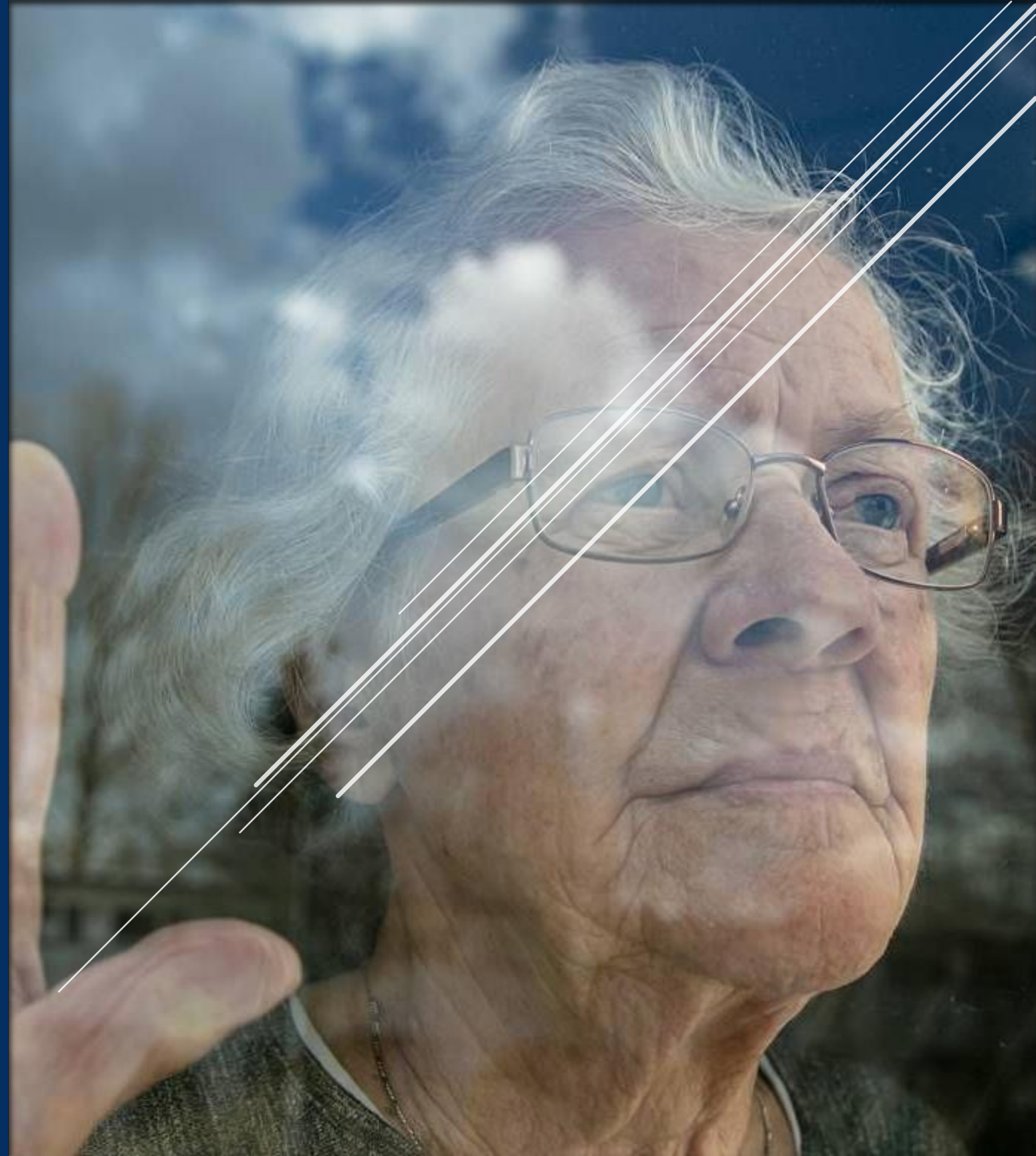


SOCIAL ISOLATION AND OLDER ADULTS: COST TO MEDICARE AND IMPACTS OF COVID-19

**Montgomery County
Commission on Aging
Public Forum
May 18, 2021**

Lynda Flowers, JD, MSN, RN



**Research Study:
The High Cost of Social Isolation to Medicare**

STUDY WAS A TEAM EFFORT

AARP Public Policy Institute

- Lynda Flowers
- Claire Noel-Miller
- Ari Houser

Stanford University

- Jonathan Shaw
- Jay Bhattacharya
- Lena Schoemaker
- Monica Farid (now at Harvard)

Funding Support

- AARP Public Policy Institute
- National Institute on Aging



Health Effects of Social Isolation

INCREASED RISK FOR:

PREMATURE MORTALITY

MORBIDITIES LIKE ...

