



LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

By Gene Kyle, Chair, Ludington Senior Citizens Advisory Board

Both the National Institute on Aging and the World Health Organization identify loneliness and social isolation as powerful predictors of poor health outcomes for seniors. Here are five reasons why:

1. Those who are lonely have a higher risk of serious physical health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, a weakened immune system, and higher hospitalization rates.
2. Loneliness is strongly associated with an increased risk of faster cognitive decline and a higher risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.
3. Those who are lonely and/or isolated tend to have more mental-health issues such as depression and anxiety stemming from heart
4. Loneliness contributes to functional decline, making everyday tasks—like driving, managing medications, paying bills, cooking, and maintaining a safe home environment—harder to perform. These declines also increase fall risk, emergency-room visits, and nursing-home placement.
5. Adults who are lonely or socially isolated experience increased mortality. They are more likely to die earlier than those with strong social connections.

LONELY SENIORS SUFFER INCREASED MORTALITY

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WHY LONELINESS HITS SENIORS HARDER

Life circumstances that are typically experienced to a greater degree by the senior population contribute to an increased likelihood of being impacted by loneliness, including

- loss of mobility
- hearing and/or vision problems
- chronic illness
- living alone
- death of spouse and/or friends
- transportation barriers
- rural or hard-to-reach communities (a highly relevant factor in Mason County)

EVIDENCE-BASED WAYS TO REDUCE LONELINESS

These interventions combatting loneliness have the strongest research support:

- **Regular Social Contact:** Even brief, predictable

interactions reduce stress and improve health.

- **Volunteering:** Older adults who volunteer report lower loneliness, better mood, and have longer life expectancy.
- **Group Activities:** Walking clubs, senior-center programs, hobby groups, and faith-based gatherings provide structure and purpose.
- **Hearing and Vision Treatment:** Untreated hearing and vision loss is a major driver of isolation. Hearing and visual aids and therapy significantly reduce loneliness.

There are 1,650 single households in Ludington, and many are occupied by seniors. All of this, plus the fact that 30 percent of Ludington's population is 65 or older, certainly should justify serious consideration by our city leaders when it comes to meeting the needs of almost one-third of the population.