

IBM Study Sheds New Light on Loneliness in the Aging Population

Communities can help rebuild aging adults' social capital with human and community-centric technology

NEW YORK, May 10, 2017 /PRNewswire/ -- Despite the societal impact of a rapidly growing aging population struggling with loneliness, a recent study by IBM (NYSE: [IBM](#)) finds there is also a tremendous opportunity for new and existing organizations to create solutions that improve how older adults engage with the world. Cognitive and cloud technology can be used to aggregate and interpret data, connect organizations, and help prevent loneliness by delivering personalized resources and social support within communities.

By 2050, the [United Nations](#)¹ expects that Japan and Germany will have close to 40 percent or more of their population over the age of 60, and the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom will have approximately 30 percent of the same age group. Loneliness in older adults has been well documented and shown to have health risks equivalent to those of smoking and diabetes, with an overall 26 percent increase in mortality². The impact extends beyond health issues, though; such as governments potentially struggling to manage their overall social care budgets and communities that could lose the contribution of older adults in civic activities.

To better understand the impact of loneliness on the aging population, IBM's Institute for Business Value (IBV) conducted interviews with a global ecosystem of medical professionals, social workers, consumer and electronics manufacturing experts, advocacy leaders, as well as software startups and government officials for its study, "[Loneliness and the aging population - how businesses and governments can address a looming crisis](#)". The report focuses on addressing how organizations can better understand loneliness and aging, and provides recommended actions for to foster greater connection among older adults.

"Loneliness in older adults has been described as 'your world dying before you do'," said DrPaul Tang, Vice President, Chief Health Transformation Officer at IBM Watson Health. "In order to mitigate loneliness, we need to help people rebuild social connections and engagement with their communities. Future solutions will require innovative thinking, disruptive organizational and business models, as well as the support of new technologies to adapt to the needs of a changing society."

By leveraging a cognitive or cloud platform --including natural language, visual recognition, data integration, artificial intelligence and more--any number of entities such as cities, agencies, hospital networks, telecommunication vendors, and others can quickly build cost-effective, community-based solutions that are personalized and adaptable to meet the needs of an aging individual.

Other organizations such as Front Porch are using technologies such as It's Never 2 Late (iN2L) to create a digital community where older individuals can come together online using a wide array of digital tools to support health, wellness, engagement, growth and learning. "Siloed data sets are a constant challenge, pulling them together and making information meaningful, actionable and simple is a tremendous opportunity," said Kari Olson, Chief Innovation and Technology Officer, Front Porch. "Ultimately we are creating a tipping point where we identify the best technologies that can meet the needs of older adults and help individuals live independently and well in the place they choose to call home."

When it comes to implementing services and offerings to help older adults connect with their loved ones, engage with their community, and build new social connections, the IBV recommends the following:

For solution providers:

- Build solutions that are flexible enough to address the different levels of technical fluency within the aging population.
- Leverage the use of cognitive technologies that make it easier to personalize offerings based on an individual's personal

preferences and connect them to relevant content and interests.

- Expand the partner ecosystem and network to include providers that older adults know and trust.

For business organizations, employers, and educational institutions:

- Provide opportunities for flexible work to leverage the knowledge and expertise of the growing aging population.
- Connect individuals to lifelong learning experiences and opportunities, enabling them to be intellectually engaged and to remain vital in the workplace as they age.

For government agencies, healthcare providers and advocacy groups:

- Investigate the use of cognitive systems that could aggregate data, connect organizations and effectively match and manage individual social and medical needs to programs and resources within the community.
- Consider how existing network infrastructures, such as, telecommunications providers, postal systems or emergency responders, could be used to identify and mitigate loneliness in the aging population.

To view the full study, visit: ibm.com/services/us/gbs/thoughtleadership/loneliness

About IBM's Institute for Business Value

For more information about the IBM Institute for Business Value visit www.ibm.com/iiby

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¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. "World Population Aging 2015." 2015. <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>. Accessed on April 12, 2017.

² Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker, Tyler Harris and David Stephenson. "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review." Sage Journals. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 227–237. March 11, 2015. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1745691614568352>. Accessed on April 12, 2017

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