

Government launches plan to tackle loneliness during coronavirus lockdown

- New public campaign launched by Culture Secretary to get people talking openly about loneliness
- Oliver Dowden announces loneliness to be a priority category of £750 million charity funding package
- Guaranteed £5 million boost for national loneliness organisations leading the charge
- Government publishes guidance on supporting yourself and others safely
- Loneliness charities including Age UK will be supported to work with NHS Volunteer Responders in their communities
- Network of high-profile charities, businesses and public figures to join 'Tackling Loneliness Network' formed by Government to help connect groups at risk of isolation

Led by Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden, the plan will aim to ensure that, for people of all ages and backgrounds, staying at home does not need to lead to loneliness.

The latest #Let'sTalkLoneliness public campaign has been rolled out to get people talking openly about loneliness, which includes new public guidance offering useful tips and advice on what to do to look after yourself and others safely.

The campaign, initially launched last year, is being supported by famous faces across social media including TV presenter Angellica Bell and Karen Gibson, founder of The Kingdom Choir. More information can be found at <https://letstalkloneliness.co.uk/>

In a wide ranging cross-Government and cross-sector plan, Dowden has also announced that:

- Smaller, community-based organisations in England helping people to stay connected in local communities will benefit from being a priority category of the £750 million package of support for charities announced by the Chancellor on 8 April.
- National loneliness organisations will be allocated a guaranteed £5 million worth of funding to continue and adapt their critical work at this time.
- As part of the national effort, loneliness charities including Age UK will be supported to work with NHS Volunteer Responders in their communities.

In collaboration with the Connection Coalition, organised by Jo Cox Foundation, the Government has also convened a network of high-profile charities, businesses, organisations and public figures. The group will explore ways to bring people together to build strong community spirit, with a focus on groups at particular risk of loneliness, and will work to continue these initiatives in the future.

Chaired by Minister for Loneliness Baroness Barran, the 'Tackling Loneliness Network' includes the BBC, Premier League, Facebook, ITV, British Red Cross, Jo Cox Foundation, Vodafone, Zurich, Nationwide Building Society, Campaign to End Loneliness, Aviva, Sports and Recreation Alliance, English Football League, JC Decaux UK, Samaritans, Age UK, Arts Council England, Co-op Foundation, The Cares Family, University College London, Independent Age, Libraries Connected, Sense, Manchester Museum, Nesta Challenges and Seema Kennedy, former Co-Chair of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness.

The moves come after the Culture Secretary chaired a virtual summit on Friday (17 April) with a number of loneliness charities including the Jo Cox Foundation, British Red Cross, Campaign to End Loneliness, Co-op Foundation, Age UK, The Cares Family, Mind, Sense and Samaritans, who discussed how to ensure tackling loneliness is a key priority during the pandemic.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

Coronavirus and social distancing has forced all of us to look loneliness in the eye. So recognising the signs and tackling the stigma has never been more important.

We're launching this plan now to help ensure no one needs to feel lonely in the weeks ahead. It will help everyone understand the role they can play in looking after each other, and empower our expert charities and volunteers to reach more vulnerable people.

Zoë Abrams, British Red Cross executive director and Loneliness Action Group co-chair said:

It has never been more important that we all pull together to tackle loneliness by building on the sense of community and connectedness that has been so inspiring to see in the face of the coronavirus outbreak.

Today's announcement of investment in this area is critical to help keep funding services and activities that provide a vital lifeline to those who feel lonely and isolated at this time.

Combined with robust policies and practical action across government departments, this should help maintain the momentum on implementing the government's loneliness strategy and ensure that, even whilst this virus keeps us apart, we are making sure that kindness can keep us together".

Catherine Anderson, CEO of The Jo Cox Foundation said:

The priority given to loneliness and social isolation at this time is extremely welcome. Maintaining social connection at a time of physical distancing is vitally important. And when we eventually come out of this crisis the country will emerge stronger and healthier if we act now to establish a legacy of stronger connections that are maintained in the future. The Jo Cox Foundation, along with our many partner organisations in the Connection Coalition, are investing much time and energy in ensuring this happens and we're delighted to be playing a role alongside the government in this important work.

In very different times, Jo correctly identified two essential truths that are now self-evident. Firstly, that social isolation and loneliness do not discriminate. Secondly, that we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us.

Ruth Sutherland, CEO of Samaritans, said:

Loneliness is a deeply personal experience which means different things to people, often affecting them in different ways. Whilst suicide is rarely caused by a single factor, we know that there can be a connection between loneliness and suicidal thoughts for some people, so this investment to tackle loneliness is critical during this difficult time. Whilst physical isolation is a necessary outcome of the lockdown restrictions, loneliness doesn't have to be if we work together to look after each other.

ENDS

Notes to Editor

Three tangible actions for anyone feeling lonely and three actions for people wanting to help If you are lonely you can:

- Keep in touch with friends, family and neighbours
- Ask for help if you need shopping, medicine or are feeling lonely
- Set a routine with online activities, regular tasks or by volunteering

If you are worried about someone who is lonely:

- Phone a friend or family member you think may be lonely
- Smile, wave or chat from a safe distance with a neighbour
- Help out through volunteering by picking up food, medicine or by offering regular conversation to someone living alone

Over the last two years, the UK Government has been leading the way on tackling loneliness:

- It created the world's first Minister for Loneliness and published the world's first Government loneliness [strategy](#) in October 2018, containing 60 commitments from nine Government departments. Implementation of the strategy is ongoing and the Government published a first [annual report](#) in January 2020 setting out our progress;
- It launched the first Government fund dedicated to reducing loneliness worth £11.5 million, which is supporting 126 projects to transform the lives of thousands of lonely people across England;
- It launched the inaugural [#LetsTalkLoneliness](#) campaign in June 2019 to help raise awareness and tackle stigma.