Loneliness in America 2025:

A pervasive struggle requires a communal response

THE CIGNA GROUP

In today's increasingly connected society, a paradox has emerged: **Loneliness remains pervasive** throughout the population, yet each individual experiences loneliness in their own way.

While loneliness is not always noticeable to others, it can subtly influence all aspects of life – diminishing personal vitality while having an effect at work, in relationships, and within communities. People who are lonely overwhelmingly report feeling a lack of belonging, even when they have other people in their lives.

And the consequences of loneliness go beyond a person's mental state. People living with high levels of social isolation and loneliness have a higher risk of developing chronic conditions, including depression, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and cancer, and an increased risk of premature death.

As a global health services company, The Cigna Group has shone a light on the effect of loneliness on health and well-being since 2018. This report leverages data from the Vitality in America 2024 study to delve into the multifaceted nature of loneliness in America, exploring its effect upon people of different ages, life stages, and roles – from digitally connected yet isolated younger people to seasoned yet solitary older adults, from always-on workers experiencing burnout to caregivers who are rarely alone but often lonely.

Key takeaways

1. While more people in younger generations classify as lonely, **loneliness affects GenXers and baby boomers to a greater degree.** Older Americans who are lonely are more likely to report mental health issues, including depression or anxiety.

2. **Many parents of young children** and people providing unpaid care to adults or disabled individuals **report feeling isolated**, with two-thirds classifying as lonely.

3. **Workers who are lonely are more likely to miss work** or seek new roles and less likely to accomplish their work goals, which can be costly for employers.

In this paper, we delve into the root causes of loneliness and its wider impacts on people across ages, life stages, and places. We also offer recommendations to identify strategies to address the individual experience of the loneliness epidemic and help build resilience and improve the health and vitality of all.

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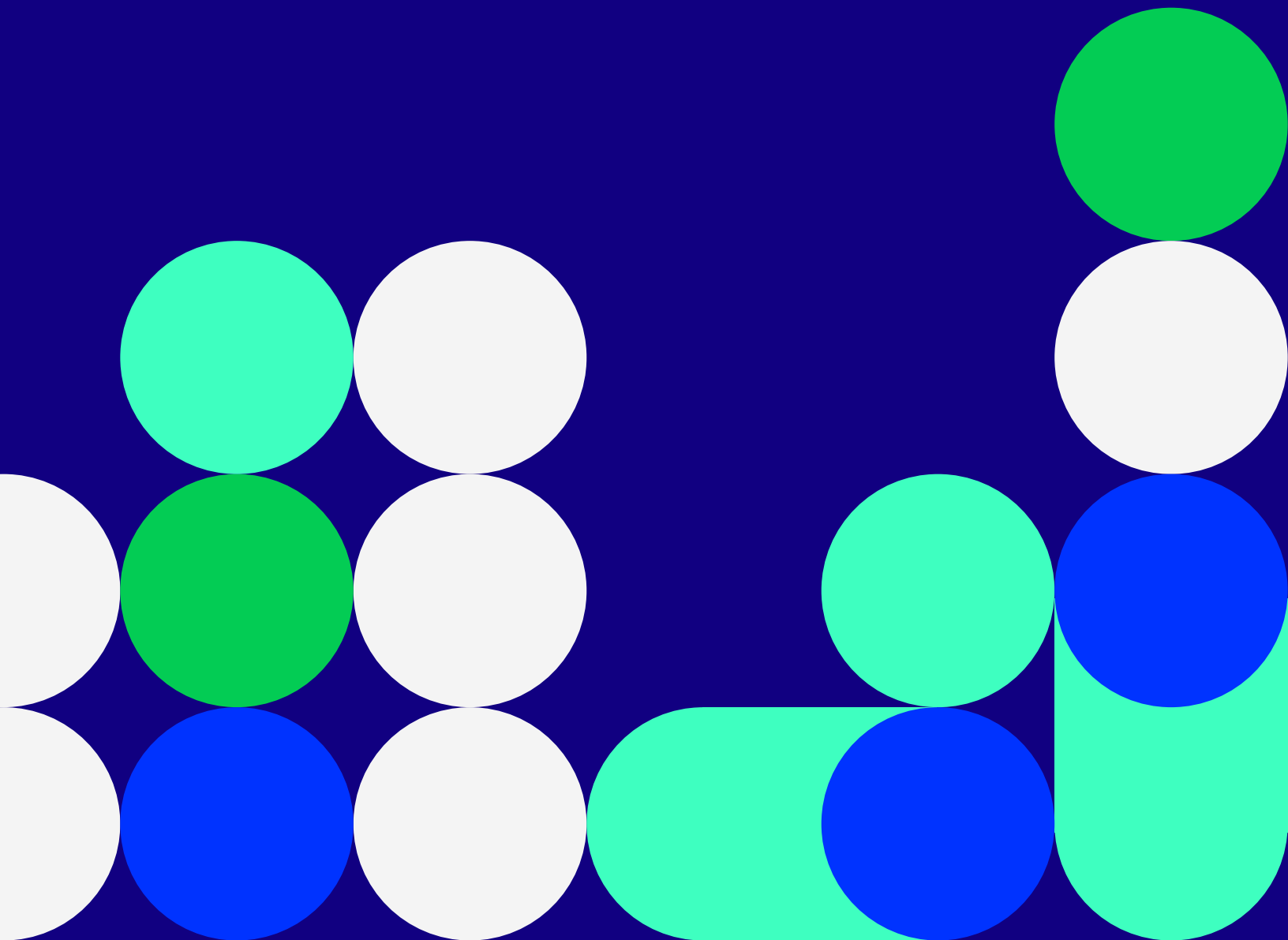
CHAPTER 1

