Getting Started:
RESOURCES & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

COMMIT TO
Connect

STRATEGIES & PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social Calls/Wellness Check-In. When the pandemic started, the Northwest Georgia Center for Independent Living (NWGA CIL) prioritized contacting consumers and providing a safe space to connect. Calls initially took place every week and have now shifted to every other week, with an increase in calls during holidays.

The call recipient's interest shapes the discussion; topics can range from coping with holidays to sharing favorite recipes. The calls include open discussion about the effects social isolation have on people—even those who don't think of themselves as struggling emotionally. NWGA CIL hired a specialist who provides mental health peer support; the specialist is making connections with community-based organizations that provide peer support (NAMI, Elevation House), collaborating with these groups to reach more people and engage the community.

Screen for Risk of Social Isolation/Loneliness, Assess for Assistive Technology (AT), and Train and Provide AT. Funded through the 2020 CARES Act, Connecticut's "Stay Connected" is a collaborative effort led by the state's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)/No Wrong Door System. The program helps people who need long-term services and supports to enroll and obtain the services they choose in the place they want to live. Among the collaborators are the Connecticut State Unit on Aging, Connecticut's Tech Act Program (the State AT program), five Area Agencies on Aging, five CILs, three AT Partners, and Quinnipiac University School of Nursing.

The program uses Prof. Nicholas R. Nicholson's six-question Social Isolation Scale to identify older adults and people with disabilities who are socially isolated or at risk of social isolation. Based on survey results, a person is referred for an AT consultation and services provided by the Connecticut Tech Act Program and AT Partners.

Evidence-Based Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many evidence-based disease prevention programs have initiated virtual sessions and apps to enable people to continue benefiting from these programs and services.

One example is the Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence (LWCE), a division of MAC, Incorporated—a Maryland Area Agency on Aging on the Eastern Shore. LWCE worked with EAGLEForce to develop an app that screens for social isolation using LWCE's and Dr. Matthew Smith's assessment instrument: an upstream social isolation risk screener. Based on screening scores, LWCE offers the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives for Seniors (PEARLS), an evidence-based intervention to address social isolation, loneliness, and depression. PEARLS loans tablets to older adults to engage in the program if they don't have the technology to participate.

TAKE ACTION: DEVELOPING SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

- Join the *Commit to Connect* Nationwide Network of Champions.

- Build and/or leverage partnerships across aging and disability programs (AAAs, DD Councils, AT programs, CILs, LTC Ombudsmen, nutrition providers, P&A programs, SHIPs, SMPs, UCEDDs, etc.) and housing providers.

- Weave social isolation screening into intake processes for any program administered.

- Consult resources available through the sites, programs, and initiatives below.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & RESOURCES

Commit to Connect Campaign

Commit to Connect is a public-private partnership pulled together by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and comprising organizations from across federal government, the aging and disability networks, philanthropy, and industry. The campaign's range of solutions are designed to address social isolation—during COVID-19 and beyond—and include:

- Building a **nationwide network of champions**—that is, a community of practice and a nationwide network of national, state, and local champions and organizations that work together to address social isolation. The nationwide network of champions will enable real-time sharing of successful efforts and help develop a collective awareness of evidence-based or evidence-informed practices and programs that can be replicated across communities.

- Establishing a **scientific advisory group** that assesses the evidence base to support program and technology solutions and develop a methodology for sharing the evidence on those solutions.

- Creating a **clearinghouse of social engagement programs and technologies** that address social isolation.

engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults

engAGED is a national effort funded by ACL and administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging to increase the social engagement of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers by expanding and enhancing the aging network's capacity to offer social engagement. engAGED identifies and disseminates information about emerging trends, resources, and replication strategies that the aging network can customize for use in their communities.

engAGING Practices: Best Practices for Helping Older Adults Stay Socially Engaged features programs that offer a range of tactics to address social isolation through participation in the arts, lifelong learning, civic engagement, technology, and intergenerational activities.

Innovations from the Field currently focuses on COVID-19 but is being expanded to include other innovations as well. Examples from the field are organized by:

- Telephone Reassurance and Wellness Checks
- Remote Connectedness
- Virtual Wellness Programming
- Engaging Older Adults at Home
- Transportation and Social Isolation
- Caregiver Social Isolation
- Dementia and Social Isolation

The engAGED Community Toolkit includes an explainer on the UCLA Three-Item Loneliness Scale, a revised version of the original 20-question instrument.

ADvancingStates

Addressing Social Isolation for Older Adults During the COVID-19 Crisis was created through one-to-one conversations with states and a call for ideas in the Friday Update, a weekly email reaching more than 15,000 aging and disability professionals. Updated regularly, this resource assists states and others with creative and thoughtful approaches to address social isolation and loneliness in older adults, and to facilitate sharing and learning across states.

Meals on Wheels America (MOWA)

Combating Senior Isolation and Loneliness is an overview of three programs offered through MOWA's nutrition and meal delivery service. The programs include Telephone Reassurance, Friendly Visitors (Senior Companions), and Pet Assistance and Food Delivery.

AT3

This Assistive Technology Toolkit provides the aging and disability networks and others who serve older adults and people with disabilities with a range of tools to improve awareness about AT. The toolkit can help agencies and their partners start a conversation about using existing AT resources in their states and communities, while also guiding them to consider diverse agency structures and capacities in order to see what steps can be taken to more fully provide awareness and resources about AT devices and services to older adults, people with disabilities, caregivers, and others.

LeadingAge CAST

The Social Connectedness and Engagement Tool is a comprehensive portfolio of hands-on resources that help providers understand, plan for, select, implement, and adopt the appropriate technology while advocating for innovative care models.

BridgingApps

BridgingApps provides caregivers and professionals with resources for choosing apps to enhance everyday life for people with disabilities, and sharing their successes with others. A search on social isolation provides stories of people's experience with apps to address social isolation.

Connect2Affect

This social isolation assessment is a tool to screen for a person's risk of social isolation. The site also includes a searchable database of activities by ZIP codes.

FURTHER READING ON ASSESSMENTS & SCREENERS

- Measuring Your Impact on Loneliness in Later Life is a publication of the U.K.'s *Campaign to End Loneliness* offers organizations guidance on choosing and using a scale to measure the impact of their services on loneliness in older adults.

- Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System (NASEM Consensus Study Report)

- Combatting Social Isolation Among Older Adults in a Time of Physical Distancing: The COVID 19 Social Connectivity Paradox (Frontiers in Public Health)