



April 23, 2024

The Honorable Bernard Sanders  
Chairman  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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**Re: Long COVID Moonshot Legislative Proposal**

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Dear Chairman Sanders:

On behalf of the Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness (the Coalition) we appreciate the opportunity to provide input on the Long COVID Moonshot Legislative Proposal to address the Long COVID crisis that is negatively impacting the health of millions of Americans. Established in 2018, the Coalition brings together a diverse set of national organizations including consumer groups, technology innovators, health care providers, patient advocates, and health plans to develop and advocate for federal policy solutions to address the issues of social isolation and loneliness in the United States. With a [comprehensive policy agenda](#) that focuses on public awareness, social and health services, technology, and research, the Coalition works to address the adverse health effects of social isolation and loneliness and advance approaches that improve social connectedness for all Americans.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer comments and recommendations to further address and support the needs of millions of individuals who are impacted by Long COVID, and the adverse side effects associated with it. The Coalition advocates for policies that support all populations who are impacted by social isolation and loneliness, and broadly support initiatives that seek to understand and address their potential underlying causes, such as Long COVID.

As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated experiences of social isolation and loneliness for Americans, especially among older adults and other marginalized populations, due to stay at home orders, physical distancing protocols, the closures of senior centers and other community spaces, and visitation limitations. These factors significantly contributed to what the U.S. Surgeon General defined as an “epidemic of social isolation and isolation” in May of 2023.<sup>1</sup> Compounding this, approximately 23 million Americans are experiencing the adverse health effects as a direct result of Long COVID.<sup>2</sup> An estimated 80 percent of people with Long COVID report activity limitations as a result of their symptoms, with a fourth of those individuals indicating that the illness significantly limited their activity.<sup>3</sup> As limitations on activities resulting from these symptoms persist, isolation and loneliness are likely to also

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<sup>1</sup> Murthy, V. H. "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation." May 2023. HHS. Accessed April 17, 2024.

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. March 2022. Science & Tech Spotlight:

Long COVID. Accessed April 17, 2024. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105666.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Burns, A. "As Recommendations for Isolation End, How Common Is Long COVID?" April 9, 2024. KFF. Accessed April 17, 2024. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/as-recommendations-for-isolation-end-how-common-is-long-covid/>.

continue, further exacerbating our ongoing epidemic of social isolation and loneliness. Previous research on COVID-19 and social isolation suggest a potential connection with Long COVID, warranting further research.<sup>4, 5</sup> Additionally, data shows a 32% increased risk of Long COVID due to loneliness, stemming from the relationship between loneliness and immune dysregulation and inflammation.<sup>6</sup>

Given the detrimental effects of Long COVID and social isolation and loneliness, and the need for comprehensive research into their implications on the health and wellbeing of individuals, **the Coalition respectfully recommends that Chairman Sanders and the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (the Committee) consider integrating social isolation and loneliness into the proposed provision of \$1 billion in annual mandatory funding for 10 years to the National Institute of Health (NIH) to address the Long COVID crisis.** Incorporating social isolation and loneliness into clinical research and trials will elucidate the bilateral connection between Long COVID's adverse effects and social isolation and loneliness, facilitating the identification of potential solutions. In addition, **the Coalition urges Chairman Sanders and the Committee to direct the NIH, through the Long COVID database, to collect data on social isolation, loneliness, and Long COVID, to clarify their interplay.** Recognizing the insufficient resources and attention devoted to these conditions, the Coalition sees an opportunity for increased support for those affected by Long COVID, social isolation, and loneliness, who are often marginalized and underserved by the medical and research community.

Overall, the Coalition commends Chairman Sanders and the Committee's efforts to address the Long COVID crisis and improve the health and wellbeing of those affected by this crisis. Importantly we urge Chairman Sanders and the Committee to consider the recommendations outlined to address social isolation and loneliness experienced by those impacted by the Long COVID crisis in this country.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity for stakeholders to share insights and recommendations. If you have any questions, please contact Coalition Policy Advisor, Mosalewa Ani, at [mani@healthsperien.com](mailto:mani@healthsperien.com)

Sincerely,



Andrew MacPherson  
Founder and Chair  
The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffers A, Meehan AA, Barker J, Asher A, Montgomery MP, Bautista G, Ray CM, Laws RL, Fields VL, Radhakrishnan L, Cha S, Christensen A, Dupervil B, Verlenden JV, Cassell CH, Boyer A, DiPietro B, Cary M, Yang M, Mosites E, Marcus R. Impact of Social Isolation during the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Homelessness: Qualitative Interviews with Behavioral Health Providers. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2022 Sep 25;19(19):12120. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191912120. PMID: 36231422; PMCID: PMC9566547.

<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Identification and Management of Mental Health Symptoms and Conditions Associated with Long COVID. Publication No. PEP23-06-05-007. Rockville, MD: National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Wang S, Quan L, Chavarro JE, et al. Associations of Depression, Anxiety, Worry, Perceived Stress, and Loneliness Prior to Infection With Risk of Post-COVID-19 Conditions. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2022;79(11):1081–1091. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2022.2640