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND STROKE

DEMENTIA AND COGNITIVE DECLINE

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIORS

SUICIDAL IDEATION AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS

ISOLATION KILLS, BUT DOES IT COST?

Research Question:

The health consequences of social isolation among older adults are well known, but is social isolation costly for Medicare?



TO LEARN THE ANSWER, WE....

- Linked nationally representative data from the **Health and Retirement Study** (to derive social isolation) to **Medicare claims data** (to show actual spending)
- We followed spending over an average of **five years**.



WE ALSO.....

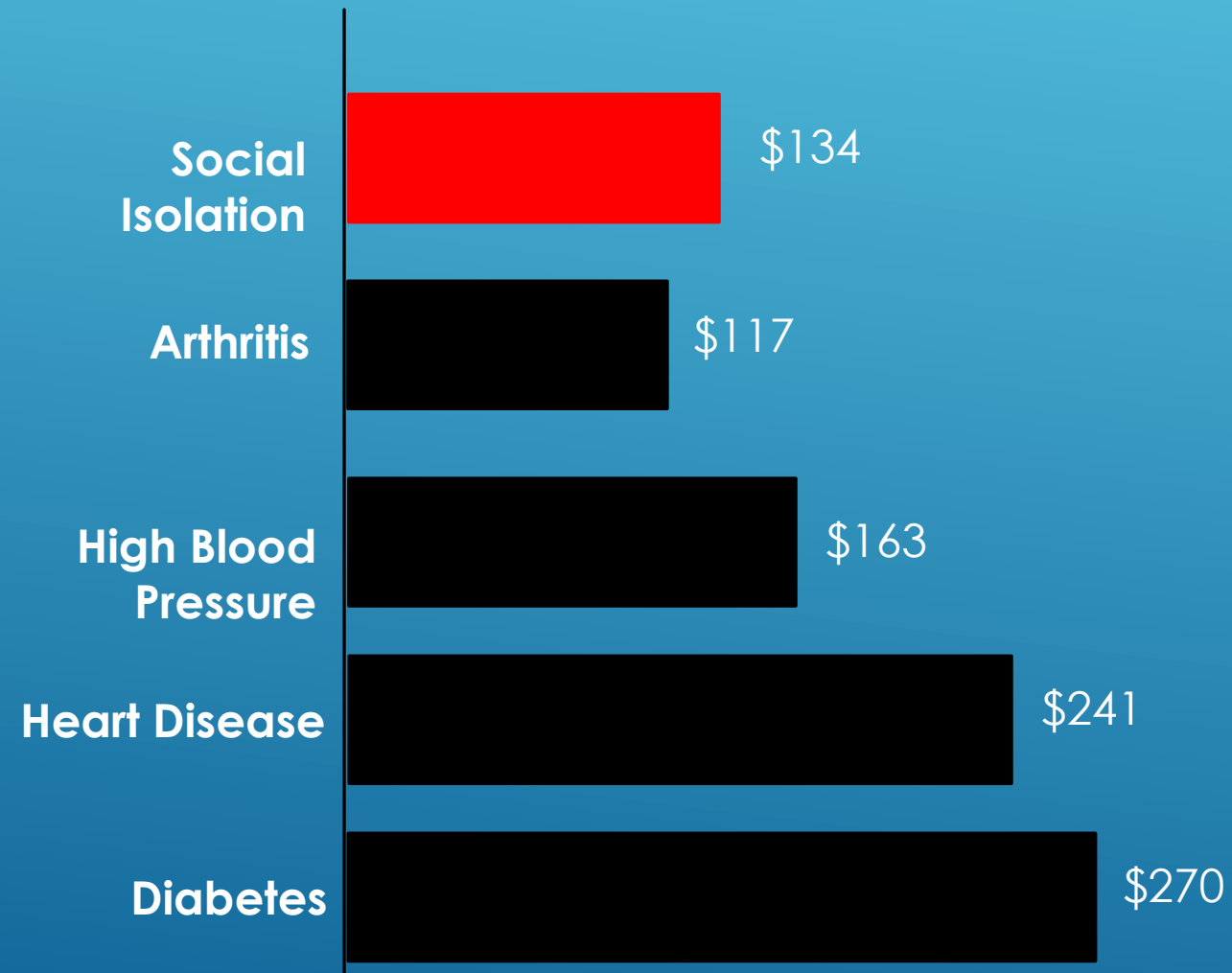


Controlled for factors known to influence Medicare spending to isolate the effects of isolation:

- demographics
- health and functional status
- socio-economic status
- region
- living arrangement
- supplemental coverage

WHAT WE FOUND...

Additional Monthly Medicare Cost by Selected Conditions



\$6.7 Billion

each year in
additional federal
spending

\$1,608
more per
person per
year

ACCOUNTING FOR THE INCREASED COST

Socially isolated older adults were:

- More likely to use skilled nursing facility care and when they did, they cost Medicare more.
- Not more likely to use more inpatient hospital care, but when they did, they cost Medicare more.



COSTS COULD BE EVEN HIGHER

Total costs to Medicare could be higher, if we had included:

- Medicare prescription drug spending (Part D)
- Spending on younger Medicare beneficiaries with disabilities
- Spending on Medicare beneficiaries enrolled Medicare Advantage private plans
- Isolation associated with current pandemic



WHO IS ISOLATED?

Socially isolated older adults were more likely to be:

- men
- depressed
- dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid
- experiencing difficulties performing activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, etc.)



WHO'S ISOLATED? IT'S COUNTERINTUITIVE!

You might think that people who **live alone** or **are single** are more likely to be the socially isolated.

Our findings did not bear this out.

That's why its important to **not exclude** certain populations from screening.



POLICY SOLUTIONS

- Develop a valid and reliable tool to screen for isolation
- Develop and fund partnerships to identify evidence-based interventions
- Require screenings in the Medicare Program (Welcome to Medicare and Annual Wellness Visits)
- Broaden the conversation: Engage the public health community



