



NEWS RELEASE – For immediate release

## ***Loneliness Harms Health: Gloria Hunniford calls on people to campaign to end loneliness***

Gloria Hunniford today joins forces with the Campaign to End Loneliness to highlight that loneliness harms health this week.

There are 800,000 older people in England who are chronically lonely.<sup>1</sup> Loneliness is as bad for us as smoking 15 cigarettes a day<sup>2</sup> and has a destructive impact on our quality of life. Despite this, services and activities keeping older people connected are under threat. To confront this challenge, the Campaign to End Loneliness today urges people across England to let their local health bodies know about the health impacts of loneliness and how much tackling loneliness matters to them. This could include writing to their local newspaper, their MP or building a network of people in their area who care about the issue of loneliness.<sup>3</sup>

This week, the Campaign to End Loneliness launches *Loneliness Harms Health* nationwide with launch events taking place in Cornwall and Essex: a fair showcasing local services aimed at keeping older people connected will be held in Cornwall, whilst Chelmsford in Essex will host a public meeting addressed by a senior county councillor and local voluntary sector representatives.

Gloria Hunniford lent her support to *Loneliness Harms Health*, saying:

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<sup>1</sup> Victor, CR, Scambler, SJ, Bowling, A and Bond, J (2005) The prevalence of, and risk factors for, loneliness in later life: a survey of older people in Great Britain, *Ageing and Society*, 25, (3), pp 357–76

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> You can find out more by taking a look at the *Loneliness Harms Health Action Pack* which guides people through starting a campaign. It is available on our website at [www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/campaign/loneliness-harms-health](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/campaign/loneliness-harms-health)

*“I was shocked to discover that loneliness is as bad for our health as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day! Of course, we can all help by making sure we are properly supporting our older family, friends and neighbours. But for lasting change in our communities, we also need to make sure that our councils and local NHS authorities are working to protect and improve services that can help reduce loneliness. To make sure they listen, we must work together - that’s why I’m supporting the Loneliness Harms Health campaign.”*

## **Media Case Studies**

*The cuts and closure of key services can have a devastating impact on older people who rely on them to keep them active and connected, as the case study of Mrs D suggests:*

Mrs D is a widowed 84 year old who lives in rural Cornwall. She suffers from severe depression and arthritis. She used to attend a day centre in the nearby town, which she very much enjoyed, but which closed down in 2010. Since then, she has found nothing to replace it and has become ever more isolated.

Mrs D would be willing to speak to a journalist to discuss her experiences.

*Key services can make a huge difference to the lives of people experiencing loneliness, as this case study demonstrates:*

Mrs F was experiencing severe loneliness because she was caring for her husband who suffered from Alzheimer’s. She was signposted to a Cornwall Memory Café. After this, her life took a massive change for the better. She has been visiting the cafe for nearly two years now. Her husband is in a long term care home and she continues to visit the cafe every fortnight, describing it as her lifeline. She has even become a part of the committee.

Mrs F would also be willing to speak with a journalist about her experiences.

*We can provide details of a variety of other individuals across England who would be willing to discuss their experiences with a journalist.*

**Ends**

## Notes to editors

### Loneliness

- Loneliness is as bad for health as smoking<sup>i</sup>. It is also associated with poor mental<sup>ii</sup>, physical and emotional health, including increased rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertension<sup>iii</sup>, cognitive decline<sup>iv</sup> and dementia<sup>v</sup>. Socially isolated and lonely adults are more likely to undergo early admission into residential or nursing care<sup>vi</sup>.
- Those who are lonely are at higher risk of the onset of disability<sup>vii</sup> and those who are deafblind are at considerable risk of loneliness<sup>viii</sup>.
- About 20% of the older population is lonely sometimes (around 1,600,000 people) and another 8 to 10% is intensely lonely<sup>ix</sup>, around 800,000 people
- 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<sup>x</sup>
- Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone<sup>xi</sup>
- Half of all older people (over 5 million) say the television is their main company<sup>xii</sup>
- 9% say they feel cut off from society<sup>xiii</sup>
- Just under 20% of older people are sometimes lonely and 6-13% of older people say they always feel lonely<sup>xiv</sup>

### ***Loneliness Harms Health***

*Loneliness Harms Health* invites local communities across England to join together to urge new local forums for local health and care leaders, known as health and wellbeing boards, to recognise the negative health implications of loneliness. The campaign calls on these boards to make tackling loneliness in their communities a priority and protect and improve services that keep people connected.

The Campaign to End Loneliness has put together a set of resources to help campaigners across the country get started which can be seen here <http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/campaigns/loneliness-harms-health/>

For more information, call 020 7012 1411 or email [marianne@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk](mailto:marianne@campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk).

A flagship campaign in Cornwall, with local people campaigning for the past six months, have resulted in Cornwall's Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board recently highlighting loneliness in older age in their health and wellbeing strategy. This was after a deluge of letters and emails from local people, saying that loneliness was important to them. The success of the campaign in Cornwall serves to highlight the impact that a group of campaigners can have and local groups and people are urged to repeat the success in Cornwall across the rest of England.

### **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, who will be invited to campaign in their own area to raise awareness of the problem of loneliness among local health and wellbeing commissioners.

More information about the Campaign can be found at:  
[www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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.

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<sup>i</sup> 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>

<sup>ii</sup> 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>

<sup>iii</sup> 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>

<sup>iv</sup> 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>

<sup>v</sup> 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>

<sup>vi</sup> 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>

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<sup>vii</sup> 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>

<sup>viii</sup> *Visual 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>

<sup>ix</sup> Victor, CR, Scambler, SJ, Bowling, A and Bond, J (2005) The prevalence of, and risk factors for, loneliness in later life: a survey of older people in Great Britain, *Ageing and Society*, 25, (3), pp 357–76

<sup>x</sup> Victor, C. Scambler, S, Bond, J and Bowling, A. 'Being alone in later life: loneliness, social isolation and living alone' *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology* 2000 v.10 (4)

<sup>xi</sup> Office for National Statistics (2010) *General Lifestyle Survey 2008* (London: Office for National Statistics).

<sup>xii</sup> Harrop, A and Jopling, K (2009) *One Voice: shaping our ageing society* (Age Concern and Help the Aged).

<sup>xiii</sup> GfK/NOP (2005) 'Help Unite Generations (HUG) Survey for Help the Aged' (unpublished)

<sup>xiv</sup> Victor, CR, Scambler, SJ, Bowling, A and Bond, J (2005) The prevalence of, and risk factors for, loneliness in later life: a survey of older people in Great Britain, *Ageing and Society*, 25, (3), pp 357–76