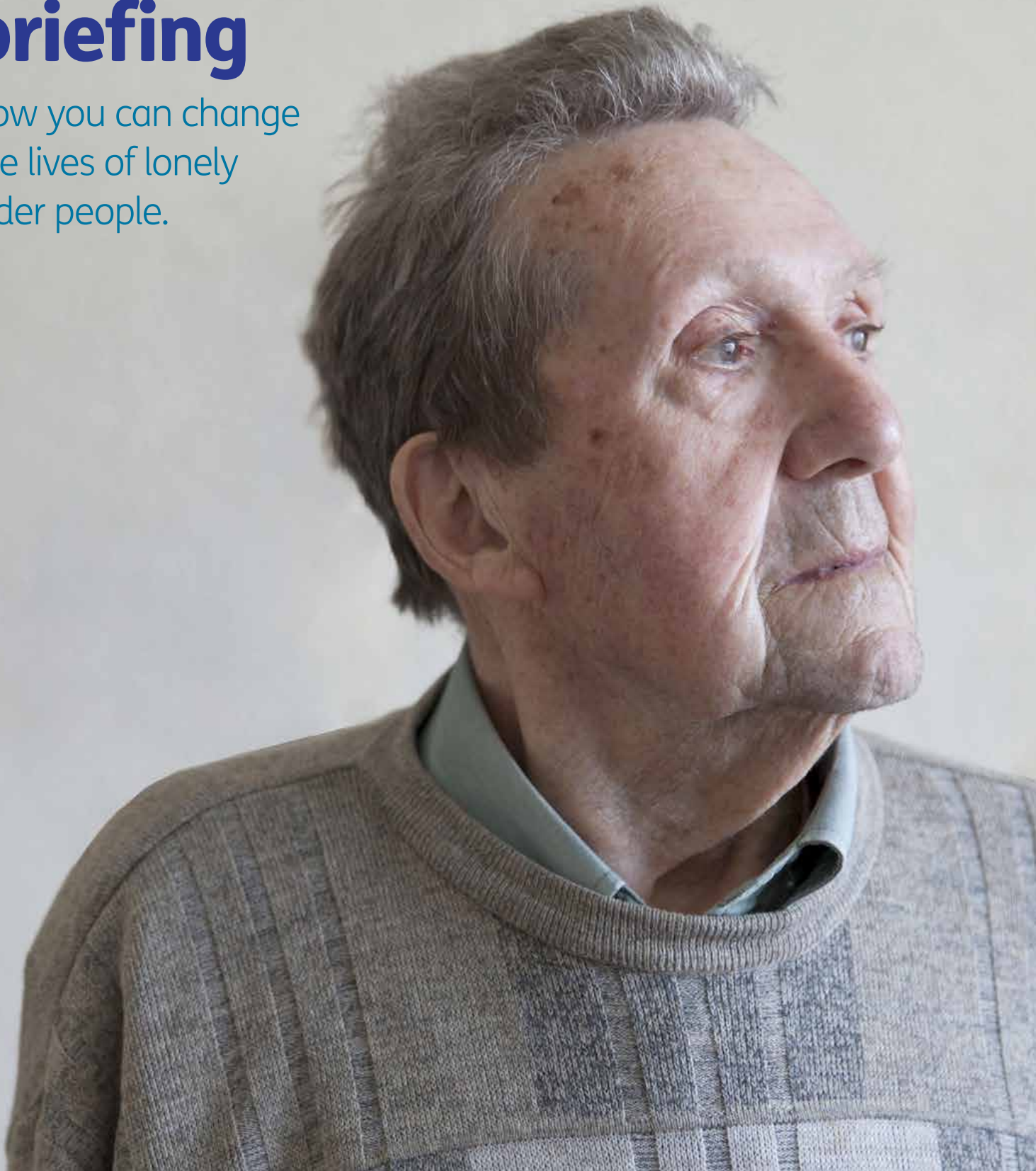


Parliamentary briefing

How you can change
the lives of lonely
older people.



Most of us have felt miserably and lonely at some point in our lives. For many, life moves on and the feelings pass.

But for some **loneliness becomes chronic**, and it becomes increasingly difficult to find ways to reconnect and form meaningful relationships.


There is growing public and political awareness that we must do something to help people who find themselves chronically lonely. This briefing outlines the information you need to know about loneliness amongst older people, what works to help them and the crucial role you can play in helping lonely older people in your constituency.


This document accompanies Age UK's 'No one should have no one' report, providing more statistics and details of initiatives that work locally.


For a copy, please email campaigns@ageuk.org.uk

Why it matters


Loneliness affects a growing number of older people

 Around **10%** (1.2 million) of people aged 65+ say they are chronically lonely¹. This percentage has remained very similar over the last 50 years.