Isolation among Older Adults Has Increased During The Pandemic

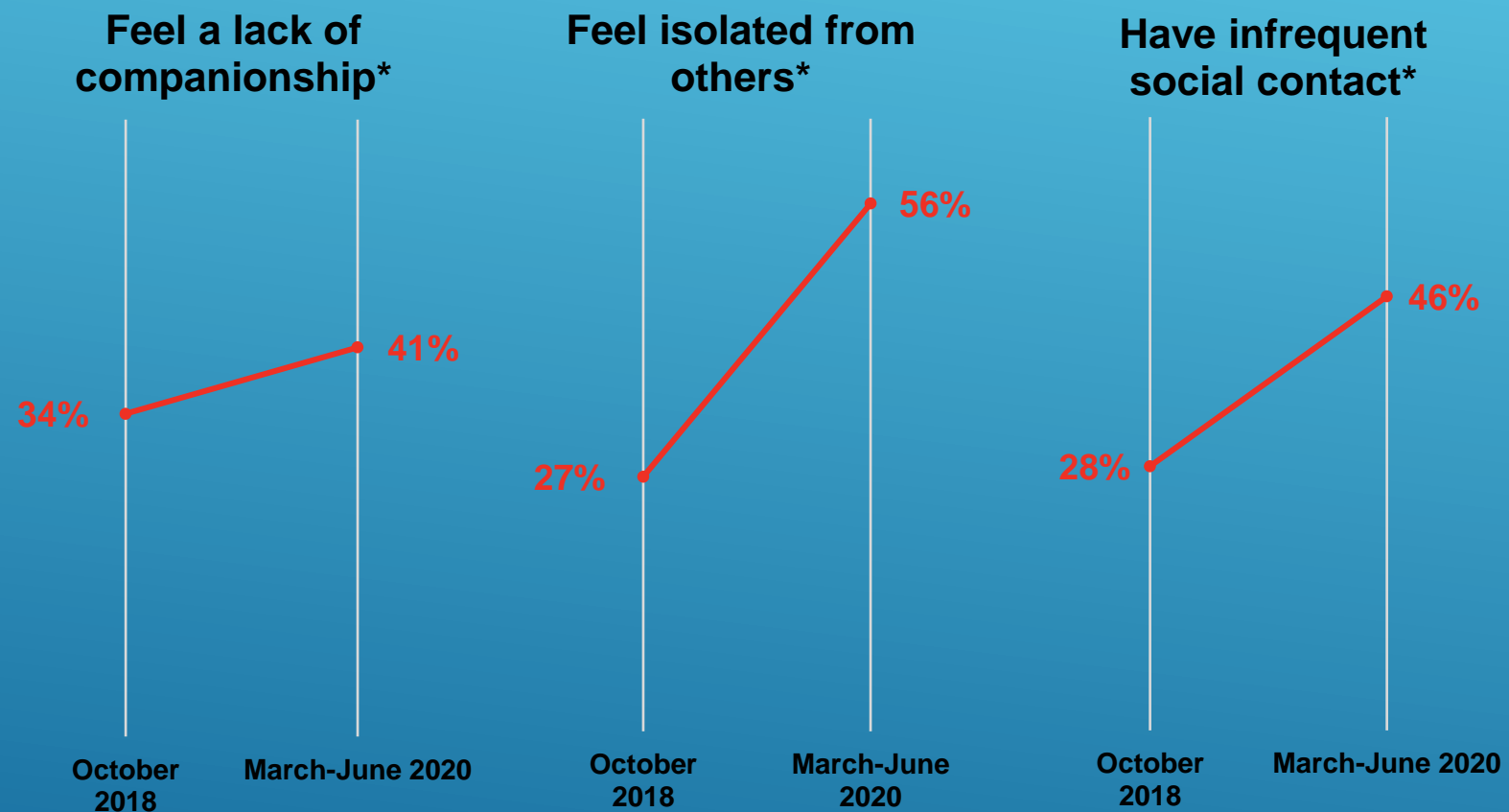
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SOCIAL DISTANCING MEANT NO MORE ...

- Congregate Meals
- Group Exercise Classes
- Adult Day
- In-person Doctor Visits
- Nursing Home Visitors
- Shopping Trips
- Volunteer Activities
- Visits with Grandchildren



THE PANDEMIC – LONELINESS AND SOCIAL CONTACT



JAN 2021
73%
feel socially isolated from others*



SOURCE: Malani, Preeti, Jeffrey Kullgren, Erica Solway, et al. *National Poll on Healthy Aging*, Ann Arbor, MI: The Regents of the University of Michigan, September 2020.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/162549>

