



Loneliness in Older Adults: Urgency and Opportunity

Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH

U-Maine Colloquium- Oct 27, 2020



The Foundation for
Art & Healing



HARVARD
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Welcome!

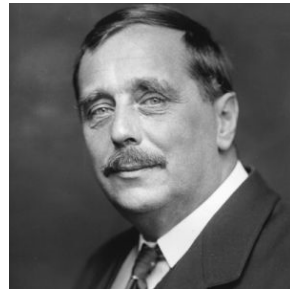


- Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH
 - Faculty, Center for Primary Care, Harvard Medical School
 - President, Foundation for Art & Healing; Founder of the UnLonely Project
 - Member, State of Maine's Age Friendly Advisory Committee
 - Poet (Maybe a reading with Gov. Janet Mills sometime?)

A Note of Urgency...



*History is a race between
education and catastrophe.*



- H.G. Wells

TODAY'S "EDUCATIONAL" AGENDA

- Loneliness and isolation in older adults: Why should we care?
- Loneliness more important now than ever: COVID19; NAS Study; BLM & Social Justice
- Fresh Thinking: Creative arts engagement as a Population Health Intervention
- FAH's Aging UnLonely as a case study
- Q&A



Loneliness corresponds to the discrepancy between desired and actual social relations

Polling Questions

Everyone is lonely from time to time, desiring better social connection than they feel they have.

- **Question One:** *In the last month, have you been often or very lonely? (Y/N?)*
- **Question Two:** *In the last month have you said to someone: “I feel lonely?” (Y/N?)*
- **Question Three:** *Are you more lonely now than before the COVID-19 pandemic began? (Y/N?)*

Social Isolation, Health and Older Adults: Reasons for Concern

- Mental Health
 - Depression
 - Addiction
 - Suicide
- Physical Health
 - Cardiovascular
 - Metabolic
 - Immunologic
- Social Health
 - Meaning
 - Thriving
 - Mutual Support