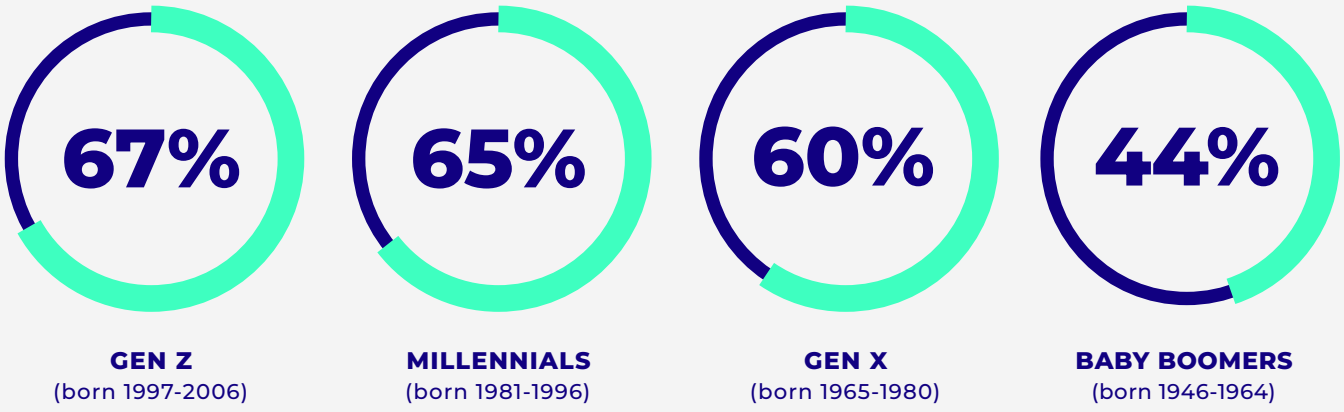
Generation gap: People of different ages have different experiences with loneliness



Just as each generation is shaped by distinct social contexts, their experiences have an impact on loneliness. Generation Z and millennials, who grew up alongside digital technologies such as the internet, mobile phones, and smart devices, are the most connected, yet they have higher levels of loneliness than older generations.

LONELINESS ACROSS GENERATIONS

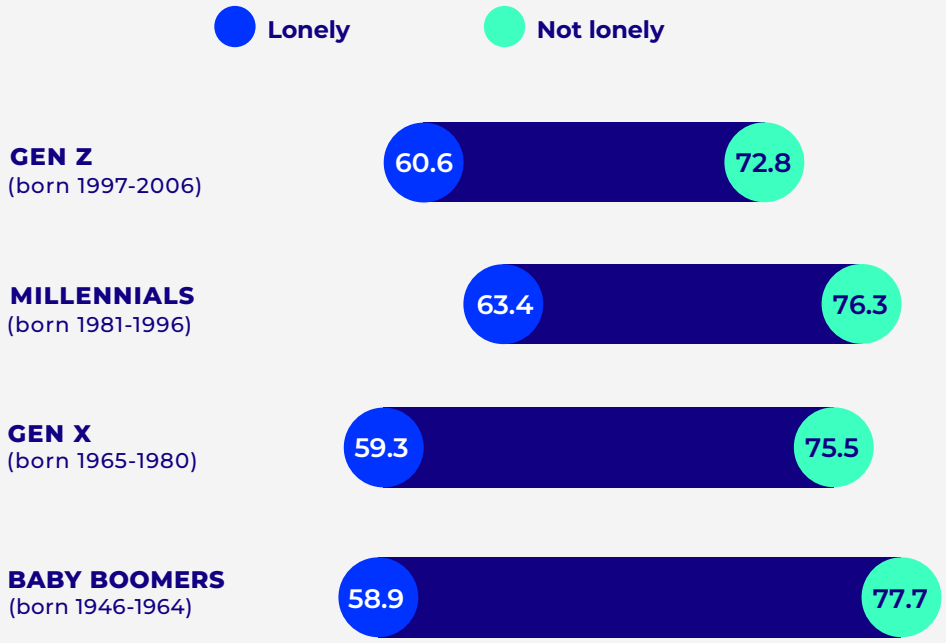
(% LONELY)



2024 Vitality Index

In all age groups, loneliness is linked to significantly lower vitality. However, the detrimental effects of loneliness are greater for older Americans, who experience a significant decrease in vitality scores.

VITALITY BY GENERATION, LONELY VS. NOT LONELY



2024 Vitality Index

Older adults who are lonely also report significantly more mental health challenges. For example, lonely Gen Xers rate their mental health an average of 30 points lower and their incidence of depression or anxiety as 23 points higher than their non-lonely counterparts. Similarly, nearly 3 out of 4 baby boomers who are not lonely rate their mental health as excellent or very good (73%); only about a third of lonely baby boomers say the same (34%).

