspired by campaigns such as Time to Change on mental health⁶⁵, the Campaign included a significant portion of funding for public facing work in its bid to the Big Lottery Fund.

After initially working on a concept around encouraging acts of kindness, the Campaign ultimately developed a campaign called Be More Us.

Be More Us was successful against its own measures. It reached a significant audience and encouraged many people to pledge to take action to connect to others. It also drew significant numbers of new supporters to the Campaign’s work (although not necessarily to the Campaign itself as Be More Us was a separate brand). The videos and materials developed for the campaign were highly regarded.⁶⁶

“ I loved the Be More Us campaign from the outside. I really liked it. [...], I thought it was good, it was human and it was quality content. I just thought really high quality product and I think it landed with people well. ”

Nancy Hey
Executive Director
What Works Centre for Wellbeing

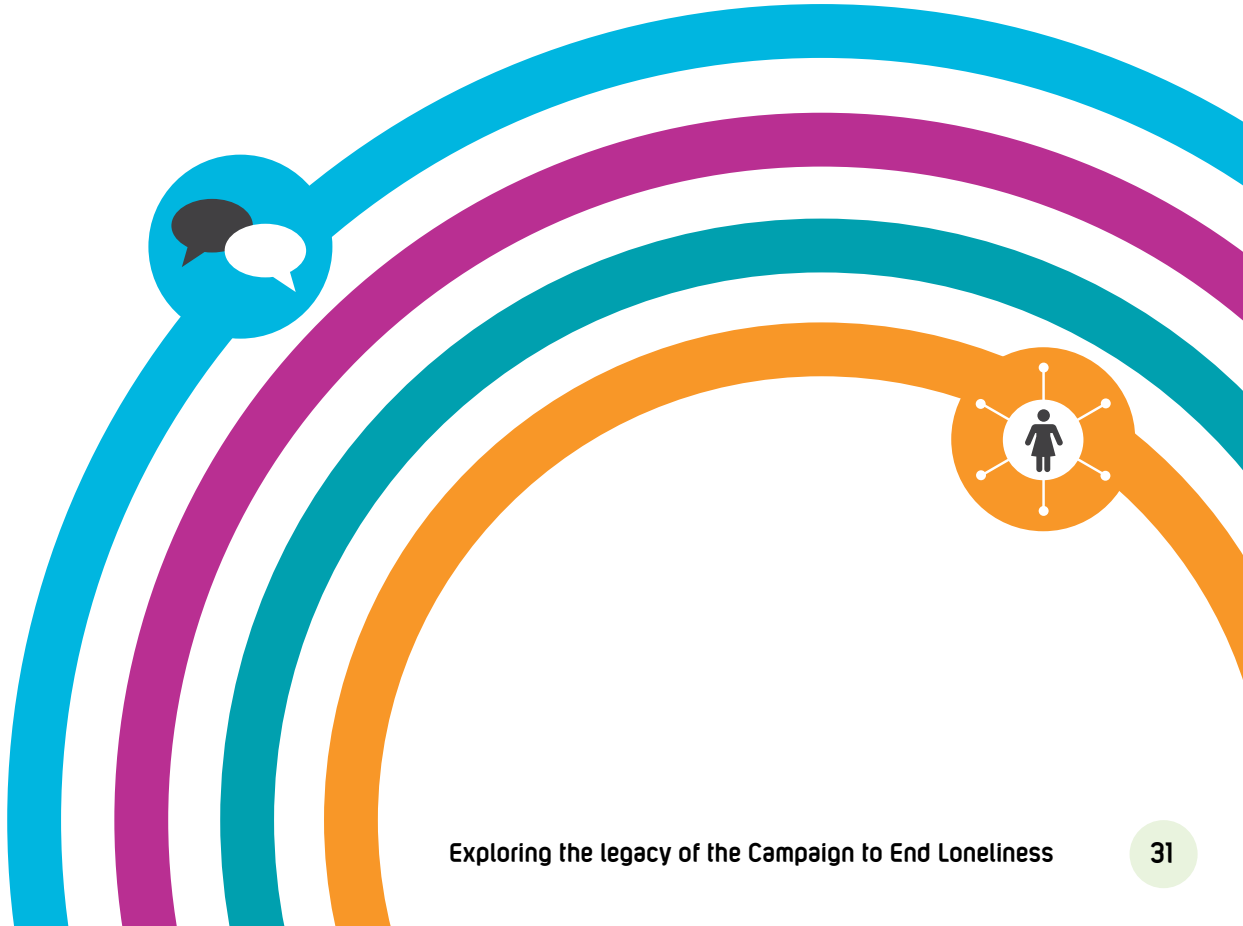
However some stakeholders questioned whether the Be More Us campaign had made a real difference at any scale, and whether Be More Us fit with the Campaign's usual rooting in firm evidence. Others felt that the Campaign hadn't been sufficiently mature as an organisation to take on this role. Several felt that this approach was more aligned with funders' interests than the core business of the Campaign.

Similarly, some stakeholders felt that in more recent years the Campaign had become too reliant on project funding to the detriment of its work and mission. Some felt there were missed opportunities to engage businesses with the loneliness agenda. Other commentators felt that the Campaign to End Loneliness had been hindered by being a hosted organisation rather than setting out on its own as a small charity or community interest company.

These stakeholders tended to argue that a clearer sense of purpose and mission may have allowed the Campaign better to make the case for action on loneliness. Some also felt that this may have enabled it to survive. However, ultimately, there was little consensus as to what, if anything, could have enabled the Campaign to ride out what was acknowledged to be an increasingly difficult period in the funding environment, particularly for organisations like the Campaign. Stakeholders recognised that funders increasingly were focussed on agenda other than loneliness and were tending to fund direct delivery rather than advocacy and infrastructure bodies.

“ I don't think there's appetite for funding a national policy organisation solely to do work around loneliness. ”

Richard Kramer
CEO, Sense



Mission accomplished?

“ It enabled a coalition that then went on to do all the great stuff that is still happening now. So I mean, I can tell you at all NHS meetings I go to, loneliness is mentioned. It’s part of what’s measured about patients and carers in mental health services. [...] I think the fact that the Campaign to End Loneliness set that out there and it was bold and it was brave: It did that. ”

Sophy Proctor
Former Head of Funding
National Lottery Community Fund

The Campaign to End Loneliness did not set out to end all loneliness. Instead, it aimed to make a difference by inspiring and enabling action to prevent and address chronic loneliness. Stakeholders were clear that it had done this.

The Campaign effectively galvanised a wider movement on loneliness, creating a place of belonging for those working in the field, and offering leadership to this movement, helping to push loneliness up the agenda and maintain and refresh interest and engagement with the issue.

Without doubt, the publication of a national strategy for loneliness in the UK was an important mark of recognition for the agenda, and it created a moment of opportunity for action. It delivered encouragement, and emboldened and gave permission to act to a wide range of organisations. It delivered confirmation from the highest levels of government that loneliness is a genuine issue which deserves attention and can justify action. It changed the mood music surrounding the issue, lent power to elbows, and pushed loneliness up the agenda. This can be seen in a number of key areas: most significantly, perhaps given its investment and reach, in the health system – where social prescribing is now part of the NHS landscape and loneliness is recognised as a core determinant of health; but also in other government departments – with, for example, the Department for Transport funding a £5m pilot programme exploring ways of addressing loneliness through transport projects. It is also reflected in the growing number of local authorities which have developed initiatives on loneliness.

Through the pandemic period, loneliness was firmly on the agenda – with funding channelled into addressing loneliness and Ministers gathering stakeholders to identify actions. This was significant shift.

A slowing of progress

Arguably, though, there has been a slowing of progress on loneliness since the publication of the national strategy. In many ways 2018 represented a highwater mark in interest in loneliness, particularly as a cross-governmental issue. While the issue saw a resurgence of interest during the pandemic, this was not sustained.

At the national level the promise of cross-governmental action has not always been realised and the loneliness agenda has been buffeted by political turbulence and pandemic. The hopes of building significant inroads to agenda such as reform of social care, transport provision and housing design in the name of tackling loneliness have not been fulfilled. Meanwhile widening inequalities, deepening poverty and increasing burden of ill-health exacerbate the issue.

“It’s been disappointing that it hasn’t gone as far as we have all wanted. But, for a period of time, it was one of the issues was being addressed in a cross-governmental way, with a lot of gusto and action. Some really interesting policy documents were written that were different from the ones that had come before.”

Gregor Henderson
Former Head of Mental Wellbeing
Public Health England

The national commitment to regular measurement of levels of loneliness across the population, which the Campaign helped to secure, means that we now have the data needed to understand what is happening to loneliness levels.

This data tells us that overall levels of chronic loneliness have risen – there are half a million more people who experience loneliness often or always, than before the pandemic. However, the increase in loneliness was significantly lower than some predicted. At the same time risk factors for loneliness such as poor mental and physical health, and low income are on the rise.

