

## EPIDEMIC OVER? LONELINESS AMONG OLDER ALBERTANS

Loneliness among older Albertans has improved since the pandemic in 2022, but many still lack connection.

It is commonly assumed Canada's older adults are caught up in an epidemic of loneliness, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. But what does that mean in practical terms, and what might policymakers do about it?

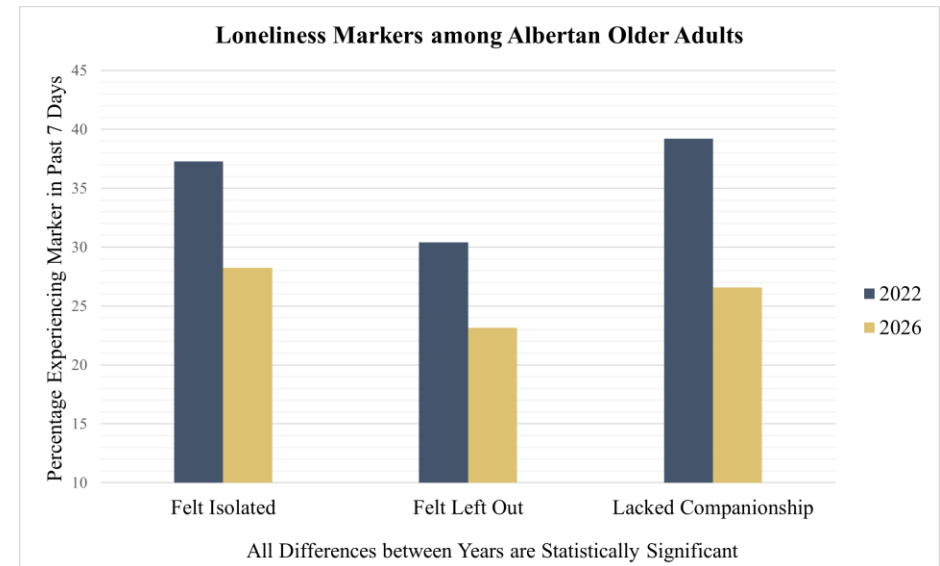
Our team set out to get a better idea of the extent of the epidemic and where policy attention might best be focused. Loneliness is often thought of by researchers as having three key dimensions: feelings of isolation, a sense of being 'left out,' and a lack of companionship.

Working with colleagues at the Angus Reid Group, [we surveyed older adult Albertans](#) (aged 65-85) in 2022 and again in 2026, asking them about their experiences of the three dimensions of loneliness. Our sample size in 2022 was 355, and in 2026 was 715.

Figure 1 shows that older adults in 2022 were experiencing substantial levels of isolation, feeling left out, and lack of companionship. The good news is that each of these markers are better in 2026.

However, even if loneliness is no longer at such high levels, it is still remarkably widespread. In January of this year, nearly three in ten older Albertans reported feeling isolated during the previous week, and roughly one in four reported feeling left out or lacking companionship.

This uneven recovery across the dimensions of loneliness offers an important insight. Improvements in companionship suggest that social contact became easier to restore once COVID-19 restrictions eased. However, smaller declines in feeling isolated and feeling left out suggest that deeper experiences of loneliness—such as feeling



Source: Data collected from the Finances, Aging, and Daily Experiences Study, conducted in cooperation with the Angus Reid Group.

disconnected or excluded—are more resistant to change. Seeing people again does not automatically restore a sense of belonging.

Although opportunities for companionship and social interaction have clearly improved since the end of the pandemic, loneliness was not simply a temporary response to COVID's disruptions. Instead, loneliness is an ongoing experience for a substantial number of Alberta's older adults.

With this in mind, policymakers may want to consider supports to strengthen meaningful social connections. Investments in community programs, accessible transportation, and welcoming public spaces may help sustain recent gains while addressing the persistent loneliness that continues to affect so many of the province's older adults.