



[To all MPs in England]

30 April 2020

Dear colleague,

NEW PLAN FOR TACKLING LONELINESS

I am writing to draw to your attention the government's [new plan for tackling loneliness](#), which was announced last week. As many of you will know, my department has led efforts to tackle loneliness for some time and I'm proud that this government was the first to appoint a lead minister for loneliness and to publish [a strategy for tackling loneliness](#). But Covid 19 and social distancing have forced all of us to consider loneliness afresh and this work has never been so crucial.

This new plan aims to ensure that, for people of all ages and backgrounds, staying at home does not need to lead to loneliness. It will help everyone understand the role they can play in looking after each other, and empower our expert charities and volunteers to reach more vulnerable people. Loneliness can affect anyone, but everyone can help. So I am writing to ask you to join me in taking action on this critical issue, which can have such an impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing.

My priority is to ensure that no one needs to feel lonely in the weeks ahead, to build on the upswell of kindness and connection that we have seen from the public, and to maintain that increased understanding of the importance of social connection in the long term.

The plan contains several elements:

- A [new public campaign](#) to get people talking openly about loneliness, reducing the stigma that stops people asking for help.
- Guidance on supporting [yourself](#) and [others](#) to avoid and reduce loneliness.
- A £5 million funding boost for loneliness charities leading the charge, plus confirmation that tackling loneliness will be one of the priority categories for the additional funding to be allocated by the National Lottery Community Fund in response to Covid 19.
- Loneliness charities including Age UK will be supported to work with NHS Volunteer Responders in their communities.
- A new 'Tackling Loneliness Network' bringing together high-profile charities, businesses and public figures with government. The group will explore ways to

establish better connections between people in order to build strong community spirit, with a focus on groups at particular risk of loneliness.

I know that in our constituencies we witness both the consequences of loneliness and the inspiring work that's already going on to bring communities together, so I am grateful for the examples that many of you have shared with me. The advice and information that you have passed on, particularly the contributions of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness, now chaired by Neil O'Brien, have been an important factor in informing the government's work. I also know that many of you are very active in your local areas and constituencies, coordinating and galvanising local groups to build social connection. This is a vital contribution, and I'd be very interested to hear more of your reflections as we start implementing the new plan. Please direct these reflections to the Minister for Civil Society in the first instance.

You can take action in several ways.

Firstly, please do spread the word about the Let's Talk Loneliness campaign and the guidance now available for those feeling lonely and those wanting to help, via social media and any newsletters or other communications that you use. In the end, it is friendly everyday acts from each of us that will beat loneliness, so the more people we can inspire and encourage to act, the better.

Secondly, services that tackle loneliness and social isolation are a priority for the new funding that will be available via the National Lottery Community Fund. I would therefore be grateful if you could direct your local loneliness charities towards this fund when it launches - I will share more information about how they can apply shortly.

Thirdly, please encourage the charities and businesses that you come into contact with to consider what role they can play in bringing people together and building social connection. There are lots of examples and ideas on the Let's Talk Loneliness website and in the Loneliness Strategy and my officials would be very happy to discuss opportunities with interested organisations. They can be contacted at enquiries@culture.gov.uk.

I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues across both Houses, building on the great cross-party approach established by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, to create a society that is more socially connected, both during the current period of social distancing and beyond.



RT HON OLIVER DOWDEN CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport