

Loneliness for our senior citizens is more than just an emotional experience; it's a growing public health concern with serious consequences. Studies show that social isolation increases the risk of premature death by 26%. It can also worsen cardiovascular health, and contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke. Beyond physical effects, loneliness can accelerate cognitive decline, while increasing the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease - and is also linked to depression and anxiety. Over time, isolated individuals are less likely to exercise, sleep well, or maintain healthy routines - which can lead to further challenges for both body and mind.

Fortunately, there are many meaningful ways for our older adults to stay connected and protect their overall well-being, whether in person or online.

In-Person Activities

Engaging with others through shared interests is one of the most effective ways to counter loneliness. Joining clubs or hobby groups, such as book, gardening, or art clubs, offers opportunities for seniors to meet people with similar passions. Volunteering at local food banks, tutoring programs, or community events provide both social interaction and a sense of purpose. Attending community gatherings like farmers' markets, holiday celebrations, or concerts can also help strengthen a sense of belonging. Many senior centers offer group exercise classes, workshops, and social activities specifically designed to encourage connection and active living.

Virtual and At-Home Connections

For those who prefer, or need, to stay home - technology can offer powerful ways for older adults to stay engaged. Video calls with family and friends can be a welcome replacement for face-to-face connection, while virtual book clubs and online communities can spur new friendships and shared experiences. Staying in regular contact, through phone calls, online chats, or visits—helps to reinforce existing relationships. Even small acts of help, like assisting with errands or providing a ride to an event, can foster meaningful interactions and reduce feelings of isolation.

Personal and Family Support

Connection begins close to home. Families and neighbors can play a crucial role by including older adults in everyday activities, inviting them to join meals, go on walks or outings, which helps them to build a supportive social circle. Pairing someone with a reliable "buddy" - meaning a friend or neighbor who checks in regularly - can make a lasting difference.

By nurturing relationships through activities, technology, and community engagement, individuals can greatly reduce the health risks of loneliness—leading to longer, happier, and healthier lives.

Lake County Partners in Aging: Supporting Independence, Dignity, and Connection

A Vernon Township Community Mental Health Board grant recipient, the organization serves older adults and provides support for caregivers.

For more than 20 years, Lake County Partners in Aging has been a trusted community resource dedicated to helping older adults live independently, with dignity and purpose. What began as a small volunteer effort has grown into a compassionate nonprofit organization serving the townships of Moraine, Shields, West Deerfield, and Vernon.

At the heart of the organization's mission is a simple yet powerful belief: when seniors can age safely in their own homes—with the right support—they enjoy a higher quality of life. Lake County Partners in Aging makes this possible through compassionate care, meaningful connections, and community partnerships.

Essential Services that Empower Independence

The agency provides essential transportation and supportive services that enable older adults to stay active and engaged. Its transportation program ensures seniors can safely reach medical appointments, dialysis, cancer treatments, adult day programs, and nutrition sites. Each ride represents far more than a trip—it's a lifeline to independence and peace of mind.

Expanding Support for Mental Wellness

In 2024, the Vernon Township Mental Health Board awarded Lake County Partners a grant that helped to expand its services to include mental wellness programs for older adults, along with their caregivers. These include in-home counseling, social and resource connections, and "friendship lines" that offer compassionate conversations and emotional support. By addressing isolation and promoting mental health, the organization ensures that aging in place means living well, through mind, body, and spirit.

Caring for the Caregivers

Lake County Partners in Aging recognizes growing challenges faced by the "sandwich generation"—adults caring for aging parents while raising children of their own. To support these caregivers, the agency offers support groups where participants can connect, share experiences, and find comfort. For caregivers who need a break, Lake County Partners in Aging helps to arrange respite care for their loved ones, providing valuable relief and reassurance.

Meeting a Growing Need

Executive Director Robbie Boudreau, who has led the organization for 15 years, has witnessed the rising demand for these vital services. In Lake County, residents aged 65 and older increased from 10.5% in 2010 to 16.9% in 2024—a trend that is expected to continue as the Baby Boomer generation ages.

“Lake County Partners in Aging remains steadfast in its commitment to adapt and grow alongside this demographic shift,” Boudreau said.

Building a Community of Care

Lake County Partners in Aging is built on collaboration—between older adults, families, volunteers, healthcare providers, and local agencies. Together, they ensure that aging in Lake County is not defined by limitations, but by connection, compassion, and community.

For information about becoming a volunteer or registering for programs, visit piahelp.org, call 847-721-8414, or email info@piahelp.org.