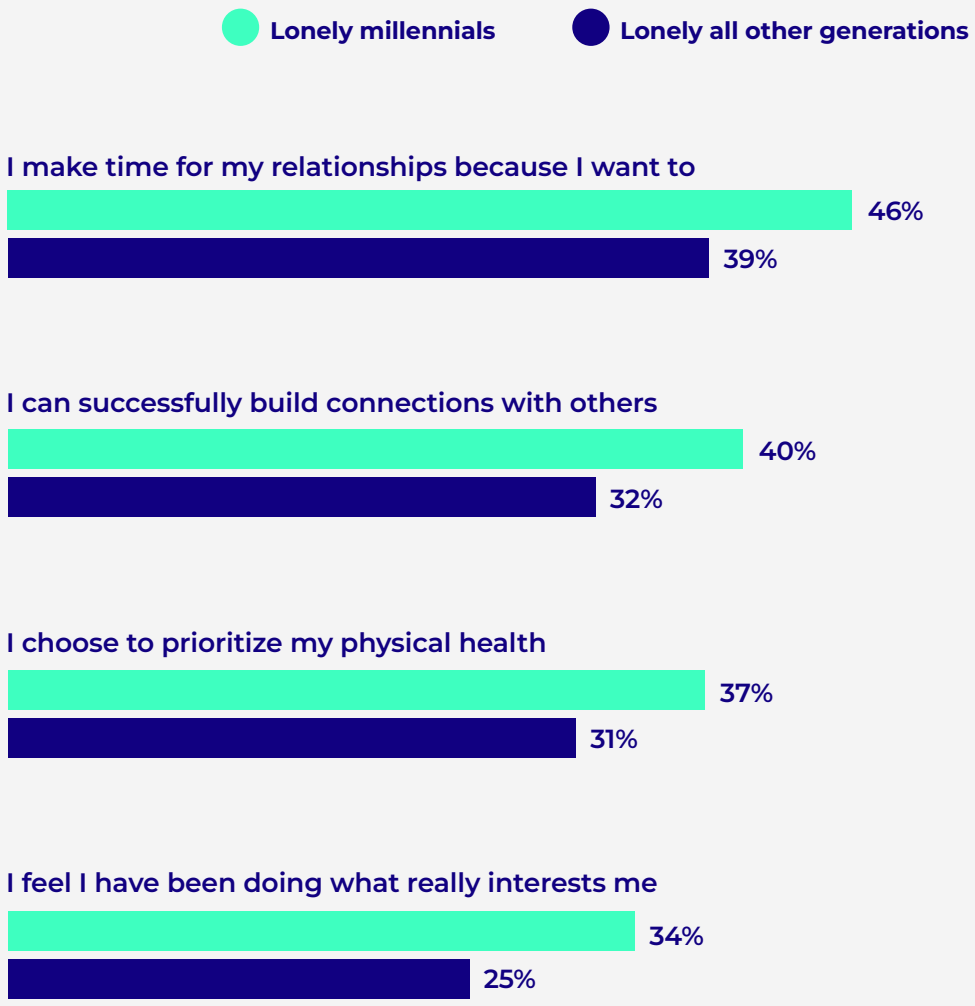
Activity and engagement combat loneliness

We know that loneliness is linked to chronic conditions, and isolating experiences such as the death of a spouse, separation from loved ones, retirement, or loss of mobility compound those risks.

However, people who are socially engaged – participating in cultural events, religious services, or volunteering in their communities – have an enhanced ability to maintain their well-being. Our research shows that while younger generations experience higher levels of loneliness, they often display an ability to manage its impact – perhaps due to their social engagement.

Let's look at millennials. Despite a high prevalence of loneliness, millennials appear to be better able to mitigate its negative impacts than members of other generations. Lonely millennials are more likely to participate in activities that interest them, prioritize their physical health, and foster social connections. They are the most likely generation to feel they can build connections and friendships with others, which may help them focus on well-being and maintain a balanced life.

ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS THAT COMBAT LONELINESS



2024 Vitality Index

Vitality research did not assess whether millennials are taking specific actions to combat loneliness, but as a generation they have proven they can persevere through challenges. This resilience may be the reason even lonely millennials take a more holistic approach to life, prioritizing relationships and health, which increases vitality and acts as a buffer against loneliness.

Older Americans can learn from their younger neighbors. Whether through work, school, community organizations, or other venues, making time for relationships, pursuing interests, and building social muscles are imperative, because activity and connection are keys to fighting loneliness.

Health care providers are addressing loneliness alongside medical conditions and social prescribing – especially for aging populations – is gaining traction.

"A social prescription can be a powerful tool to improve a person's overall health outcomes."

"With a social prescription, a health care provider doesn't just recommend a non-medical intervention such as movement, acting in service of others, or spending time in nature to treat a physical or behavioral issue, but includes it in the course of treatment," explains Dr. Stuart Lustig, national medical executive for behavioral health strategy and product design with Cigna Healthcare, a division of The Cigna Group. "Whether prescribed by a health care provider or self-prescribed, a social prescription can be a powerful tool to improve a person's overall health outcomes."