Aging exacerbates loneliness' effects

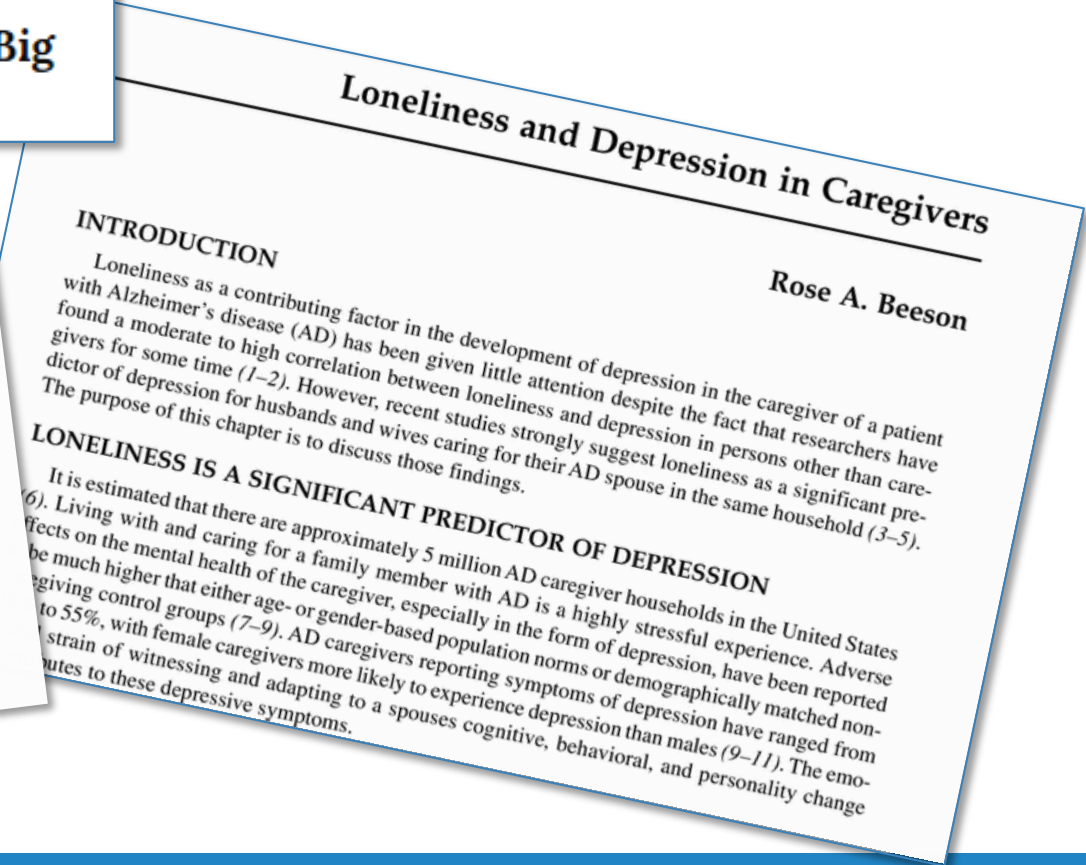
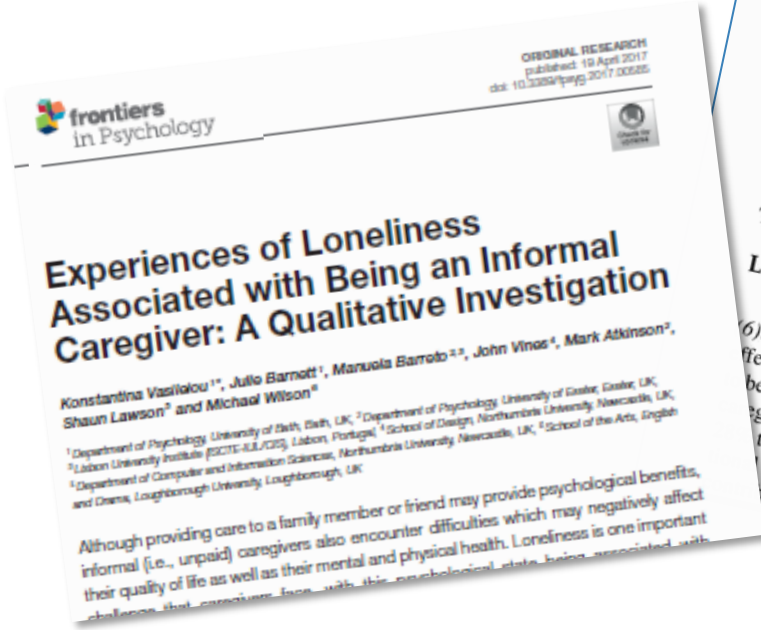
- ▶ Greater effects on poor health behaviors (notably poor sleep), frequency of stressful events, bereavement, biological dysfunction, negative social cognition, and influences on brain activity