 Loneliness is not the same as social isolation, and people can feel lonely in a crowd whilst others enjoy solitude. However, the **lack of meaningful relationships** is a key component of loneliness.

 **1.7%** or 200,000 older people 65+ have not had a conversation with friends or family for a month.²

Many older people do not feel valued by their community


 **16.1%** or 1.9 million older people 65+ often feel ignored or invisible.³


And getting out and about to engage with the wider world is an issue for many

 **9%** of older people feel trapped in their own home.⁴

Loneliness is associated with ill health and premature mortality⁵

 Lonely people are **more likely** to have mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

 Lonely older people are **more likely** to have dementia, and there is some evidence that loneliness can contribute to the development of dementia.

 Loneliness is also associated with a **higher rate** of cardio-vascular disease and strokes.

JO COX LONELINESS

start a conversation

Age UK is proud to be a member of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. During her time as an MP, Jo Cox was dedicated to combating loneliness in the UK. Jo formed an independent, cross-party Commission of MPs and charities to highlight the fact that we can all do something to help lonely people in our community.

Following her tragic murder, the Commission has been taken forward by Rachel Reeves MP (Labour) and Seema Kennedy MP (Conservative) in order to, in Jo's words, 'turbo charge the public's awareness of loneliness'.

The Commission aims not simply to make us aware of the problem, but to ask us all to take action to reduce loneliness.

The Commission will be working throughout 2017 to address the impact loneliness has on different sections of society and plans to produce a list of recommendations at the end of the year.

'Turbo charge the public's awareness of loneliness'

- Jo Cox -



What helps combat loneliness for older people?

Finding older people who are lonely

Our experience shows it is often a significant challenge to find older people who are chronically lonely. Many may have had little contact with their community in recent years but Age UK has found the tools and techniques below particularly effective.



Training eyes and ears on the ground: there are many people in our communities who are already in touch with older people who are lonely but either don't realise it or know how to help them. Training key people in our communities - such as GP's receptionists, district nurses, Police Community Support Officers, shopkeepers, hairdressers and pub staff - to identify lonely older people and feel comfortable having a conversation with them about it, can make a huge difference.



Using Age UK's mapping tool: which draws on census statistics to indicate areas where older people maybe at higher risk of loneliness. These can also help local voluntary sector partners and local authorities to identify areas with a potentially high number of lonely older people but few services.



Organising a door knocking event: local Age UKs have had huge success in organising a local door knocking exercise in an area they have identified as at high risk of having many lonely older people in. By knocking on every door in an area, this collaboration between local partners such as local Age UKs, Fire and Rescue services and other local voluntary sector partners can be hugely effective in identifying older people who would never have asked for help.



.....
During the war I served in the Army and spent four years as a prisoner of war. I've lost two wonderful wives and **I live here alone now**. I wanted to get out of the house - **I felt very depressed**.
.....

- Wills, 97 -
.....

Recognising that different people need different sorts of help

Loneliness is a very personal experience. There are a wide range of different triggers for loneliness and an equally wide range of journeys to come out of it.

For some, finding they're eligible for benefits and having more money in their pocket may be all they need to get out and become active again. For others, help to regain confidence in travelling on public transport after a fall may be the key. Other people may need more intensive interventions to re-engage through face to face befriending services which help people to gain confidence, increase their self-esteem and start to be able to think about what they can do to help themselves and act upon it.

Key enablers such as transport and IT, as well as safe streets and public spaces, can make a significant difference to helping older people build more meaningful relationships.

Places to go and people to see

Once older people have regained their confidence to build new relationships with people, they need places and opportunities in which to do that. At a time when many of the day centres and other support services provided by adult social care departments have been cut back, the voluntary sector plays a crucial role in keeping people connected and helping those who have become lonely reconnect.

Some people respond well to befrienders and volunteers brokering introductions - for example someone in the next street who also likes playing Scrabble or Bridge, or a local book club. Others enjoy coffee mornings and luncheon clubs.

There are many other types of activities organised by local Age UKs which cater for every taste - for example: Men in Sheds; walking football; walking netball; cooking for one; as well as letting people know about other opportunities going on in their local area.



