



Walkability, social connection and heart health



Social isolation and loneliness can impact heart health through behavioural, psychological and physiological effects.

Traditionally, treatments to help overcome loneliness have focused on mental health and wellbeing, and prescription of medications.

More recently, public health researchers are looking at the role our built environments play. This includes the built environment's role in contributing to loneliness and social isolation, as well as its potential to help address and overcome these issues.

The term 'lonelygenic environments' has been used to describe the ways in which the built environment contributes to a sense of loneliness, through planning and design outcomes. These include neighbourhoods where there are limited spaces and infrastructure for connection and interaction.

The effects of the built environment on social isolation and loneliness can be most felt by those who are already vulnerable in our communities, including for older people, people living with a disability and disadvantaged populations.



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The role of the built environment in reducing social isolation and loneliness



Social isolation and loneliness can have a negative impact on heart health



Built environments can be designed to allow people to stop and linger, to play and socialise, providing opportunities for social connection, helping reduce social isolation and loneliness

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In contrast, walkable neighbourhoods provide spaces and infrastructure that facilitate and enable social connection, as well as a sense of community and belonging. These can include public open green spaces, libraries, local shops and cafes, community gardens, walking and cycling paths and public transport networks.

Urban planning can be shaped to enhance opportunities for social connection by prioritising community interaction and health.

It is important that your local area provides people-friendly streets and places to connect with others. Places to stop, linger and enjoy. Places to play, socialise and connect.

Source: Feng, X., & Astell-Burt, T. (2022). Lonelygenic environments: a call for research on multilevel determinants of loneliness. *The Lancet. Planetary health*, 6(12), e933–e934. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(22\)00306-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(22)00306-0)