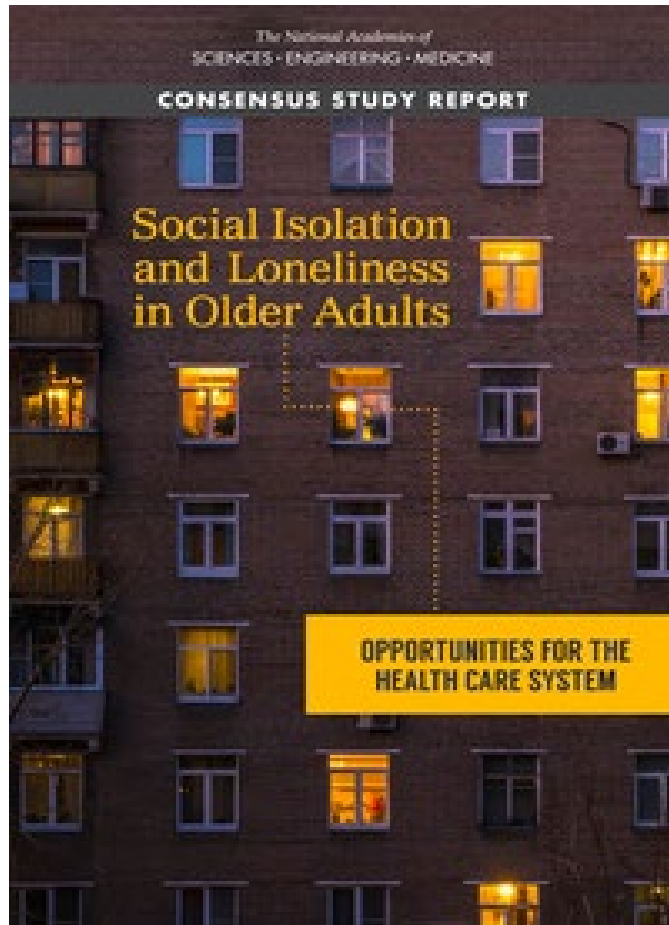
Noting a Particular Concern: Caregiver Loneliness is Increasing

TIME

Why Loneliness May Be the Next Big Public-Health Issue



Timely New NAS Study: Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults



Bottom Line: Its bad and getting worse. Health systems have an important role to play.

[National Academies of Science, Engineering, Medicine](#)



Quantifying Risks that Loneliness & Isolation Present to Older Adults

The COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted underlying inequities and threats that our older loved ones face.

73%

of older adults self-reported feelings of loneliness about one month into quarantine,

[Special Senate Committee on Aging Testimony / University of California, San Francisco](#)

\$6.7B

in additional health care costs **spent annually** associated with older adults' lack of social contact.

[AARP](#)



Chronic loneliness can lead to increased memory and cognitive decline, impaired physical health, and **27%** greater risk of early death.

[The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, Medicine](#)

[PLOS Journal](#)



Loneliness can lead to a **29%** increased risk of coronary heart disease, a **32%** increased risk of stroke, and a **50%** increased risk of Type 2 Diabetes.

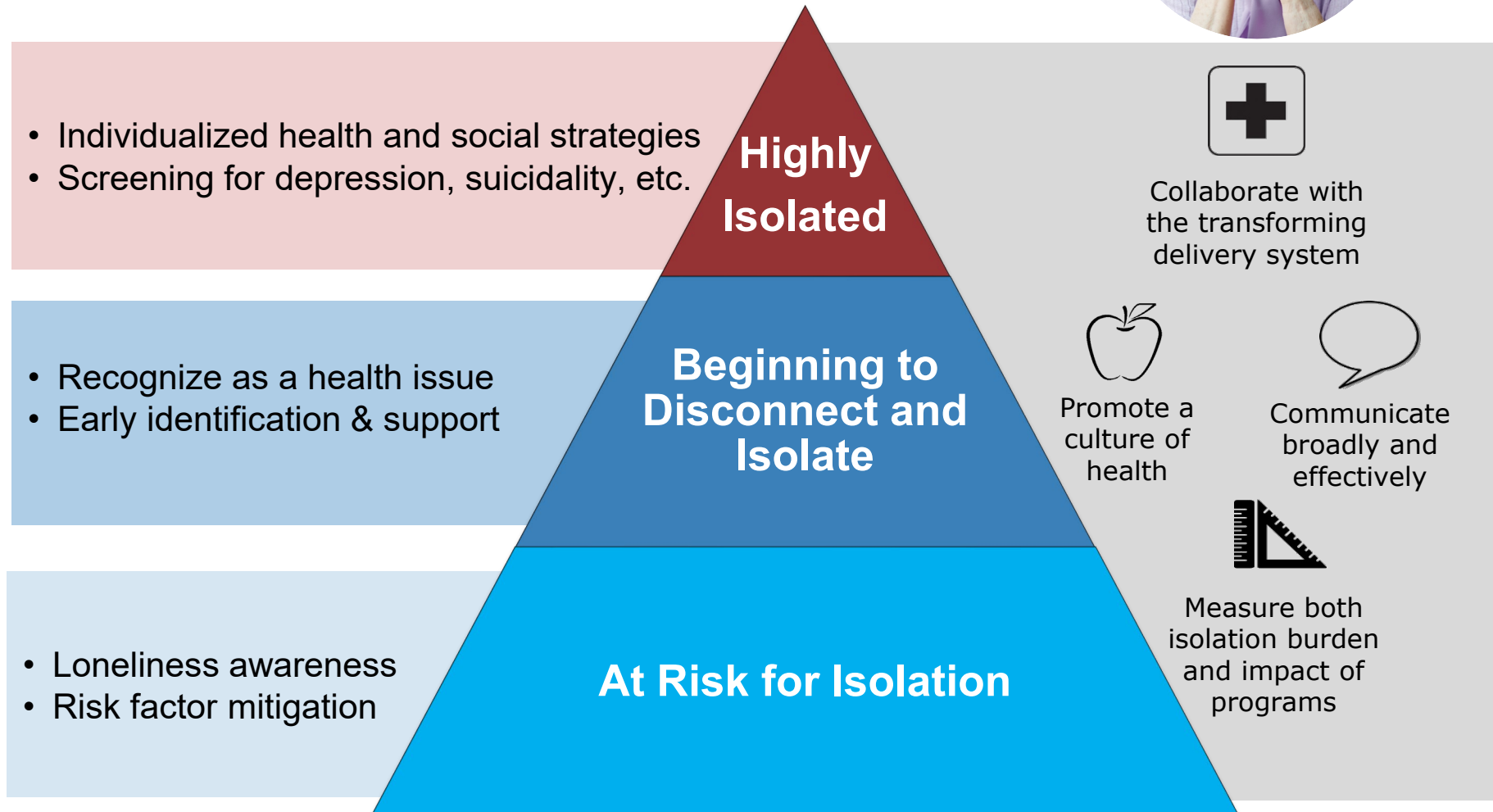
[BMC Global Health Research & Policy](#)

[Diabetologia](#)

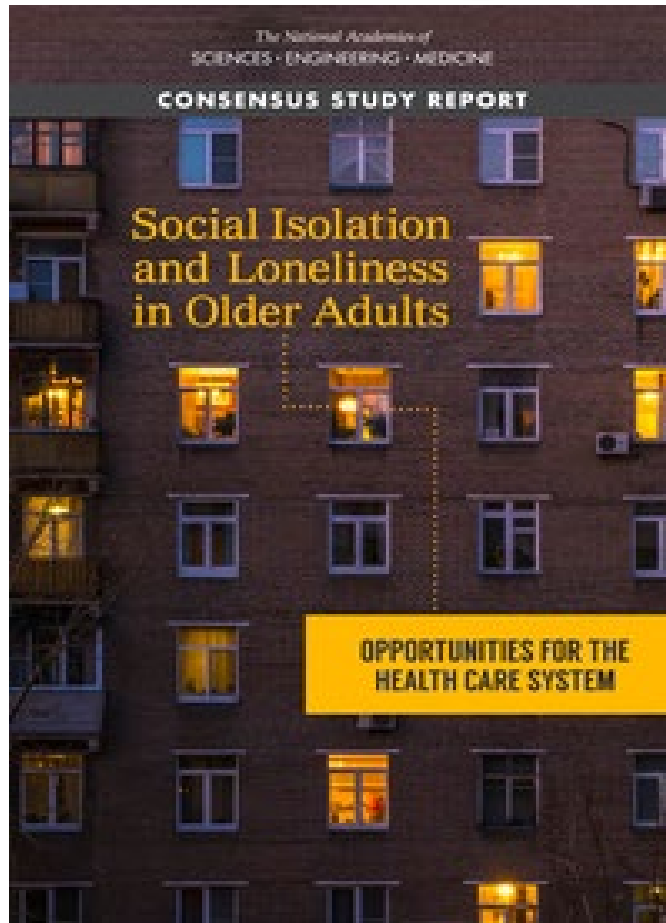


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A Pyramid of Vulnerability: Population Health Approach



