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FIRST SUMMIT TO TACKLE LONELINESS

One million over 65s are lonely; dramatic impact on mortality

The UK's one million lonely older people who aren't able to leave their homes and don't have contact with friends or relatives are the focus of the first major summit on loneliness, hosted today jointly by Minister of State for Care Services Paul Burstow and the Campaign to End Loneliness.

The summit will be addressing both the health and social impacts of loneliness on older people. Research has shown that the health impacts of loneliness can be substantial – with a recent study reporting a fifty per cent reduction in the likelihood of mortality for individuals with strong social relationships¹. Estimates suggest that 17 per cent of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week.

Today's summit will see charities, businesses, MPs and public sector organisations for the first time coming together to start a public discussion and consider how best each organisation can address and reduce loneliness in older age.

In support of the agenda, Pensions Minister Steve Webb will launch new online guidance from the DWP-funded Ageing Well programme and the Campaign to end Loneliness for councils to combat loneliness and isolation in older age.

A joined-up approach to this issue from across government and the independent sector is essential given the impact loneliness can have. Research has shown that loneliness can have a detrimental impact on mental and physical health, and the numbers of people who can't get out and about or don't have friends and families to visit are staggering. It is estimated that:

- More than one million people aged over 65 are often or always lonely
- 12 per cent of older people feel trapped in their own home
- Six per cent of older people leave their house once a week or less
- Nearly 200,000 older people in the UK don't get help to get out of their home

¹ Andy P. Dickens, Suzanne H. Richards, Colin J. Greaves, and John L. Campbell, 'Interventions Targeting Social Isolation in Older People: A Systematic Review', *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 11 (2011), pp. 647 – 669, p. 647.

- 17 per cent of older people are in contact with family, friends and neighbors less than once a week and 11 per cent are in contact less than once a month
- Over half (51 per cent) of all people aged 75 and over live alone
- 36 per cent of people aged 65 and over in the UK feel out of touch with the pace of modern life and nine per cent say they feel cut off from society
- Half of all older people (about 5 million) say the television is their main company.

Care Services Minister Paul Burstow said:

“Loneliness is one of society’s unspoken tragedies. We all have elderly neighbours or relatives who live on their own. Lack of day-to-day contact can have a huge impact on their health.

“Research has shown that loneliness can be as harmful to your health as alcohol and tobacco, but we also know that people who have day to day contact live longer and healthier lives.

“The Government is working with the Campaign to End Loneliness to raise awareness about just how important even a simple phone call or visit can be to someone’s health. That’s why we’ll be working in partnership with the voluntary sector, businesses, local communities and others to make a difference.”

Laura Ferguson, Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness said:

“Loneliness presents a very real threat to people’s health. It has been shown to be worse than obesity and as bad as lifelong smoking, so we are excited about this chance to give health commissioners the information they need to improve services that alleviate and prevent loneliness.

“This will ultimately improve the health and wellbeing of older people, and deliver savings to both health and social care in the long term”.

Minister for Pensions Steve Webb said:

"We must do all we can to help older people remain active and involved in their local communities. We have provided £1 million through our Active at 60 programme to help people most at risk of longer-term social isolation following retirement. And the online guidance launched today will help councils make sure they are not left lonely and isolated.

"We are beginning to meet the challenges of our ageing society through the Age Action Alliance network, supported by organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors. And older people are already shaping local services to meet their needs through the Ageing Well programme."

Ends

Notes to Editors

1) On the morning of Thursday 15 March, Care Services Minister Paul Burstow will undertake a visit with the Kensington and Chelsea Befriending Scheme, run by WRVS. The scheme allocates volunteers as befrienders to older housebound people. The visit will see the Minister join a volunteer undertaking a visit to a service user in the locality. **Please note, this visit is closed to media.**

2) About loneliness in older age:

Information provided by the Campaign to End Loneliness

Loneliness is as bad for health as smoking.ⁱ It is also associated with poor mentalⁱⁱ, physical and emotional health, including increased rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertensionⁱⁱⁱ, cognitive decline^{iv} and dementia^v. Socially isolated and lonely adults are more likely to undergo early admission into residential or nursing care.^{vi}

Those who are lonely are at higher risk of the onset of disability^{vii} and those who are deafblind are at considerable risk of loneliness^{viii}.

