January 15, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
c/o Ms. Chiquita Brooks-LaSure
Team Lead
HHS Agency Review Team
Biden-Harris Transition
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C., 20230

RE: Policy Recommendations to Address the Crisis of Social Isolation and Loneliness in the U.S. in the First One Hundred Days of the Biden Administration

Dear President-elect Biden:

On behalf of the Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness, I want to congratulate you and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris on your election as the 46th President of the United States and 49th Vice President of the United States, respectively. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact every part of society, but we are confident that you and your Administration are well-positioned to guide the country toward recovery through your extraordinary leadership and sound policy. We write to you today to urge you to adopt a series of policies and recommendations in the first one hundred days of your Administration to increase public awareness of and develop a coordinated federal-state approach to addressing social isolation and loneliness and its effect on health and wellbeing.

The Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness brings together a diverse set of national organizations including, but not limited to, consumer groups, community-based organizations, technology innovators, health and mental health care providers, patient advocates, and health insurers to develop and advocate for federal policy solutions to address social isolation and loneliness in the United States. In response to COVID-19, the Coalition and its members have been leaders in providing evidence-based resources that assist individuals experiencing social isolation and loneliness.

A growing body of evidence indicates that anywhere from 25 to 45 percent of the total U.S. population experienced social isolation and/or loneliness prior to the current public health emergency. In addition, the number of people experiencing negative mental health effects as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is substantial. A Kaiser Family Foundation poll found that nearly half (45 percent) of adults in the United States reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted due to worries and stress over the virus.

Furthermore, current physical distancing protocols, which exacerbate social isolation and loneliness, are having a similar negative impact on Americans’ mental health. The same Kaiser Family Foundation study found that “significantly higher shares of people who were sheltering in place (47 percent) reported negative mental health effects resulting from worry or stress related to coronavirus than among those not sheltering in place (37 percent).”⁴ To this end, we strongly urge you to prioritize the recommendations provided herein to raise public awareness at a national level regarding social isolation and loneliness and its effect on health and wellbeing.

The Coalition’s consensus-based policy agenda that focuses on investing in public awareness, social and health services, technology, and research to combat the adverse health effects of social isolation and loneliness and advance social connectedness for all Americans.⁶ We appreciate your leadership in proposing a $4 billion in appropriations for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as part of your recent COVID-19 aid package. In addition, we urge you to:

- Develop a national strategy to combat social isolation and loneliness for all Americans;
- Create an Inter-Departmental and Agency National Coordinator of Social Isolation and Loneliness to lead and coordinate administrative efforts, identify and leverage current federal and state resources, and make recommendations to cabinet officials and the White House aimed to reduce stigma and encourage social connection; and,
- Provide funding for an HHS-led national public education campaign to raise the visibility of the crisis of social isolation and loneliness and develop provider-focused education initiatives.

More information about our comprehensive policy agenda and priorities can be found at our website: https://www.endsocialisolation.org/policy-priorities.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to addressing the crisis that COVID-19 presents to all Americans. We stand prepared to work with you and your Administration to ensure the individuals we serve receive the best support possible. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time with questions or for further information at (202) 420-8505 or andrew@healthsperien.com.

Sincerely,

Andrew MacPherson
Co-Director, Coalition to End Social Isolation & Loneliness

⁶ The Coalition to End Social Isolation and Loneliness works in closely with the Foundation for Social Connection, a 501(c)3 non-profit dedicated to the development and translation of scientific research and interventions that address social disconnection. The content of this letter does not represent the direct views of the Foundation.