

The Cost of Loneliness

In a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 22% of American adults say they always or often feel lonely. Another study by research firm Ipsos found nearly half of all Americans say they sometimes feel lonely. Adults younger than age 22 and older than 60 are at highest risk to experience loneliness. Health officials from around the world have said that the number of people who self-identify as lonely has reached epidemic levels in the U.S. and many other countries.

Loneliness affects the workplace. Reventure, a human resources think tank, says that lonely workers make more mistakes and feel less productive. When your employees experience loneliness, it can:

- Shorten their lives by up to 15 years, which is equivalent to being obese or smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Trigger the release of stress hormones associated with higher blood pressure, increased heart disease and cancer, and decreased resistance to infection
- Accelerate cognitive and functional decline
- Serve as a preclinical sign for Alzheimer's disease
- Increase their risk of death, stroke and heart disease

How your company can help

There are a number of things your company can do to help address loneliness in your employees:

- Recognize it's a possible problem.
- Encourage conversations.
- Make room for friends.
- Make personal connections a part of new hire onboarding training.
- Provide social options.
- See your people.
- Address bullies.
- Offer an employee assistance program.



Neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman from the University of California Los Angeles says social connection is a superpower that makes people smarter, happier and more productive. As a leader, you can assess your office for connections. If your employees feel socially isolated, you can offer them opportunities to connect, which will benefit their health and work performance. When you make the effort to address loneliness, it can help your company attract and retain top talent.

Sources: campaigntoendloneliness.org*, kff.org*, images.agoramedia.com*

*Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network don't own or control these websites.