MILLENNIALS: A GENERATION OF CHALLENGES

2001

9/11
Coming to age during the war on terrorism.

2007

Entering adulthood in recession
Great Recession begins as the oldest millennials turn 26, leading to a difficult job market.

2012

The burden of education
Student debt surpasses $1 trillion, intensifying financial struggles for college-educated millennials.

2017

Stagnant wages & rising costs
Cost of living soars while millennials see minimal wage growth.

2020

Global pandemic
COVID-19 pandemic triggers a second recession before millennials hit 40, increasing unemployment and financial insecurity, especially for millennial parents.

2021

Housing crisis redux
As millennials seek homeownership, a housing crisis emerges with limited inventory and record-high prices.

2022

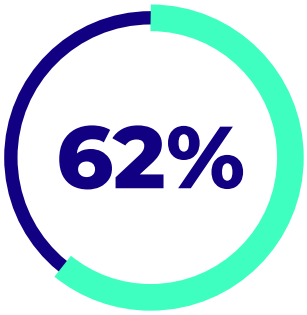
Inflation strikes
Inflation rises to a 41-year high, hitting millennials hardest as they enter high-spending years (as seen with previous generations).

As a generation, millennials have proven they can persevere through challenges.

CHAPTER 2

Rarely alone, often lonely: The caregiver's paradox

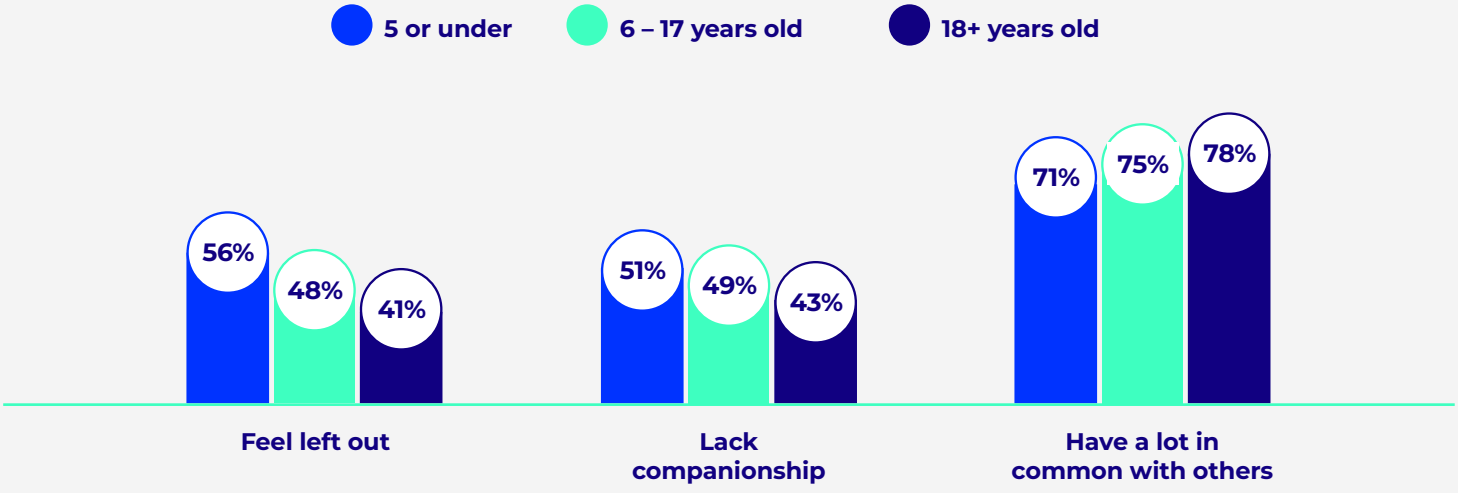
Caregiving can be a profound act of love and dedication, yet it often comes with an emotional toll. Many unpaid caregivers, especially parents of young children and caregivers for older or disabled family members, feel isolated and are lonely.



of **unpaid caregivers** report feelings of loneliness

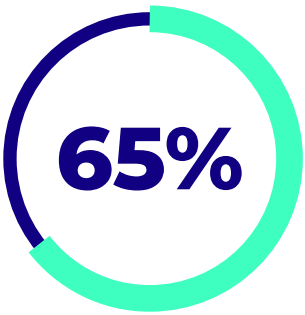
They juggle demanding responsibilities, frequently sacrificing their social lives and personal well-being. The emotional burden can be immense, leaving caregivers feeling left out and disconnected from their peers.

PARENTS OF YOUNGER CHILDREN FEEL ISOLATED



2024 Vitality Index

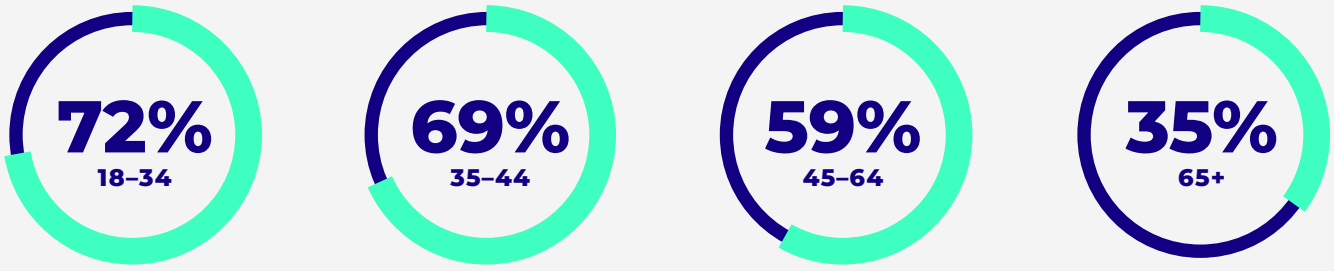
People who are caregivers for other adults as well as their own children often feel increased levels of loneliness. Despite being surrounded by family, caregivers who are part of the sandwich generation often say they are emotionally isolated and lack the companionship and social interactions vital for personal well-being.



