

NEWS RELEASE

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Jeremy Hunt highlights loneliness in key speech

In a speech to be given to delegates at the National Children and Adults Services (NCAS) conference, the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has flagged loneliness as a critical issue affecting older people.

In the speech **Jeremy Hunt** will say: "According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, there are 800,000 people in England who are chronically lonely. Some five million people say television is their main form of company - that's 10% of the population. We know there is a broader problem of loneliness that in our busy lives we have utterly failed to confront as a society. Each and every lonely person has someone who could visit them and offer companionship. A forgotten million who live amongst us - ignored to our national shame."

Commenting on the speech **Kate Jopling**, Director for the Campaign to End Loneliness, says: "Jeremy Hunt is right to highlight loneliness as an important issue for our ageing population. However, loneliness is not just a moral outrage, but also a serious public health issue which deserves a comprehensive response. Research shows that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

"We now need to put in place the services which can prevent and alleviate loneliness and thereby reduce the suffering of thousands of older people and help bring under control the spiralling costs of treating preventable ill health."

-ENDS-

Facts about loneliness:

- Loneliness and isolation are as bad for health as smoking. It is also associated with poor mental, physical and emotional health, including increased rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cognitive decline and dementia. Socially isolated and lonely adults are more likely to undergo early admission into residential or nursing care.

- Those who are lonely are at higher risk of the onset of disability and those who are deafblind are at considerable risk of loneliness.
- Almost 3 million older people are lonely: about 20% of the older population is lonely sometimes and another 8 to 10% is intensely lonely.
- 17% of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week, and 11% are in contact less than once a month.
- Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone
- Half of all older people (over 5 million) say the television is their main company
- 9% say they feel cut off from society
- Just under 20% of older people are sometimes lonely and 6-13% of older people say they always feel lonely
- 61 of the 128 published Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies have acknowledged loneliness and/or isolation as serious issues. However, over half of all health and wellbeing boards with published strategies (53%) have not recognised that loneliness and/or isolation are issues that need addressing.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness is network of local, regional and national organisations and individuals working together through community action, good practice, policy and research to combat loneliness and isolation in the United Kingdom.

Anyone can make their voice heard in their own area by letting their local health and wellbeing board know about the problem of loneliness and isolation – more information is available on our website: <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/campaigns/loneliness-harms-health/>

The Campaign has five partners who lead the strategic direction of the Campaign: Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Manchester City Council, Royal Voluntary Service and Sense. More information about the Campaign can be found at: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk