



Life in Isolation: How to Fight the Loneliness Epidemic

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

This conference call focused on the current loneliness epidemic exacerbated by COVID-19. Moderated by Nora Super, senior director of the Center for the Future of Aging, a panel of thought leaders, discussed ways to combat loneliness and social isolation for all ages. The group emphasized solutions that engage multigenerational interaction, explored how the pandemic has raised structural inequities in the health system in the treatment of older adults, and highlighted employer and community-based best practices to foster trust, social connection, and mental resilience.

Webinar panelists included:

- **Nora Super (Moderator)**, Senior Director, Center for the Future of Aging, Milken Institute
- **Arianna Huffington**, Founder and CEO, Thrive Global; Founder, The Huffington Post
- **Dr. Scott Kaiser**, Chief Innovation Officer, Motion Picture and Television Fund (MPTF)
- **Lisa Marsh Ryerson**, President, AARP Foundation

The panelists touched on the following:

- Super opened the call by addressing the health impacts associated with aging and prolonged social isolation, including an increased risk for premature mortality and a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia. Older adults and those with underlying health conditions remain at greatest risk from COVID-19. As a result, many have become even more isolated, especially those living in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, or living alone.
- Huffington touched on productive behavioral modification techniques, or micro-steps, to improve social connection and mental health, including those that address sleep deprivation. She emphasized the importance of engendering gratitude in our daily lives and the critical role that employers must play in addressing the mental health crisis.
- Ryerson advocated for greater awareness that certain identity groups remain at increased risk of social isolation, including unpaid caregivers, low-income, LGBT, and marginalized older adults, speaking to a need to include social isolation within the lens of social determinants of health. She emphasized the importance of intentional outreach and connection to vulnerable populations amid this crisis and beyond to build more livable and equitable communities.
- Kaiser reviewed MPTF's emphasis on "living well and aging well" amid the pandemic, and how identifying those at risk of social isolation is at the core of their community mission. Being attune to the clinical risks of loneliness as a predictor of functional decline must be prioritized by the health-care community. Micro-level interventions will strengthen the connection to the community and family and facilitate intergenerational engagement.