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The Loneliness Epidemic: research reveals loneliness in older age ‘more likely than ever’

- 9 in 10 people (89%) believe loneliness in older age is now more likely than ever - rising to 93% when asking those aged 65+
- More than half of British adults (56%) say admitting to loneliness is difficult
- The Campaign to End Loneliness says that the stigma of loneliness is isolating millions of older people
- Three quarters of over-65s (76%) say they would find it hard to admit to feeling lonely because they do not want to be a burden
- But 67% of people - rising to 76% of those aged 16-24 - say they want to help address the loneliness crisis
- Research also shows that every £1 invested in tackling loneliness can save £3 in health costs

The Campaign to End Loneliness has revealed that 9 in 10 people (89%) believe loneliness in older age is more likely now than ever – with over half of British adults saying that admitting to loneliness is difficult.

The Campaign also released a review by the London School of Economics (LSE) that demonstrates that it pays to invest in loneliness interventions. Up to £3 of health costs can be saved for every £1 spent on an effective intervention.

The Campaign to End Loneliness is launching the first phase of its work to drive public action to tackle loneliness in older age, working with partners from across the UK to inspire thousands of people to take action in their communities, workplaces, and businesses. The Campaign is supported with National Lottery funding from the Big Lottery Fund.

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

“There is much to do to overcome loneliness. The huge stigma surrounding it is clear, which is slowing down efforts to combat it. This is isolating millions of older people - and with our ageing population, the epidemic of loneliness is growing fast.

“The fact that over three-quarters of older people will not admit to feeling lonely is deeply worrying. The health impacts of loneliness are devastating; it is worse for you than obesity and as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Most worrying, however, is the popular view that loneliness in older age is more likely than ever - that loneliness is inevitable.

“But, with two thirds of people wanting to address the loneliness epidemic - and with compelling evidence that it pays to tackle loneliness - we know that we can challenge this. Loneliness is not

inevitable. So, we are calling on the public to take action. Watch and share our inspiring new film ‘**The Loneliness Project**’, and join the campaign. Together, we can end loneliness.”

Deborah Moggach, Campaign to End Loneliness ambassador and author of the best-selling novel *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, believes by working together it is possible to tackle loneliness. She said:

“Loneliness really is the last taboo. Older age should be seen as a whole new adventure - not an inevitable descent into despair. We have to stop thinking of this as someone else’s problem. As a society, we need to recognise loneliness as an issue, and put something in place that enables older generations to flourish - not flounder.”

84 year-old Barry Ward, who took part in ‘The Loneliness Project’, said:

“Loneliness is like grief; it’s suffocating. After my beloved wife Christine suddenly died, I felt only half alive. I felt paralysed by loneliness. By talking more about it, we can break down the stigma that prevents many older people from being open about loneliness. The human need for friendship and support does not go away with age; it actually increases. Whether we are 24 or 84, we all need connections that matter.”

Watch [‘The Loneliness Project’](#) and sign up to the Campaign

https://www.youtube.com/edit?o=U&video_id=IYc85A8f2CM

www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/LonelinessProject

Barry and Joe in ‘The Loneliness Project’



Notes to Editors

- More than half (63%) of British adults have suffered with loneliness
- A quarter (24%) of those saying they have suffered with it for months or more
- A quarter of those aged 45+ believe that loneliness is an inevitable part of getting older.
- More than three-quarters (76%) of those aged 65+ say older people will not admit to feeling lonely because they do not want to burden others

Based on a Censuswide survey of 2240 general consumers, including 504 65+ year olds, in August and September 2017

About the LSE Research

The initial findings of **'Making the economic case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review'** were published in September 2017. It was undertaken by David McDaid, Annette Bauer and A-La Park from the Personal Social Services Research Unit of the London School of Economics and Political Science. LSE searched a number of health and social science literature databases to identify studies that compare the costs of investing in an action to tackle / prevent loneliness with the costs that may be avoided as a result of intervention. **The review has demonstrated that it is clear that it pays to invest in loneliness interventions:**

- The societal and health costs of loneliness (expenditure for visits to GP's, A&E, prescriptions and other health-related costs) comes in at £6,000 per person over ten years
- Preliminary findings show that for every £1 invested you can expect a £3 return in health costs. If we spend £1 tackling the problem now, it will save us £3 in five years

Loneliness: The Facts

- There are 1.2 million chronically lonely older people in the UK (Age UK 2016, No-one should have no one)
- Half a million older people go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all (Age UK 2016, No-one should have no one)
- Over half (51%) of all people aged 75 and over live alone (Office for National Statistics 2010. *General Lifestyle Survey 2008*)
- Two fifths all older people (about 3.9 million) say the television is their main company (Age, U.K., 2014. Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life. *London: Age UK*)

About the Campaign to End Loneliness

The Campaign to End Loneliness believes that loneliness is everyone's business. We believe that everyone in older age should have meaningful connections in their life. We work with thousands of organisations and people to tackle loneliness. We influence government policy and practice through our research and learning network, and campaign to ensure that loneliness is a public health priority at national and local levels. We believe that loneliness is not inevitable.



Using our recent grant from the Big Lottery Fund, we have begun work in four areas across the UK - Glasgow, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, Cambridgeshire and Belfast - to support change already being delivered by our partners and others. In each area we hope to help catalyse ideas, share good practice and influence service providers, so loneliness is reduced for local older people. We will also deliver new public and business focused campaigns so that everyone knows the role they can play in reducing loneliness. In each area we have recruited a Campaign Manager (from January 2018 in Northern Ireland) who will build change with local partners.

About Barry Ward

Barry is 84 and lives in Rutland. He is the author of *Remembering Christine*, a guide to grief and bereavement www.barrywardauthor.com