1. Why social connection as a global priority?
   - Scale of problem
   - Severity of impact
   - Promising interventions

2. Why now?

3. WHO response: The Commission on Social Connection
What is social connection?

**Social connection**
An individual’s position on a continuum made up of structural, functional, and qualitative relationship indicators

**Loneliness**
A subjective experience arising from a mismatch between expected and actual quality/quantity of connections

**Social isolation**
The objective number of social connections and interactions an individual experiences

Holt-Lunstad (2021); Peplau & Perlman (1982)
'Loneliness and isolation represent profound threats to our health and wellbeing – as individuals and societies. Rebuilding social connection must now be a public health priority… it will require reorienting ourselves, our communities and our institutions to prioritise human connection and healthy relationships'.

— Vivek Murthy, US Surgeon General
(Advisory, 1 May 2023)
Social connection: why is it a global public health priority?

- Scale of problem
- Severity of impact
- Promising solutions
Scale of the problem

Global prevalence of social isolation in older adults (Teo et al., 2023)

The prevalence of loneliness in adolescents (Surkalim et al., 2022)
Impact on individuals

Mortality

Lacking Social Connection

- Smoking up to 15 cigarettes daily
- Drinking 6 alcoholic drinks daily
- Physical inactivity
- Obesity
- Air pollution

Odds of Premature Mortality

Murthy (2023)
Impact on individuals

Health Outcomes

Physical & Mental Health

Non-health Outcomes

Educational

Economic

Costs
Impact on communities and societies

- Community safety
- Community prosperity
- Community governance

Social Connection

Social Capital

Costs

- Social & economic development
- Innovation

World Health Organization

WHO Commission on Social Connection
Promising interventions – examples

- Laws and policies that address:
  - Discrimination and marginalization
  - Social cohesion and norms
- Improving infrastructure
- Volunteering
- Social prescribing
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Psychoeducation
Why now?

2023

WHO’s Commission on Social Connection

Longer-term Trends
- Industrialization
- Family Structure
- Mobility
- Technology

Shorter-term Trends
- Science
- Social Media
- Local & national Initiatives
- COVID-19

World Health Organization
WHO Commission on Social Connection: 2023–2026

- Increase priority
- Reposition issue
- Scale-up solutions
Commission composition

Political: Commissioners

Technical: Advisors

Secretariat: WHO
Commission outputs

**Commission Report (2024)**
- Identifies priorities
- Sets agenda

- **Measurement**
  - Global Index

- **Solutions**
  - Intervention Accelerator

- **Advocacy**
  - Film → UNGA

**Cost**
$4-5 million over 3 years

World Health Organization

WHO Commission on Social Connection
Beyond the Commission...

WHO welcomes engagement and seeks support for this agenda-setting global initiative.

Catalytic funding required $2.5 million.
References