of adults who are **parenting and providing care for other adults** are lonely.

The pressures of caregiving are particularly challenging for younger adults. Caregivers aged 45 or older have significantly lower levels of loneliness, suggesting that time, experience, and the aging of their dependents may enable a greater sense of competence and balance while navigating these challenges.

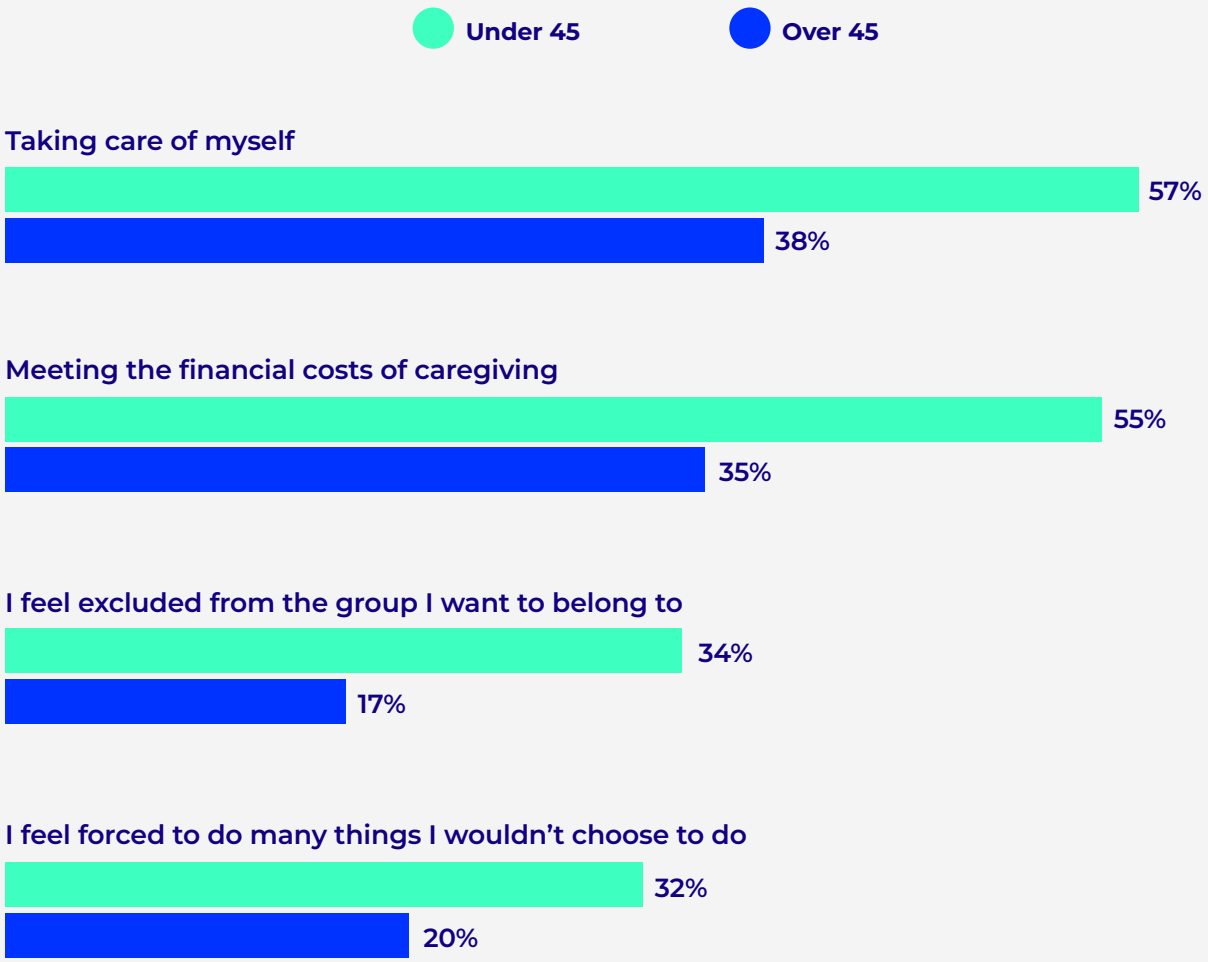
FEELINGS OF LONELINESS IN ADULTS IN CAREGIVING ROLES BY AGE GROUP



2024 Vitality Index

The emotional burden and lack of autonomy younger caregivers feel is a concern. Compared to their counterparts aged 45 and older, caregivers under 45 are twice as likely to say they feel excluded from the group they want to belong to and are far more likely to say they struggle to care for themselves, to meet the financial costs of caregiving, and feel forced to do many things they would not choose to do.

