

## NEWS RELEASE

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### More help needed for lonely to reduce NHS demands this winter

Chronic loneliness could increase the demand on NHS services including A&E this winter, unless more help reaches older people, according to a leading UK Campaign.

In a new survey (released today), The Campaign to End Loneliness estimates nearly 2.5m people over 60 (16%) would not know where to go for help if they were feeling lonely, and predicts it is likely to worsen with nearly 1 in 5 (19%) over 60 year olds expecting to be lonely as they get older.

The charity is [warning](#) that loneliness and isolation are as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, with research showing that those experiencing loneliness are [more likely](#) to use accident and emergency services, visit their GP, and have higher use of medication.

The Campaign's warning follows calls from [NHS leaders last year](#) for more support to curb loneliness to ease pressures on hospital A&E departments over the Christmas period, after emergency admissions [reached record levels](#). Prof Keith Willett, NHS England's Director for Acute Care last year cited a [study in south west England](#) showing that 45% of patients over 75 admitted as an emergency said they were socially isolated.

The Campaign says that health services and charities need to work closely to make older people more aware of what support is available to tackle loneliness this winter, like befriending services from Campaign members, such as UK charity the [Royal Voluntary Service](#).

Their [Good Neighbours scheme](#) works directly with local GPs who identify those older people most at risk of ending up in hospital within the next year and their volunteers offer support and companionship to keep them safe and well – from weekly visits, or transport to a doctor's appointment, getting some shopping in or simply having a cup of tea and a chat.

Mrs Owen, aged 72 from North Wales turned to the Good Neighbours service for support and company after a bereavement. "Good Neighbours has helped me pick up the pieces after a bereavement. I attend the lunch club with a wonderful group of people and I also use their befriending service. The service has given me the confidence to be involved with my community again."

"Royal Voluntary Service has really made a positive difference to my life. I feel that more people need to know what their Good Neighbours service does, and what help is available."

**Marcus Rand**, Director for the Campaign to End Loneliness, says: "It's worrying that there is a lack of awareness amongst older people about the support available to address loneliness, especially when nearly 20 per cent say they expect to be lonely as they get older.

“We know that loneliness is linked to an increase in use of NHS services and is a serious public health issue. This is why it is important that health services and charities offering support to older people work together to identify and reach the most vulnerable. This early offer of support is essential to help reduce strain on local services this winter.”

-ENDS-

## NOTES TO EDITORS

[1] The Campaign to End Loneliness inspires thousands of organisations and people to do more to tackle the health threat of loneliness in older age through community action, good practice and evidence. Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Manchester City Council, Royal Voluntary Service and Sense provide governance and strategic direction for Campaign. More information can be found at [www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk)

[2] The poll was conducted by [Survation](http://survation.com) with 1,254 people aged 60 and over in the UK. Click here to view the survey tables <http://survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CEL-271015.pdf>

- **Over 1 in 10 (16%)** of older people would not know where to go for help if they were feeling lonely. That's 2,339,300 people (based on ONS stats 2015 of over 60 year olds in UK).
- **Nearly 1 in 5 (19%)** over 60 year olds expect to be lonely as they get older. That's 2,778,912 million people (based on ONS stats 2015 of over 60s in UK).

[3] [Survation](http://survation.com) is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

[4] Key loneliness facts:

- Over a [million people in the UK](#) feel chronically lonely, that is all or most of the time
- Loneliness and isolation in older age is a [serious public health issue](#) and increases the risk of conditions including dementia ([James et al, 2011](#)), high blood pressure ([Hawkley et al, 2010](#)) and depression ([Cacioppo et al, 2006](#)) ([Green et al, 1992](#)).
- Loneliness increases the demand on health services: academic research shows that those experiencing loneliness are [more likely](#) to use accident and emergency services ([Geller, Janson, McGovern and Valdini, 1999](#)), visit their GP ([Gerst-Emerson, Jayawardhana 2014](#)), and have higher use of medication ([Cohen, 2006](#))
- [76% GPs report](#) 1-5 patients a day come to their surgery because they are lonely

[4] About Royal Voluntary Service

- Formerly known as WRVS, Royal Voluntary Service has been helping people in Britain for 75 years.
- Originally set up as the Women's Voluntary Service in 1938, the charity played a crucial role during the Second World War.
- Whilst keeping the same values of community service, Royal Voluntary Service has now focused its work on helping older people to remain independent and get more out of life.

- Royal Voluntary Service is one of the largest voluntary organisations in Britain with 35,000 men and women helping people in their homes, the community, hospitals and in emergencies.
- The charity is a founding member of the Campaign to End Loneliness, a partner in the Big Lottery funded project, Shaping our Age, a supporter of the Malnutrition Task Force and a member of the Care and Support Alliance, the Falls and Fractures Alliance, Age Action Alliance and the Dementia Action Alliance.
- Royal Voluntary Service has Investing in Volunteers status in recognition of its good practice and effective volunteer management.
- For more information on the Royal Voluntary Service please visit [www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk](http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk)