



Fostering Social Health for Residents with Developmental Disabilities

The importance of social connection as a basic human need

Social health is the foundation of our mental and physical health. When we don't have the amount of positive social connection in our life that we feel we need, we can become lonely and feel that we don't belong.

Recent studies show that more than 60% of Americans are feeling lonely with. Further, this council (the CT Council on Developmental Disabilities) estimates 43,000 CT residents are living with a developmental disability. Assuming each person living with a developmental disability has at least one caregiver supporting him or her, that equates to approximately 86,000 CT residents impacted. Assuming 60% of this group is feeling lonely, that equates to approximately *51,000 CT residents experiencing loneliness annually.*

Loneliness can lead to a 26% increased risk of premature all-cause mortality¹ and is associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation. Further, studies indicate that poor social relationships result in a 29% increased risk of heart disease, a 32% increased risk for stroke, a 57% increased risk of hospital readmissions for heart failure patients, and a 50% increased risk of developing dementia. See

<https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>.

In May 2023, US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy elevated loneliness and isolation to public health priorities and issued a historic Advisory on the healing effects of social connection and community to tackle the epidemic of loneliness. See www.surgeongeneral.gov/connection.

Funding request

We are seeking funding for FY 2025 of \$44,050 to undertake a statewide initiative to foster social connectivity, belonging, and community engagement for Connecticut's residents with developmental disabilities and their caregivers.

Fully inclusive focus groups

This initiative will begin with hosting a series of 8 listening sessions across the state, each to include 20+ people, including self-advocates (those with developmental disabilities), families/caregivers, direct support professionals, group home managers, employees of various state departments, and leaders of community organizations supporting residents with developmental disabilities to investigate successful social inclusion policies and practices and to identify regulations, policies, and practices that may present barriers to positive social connectivity. Better understanding of people's

¹ [Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review](#), Holt-Lunstad, et al., 2015.



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experiences with making friends, having relationships, being involved in the community, identifying what is working well, and what may get in the way, is vital to creating a positive environment for social connectivity at the local level. And understanding the needs of caregivers is just as important.

Outcome #1: Collaboratively created educational action guides to improve social health; addition to CT Collaborative to End Loneliness website

Following the focus groups, we will lead the development and publishing (with assistance and review from local developmental disability experts along with those with disabilities and their caregivers) of a series of action guides setting forth ideas, recommendations, and strategies for improving a person's involvement with their friends, neighbors, and community, including identification of barriers to social connectivity that may require state or local policy changes and actionable steps to improving social health for residents and their caregivers.

These recommendations will be targeted to different audiences, including self-advocates and their family caregivers, support agencies, municipal leaders, and clinicians and will be made widely available to everyone at no cost. Note that funding will also include updating the [CT Collaborative to End Loneliness' website](#) to include a section on individuals with developmental disabilities and their caregivers.

Outcome #2 (assuming FY 2026 funding): Statewide educational series for people with disabilities, their parents and caregivers

We will seek additional funding of approximately \$25,000 in year two to continue the work by organizing and hosting an impactful, educational series for CT residents with developmental disabilities and their caregivers that will include people with lived experience and experts sharing their experiences and strategies for social connection and engaging residents to think about ways to improve their social connectivity and the social health of those in their direct sphere of influence (we anticipate that the format may follow the current [Connecting CT Conversation series](#) format but the actual format will be determined based on recommendations from self-advocates, caregivers, and professionals). This educational series will offer real-life stories and replicable examples of social connection and community involvement providing attendees with ideas for actionable steps to improve their social connectivity and their mental and social health.



About For All Ages



Background

Launched in 2019, [For All Ages](#) is Connecticut's only 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting the generations and inspiring action to end loneliness, reduce ageism, and improve the mental, physical and social health of Connecticut's residents. We have created and hosted innovative, intergenerational programs that have provided more than 10,000 hours of impactful social connection for more than 2,300 residents.

Tea @ 3 Community

Our signature [Tea @ 3 intergenerational friendship community](#) targets two populations reporting the highest levels of loneliness (according to Cigna's 2020 Loneliness study): young adults between the age of 18 and 25 and older adults. This program is offered without limitation to all communities in the state of Connecticut. We invite anyone who can use a phone to participate and our program participants are a diverse group. We are proud of our ability to bring together a heterogeneous group of people and create a space where everyone belongs.

Inclusive social connection programs and events

We are focused on being as inclusive as possible in our other programs, too. In the past two years alone, we've designed and facilitated an inclusive, intergenerational bocce event, an intergenerational program for the dementia patients at Avery Heights in Hartford, a program specially designed for the residents at New Horizons Village in Unionville, and a program for young adults on the autism spectrum.

Social health education

Further, we have designed and facilitated social health educational programs for thousands of CT residents and people across the country and our founder Deb Bibbins has spoken at numerous state and other programs and events about the importance of social health (see [For All Ages' education webpage](#) and [In the News webpage](#) for more information).



About For All Ages (continued)

Convener of The CT Collaborative to End Loneliness

Finally, we are the convener of [The CT Collaborative to End Loneliness](#), a statewide, cross-sector initiative to foster social connection for Connecticut's residents – of all ages and abilities. As part of this statewide initiative, we have been hosting a series of conversations/educational sessions on social connection across the state that have attracted residents of all ages, along with municipal and state leaders including Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, US Senator Chris Murphy, and others.