

## LONELINESS IS NOW A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Loneliness presents a profound public health threat akin to smoking and obesity, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy warned in an advisory issued May 2, 2023, that aims to rally Americans to spend more time with one another in an increasingly divided and digital society. "Social connection is as fundamental to our mental and physical health as food, water, and sleep," Murthy said in releasing the report which can be found at:

<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html>

We at Mill Creek Village especially appreciate this warning, as social isolation is a target of our efforts. Loneliness can affect the physical and mental health and overall well-being of elderly residents significantly. The advisory further motivates the Village's efforts to serve such residents' needs, as well as foster a socially connected community in Mill Creek Towne via our intergenerational neighborhood events.

Older adults have the highest rates of social isolation, yet younger adults are almost twice as likely to report feeling lonely as senior citizens. Social isolation is most prevalent in people of poor health, those struggling financially and those living alone.

Half of U.S. adults experience loneliness, putting them at heightened risk of depression, chronic stress, anxiety, tissue and blood vessel damage, heart disease, stroke, and dementia. The risk of premature death posed by social disconnection is akin to smoking 15 cigarettes per day and even greater than obesity and Physical inactivity, according to research on social connection.

Time spent with friends and family declined by 20 hours per month between 2003 and 2020, while time spent alone increased by 24 hours a month during that period. These trends likely intensified further during COVID pandemic which forced people to sequester at home.

The advisory calls for a collective effort to "mend the social fabric of our nation," including teaching children how to build healthy relationships; talking and engaging more with relatives, friends and co-workers; and spending less time online and on social media if it comes at the expense of in-person interactions.

Murthy said that "investing small moments of time with others can return major health dividends." While social media has made it easier for the socially isolated to create "community" with other others who feel like outcasts across the world, but it cannot replace the benefits of in-person socializing and caring about one another.