

# COVID-19 Webinar Series

## Session 9: Social Isolation and Loneliness

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The  
Commonwealth  
Fund

# High Prevalence of Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older Adults



**1 in 4**  
live alone  
in the  
community



**44%**  
of women  
over 75  
live alone



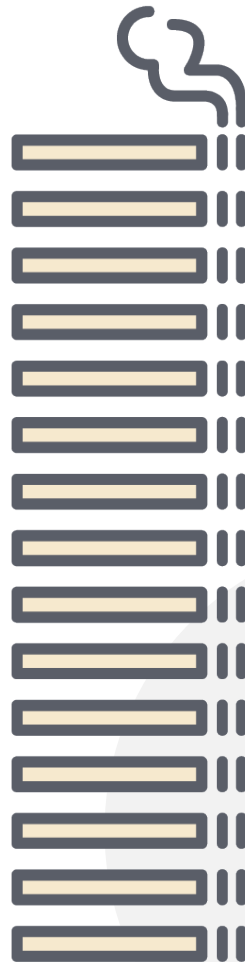
**50%**  
of those with  
lower incomes  
report being  
lonely



**Most**  
experience  
worse  
outcomes  
and mortality

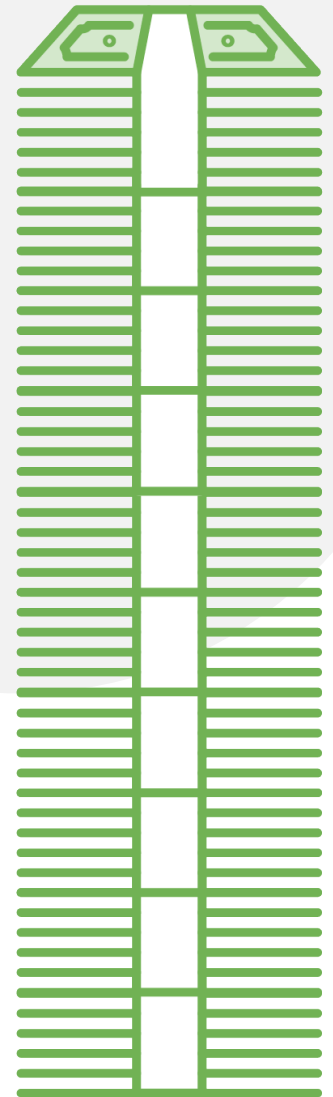
# Costs and Consequences of Social Isolation

The health damage caused by isolation and loneliness is estimated to increase the risk of **early death by 26%**

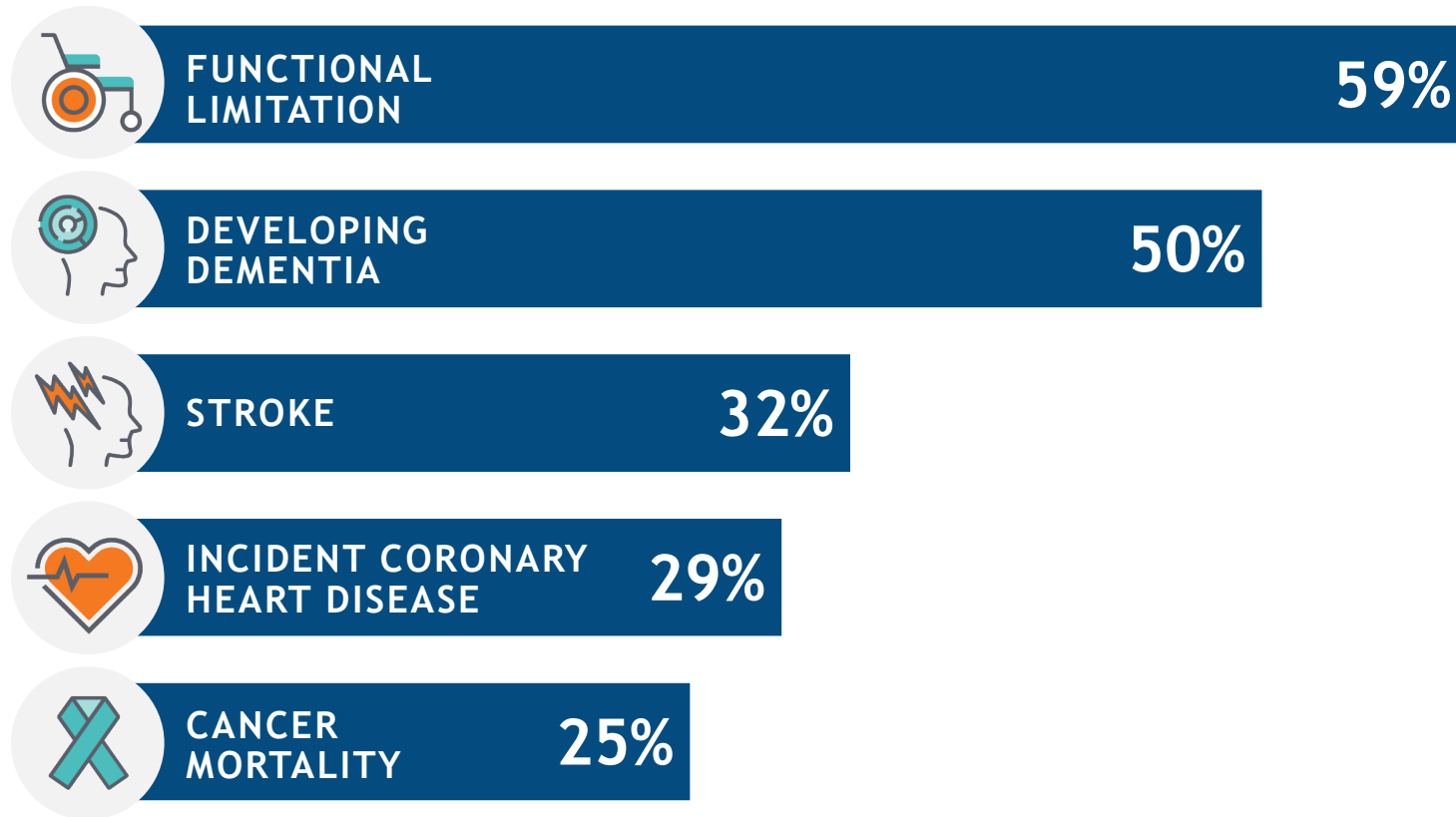


It has been equated to **smoking 15 cigarettes a day**

It is estimated to cumulatively cost Medicare an additional **\$6.7 billion each year**



# Research Shows Significant Increased Risk for Many Chronic and Debilitating Conditions



# Key Opportunities to Address Social Isolation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Screening for isolation and referring to digital and telehealth support
  - Use validated tools to evaluate the impact it could have on the health of members or patients, and refer them as needed to appropriate supports.
- Expanding access to telehealth for mental health care
  - Several promising flexibilities for telehealth broadly but mental health providers struggle to provide services in new environment
- Increasing access to internet and smartphones
  - Nearly 50% of older do not have broadband service or smartphones. Precedent for Medicare and Medicaid to provide to vulnerable populations.