

**“Loneliness is a health issue that’s as damaging as smoking 15 cigarettes a day” says  
ALONE**

**8<sup>th</sup> February 2015** ALONE are highlighting the health effects of loneliness during their 2015 Friendship week (9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> February). ALONE believe that combating loneliness should be viewed as a preventative health measure by the Department of Health.

In Ireland, almost 1 in 3 older people live on their own (29%), and 7-9% of older people suffer from chronic loneliness. In recent years, a wide range of studies have shown that isolation and loneliness affect the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of an individual. Loneliness is proven to be as damaging to your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. (Sources Below)

Seán Moynihan, CEO of ALONE commented, “It is vitally important that as we age we maintain strong links with our local community. Older people need good services of a consistent quality, to ensure that they don’t slip through the cracks and become isolated from other people”.

One of ALONE’s key activities throughout the year is the management of their Befriending Service whereby volunteers are matched with a vulnerable older person whom they then visit every week. All volunteers are trained and Garda vetted and supported by ALONE staff to ensure quality and consistency of service. The Befriending Service is a model of service that works because it is cost effective, and represents the community looking after its own.

Moynihan continued, “There is a difference between befriending and ‘being friendly’, while it’s wonderful to say hello to your older neighbour when you see them on the street, that small interaction alone won’t stave off loneliness. Through the ALONE Befriending Service older people form supportive relationships with a volunteer over the course of months or years, they can truly rely on the weekly visit for a proper social outlet”.

ALONE believe that loneliness should be treated as a serious health risk, as it puts you at higher risk of dementia, cardiovascular disease and decreased immune system responsivity. Older people are the most at-risk demographic for loneliness due to loss of partners and friends which becomes more common as people age. According to TILDA depression is projected to be the second leading cause of disability worldwide by 2020. ALONE are currently working with other befriending groups to ensure consistency and quality across the whole country to ensure no older person is left isolated and lonely.

For those who have concerns about their own wellbeing, or the wellbeing of a vulnerable older person in the community, ALONE can be contacted on (01) 679 1032. To make a donation and help aid ALONE’s work visit [www.alone.ie](http://www.alone.ie)