With a General Election on the horizon (at the time of writing) the loneliness agenda is by no means secure. While there remains a small infrastructure around loneliness within government, these structures are fragile and increasingly unable to leverage significant action beyond the DCMS, where the loneliness team is housed.

Meanwhile significant national organisations have reduced their activity on loneliness, or closed and several funders have begun to move away from work on loneliness.

Time for a fallow period?

“The Campaign helped blaze the trail for a very successful response to a national call to deal with loneliness and isolation. The fact that it is now going into legacy mode is, to me, not sad. It should be celebrated, for all the things that it has done.”

Gregor Henderson
Former Head of Mental Wellbeing
Public Health England

Some stakeholders were sanguine about the changes underway in the loneliness space, arguing that while loneliness remained an important issue, it was unrealistic to expect it to maintain a place in the spotlight.

“ If you can galvanise people, encourage them to think differently, to use resources more effectively, to build community and cohesion and inclusion and all of those things, then maybe it doesn't need to live forever. ”

Janet Morrison
Co-Founder
Campaign to End Loneliness

Several pointed to the growing interest in adjacent issues such as building community, community power, and improving mental health and argued that the future of the loneliness agenda lay in aligning with these newer movements.

Some argued that the closure of the Campaign to End Loneliness should mark the start of a “fallow period” for the issue, during which it would not be so prominent in the public policy debate.

“ It may be that, like many social issues, the spotlight on it rises and falls. ”

Matt Roche
The Mercer's Company

A new agenda for loneliness

“ I think the convening role is really important and needs to be done in a way that continues to be cross sector, particularly with engaging policy makers and government. Especially having seen how the political turmoil of the last couple of years can really impact how much can or cannot take place when there's such instability. So, just continuing to champion for that kind of political oversight and buy-in I think is really important for loneliness. ”

Sarah Hale
Astra Foundation

However the majority of stakeholders did not agree with this view and wanted to see ongoing work on loneliness, perceiving that:

- **The case for action on loneliness remained compelling**
- **There was a need for specific attention to loneliness, as without dedicated focus the issue could be lost or downgraded**

“ It seems like you have an organisation that was established that did extremely good work, that was instrumental, maybe central to this issue actually being taken seriously, that is then disbanded before the issue is resolved in any serious way, or maybe even slightest dent has been... I don't know I mean we don't really know if the rates have gone up or down, but it's definitely not an issue that's no longer a problem. ”

Chris Mikton
World Health Organization

Some stakeholders pointed out that while there had been some shocks to the loneliness agenda on the national stage, the global agenda on loneliness was only just coming to prominence – with a major WHO commission planned for the next two years and new initiatives in the US, in Japan, in Denmark and Sweden and beyond.

Equally stakeholders pointed out that the work in communities, and across civil society continued, albeit buffeted by a challenging funding environment.

Stakeholders feared the loss of that national voice, hub and evidence-base for action. Without it, they feared vital progress on loneliness would be lost, and in a few years' time wheels would have to be reinvented to bring this issue back to life.

“ I think the worry is that you just relearn a load of lessons in 10 to 15 years. ”

Robin Hewings
Former Director
Campaign to End Loneliness

“ I think it's just such an issue of our time and I think the risk is that people keep coming back to it and do something interesting, but relatively light touch that kind of repeats stuff again rather than building that learning. ”

Nancy Hey
Executive Director
What Works Centre for Wellbeing

“ My real concern is that five years down the line, we will be back to where we were back in twenty-whenever, when it all started. ”

Sophy Proctor
Former Head of Funding
National Lottery Community Fund

What work needs to be done?

As we have explored the Campaign's legacy with stakeholders, we have also identified a range of areas for ongoing action. These include:

Sharing learning internationally and building the global community on loneliness:

Stakeholders told us that the years ahead – and particularly the next two years during which the WHO Commission on Social Connection would be working – would be vital for action on loneliness on the global stage.

“ How do we look globally at this? And it's really interesting, obviously we've got this World Health Commission on Social Connection, it's going to publish in 2026, so what's that going to tell us? And how do we make sure that the voice and experiences of communities in the UK is heard into that? ”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks

Stakeholders argued that there were enormous opportunities for developing a global movement on loneliness, and for the UK to share and learn as leaders come together across the globe to identify an agenda for action. There will also be fresh opportunities to galvanise action in the UK, as Ministers come together as part of the global movement.

