Social Isolation

Section Summary

- Older adults who are socially isolated have a 60% greater risk of developing dementia.
- This may be because socialization is thought to be beneficial to cognition (brain function), and when socialization is lacking neural connections in the brain are weakened.
- In addition, social isolation can cause stress which also impacts brain function.
- Those who are socially isolated are more likely to:
  - be women
  - be aged 75+
  - be racial or ethnic minorities
  - be 2SLGBTQ
  - be single/live alone
  - be lower income
  - have lower education level
  - have sensory problems
  - have physical incapacity
  - have memory problems
  - have transportation barriers
  - live in rural or remote areas

Activities

Activity One: What’s Making You Lonely

- Using a virtual or an IRL whiteboard, share the following list of social determinants of health.
- Ask participants to circle the ones that may contribute to social isolation and describe how they believe they are connected.
- This is a great exercise to begin to identify and think about potential risk factors of social isolation in our own lives or in the lives of others.
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Activity Two: Shared Interests

- Pair participants off into two’s and challenge them to find at least 3 things they have in common with one another.
  - These could be hobbies they share, books or movies they both like or values they both hold.
- This exercise highlights the importance of making a continual effort to upkeep and create new social connections as we age.

Discussion Questions

*Consider running this as a writing exercise as people may not feel comfortable discussing this topic out loud.*

- Can you recall a time when you felt isolated? If so, do you remember affecting you physically?
- What does the word “isolation” mean to you?