STRESS IN CAREGIVING ROLES

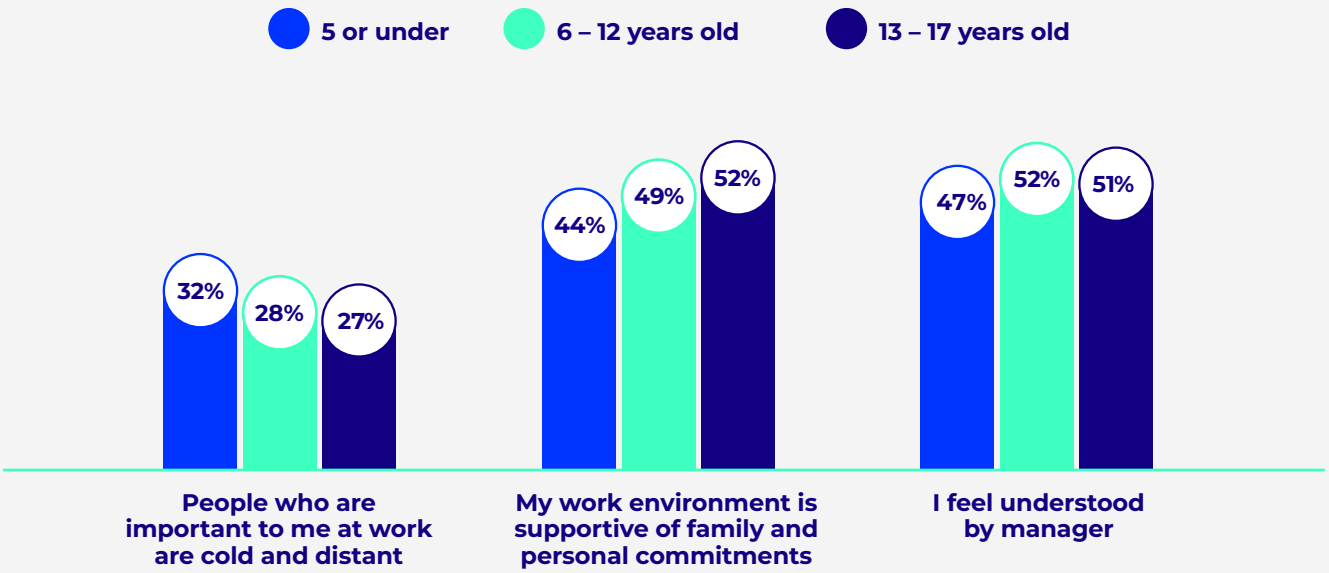


2024 Vitality Index

The stresses of caregiving can be exacerbated when work is thrown into the mix. Vitality research shows that working parents of younger children face additional challenges that may contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Workers with children aged 5 or younger at home feel stressed more regularly about their family and social relationships, their work, and their health and finances than those with older children.

Of concern to employers, workers with younger children are more likely to say the people who are important to them at work are cold and distant, are less likely to say their manager understands them, and are less likely to feel their work is supportive of their family and personal commitments.

