

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)
154TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND -- JANUARY 26, 2024

United States of America, Japan & Morocco

Members, WHO Executive Board and WHO Commission on Social Connection

Sweden, Kenya & Chile

Members, WHO Commission on Social Connection

The Importance of Social Connection to Human Health and Well-being

Agenda Item 21: Well-Being & Health Promotion

- The United States, Japan and Morocco – as WHO Executive Board members and as members of the newly launched WHO Commission on Social Connection – alongside fellow Commission members Sweden, Kenya and Chile, take this opportunity to highlight the importance of social connection to the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies.
- Studies show that social isolation and loneliness are widespread globally, across age groups and regions. These trends may have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend the WHO for contributing to rigorous measurement of these disturbing global rates.
- Loneliness and social isolation have clear and causal links with critical physical and mental health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, and cognitive decline. In fact, they carry a comparable risk of early death as risk factors such as smoking and excessive drinking.
- Social connection can serve as a key to preventing adverse outcomes and promoting well-being and thriving—extending lifespans and enhancing quality of life. Healthy connections and relationships can improve education outcomes for young people; enhance economic opportunities and job performance; contribute to prosperous, safe communities; and foster civic engagement and representative government.
- Over its term, the Commission on Social Connection will work to raise awareness, marshal support, and accelerate the scaling of evidence-based solutions in countries of all income levels, with a focus on the most vulnerable populations.
- For too long, the power of social connection has been overlooked and undervalued in medicine and policy making. The issue has never been discussed at the Executive Board level, despite its scale and severity of impact. As Commissioners, joined by diverse colleagues from governments, civil society and the private sector, we look forward to working with the WHO to draw attention to this global challenge, and to the most effective solutions. This effort will require dedication and collaboration, but it is one that will yield benefits to nations, communities, and individuals across the globe. We invite fellow Executive Board members, and the broader WHO community, to join us in working to realize the Commission’s vision of ‘a world where everyone has quality social connections that benefit their health and wellbeing.’

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