

Integrating Social Isolation and Loneliness in the Older Americans Act

About us

Founded in 2018, the Foundation for Social Connection Action Network is a collaborative of diverse organizations partnering to end social isolation and loneliness. Our partners are helping to design and advocate for evidence-informed public policies to address social isolation and loneliness.

In 2023, the Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, declared social isolation and loneliness as a public health epidemic in America, bringing national attention to the challenge, and opportunity, it presents.

The Evidence: Older Adults are Affected by SIL

Social isolation and loneliness (SIL) should be a priority area for the Older Americans Act because:

About 28% of older adults in the U.S. (13.8 million people) live alone, putting a large population at increased risk of social isolation and related health issues.

35% of adults 45 and older, and 43 percent of adults aged 60 or older, report feeling lonely - defined as a subjective feeling of disconnection.

The US population is aging. Every day, 10,000 Americans turn 65 years old, and **by 2040, 1 in 5 Americans will be over the age of 65.**

Health & Economic Impacts of SIL among older adults

Social isolation is considered a physical separation from other individuals, and has been linked to a **50% increased risk of dementia**.

Social isolation and loneliness are also linked with poorer physical outcomes, with one study finding a **29% increased risk for heart attack and/or death from heart disease** and a **32% increased risk for stroke**.

Social isolation and loneliness are not just social issues—they drive up health care costs. A systematic review estimates the economic impact of social isolation and loneliness at **\$2–\$25.2 billion each year**.

Social isolation and loneliness increases mortality risk by **29%** and **26%**, respectively.

Research shows that social engagement improves longevity, mental health, and cognitive function, underscoring the need for policies that fund community-based and supportive care programs.

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The Older Americans Act

The Older Americans Act (OAA) provides older adults with community-based social services, ranging from nutrition and meal services, transportation, and support for caregivers. The programs and services under the OAA are administered by the Administration of Community Living (ACL).

The majority of the funding authorizes grants across the state and community programs on aging to provide:

- Senior centers and support services
- Nutrition services
- Disease prevention and health promotion
- National Family Caregiver Support Program

The Action Network has supported the core mission of the OAA to maximize the emotional and physical wellbeing of older adults and caregivers.

While funding for the OAA has increased over the past decade, **the rate of funding growth has not kept pace with the need among the senior population or the costs of providing social connection.** Level funding, or reduced funding, could result in program shifts that hinder the ability of staff to oversee OAA program efforts.

OAA programs are already uniquely positioned to address social isolation because they already deliver community-based services that promote connection, independence, and health.



How OAA Funding Strengthens Connection

OAA nutrition program funding supports congregate meal programs which reduce hunger and provide regular social connection for older adults, supportive services which have provided transportation and personal care services to over **1 million Americans.**

Our Recommendation

The Action Network urges Congress to pass S.2120, the **Older Americans Act Reauthorization Act**, as introduced in the Senate, and ensure appropriate funding and the inclusion of social connection provisions.