

# Social Isolation & Loneliness Among American Indian Elders



**Social isolation** is defined as a lack of social connections. Social isolation can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

**Loneliness** is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact.

Some Indigenous elders may feel lonely despite how often they receive social contact and some are socially isolated.

The National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) reminds our elders that they have survived many changes and obstacles throughout their lives. We are strong and resilient!

## We know that Indigenous elders who are socially connected

- Live longer
- Are healthier and avoid such issues as high blood pressure, colds and flu
- Have less hospitalization and fewer trips to the emergency room
- Are happier
- Have protection from or avoid mental health issues, such as dementia and Alzheimer's

## Other resources are available to Native elders

- AARP Foundation Connect2Affect  
<https://connect2affect.org>
- Eldercare.gov
- American Indian/Alaska Native elder programs – Title VI of the Older American Americans Act provides funding for reservation-based programs  
<https://olderindians.acl.gov>
- NICOA Long Term Services & Supports – Listing of various services, programs and resources for tribal elders and their caregivers  
<http://nicoaltsscompass.org>



#ConnectedIndigenousElders | [Nicoa.org](http://Nicoa.org)

**NICOA** | National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

NICOA encourages elders to become more socially active or seek help to feel more fulfilled emotionally, physically and mentally. We also have programs to help elders learn new skills such as our Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

## Studies Show



Social isolation was associated with about a 50% increased risk of dementia.<sup>1</sup>

Prolonged social isolation is as harmful to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is more harmful than obesity.<sup>2</sup>



More than 1/3 of adults aged 45 and older feel lonely.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly 1/4 of adults aged 65 & older are considered to be socially isolated. Older adults are at increased risk for loneliness and social isolation because they are more likely to face factors such as living alone, the loss of family, or friends, chronic illness.<sup>4</sup>



Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly 4-time increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of ER visits.<sup>5</sup>

Poor social relationships (characterized by social isolation or loneliness) were associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.<sup>6</sup>

Heart Disease



Stroke



<sup>1,3-6</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25663>

<sup>2</sup> Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker. Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review. Perspectives on Psychological Science. 2015. Sage Publishing. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1745691614568352>

