

Life after lockdown: Tackling loneliness among those left behind

The detailed policy recommendations set out in this short paper are based on the findings set out in the British Red Cross report (June 2020) [Life after lockdown: Tackling loneliness among those left behind](#).

Our recommendations – an overview

To ensure no one is left behind and feels alone, we have set out four recommendations for policy makers and civil society:

- 1) Prioritise those most vulnerable to loneliness.** This should include ensuring access to ongoing emotional and practical support needed to cope and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as policy and practice change focused on removing the cultural and structural barriers to establishing and maintaining strong relationships. This should be supported by conducting further research where needed.
- 2) Secure sustained funding for tackling loneliness.** This should include ensuring the voluntary and community sector organisations committed to tackling loneliness, local authorities and NHS bodies are well equipped to reach and support those most left behind.
- 3) Continue to roll out social prescribing and ensure it delivers for loneliness.** Social prescribing link workers should continue to be embedded across our health and social care systems. To ensure social prescribing effectively tackles loneliness, healthcare professionals should routinely check in on people's psychosocial needs, including loneliness, and link workers should support people to establish the meaningful relationships of their choosing by providing tailored support and choice.
- 4) Work collaboratively across sectors and specialisms, and with people with lived experience of loneliness.** Together, we should continue to share learning, develop new solutions and drive forward a more holistic and coordinated approach to tackling loneliness, and its underlying causes.

Our commitment

The British Red Cross is committed to continuing to work in partnership to take these recommendations forward, including with the APPG on Loneliness, the Loneliness Action Group, comprised of more than 100 organisations from the voluntary, private and public sector,¹ with our Connection Coalition and government partners – and, most importantly, with affected communities themselves.

As set out in our new 10-year strategy² we remain committed tackling health inequalities and connecting communities. We've challenged ourselves to operate more in places of high deprivation, to invest in understanding where unmet needs are the greatest and to work in close partnership with others at the national and local level – and people and communities themselves – to co-design holistic and sustainable solutions.

¹ Learn more about how the British Red Cross works with partners across sectors to influence national policy and practice change to tackle loneliness: redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/action-on-loneliness

² See the British Red Cross Strategy 2030: redcross.org.uk/about-us/how-we-are-run/corporate-strategy

Detailed policy recommendations for policy makers and civil society

1) Prioritise those most vulnerable to loneliness.

To deliver this, the British Red Cross recommends:

- > **The new 'Tackling Loneliness Network'** convened by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and comprised of experts from the public, private and voluntary sectors, should prioritise developing and implementing targeted policy and practice solutions to tackle loneliness among the populations identified as most at risk of being left behind in [Life after Lockdown](#). These populations include those who are digitally excluded, BAME communities, younger people, disabled people, people with long term physical and mental health conditions, people seeking asylum, parents with young children as well as people experiencing hardship.
- > **The cross-Government tackling loneliness agenda** should conduct further research to better understand loneliness among those most at risk where needed. This should include a study exploring the prevalence and experiences of loneliness among people from BAME backgrounds as well as the intersectionality with other characteristics.
- > **National and local government** should adopt and champion a more holistic understanding of vulnerability throughout the next phases of its Covid-19 response, including during recovery. This should draw on [the British Red Cross Covid-19 Vulnerabilities Index](#), which maps health inequalities as well as economic and social vulnerabilities in addition to clinical and demographic factors.
- > **National and local government** should embed tackling loneliness into its overall coronavirus response, including:
 - Routinely checking in on people's psychosocial needs, including loneliness, when providing other practical support, such as food or medicine.
 - Offering information about emotional support, including loneliness, in guidance and other communications, and ensuring this information can be accessed offline as well as online.
 - Working hand in hand with the voluntary and community sector to design and deliver solutions. The voluntary and community sector often holds unique insight and reach to communities particularly vulnerable to loneliness.
 - Considering the impact of future policy and practice decision on loneliness and mitigating risks where possible.
- > **Government** should deliver a cross-Government approach to tackling health inequalities, including a specific focus on ethnic inequalities. This should seek to tackle the wider determinants of health, including loneliness and social isolation.
- > **Voluntary and community sector organisations** delivering services to tackle loneliness should ensure their schemes reach those identified as most at risk of being left behind in [Life after Lockdown](#).
- > **Voluntary and community sector organisations** delivering practical support during Covid-19 should check in on people's psychosocial needs, including loneliness, and equip themselves with local knowledge to signpost people accordingly.

2) Secure sustained funding for tackling loneliness.

To deliver this, the British Red Cross recommends:

- > **Government** should renew its commitment to tackling loneliness during and after Covid-19, by securing a sustained and dedicated funding package in 2020's three-year Spending Review.
- > **Government** should support the voluntary and community sector, and their partners, to continue to tackle loneliness by securing a sustainable package of financial support for the loneliness sector.
- > **The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and its national funding partners** should ensure grantees allocated dedicated government funds to tackle loneliness are well equipped to reach and support those identified as most at risk of being left behind in [Life after Lockdown](#). Projects should be co-designed with the communities they seek to help.
- > **The Department for Health and Social Care and the NHS** should provide a sustained investment in meeting people's mental health and emotional needs, including loneliness, throughout the next phases of the Covid-19 response, including recovery.
- > **Local commissioners, businesses and civil society organisations** should continue to invest in tackling loneliness schemes during and after Covid-19.

3) Continue to roll out social prescribing and ensure it delivers for loneliness.

To deliver this, the British Red Cross recommends:

- > **Commissioners, funders, civil society organisations and social prescribing link workers** should prioritise interventions that support people to establish the meaningful connections of their choosing by providing tailored support and choice.
- > **The Department for Health and Social Care and the NHS** should continue to roll out social prescribing link workers across our health and social care systems, and renew their commitment to ensuring social prescribing delivers for loneliness. As a minimum:
 - **The Department for Health and Social Care and the NHS** should equip healthcare professionals with the skills and confidence to ask after people's support networks and relationships at every opportunity.
 - **The Department for Health and Social Care and the NHS** should assess the impact of social prescribing using the ONS recommended loneliness measures.
 - **Government** should work with partners to identify sustainable ways to fund the services and support that communities need to enable people to reconnect.
 - See 10 further areas for action to ensure social prescribing effectively tackles loneliness set out in the British Red Cross and Co-op report, [Fulfilling the promise: How social prescribing can most effectively tackle loneliness](#).
- > **Voluntary and community sector organisations** should commit to working with local NHS partners on tackling loneliness. This should include getting to know their local social prescribing link workers and supporting Primary Care Networks to understand local need and existing schemes.

4) Work collaboratively across sectors and specialisms, and with people with lived experience of loneliness.

To deliver this, the British Red Cross recommends:

- > **The cross-Government approach to tackling loneliness**, including regular meetings between **the cross-Government ministerial implementation group** should be maintained. As part of this, alongside Government's next annual report on tackling loneliness, government should publish plans for sustained action and investment across **each of the nine government departments**³ that have been tasked to tackle the issue.
- > **The new 'Tackling Loneliness Network'** convened by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and comprised of experts from the public, private and voluntary sectors should engage people with lived experience throughout the process.
- > **Commissioners, funders and providers** should continue to collate and share insight and learning on what works to tackle loneliness transparently. **The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport** should help to fund and coordinate this work.
- > **Commissioners, funders and civil society organisations hoping to tackle loneliness** should co-design initiatives directly with the communities they seek to help.

For more information, please email LonelinessAction@redcross.org.uk

³ These departments include: the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Department for Education, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Health and Social Care, Department for Transport, Department for Work and Pensions, Home Office and the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government