## Inclusion of Older Adults

Social isolation and loneliness are now recognized to seriously impact an older adult's physical, and mental health and longevity (WHO, 2023). In many countries, 1 in 3 older people are lonely (WHO, 2021). As such, they are at risk of being excluded from, rather than being included, in society.

Inclusion has many meanings, all pertaining to being embraced as part of a group or structure. Certain populations, those who are marginalized within a society, often encounter many barriers that prevent inclusion. Such barriers are often based on stereotypes and biases that consider the excluded group as not worthy of being included. Consequently, opportunities and resources available to those "included" are frequently not available to those excluded.

Ageism, prejudice against older people, contributes to this exclusion. Among the most harmful stereotypes is the belief that older people cannot learn and even do not want to learn; are stubborn; have diminished physical and mental abilities; and do not want to participate in society. Such stereotypes contribute to an absence of policies, programs, and services that can foster and enable inclusion.

### Technology

Technology and the ability to connect with others through computers is fundamental to inclusion. Technologies, such as cell phones and video conferencing are available and increasingly used by older people to maintain contact with formal and informal connections. Use of these convenient technologies can help prevent isolation and loneliness. The importance of these connections was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person contacts were sharply curtailed. As an example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, an in-person program focused on empowering grandparent caregivers was changed to an online program. These low

income participants, received minimal training in using the computer, were highly motivated to use the technology, and found the format both convenient and stimulating. The technology enabled them to have contact with both professionals and friends. During a difficult period, the computer became a primary source for networking and inclusion.

**Policy**

Research evidence shows that isolation can be expensive in terms of the costs of physical and mental illness perhaps a motivating factor in the creation of policy that encourages connectivity. In an attempt to address this issue the Affordable Connectivity Program offers discounts to low-income older people whose income is 200% or less than the poverty guidelines, to receive internet and devices. However, the programs are limited and are not available throughout the country. The 21$^{st}$ Century Assistive Technology Act expands access to affordable assistive technology for seniors and those with disabilities with increased funding for rural areas and technical assistance for users.

**Summary**

Social inclusion for older adults is essential for their well-being and even longevity. Technology can be an important resource, particularly research shows that with training, older people are eager to use computers that can be vital for connections. A convention supporting inclusion and policies that foster participation is critical to improving health and well-being by reducing loneliness and isolation while bolstering the contributions of older people.