



Western Reserve

Area Agency on Aging

Each year, the Administration for Community Living leads the nation's observance of Older Americans Month, recognizing older adults' contributions to their families, community, and greater society and supporting their independence. This year's theme was *Powered by Connection*, which acknowledges the profound impact meaningful relationships and social connections have on our health and well-being. It explores connectedness's vital role in supporting independence and aging in place by combatting isolation, loneliness, and other issues.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought social isolation to the forefront, especially among older adults, the issue itself is not new. Social isolation goes beyond feeling lonely; instead, it is defined as a state in which someone lacks a sense of social belonging and engagement with others, has few social contacts, and has few to no fulfilling or high-quality relationships. Older adults are at elevated risk for experiencing social isolation, especially if they live alone, are living with a disability or sensory impairment, are diagnosed with a chronic disease, experiencing cognitive decline, or face barriers to transportation. We also know that social isolation is harmful to our health and well-being. In fact, research suggests that prolonged social isolation is as harmful as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day and has a serious impact on longevity, physical and mental health, and quality of life.

Engaging in meaningful, productive, and enjoyable activities with others is a great way to feel more connected to those around them, and individuals do not have to travel far to find support. Local organizations, like YMCAs and community centers, offer a variety of programs for people of all ages to come together and connect over shared interests. Volunteering, taking a class, joining a local club, or picking up a new hobby can also be a way to meet others in your community. Setting aside time each week to stay in touch with family, friends and neighbors is important, too; even a quick telephone conversation can make a significant difference. More than anything else, it is important to be *intentional* about engaging socially. If you or someone you know is experiencing social isolation, contacting local organizations, like Western Reserve Area Agencies on Aging (WRAAA), can be a great first step.

WRAAA has several programs and services to help individuals become and stay connected to their community. WRAAA's Community Outreach and Advocacy Department holds several health and wellness classes, completes check-in calls once per week with consumers in the *TeleCare* program, and provides resources and information at various events across WRAAA's five-county service area. The department even released a [newsletter for its TeleCare members](#). The WRAAA website, areaagingsolutions.com, has a [directory of volunteer opportunities for older adults](#), a [resource guide](#), and a [transportation guide](#) to help consumers travel within their communities. WRAAA also helps connect consumers to congregate meals at different community centers, home-delivered meal programs, and support groups, empowering consumers to get the support they need while engaging with others. Consumers can call our Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) at 800-626-7277 to learn more about activities and organizations available near them that address social isolation and other challenges they may be facing.

WRAAA hopes Older Americans Month and its theme will inspire you to take the initiative to reduce isolation—for yourself or someone you know.

Advocacy. Assistance. Answers on Aging and Disabilities.