- The evidence for the impact of loneliness on health and wellbeing is sufficient to merit the commitment of a wide range of stakeholders both nationally and locally to work to reduce loneliness, in all of their fields of expertise.
- Such commitments to tackle loneliness should be in direct support of the new health and wellbeing boards and their local strategies.
- In addition, innovative commissioning with local voluntary sector organisations should be undertaken to ensure that the most hard to reach are found, and to spread the investment already made in local areas.

About the Campaign to End Loneliness:

The Campaign to End Loneliness is a coalition of organisations and individuals working together through research, policy, campaigning and innovation to combat loneliness and inspire individuals to keep connected in older age in the United Kingdom.

We welcome new supporters of the Campaign to End Loneliness. Supporters will be invited to get involved in local campaigns to raise awareness of the problem of loneliness among local health and wellbeing commissioners from summer 2012.

More information about the Campaign can be found at: www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

The Campaign has five partners who lead the strategic direction of the Campaign:

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity with over 40 years of experience in promoting the wellbeing of older people throughout the county of Oxfordshire, and helping to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience. To find out about more visit <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/>

Independent Age is a unique and growing charity, providing information, advice and support for thousands of older people across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. It has recently merged with

two other older people's charities, *Counsel and Care* and *Universal Beneficent Society*, to provide a broader range of services than any of the charities could provide separately.

www.independentage.org

Manchester City Council is the local government authority for the city and metropolitan borough of Manchester. The Council have been running Valuing Older People programme for 10 years, and in 2003 launched a ten-year strategy called 'Manchester – A Great Place to Grow Older'. In 2010 Manchester became the only UK city to join the World Health Organisation's network of Age-Friendly Cities.

Sense is a national charity that has supported and campaigned for children and adults who are deafblind for over 50 years. There are currently 356 000 deafblind people in the UK and this number is set to increase by 60% to 570 000 people in 2030 with the over 70s most affected (74% of deafblind people in 2030). www.sense.org.uk

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

The Campaign is supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, which is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support transnational work tackling contemporary issues.

ⁱ Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Layton JB. Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS Med* 2010;7(7)

<http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>

ⁱⁱ Cacioppo JT, Hughes ME, Waite LJ, Hawkley LC, Thisted RA. Loneliness as a specific risk factor for depressive symptoms: cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. *Psychol Aging* 2006;21(1):140-51 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16594799>

ⁱⁱⁱ Hawkley LC, Thisted RA, Masi CM, Cacioppo JT. Loneliness predicts increased blood pressure: 5-year cross-lagged analyses in middle-aged and older adults. *Psychol Aging* 2010;25(1):132-41 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20230134>

^{iv} James BD, Wilson RS, Barnes LL, Bennett DA. Late-life social activity and cognitive decline in old age. *J Int Neuropsychol Soc* 2011;17(6):998-1005 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22040898>

^v Wilson RS, Krueger KR, Arnold SE, Schneider JA, Kelly JF, Barnes LL, et al. Loneliness and risk of Alzheimer disease. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2007 Feb; 64(2):234-40 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17283291>

^{vi} Russell DW, Cutrona CE, de la Mora A, Wallace RB. Loneliness and nursing home admission among rural older adults. *Psychol Aging* 1997;12(4):574-89 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9416627>

^{vii} Lund R, Nilsson CJ, Avlund K. Can the higher risk of disability onset among older people who live alone be alleviated by strong social relations? A longitudinal study of non-disabled men and women. *Age Ageing* 2010;39(3):319-26

<http://ageing.oxfordjournals.org/content/39/3/319.full>

viii *Impairment and hearing loss among community-dwelling older Americans: implications for health and functioning*, American Journal of Public Health; 2004; 94 (5)
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15117707>