WORKING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYER SUPPORT VARIES DEPENDING ON THEIR CHILD'S AGE



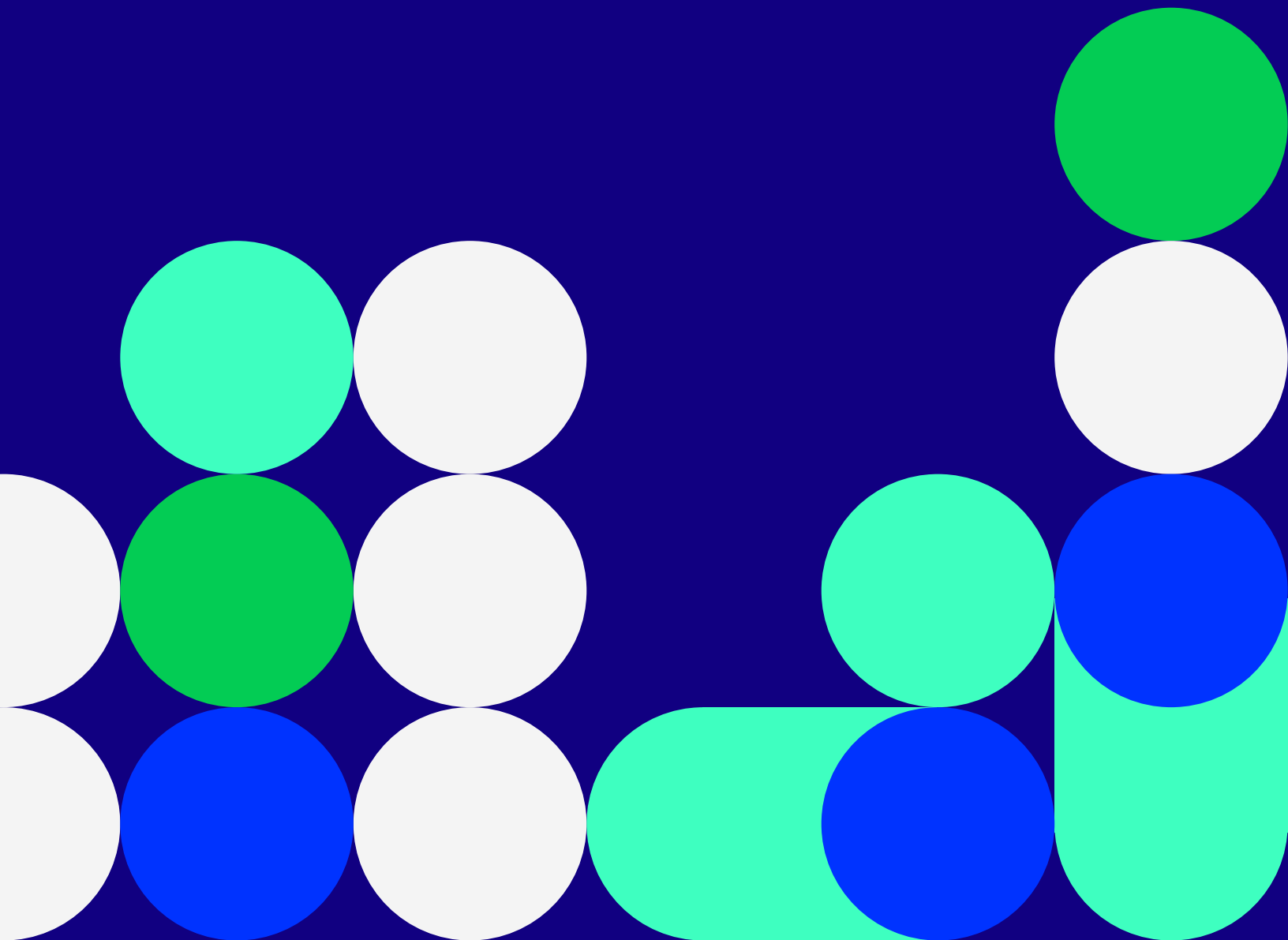
2024 Vitality Index

Caregivers are an essential part of society, and their pervasive loneliness is a grave concern. Those who may need extra support include people caring for a loved one with a disability, caregivers raising young children, and young caregivers who may see their roles as far more burdensome than their care-free peers.

Addressing loneliness requires action from individuals, communities, businesses, organizations, and policymakers. Community or neighborhood programs that provide opportunities for caregivers to connect with others in similar situations or offer temporary relief from responsibilities – babysitting, meal delivery – can go a long way in helping caregivers feel that they too are worthy of being cared for. Employers can offer similar services through an Employee Resource Group or Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

CHAPTER 3

Productivity at risk: The hidden cost of loneliness at work



The workplace can be an important community where people foster meaningful connections and spend a significant portion of their lives, yet more than half of American workers classify as lonely. This has far-reaching implications for businesses and society.

More than half of American workers report feeling lonely

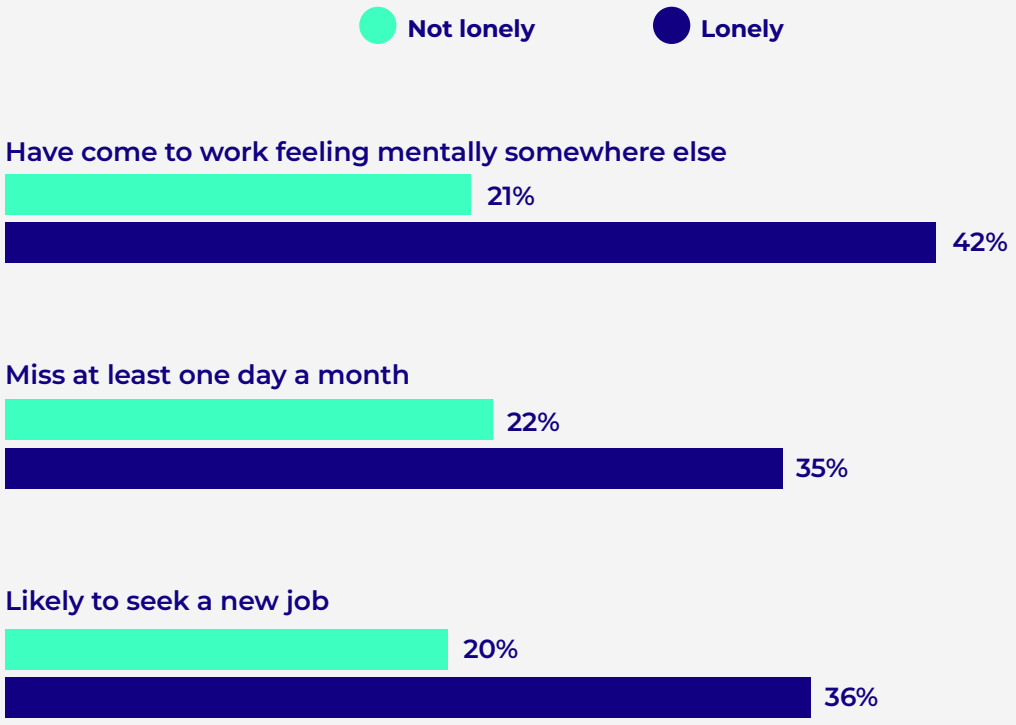
2024 Vitality Index

The cost of loneliness at work

As mentioned above, employees who have young children at home struggle to feel connected at work. But they are not the only ones; loneliness diminishes vitality for all workers, affecting job satisfaction and engagement, which are associated with increased turnover, absenteeism, and health issues.