*SOURCE: Keenan, Teresa A., Cheryl Lampkin, and Gerard Rainville. *Views on Vaccines and More – Mid-COVID*, Washington, DC: AARP Research, Forthcoming

THE PANDEMIC – ISOLATION

16%

Or nearly 1 in 5 adults ages 50 and older are sheltering in place alone.

This incidence increases with age (11% of 50-59, 17% of 60-69, 22% of 70+)**



33%

have gone a month or longer without interacting with anyone outside of their household or workplace*

17%

of adults 50 and older are going at least a day without talking to someone.

This is more severe for those sheltering alone, with

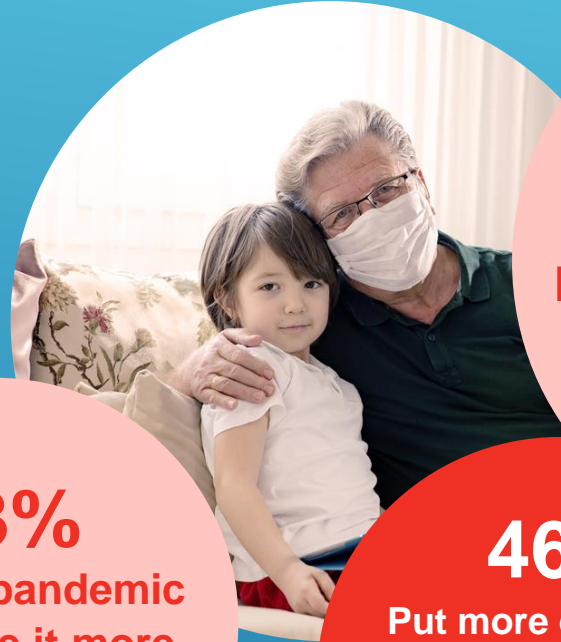
39%

going at least a day without speaking to another person.**

*SOURCE: AARP Foundation and United Health Foundation. *The Pandemic Effect: A Social Isolation Report*, Washington, DC: AARP Foundation, September 2020.