“ The international collaborations that are possible here are so exciting and we shouldn't leave it to just the academic teams to do it all. ”

Nancy Hey
Executive Director
What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Building and sharing the evidence on loneliness:

Several stakeholders highlighted the need for ongoing work in relation to measuring loneliness, understanding the impact of interventions, and understanding the impact of loneliness on particular groups.

“ I feel like the conversation is much more out there and the issue itself is out there, but I'm not a hundred percent convinced everybody knows across government, the voluntary sector, genuinely what the solutions are. And I think that still continues to be a missing piece across all areas like workplace, youth, older people, just genuinely what the right solutions are for the right context to then implement and make those changes because it's such a complex and subjective issue. ”

Stakeholder
Funder Organisation

“ We really have a very poor understanding of risk factors or drivers of loneliness. And in a way, you can’t really devise policy then devise interventions until we have a much better understanding. We don’t really know. If you look at the systematic reviews on risk factors, it’s this laundry list of risk factors, 50, 60, 70 different risk factors. There’s very little information on their relative importance. There’s very little information on their causal status. There’s very little information on their modifiability. ”

Chris Mikton
World Health Organization

As the Campaign to End Loneliness and What Works Centre for Wellbeing’s recent reviews demonstrated, there has been significant development in our understanding of what works to address loneliness in recent years, but there is more to do to build upon and refine this evidence-base; creating new tools to enable more organisations to understand and articulate their impact and to share their learning; and refining our understanding of who is affected by loneliness, how and how it can be addressed.

“ We’ll continue to need evidence of what works, both at an individual level and at scale. Those are tricky things, so it needs a very good evidence base. It needs some of the brightest academic minds to address it. And it needs not just an understanding of interventions that work, but also an understanding of the economics of those interventions, and why they work, otherwise we’ll never persuade the Treasury to invest. ”

Gregor Henderson
Former Head of Mental Wellbeing
Public Health England

Importantly stakeholders recognised that it wasn’t enough to have a thriving academic field in loneliness, because alongside this work was needed to shape and share academic endeavour to meet the needs of policy makers and practitioners. Making sure that new research reaches policy makers and practitioners in formats they can quickly grasp and act upon requires specific focus and attention.

“ I think is on the intervention side, despite all the money that’s been put into interventions and evaluations of interventions, [...] we still don’t know what the key criteria are that need to be included in interventions to be successful for which groups. ”

Andrea Wigfield
Director of the Centre for Loneliness
Studies, Sheffield Hallam University

Making the case for national action:

Several stakeholders expressed concern about a loss of overall leadership on loneliness – explaining that this had been a role that many had confidently “left” to the Campaign to End Loneliness. They argued that with so many other pressing issues facing more generalist organisations, only those with a sole focus on loneliness would have the bandwidth to drive forward public policy and campaigning work in this space. Many remained keen to continue to follow and support the work on loneliness, but were not able to lead.

“ I think just keeping the momentum going, almost being at the heels of central government, and other organisations which are saying that this is important to them, but actually they need some impetus behind. So I think that maintaining the energy of the whole issue of loneliness is [...] going to be a key thing. ”

Jeremy Sharpe
National Director
Linking Lives UK

With a General Election on the horizon, work is needed to keep loneliness on the agenda for the next Government. Advocating for policy makers to pay attention to reducing loneliness, as a key contributor to wider health and wellbeing rather than a “nice to have”, and demonstrating the linkages and synergies with wider policy objectives, including addressing inequality and building community, will be vital as any incoming Government juggles competing pressures.

“ It might get quite lost in a very busy new government agenda and without a kind of united coalition or some strong national organisations pushing that, it’s even more likely to get lost. ”

Chloe Wright
Head of External Affairs, Age UK

This work will need regular injections of “fuel” in the form of new evidence and insights to inspire and inform action.

Supporting local action:

Equally vital will be supporting the many organisations – including charities and community groups, local businesses and statutory bodies – working to address loneliness in places, across systems and within combined authorities. This is where the real action happens on loneliness.

Many of those working on loneliness are small and relatively isolated. Stakeholders argued that there was an ongoing, and potentially growing, need for organisations working on loneliness to be able to come together a share expertise. Ongoing, because this had been highly valued, and growing, because of the increasing breadth and acuity of need being faced by organisations and the increasingly limited funding available to take forward work on loneliness. This means that collaboration across organisations – whether through sharing learning to reduce inefficiency, or by working in partnership to deliver – will be even more important than ever.

“That idea of bringing people together. So I guess the conference and the hub are both really good examples of showing individuals working in organisations that other people share their concern about this issue. So there’s a visibility of, rather than a service manager or project coordinator or CEO going, ‘If only we could do something about this,’ it feels that you’re part of something bigger.”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks

Bringing this community together, building its capacity and enabling collaboration, particularly in the face of a hostile funding climate will be another vital area for action.