Employees who feel lonely are more likely to disengage, which can have a negative effect on team cohesion and overall company performance. Lonely workers are more likely to seek new jobs, which may lead to increased recruitment and training costs. They are absent more frequently due to health issues and are more likely to be distracted at work, impacting productivity. Addressing these issues is essential for employee well-being as well as overall productivity and cost containment.

LONELY WORKERS CAN BE COSTLY FOR EMPLOYERS



Q2 2024 Vitality Pulse

Conversely, employers can benefit from offsetting some of the negative impacts of loneliness for workers. Workers who are not lonely are significantly more likely to say they are willing to work harder to help their company succeed (74% vs. 63% lonely).

CHAPTER 4

Activations against loneliness enable a thriving society

Vitality research shows that even in the face of unique challenges, thoughtful actions and strategies can help combat loneliness and increase vitality.

Employers can create a workplace where people feel less isolated and more connected by empowering managers to:

Support and model work-life balance

While 20% of lonely workers who feel their employer supports a healthy work-life balance report high vitality, that proportion plummets to 2% when workers don't perceive that support. Encourage employees to take time off and be respectful of their time away. In addition, talk with your team about how you prioritize a work-life balance so they may feel inspired to do the same.

Foster a culture of inclusion

People who are lonely overwhelmingly reported feeling a lack of belonging even when they had other people in their lives. To combat this, sponsor employee resource groups, organize team-building activities or virtual coffee breaks that encourage employees to foster camaraderie and strengthen connections through social interaction.

Build a genuine relationship with team members

Empathetic leadership is crucial: 19% of workers who classify themselves as lonely but feel understood by their manager report high vitality, compared to 8% who feel misunderstood. Scheduling regular check-in calls, sharing personal stories and experiences, and even facilitating your team's connections with colleagues across the company are of utmost importance.

Individuals can also take actions to support family members, friends, neighbors, or coworkers who are feeling isolated:

Understand and watch for loneliness risk factors

The inability to connect with others on a deep level, stating that no one understands them, having many acquaintances but no close friends, and expressing negative thoughts of self-doubt and self-worth are signs of loneliness.

Remove stigma around mental health issues

Lead with compassion and reassure people that it's normal to feel alone, especially in the face of challenging situations and life events. Talk about what has helped you and share any resources you know about.

Offer a hand and invite others to do the same

Prosocial behavior (taking action for someone else's benefit) is linked to higher vitality. Volunteering, helping a neighbor, engaging in community service, or otherwise sharing your unique talents and skills with others can enhance mental and physical health and alleviate some of the negative consequences of loneliness.

It requires courage and action, but we can all take steps to address and abate the loneliness that surrounds us. By recognizing distinct differences and common threads in how loneliness tends to manifest across groups, we can identify and implement the buffers to loneliness. When we work together to address loneliness and foster a sense of belonging, we create an environment where individuals, employers, and communities achieve better health and vitality.

METHODOLOGY

2024 Vitality Index methodology

Detailed methodology

The Evernorth Research Institute conducted the second wave of the Evernorth Health and Vitality Study from May 29-June 14, 2024, in collaboration with Morning Consult. This nationally representative, bilingual (English and Spanish) online survey assessed the health, vitality, social needs, and productivity of over 5,000 U.S. adults aged 18 years and older. To ensure that the sample was representative of the United States population, quotas were established based on Census Data using a cross-section of age and gender, with employment quotas based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Data was then weighted to match the United States population on: gender (in total and for Gen Z), age, ethnicity/race, region, employment status and income.

Survey respondent demographics

The sample was split about evenly between males (48%) and females (51%). Respondents were split representatively between the South (37%), West (24%), Midwest (21%) and Northeast (18%). 67% of respondents were white, 16% report Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin, 10% were Black, 4% Asian and 3% other races. The majority (61%), of respondents work for pay with most (86%) having one job. 88% had health insurance or health care coverage.

Q2’24 Vitality Pulse methodology

Detailed methodology

The Evernorth Research Institute conducted an online survey with 2,500 U.S. adults aged 18 and over from May 29-June 14, 2024 in collaboration with YouGov. This bilingual (English and Spanish) survey assessed health, vitality, social needs, productivity and social media attitudes and behaviors across generations. Participants were United States residents 18 years of age and older, fluent in English or Spanish. To ensure that the sample was representative of the United States population, quotas were established based on Census Data using a cross-section of age and gender, with employment quotas based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Data was then weighted to match the United States population on: gender, age, ethnicity/race, region, education and income.

Survey respondent demographics

The sample was split about evenly between males (48%) and females (52%). Respondents were split representatively between the South (39%), West (24%), Midwest (20%) and Northeast (17%). 61% of respondents were white, 18% report Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin, 12% were Black, 4% Asian and 5% other races. The majority (59%), of respondents work for pay with most (86%) having one job. 90% had health insurance or health care coverage.

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