

Executive summary

Focussing on loneliness: With the spread of communications technology, older people are likely to become less isolated and more connected to others; but will this mean less loneliness? This depends upon the *quality* of day-to-day interactions with other people, not just how many there are.

- *We must ensure that we properly understand and measure loneliness.*
- *We must recognise the potential for new ways of having friends and keeping in touch with others.*

Why ageing matters for loneliness: being older (80+) is a very important predictor of loneliness, and the total number of older people in the UK will grow by close to 50% between 2013 and 2030; the older end will see even higher rates of growth. This suggests that demographic change could fuel a sharp increase in loneliness in the UK.

- *If rates of loneliness among older people are not reduced, predicted demographic change alone will drive up the numbers of lonely older people in the UK by 40% by 2030.*

Gender and relationships: The overall proportion of 65+s that live alone will rise slightly, however we note that at the older end (80+), many more will actually be staying married, as male life expectancy catches up.

- *By 2030, we need to anticipate more singles in the 60–75 range, and more couples in the 80+ range.*
- *Men will become more prevalent in the older old population; we need to ensure their needs are met.*

Wealth and poverty: In the years to 2030, differences between the wealth levels of richer and poorer older people will grow ever greater. Poverty is a very important predictor of loneliness and poorer old people tend to be disadvantaged in multiple ways i.e. having lower

levels of mobility, less access to technology and leisure activity.

- *It is vital that services targeted at reducing loneliness will work for multiply-deprived individuals i.e. accessible, cheap and locally delivered.*

Family life and intergenerational contact:

Contact with younger people is an important 'remedy' for loneliness, whether or not they are an older persons' biological children. Today's grandparents have an ever-greater role in the lives of grandchildren, and the average UK adult still lives within a few miles of their parents. Frequency of contact with children (for those that have them) has been stable in recent years.

- *We need to capitalise on these positive trends in family life, but also recognise that many older people are reluctant to lean too heavily on their children for emotional support – even among those who have children, family is only part of the answer.*

The use of technology for social contact:

The past half-century has seen successive waves of communications technologies steadily adding to total volumes of contact; face-to-face contact and call minutes continue to grow, while text messaging, email, instant messaging and social networking all just add *more* communication to the mix.

The proportion of 65+ who use the internet at home is set to rise to 71% in 2020 and 85-90% by 2030, as costs fall and increasingly user-friendly devices and software are developed. Many older users already enjoy online social networking and participation will continue to grow rapidly. However, even by 2030, large numbers of older people will still not be using the internet at all.

- *Technology has huge potential to make a positive impact on loneliness (as well as providing more engaging and interactive entertainment and distraction).*
- *However, the insensitive introduction of new technology into older peoples' lives*



can actually harm their ability to cope and communicate. The earlier in life new technologies are adopted, the better.

- *The older people who will remain ‘off-line’ in 2030 face a serious risk of intensified exclusion from society.*

Trends in social life and organisational membership:

There is no good evidence supporting the popular myth of general social fragmentation. Recent trends in organisational membership and social activity show only that the nature of our social connections is *changing*, with groups based around leisure activities and interests gradually replacing more traditional forms of association. Both in-home and out-of-home socialising are far more popular activities than they were half a century ago.

- *We need to adapt to the greater fluidity of modern social and interest group involvement, and work with organisations across an ever-broadening spectrum.*

- *We need to recognise the benefits of long-term active involvement in groups, and help organisations to ensure that people do not drop out as they reach their late 70s or early 80s.*

Housing independence and community connections:

A growing proportion of older people are remaining in independent living situations for longer, rather than moving into sheltered housing or residential care. At the same time, the use of monitoring and alerting systems and other ‘smart home’ technology is spreading.

- *In-home monitoring and alerting technology that connects older people to local care and support networks has great potential to reduce isolation and increase older peoples’ sense of security.*
- *These potentials will only be unlocked if a revolution in human support, the creation of new networks of local carers, accompanies the rise of these technologies.*