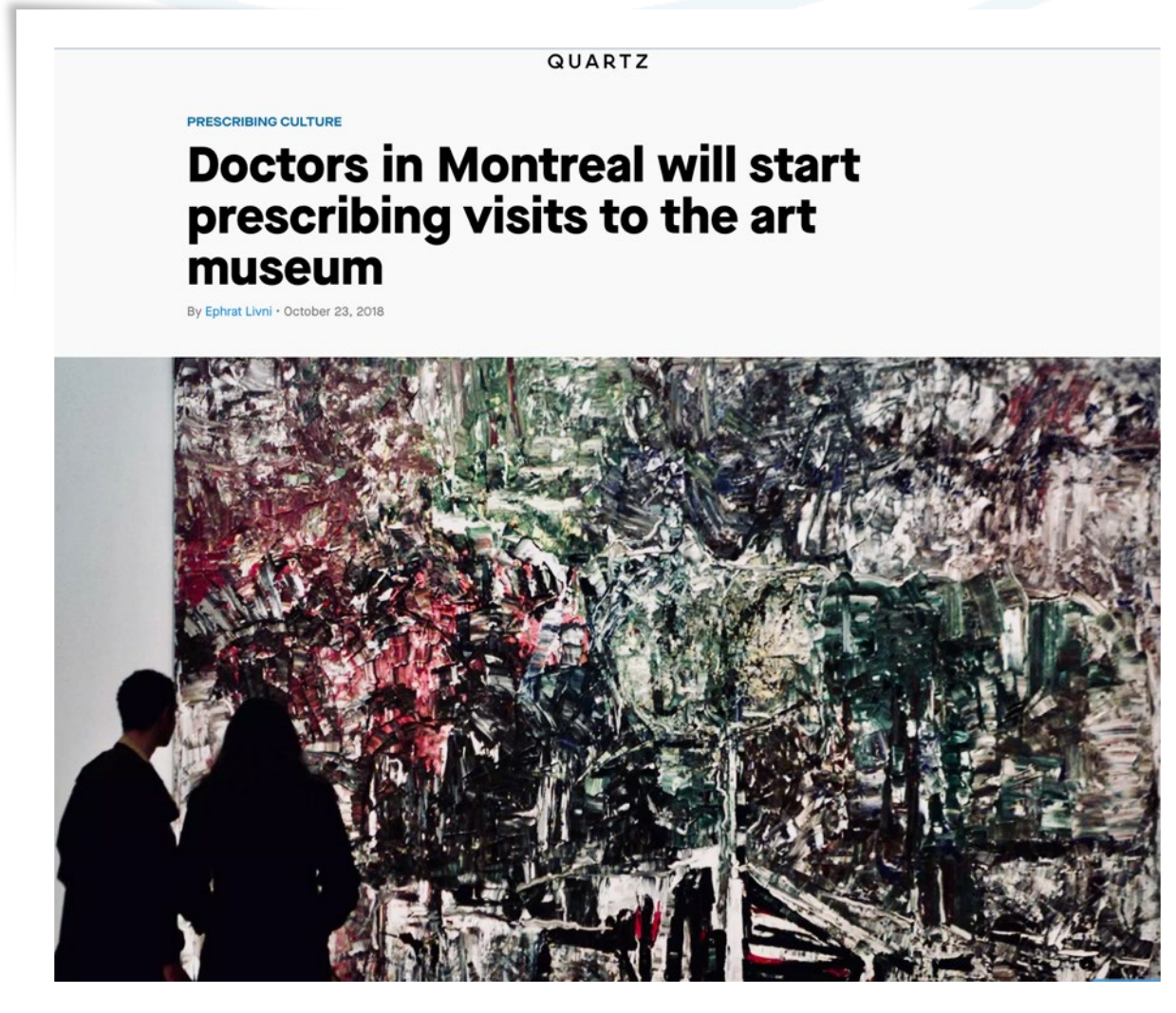
Back to the NAS Study: What can Age-Friendly Health Systems Offer?



Bottom Line: Its bad and getting worse. Health systems have an important role to play.

[National Academies of Science, Engineering, Medicine](#)

A Promising Intervention: Social Prescribing *Screen; Counsel; Guide to CBO Resources*



Telehealth offers new possibilities ... Especially if thoughtfully applied

Rapid Adoption of Anytime/Anywhere Connectivity

- Seamless Information Exchange
- Build & Maintains Relationships
- Coordinate Effective Action



High Tech +
High Touch

For Health Systems, Providers, and Payers: Addressing Loneliness Increasingly Matters!

Here's Why (Hint: Follow the Money):

Outcomes are central to emerging payment and care delivery models...

- **New payment models: MACRA/MIPS, ACO Plans, MA Plans, Medicaid/DSRIP,**
 - Outcome based payments reward increased patient engagement
 - Patient engagement increases patient satisfaction (HCAPS and Beyond)
- **Advanced primary care (Patient-centered care)**
 - Collaborative care models that better integrate mental/physical/social services
 - Care models emerging that explicitly identify loneliness as a health risk (CareMore)
- **“Engagement” is key enabler for telehealth and other population health strategies**
 - Supports real-time risk identification and personalized intervention
 - Optimizes care coordination, improves health, reduces costs

Isolation and Older Adults: Summing Up

- A **diverse group** of individuals and circumstances
- A set of **complex** and overlapping drivers, concerns and solutions
- Consequently, **no “silver bullet”**



One Intriguing Possibility...

Maybe the Arts Can Connect Us?

“

I think that people do go to art in general as a way of addressing very deep, very intimate, very mercurial and elusive, ineffable things in a communal setting.

It ends a certain kind of inner loneliness. Or it joins one's own inner loneliness with the inner loneliness of many other people.

And I think that that can be healing.

”

Tony Kushner

**There has never been a culture without art...
Maybe it helps us connect?**



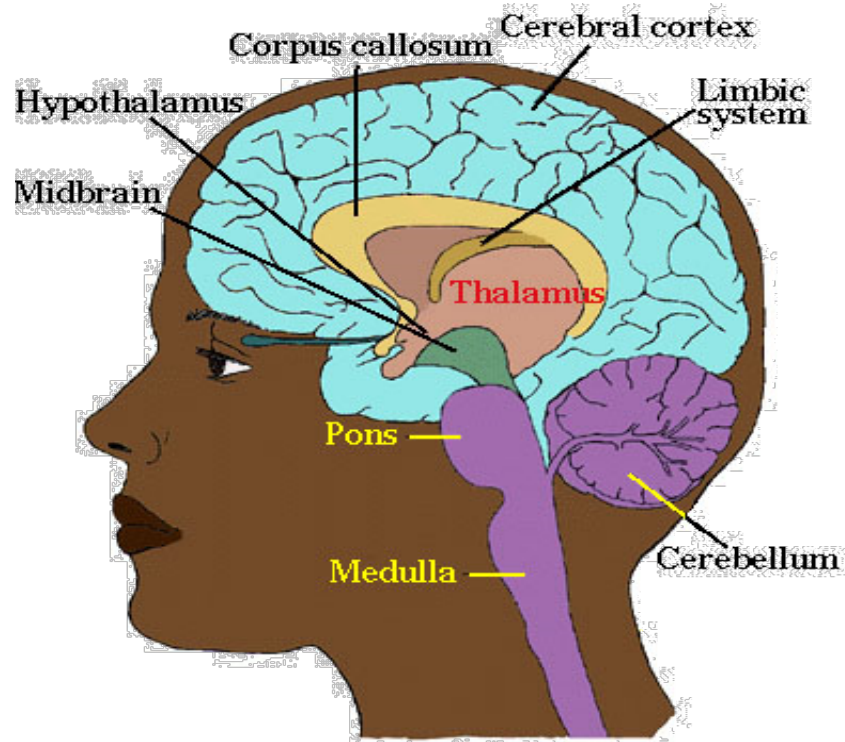
A powerful underlying principle: Creative arts rewires our brains