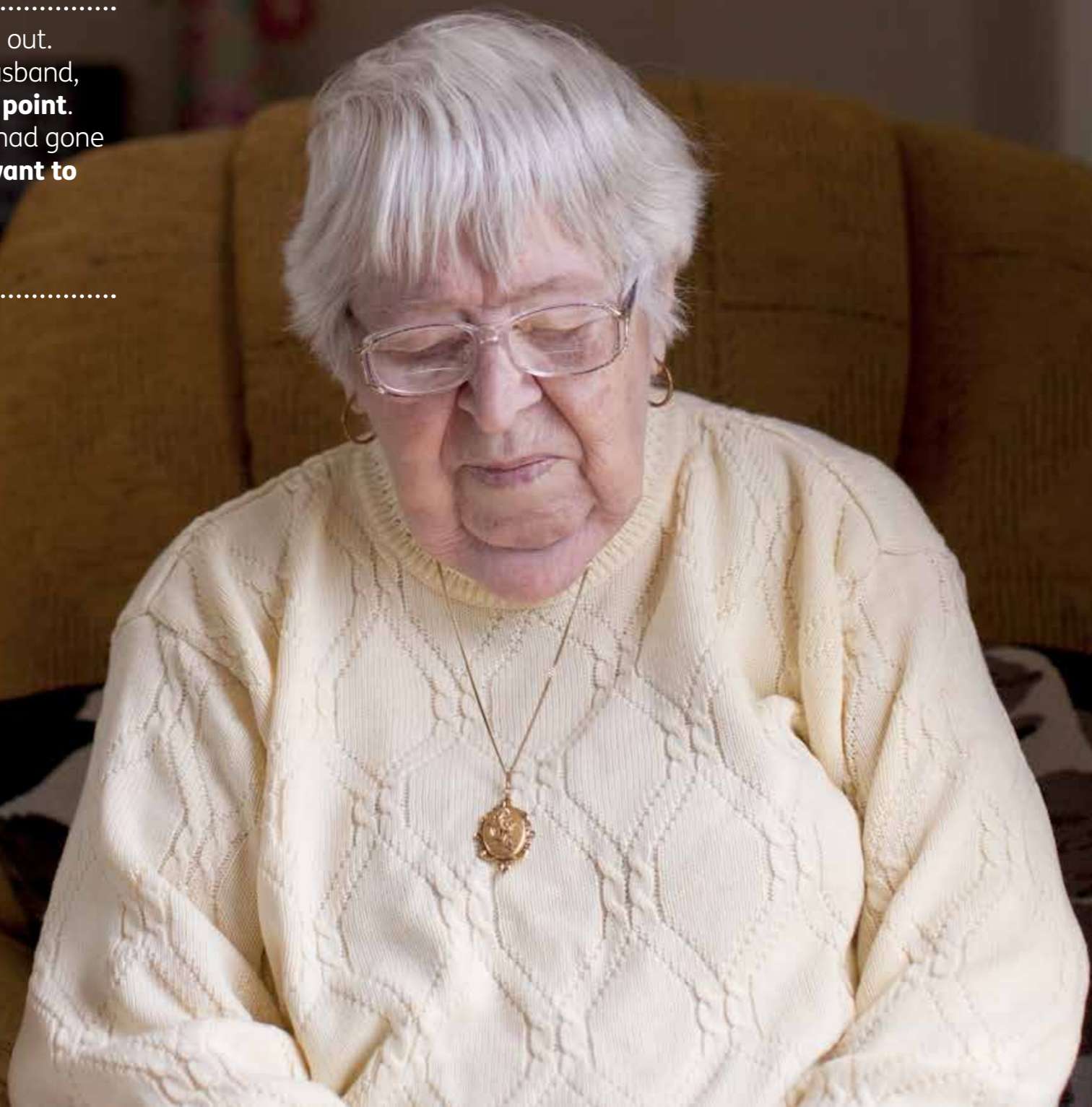
Why we need your help and what action you can take

Public awareness of just how many older people are suffering from loneliness in our society is growing. We believe the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness offers a critical window of opportunity to take action to help lonely people in our communities.

There has never been a better time for MPs of all parties to join together nationally and locally to ride this wave of public concern and support all of us – local councillors, people working in the public, private and voluntary sector and the public at large – to come together to do what we can to help lonely older people.

.....
'I didn't want to go out. After I'd lost my husband, **I couldn't see the point.** He'd gone, my life had gone and **I just didn't want to do anything.**'

- Jean, 86 -
.....



You can:



Meet with older people's charities and forums in your constituency as part of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness to understand the issues affecting lonely older people in your area. Email campaigns@ageuk.org.uk for support and connections to your local Age UK.



Use your influence to bring together key local partners to discuss how they can work together to combat loneliness.



Champion and support the work of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness.



Encourage your political party to engage with Age UK and other voluntary agencies to develop positive policy solutions.



Take steps to put loneliness in later life on the Government's agenda and hold them to account through debates and Parliamentary Questions.



Make the case for investment in local community resources to support sustainable, long term action to help lonely older people, wherever they may be.



Become an Age Champion and be open to working with Age UK nationally and locally to help end loneliness among older people. Email campaigns@ageuk.org.uk to sign up.

What will you do! Take action to help lonely older people across the UK today.

Age UK

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Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). Registered address: Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to helping more people love later life. ID203654 06/17