Stakeholders shared **five other areas for action** which they felt could be fruitfully explored:

Breaking down the stigma of loneliness and supporting individual action

While some close to the Campaign were cautious about the impact of previous work to encourage public behaviour-change, stakeholders clearly saw a need for ongoing work to galvanise public commitment to addressing loneliness, and to support people to address loneliness at the individual level.

“This has to be a social movement. It needs to be about how we behave, how we operate, our culture, the language used in public, the messages and all of that **Be More Us** was a part of.”

Paul Cann, Co-Founder
Campaign to End Loneliness

Bringing additional funds to the organisations working to address loneliness in communities

For some this was part and parcel of making the case for national action on loneliness, but others were more explicit that a key priority would be to reconvene those with an interest in loneliness to address the lack of resources. Some argued that a future Government would need to be persuaded to invest in loneliness. Others saw potential for building a case for investment by the health system.

“If loneliness isn’t on the agenda in the same way as it maybe has been over the last particularly three years post Covid [...] I think if it slips off the agenda, then funding is going to be even more of an issue. And then more and more charities that are addressing this are going to go under, as we’ve been seeing already.”

Jeremy Sharpe
National Director
Linking Lives UK

Building links with business to address loneliness

Several stakeholders felt that there had been missed opportunities to build a truly cross-sectoral approach to addressing loneliness and argued that more needed to be done to galvanise business interest in addressing loneliness.

Continuing to develop a training offer on loneliness

Another specific area that some stakeholders felt was ripe for further development was the delivery of training around addressing loneliness. As businesses and frontline workers in the public and community sectors increasingly recognise the impact of loneliness on people with whom they work, stakeholders saw opportunities to equip people to respond to these needs.

Amplifying voices of lived experience

Another area people felt was ripe for development was building the voices of lived experience into the loneliness movement. It was noted that this had been done successfully in the youth space with the support of the Co-op Foundation, but that this work was due to come to an end shortly and gaps remained for other age groups.

What next?

The Campaign to End Loneliness has been the go-to place for loneliness for over a decade – known for its networks and expertise and as a ready source of information for anyone new to the field, for those seeking to connect with others, and for journalists, broadcasters and policy makers seeking a perspective. Its closure leaves a gap.

“When we heard the news of the closure, I think that was the thing that people thought, ‘Well, how do we continue this?’ Nobody wanted to just accept, okay, it’s closed, it’s gone. Well, what do we do next? How do we keep organising ourselves with others around this issue? Because we do want the work, we do want the innovation. We do want the issue to be advanced. So I think that for me is I guess the organising vehicle somehow that feels really, really important.”

Susan Hunter
CEO, Befriending Networks,
Co-Chair of the Action Group on
Isolation and Loneliness in Scotland

There are many organisations which already play, and will continue to play a role in driving this agenda. Many of these have looked to the Campaign to End Loneliness to bring them together – to enable them to connect, and to amplify their voices.

“ Lots of organisations have said they’re willing to keep pushing for it, but there’s not that one mouthpiece who can represent all those voices. ”

Campaign team member

“ There’s no organisation that jumps out at me from there that would take on the same sort of mantle that Campaign to End Loneliness had. ”

Chloe Wright
Head of External Affairs
Age UK

The loss of a “home” for loneliness expertise, combining understanding of the evidence, policy and the practitioner landscape, is therefore a real concern for many stakeholders. Without this hub, home, and voice for loneliness, there is risk to the loneliness agenda. However, there is also potential for a new, more distributed model of leadership to emerge in the next phase of the work to address loneliness.

The green shoots of a next movement are starting to show:

- The Centre for Loneliness Studies at Sheffield Hallam University will take ownership of the Campaign to End Loneliness’ website and wider intellectual property creating an ongoing home for the Campaign’s trove of learning and insight
- The Centre is also exploring with stakeholders how it can revitalise the wider work of the Campaign to End Loneliness, keeping the website fresh and playing an ongoing role in the work to drive action on loneliness
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) intends to maintain the Tackling Loneliness Hub, and will tender for a new provider
- Stakeholder organisations and Parliamentary champions are continuing to share the joint Call to Action on Loneliness setting out an agenda for the next Government
- The Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection continues to share learning from the Campaign to End Loneliness, and others, with the World Health Organization as its work continues

However, to thrive these efforts will need funding and commitment across the long term.

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