

Eradicate Social Isolation

A Grand Challenge for Social Work

Recent research has demonstrated that social isolation is as dangerous to human health as smoking. Yet it does not receive nearly the same level of attention from the public, healthcare practitioners or policymakers. As such, the Grand Challenge to **Eradicate Social Isolation** has set out to educate the public, disseminate evidence-based practices, and advocate for policy reform, looking to deepen social connections for people of all ages.

During the past five years, network members have been studying, publishing, and presenting widely on social isolation in diverse populations and across the lifespan. In 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of social distancing measures to slow its spread, social isolation has reached crisis levels. In response, members of this Grand Challenge have sprung into action, launching new programs, delivering webinars, publishing articles, and conducting a survey on the implications of social distancing for mental health and well-being.



Network Leadership

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LOOKING BACK

During the past five years, members of the network for **Eradicate Social Isolation** and their colleagues have:

- **Compiled** a [special issue](#) of the *Clinical Social Work Journal* on eradicating social isolation in diverse populations and across the lifespan
- **Organized** a symposium at the Society for Social Work & Research conference on [“Adversity, Marginalization, and Social Isolation: Risks and Resilience”](#)
- **Participated** in the [Social Isolation Impact Summit](#), hosted by the Motion Picture & Television Fund and the Milken Institute’s Center for the Future of Aging
- **Delivered** the keynote address at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa on the importance of human relationships
- **Served** on the ad hoc committee and **contributed** to the Consensus Study Report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine on [“Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults”](#)
- **Advocated** for [policy, practice, and educational changes](#) to ensure that social isolation, particularly among older adults, receives adequate attention
- **Presented** a CSWE Teaching Institute: *“Eradicate Social Isolation: Teaching and learning strategies for generalist and advanced curriculum”*

In 2020 alone, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the network to **Eradicate Social Isolation** have:

- **Established** a helpline at Wayne State University to train volunteers to help reduce stress and social isolation among healthcare workers
- **Launched** a Virtual Health Ministry program in Washington, DC, in which social work student navigators link congregants at area churches with services as well as a Grandparent Reassurance Program
- **Delivered** webinars on [“Isolation & Creativity in the Time of COVID-19”](#) and [“Social Work: A Relational Profession in a Time of Social Distancing”](#)
- **Published** articles on the implications of COVID-19 for [older adults](#), African Americans, and the [brain itself](#)
- **Conducted** a survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 related social distancing on mental health and well-being

LOOKING AHEAD

Network members have articulated the following objectives for this Grand Challenge over the next five years:

- **Continue** to advocate for their [policy recommendations](#), using best practices gleaned from innovative approaches in the UK and other countries around the world:
 1. **Increase** access to social supports that strengthens social connections for children, families, older adults and people with disabilities
 2. **Build** more age-friendly communities that strengthen social connections
 3. **Reduce** barriers to social inclusion for those marginalized by racism and other forms of oppression
- **Organize** their research activities around a set of research questions focused on social support, social integration, and social exclusion
- **Engage** network leads and national colleagues on strategies to embed strategic teaching tools into the curriculum at the BSW, MSW, and PhD levels
- **Increase** the scope and cohesiveness of their network to better expand and coordinate their efforts
- **Include** community leaders from across the country in generating strategies to eradicate social isolation and build social connection

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