The arts stimulate thoughts, moods and feelings that change our brain and our bodies...impacting our health!



How we "make sense" of our world has profound physiologic impact



- ▶ Neuro-endocrine Outflow
 - Hormonal Regulation
 - Immune System
 - Somatic Organ Function
- ▶ Autonomic Outflow
 - Blood Pressure
 - Heart Rate
 - Respiration
- ▶ Neuro-peptide Outflow
 - Neurotransmitter Modulation
 - Mood and Emotion
 - Endorphins

Can the Arts Connect Older Adults? Seeing is Believing!



Arts and Health: synthesizing science, population health and community engagement



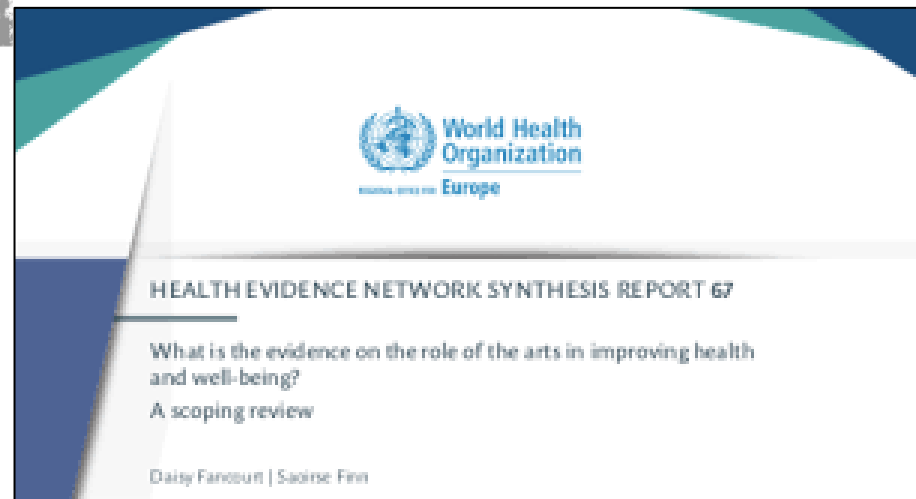
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Arts and the Heart
Roundtable NYC (2009)
If we can demonstrate that emotion affects outcomes and art affects emotion, then a logical path to better outcomes would involve more attention to engaging people in artistic pursuits.

Harlan Krumholz, MD, SM
Professor, Yale University”

”

Arts and Health: Synthesizing science, population health and community engagement



WHO Scoping Review (2019) : Available for Download: <https://www.euro.who.int>





THE
UnLonely 
PROJECT

- A multi-faceted initiative that seeks to reduce the burden of loneliness and its stigma.
- Pursuing a three-fold goal: to promote awareness, reduce stigma, activate programming



Unique Feature of the UnLonely Project: Leveraging the Power of Creative Arts!

- A fun and non-threatening way to **engage** people of all ages and in any circumstance
- Gives people a chance to **express** who they are and what matters to them
- **Activates** people, emotionally and intellectually
- A way to **connect** people to themselves and others
- A way to **promote** a general sense of **wellbeing** and belonging



Building on a Decade of Work...

46 JULY/AUGUST n 2017

INNOVATION

ARTFULLY ADVANCING TREATMENT OF DIABETES

Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH; Lewis E. Kazis, ScD; Howard Cabral, PhD, MPH; Marina Soley-Bori, PhD, MA; Harris Allen, PhD; and James Rosenzweig, MD

In this article ...