**SOURCE: Keenan, Teresa A., G. Chuck Rainville, and Jeffrey Love. *AARP 50+ Coronavirus Tracker Wave 5*. Washington, DC: AARP Research, June 2020. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00385.009>

THE PANDEMIC – CONNECTIONS



73%

Feel the pandemic has made it more difficult to connect with friends*

44%

Feel less connected to friends**

46%

Put more effort into trying to keep in touch with people at the beginning of the pandemic*

56%

With grandchildren see their grandchildren less**

40%

With grandchildren feel less connected to them**

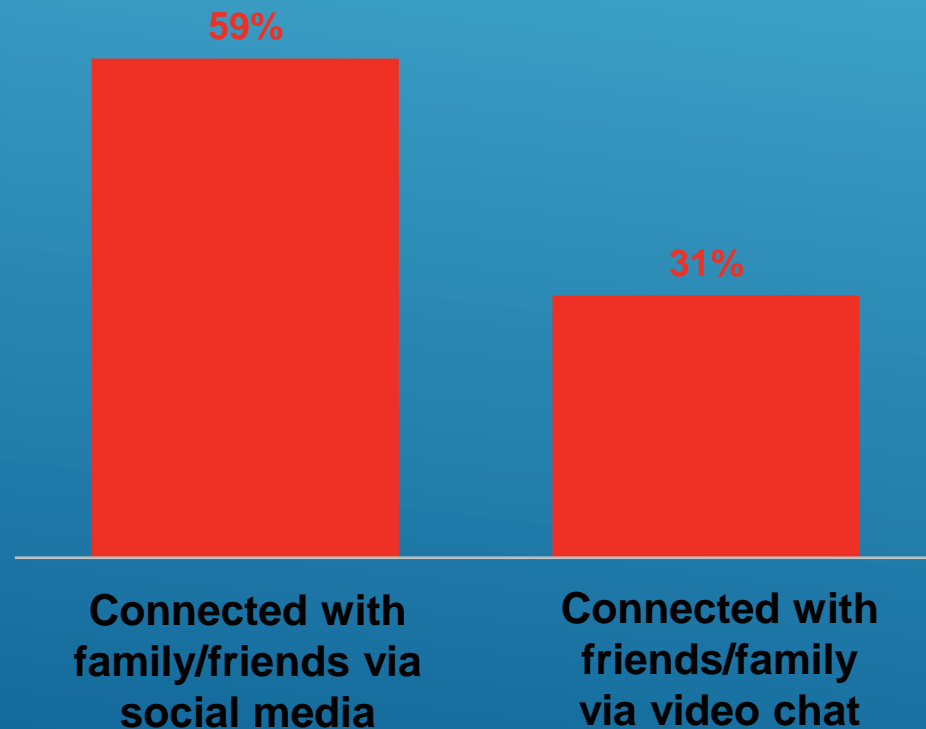
*SOURCE: AARP Foundation and United Health Foundation. *The Pandemic Effect: A Social Isolation Report*, Washington, DC: AARP Foundation, September 2020.

**SOURCE: Keenan, Teresa A., G. Chuck Rainville, and Jeffrey Love. *AARP 50+ Coronavirus Tracker Wave 5*. Washington, DC: AARP Research, June 2020. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00385.009>

