Social Isolation and Loneliness

Paul Kaplan, MD, MBA, FAAFP

Senior Medical Director, Florida Blue Medicare

January 2021
Physiological Impacts of Loneliness

- Social isolation increased the risk of premature death for every cause and for every race
- 40% increase in a person’s risk of developing dementia
- Social isolation increases health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Loneliness and social isolation are twice as harmful to physical and mental health as obesity
- Magnitude of risk similar to the magnitude of:
  - Obesity
  - Smoking
  - Physical inactivity
  - Lack of access to care
Health Effects of Social Isolation

- Depression
- Poor sleep quality
- Impaired executive function
- Accelerated cognitive decline
- Poor cardiovascular function
- Impaired sense of community
Social Determinants of Health
Collecting SDoH Data

- The community health specialists (CHS) are in place to support our Medicare Advantage members
- 27 staff members throughout the state
- Prior to COVID-19, the team would perform SDoH assessments in the members’ homes
- During the assessments, CHS ask questions to determine if social isolation and loneliness exist
- Since COVID-19 began, the team transitioned to telephone support
- We also gain insights through our other Medicare Care programs
- Our CHS act as the Care Team’s right arm and the eyes and ears of what’s happening in the members’ homes and communities
- Our CHS connect Medicare Advantage members with community resources at their time of need
During COVID-19, we transitioned to virtual support and services

• Our locally based neighborhood nurses, community specialists and service specialists are committed to providing personalized support to our members.

• We are now providing virtual support and services
Papa Pals

“Assistance from a distance”

Pals provide companionship and assist with tasks:

1. Telehealth tools
2. Virtual house call services
3. Pharmacy benefit services
4. Grocery delivery
Collaboration

Member referrals flow bi-directionally between all care programs including the Florida Blue centers.
Transportation Support

• Non-emergency medical transportation
• Rides to medical appointments
• Rides to grocery store
• Drivers are dispatched for grocery store bookings in the same manner as health care appointments, ensuring the most fragile and elderly members have specially-trained drivers.
• Rides to COVID-19 testing sites
• Rides to COVID-19 vaccination clinics
Vaccine Clinics

- Decentralized vaccination rollout at the county level in Florida
- Uneven access to vaccine due to long waits or technology barriers
- Partnerships with local hospitals to advise members about vaccine availability
Q&A