



## Diversity as the Antidote to the Invisible Crisis of Loneliness

Ana Carolina González-Peña

Dear Friends,

This month, I am pleased to highlight the writing of PSRC's new Coordinator of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, Ana Carolina González-Peña. Ana has written extensively for AARP and brings a wealth of experience and insight into her new role with PSRC.



All the Best,

*Drew A. Dyson, PhD*  
*Chief Executive Officer*

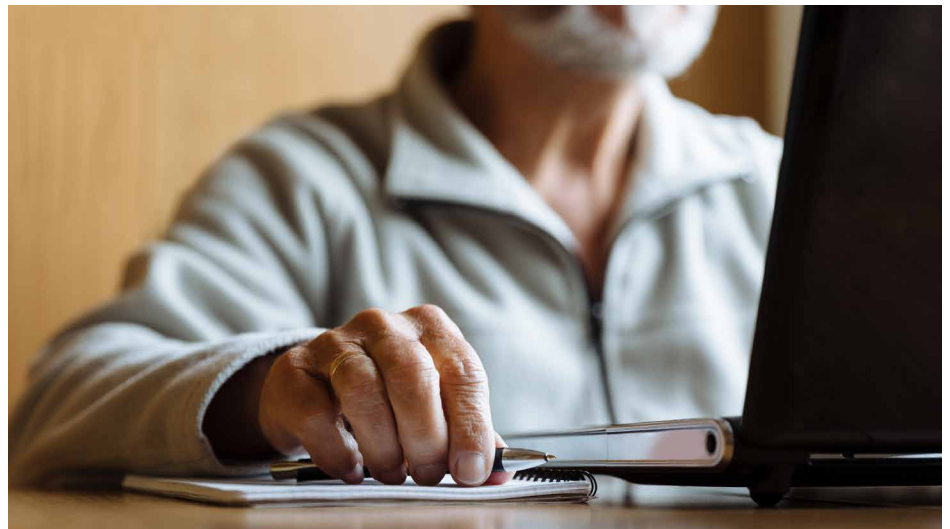
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According to the National Institute on Aging, the health risks of prolonged isolation are equivalent to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic, and it exceeds the health risks associated with obesity.

However, it is key to highlight that loneliness is a personal and subjective experience. It is defined by social psychologists as the gap between the desired social connections and the ones you currently have. There are instances where people may seem to have a wide network of friends but still experience a sense of emptiness, lacking emotional connection with those around them. Or you may encounter individuals who have intentionally chosen to isolate themselves, and they may not experience feelings of loneliness as they find contentment in their decision.

### **“Silent Pandemic”**

Often referred to as a “silent epidemic,” loneliness has emerged as a health issue, impacting people of all ages and backgrounds, including young adults, single parents, and immigrants. In 2017, former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy declared loneliness a public health epidemic. And in 2018, the United Kingdom appointed a “minister for loneliness.”



### **The Impact of Loneliness**

The impact of loneliness on our emotional well-being and overall health is profound. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, socially isolated or lonely individuals may engage in insufficient physical activity and experience poor sleep, leading to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and other chronic conditions.

When individuals feel isolated or excluded, they are less likely to participate in activities or engage with their community. This lack of connection can prevent the exchange of diverse perspectives.

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## **Diversity: A Pathway to Connection**

By embracing diversity and fostering a sense of belonging, we can break down barriers, promote open dialogue, and cultivate a more inclusive culture. Here my recommendations:

- Challenge biases and stereotypes: Be willing to question your own assumptions and examine the origins of your beliefs. Evaluate whether they are based on accurate information or misconceptions.
- Practice active listening: Truly listen to others and try to understand different perspectives.
- Listen and learn from others: Actively engage with the experiences and perspectives of people from different backgrounds.
- Use technology for good: Connect with virtual groups, online communities, and social platforms dedicated to combating loneliness.
- Embrace discomfort: Recognize that stepping out of your comfort zone by initiating conversations with new people or reevaluating your biases can be uncomfortable. Embrace this discomfort as an opportunity for personal growth and a chance to enjoy life in new and different ways.

If we take a moment in our daily lives to embrace diversity and foster a sense of belonging among individuals from diverse backgrounds, we will start building a path towards a more equitable and inclusive society for all.