THE PANDEMIC – ACTIVITIES

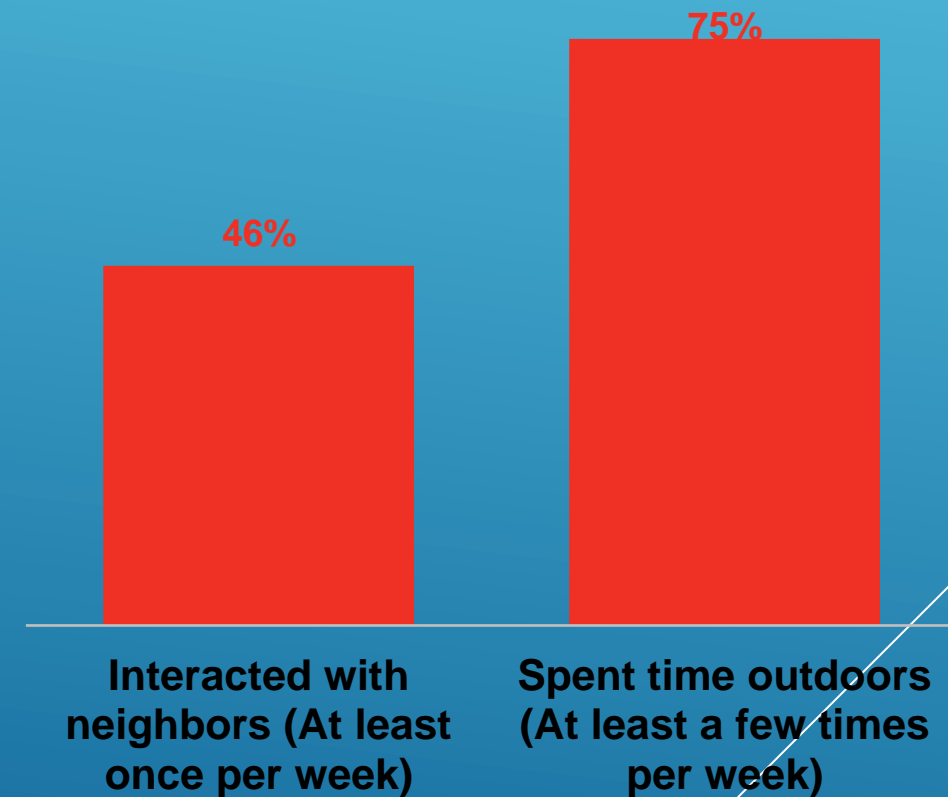
Activities

Done at Least Once Per Week
March-June 2020

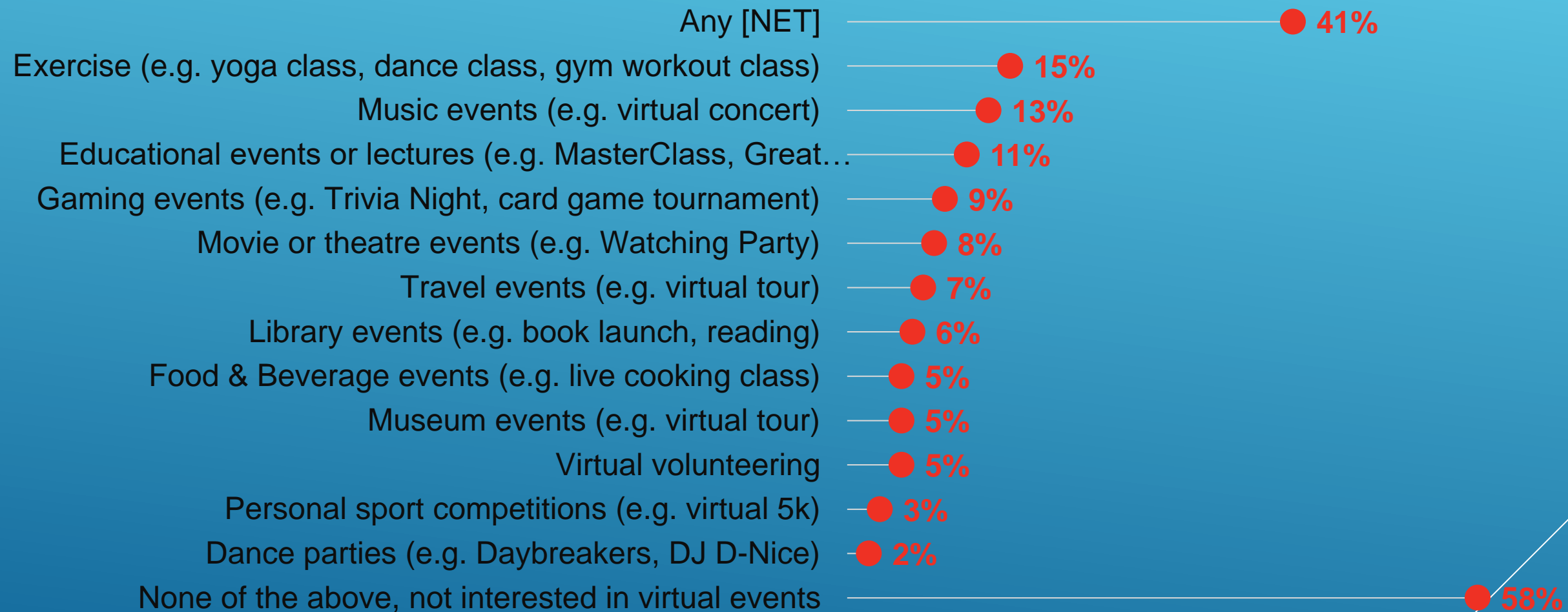


Activities

Done at Least Weekly or a Few
Times Per Week
March-June 2020

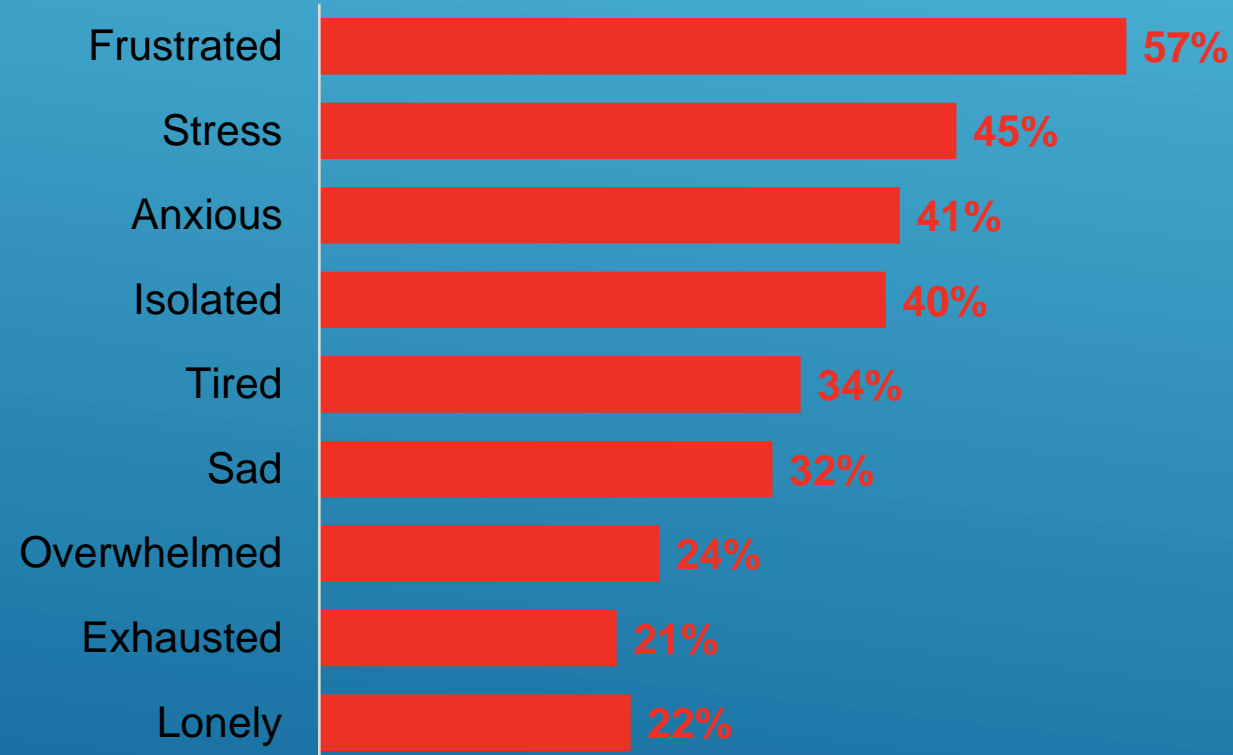


THE PANDEMIC – VIRTUAL EVENTS



THE PANDEMIC – CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ISOLATION

Emotions

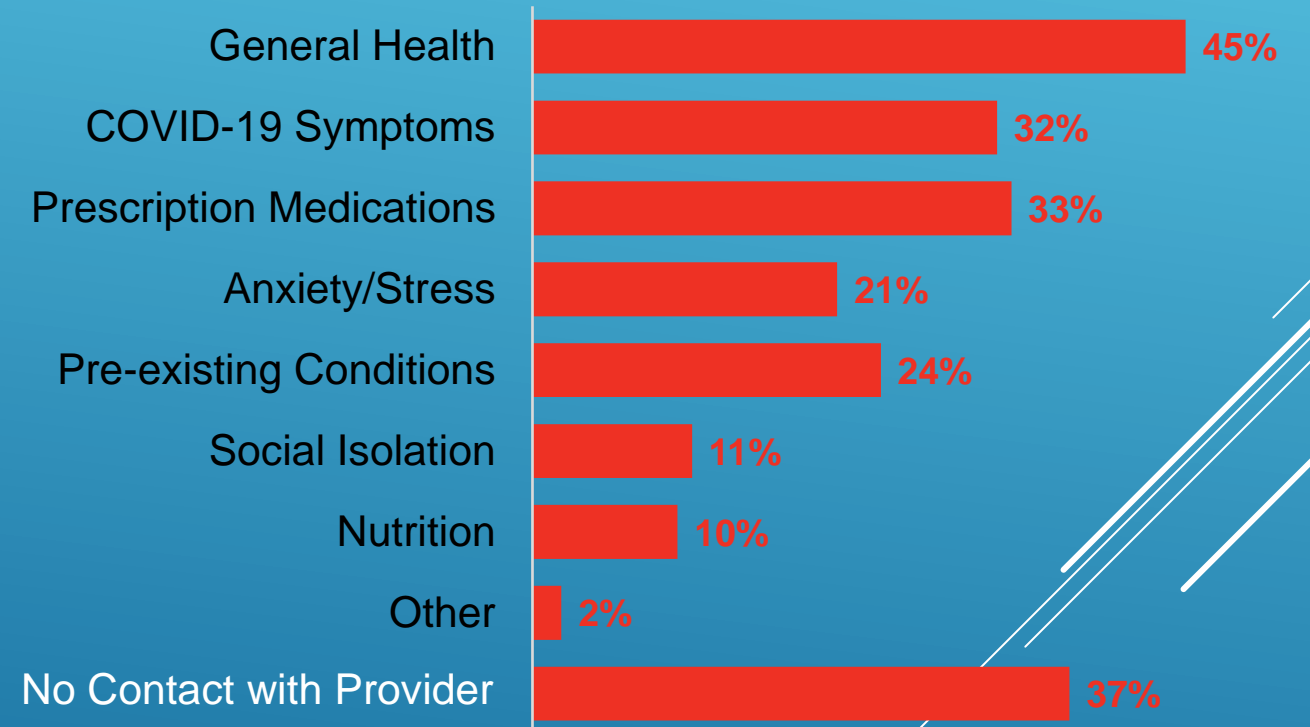


SOURCE: AARP Foundation and United Health Foundation. *The Pandemic Effect: A Social Isolation Report*, Washington, DC: AARP Foundation, September 2020.

THE PANDEMIC – CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ISOLATION



Topics Healthcare Professionals Have Asked About Since Pandemic Began



SOURCE: AARP Foundation and United Health Foundation. *The Pandemic Effect: A Social Isolation Report*, Washington, DC: AARP Foundation, September 2020.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Engage health care professionals
- Increase consumer awareness
- Enhance education and training
- Coordinate solutions
- Conduct more research



AARP AND AARP FOUNDATION RESOURCES



Connect2Affect

<https://connect2affect.org/>

At [Connect2Affect.org](https://connect2affect.org/), you can find tips and resources for maintaining social connections, including a set of articles specific to COVID-19. Our isolation assessment can help you find out how connected you are and filling out our five-question survey will take you to a list of local community assistance programs.



Community Connections

<https://aarpcommunityconnections.org/>

AARP Community Connections helps people find or start a mutual aid group so they can help the people in their community most affected by the Coronavirus.

Thank you!

Lynda Flowers, JD, MSN, RN

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