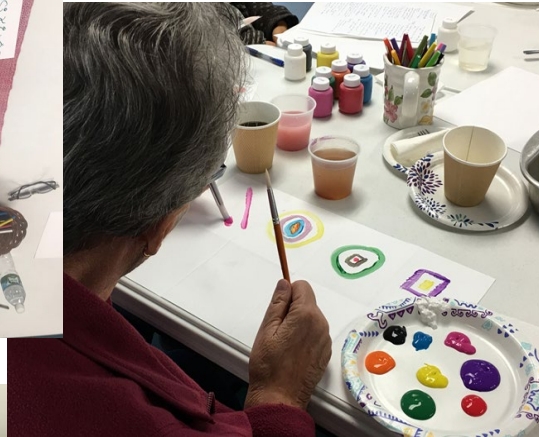
A study into creative expression as a way to increase patient activation in the management of Type 2 diabetes shows promising results as a high-value, low-cost tool for improving health in underserved populations.

Current Aging UnLonely Community Partners

*With Lead Sponsorship by AARP Foundation and UJA New York:
Our Fall 2020 series includes 9 pilot sites in 3 geographic regions*



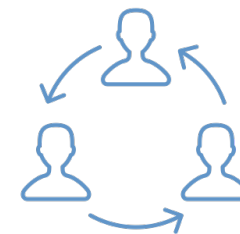
UnLonely Creativity Circles: An Innovative Blend of Components:



**Creative
Expression**



Mindfulness



**Social
Learning**



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A Community-Led Public Health Model

Effective public health programs that address health concerns for the community.



**Proven Programs
& Curriculum**



**Community-Based
Organizations**



**Vulnerable
Populations**



Key to Scalability: Empowering Field Use

The screenshot shows the UnLonelyUs website. The header includes the logo and navigation links: New? Start Here, Training, Curriculum, Measurement, PDFs & Links, Community, About the Program, My Account, and Login. The main content area features a 'Login or Register' button, a 'WELCOME!' message, and the title 'SUCCESSFUL AGING CREATIVITY CIRCLE'. Below the title is a paragraph: 'Here you'll find everything you need to run a program where participants use creative expression as a catalyst to process thoughts and feelings about aging, and to foster connection.' A list of bullet points follows: 'Full curriculum with facilitator guidance to run seven group sessions for older adults... with assistance and tools for running a Creativity Circle successfully.', 'Downloadable surveys to measure each participant's experience participating in the program, plus a collection portal to upload survey answers for data analysis.', and 'A facilitator peer community center to share tips and seek advice from other facilitators using the program.' At the bottom of the main content, it says 'Get started by logging in or registering by clicking the "Login or Register" button above. Thanks for your participation in this program!'. A video player is embedded in the center, showing a group of people working at a table. The footer contains the copyright notice: '© 2019 Foundation for Art & Healing'.

EXAMPLE SETTINGS



Libraries



Museums



Community-based
Organizations



Schools

Supports a Pop Health Ecosystem



Proven Programs
& Curriculum

Community-Based
Organizations

Vulnerable
Populations



Health
Centers



Social
Services



Housing



Schools



Workplaces



Places of
Worship



Supports the Health System's Role in Community Population Health



Proven Programs
& Curriculum

Community-Based
Organizations

Vulnerable
Populations

Health Centers



Housing



Social Services



Places of Worship



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Places of Worship



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Summary: Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults

- What we know:
 - Challenges are significant and increasing
 - High levels of diversity, variability and complexity
- What we need to better understand:
 - Assessment of prevalence, root causes and variations
 - Assessment of intervention opportunities and barriers
- What we need to do:
 - Innovate and measure; Share promising practices; Keep going!
 - But seriously...that's why we're here, isn't it? Thanks again!

Now is the Time!

Addressing senior loneliness in partnership with Health Systems and CBOs

