



NEWS RELEASE

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MPs Highlight Plight of Millions of Lonely Older People

More than two million pensioners across the country could be suffering physical and mental health problems as a result of being lonely.

Today (Dec 3) MPs across the country are joining forces with former Care Services Minister Paul Burstow and the Campaign to End Loneliness to highlight loneliness as a major health and care issue that should be taken seriously by government and local organisations in 2013.

MPs from all parties will be given a campaign pack on how to identify loneliness in their area and advice on supporting older constituents in need of help.

According to national research - around 10 per cent of the over 65s say they are lonely or very lonely, and another 20% are occasionally lonely. This means that there could be up to 2.4 million older people across the country who are lonely at any one time.

To highlight the plight of older constituents who are lonely in the run-up to Christmas, **Paul Burstow MP said:**

“As a Minister I recognised loneliness as having a big impact on people’s quality of life. In my work now as a London MP I know there are up to 300,000 lonely older people suffering in silence across the capital – and this is a scandal.

If we don’t start to champion loneliness as a health and care issue, elderly people across the country, will continue to have their lives cut short.

“This is why I am taking neighbourhood action in my constituency of Sutton and Cheam and urging other MPs to join the Campaign to End Loneliness – so they can take the lead in strengthening community ties in their constituency in order to improve public health.”

Laura Ferguson at Campaign to End Loneliness said:

“MPs need to know how many about the health and personal problems loneliness causes to their constituents: it is hidden and unless those in positions of leadership are asking questions about how best to help people who are lonely, those who are most isolated can be forgotten.

“Finding those who are lonely is vital at times like Christmas, but their lives must be helped all year-round, both one to one, in their neighbourhoods and by authorities making decisions about our health.

“Responsibility for addressing this health problem lies with those making decisions about the health of the whole population in every local area.”

Case studies are available for print interviews in Bristol and for broadcast interviews in Sutton. Call Jenny Ousbey on 02072191105 or jenny.ousbey@parliament.uk for more details.

For more information on the campaign packs for MPs go to:

<http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/campaigns/constituency/>

ENDS

Note to Editors:

- Around 10 per cent of the over 65s say they are lonely or very lonely, and another 20% are occasionally lonelyⁱ
- Loneliness increases the risk of heart disease and puts people at greater risk of blood clotsⁱⁱ.
- Loneliness is estimated to be as bad for people's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a dayⁱⁱⁱ.
- Loneliness is a significant predictor of poor health and in some cases, worse than tobacco and alcohol.^{iv}
- 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^v
- Loneliness is associated with poor mental^{vi}, physical and emotional health, including increased rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertension^{vii}, cognitive decline^{viii} and dementia^{ix}. Socially isolated and lonely adults are more likely to undergo early admission into residential or nursing care^x.

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. For more information go to:

www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

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

Age UK Oxfordshire <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire/>

Independent Age www.independentage.org

Manchester City Council www.manchester.gov.uk

Sense www.sense.org.uk

WRVS www.wrvs.org.uk

The Campaign is supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

<http://www.gulbenkian.org.uk/>

ⁱ 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

ⁱⁱ Steptoe, A et al. Loneliness and neuroendocrine, cardiovascular and inflammatory stress responses in middle aged men and women. *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 2004 Jun 29 (5): 593-611.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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>

^{iv} 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>

^v 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)

^{vi} 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>

^{vii} 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>

^{viii} 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>

^{ix} 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>

^x 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>