

# COVID-19 and Older Adults Facing Health Risks Social Isolation and Economic Strain

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## Description

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the landscape of public health, economy and social interactions globally. Among the hardest-hit populations are older adults, who have experienced extreme challenges due to their age and the associated comorbidities that increase their vulnerability to severe illness. This article describes the multifaceted impacts of the pandemic on older adults, focusing on physical health, mental well-being, social isolation, economic challenges and the implications for future healthcare policies.

### Physical health impacts

The most immediate impact of the pandemic on older adults was a heightened risk of severe illness from COVID-19. According to various studies, older individuals account for a significant proportion of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths. This disproportionate impact has necessitated a re-evaluation of healthcare resources dedicated to this demographic.

In addition to the direct effects of the virus, the pandemic has disrupted routine healthcare services. Many older adults faced barriers to accessing regular check-ups, chronic disease management and preventive services. Telehealth emerged as a vital tool to bridge this gap however, disparities in access to technology and digital literacy among older adults hindered its effectiveness. Consequently, conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease may have worsened due to delayed interventions, resulting in an increased burden of morbidity and mortality among this population. The pandemic has also exacerbated mental health issues in older adults. Social isolation became a prevalent concern as lockdowns and social distancing measures were implemented. Many older individuals live alone or in care facilities and the restrictions on visitors led to feelings of loneliness and despair.

Research has indicated a significant increase in anxiety and depression rates among older adults during the pandemic. The uncertainty surrounding the virus, fears of contracting it and the loss of social interactions contributed to heightened psychological distress. Moreover, the interruption of regular activities and routines, including exercise and hobbies, has taken a toll on their overall mental well-being. Social connections are important for maintaining the quality of life in older adults.

The pandemic has forced many into prolonged isolation, leading to detrimental effects on their social networks. Traditional forms of engagement, such as community gatherings, church services and family visits, were significantly curtailed, leaving many older adults with limited method for social interaction. Organizations and community groups have made commendable efforts to combat this isolation through virtual programs and outreach initiatives. However, the digital divide remains a significant barrier. Older adults who are not technologically savvy or lack access to the internet have been left behind, further exacerbating their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The pandemic has had extreme economic implications, particularly for older adults. Many rely on fixed incomes from pensions or social security and the economic downturn caused by the pandemic has increased financial stress for this demographic. Older workers faced unique challenges in the job market, with many being laid off or forced into early retirement due to health concerns or company downsizing. Moreover, the costs associated with healthcare, especially related to COVID-19 treatment and long-term care, have placed additional financial burdens on older adults and their families. The economic repercussions of the pandemic have highlighted the need for more robust support systems, including policies that ensure economic stability and access to healthcare for older adults.

### Healthcare policies

The challenges faced by older adults during the pandemic underscore the necessity for a comprehensive reevaluation of healthcare policies aimed at this population. As we move forward, it is important to integrate lessons learned from the pandemic into future healthcare planning. Expanding access to telehealth is essential to ensure that older adults can receive timely medical attention and mental health support. This requires addressing the technological barriers that many face, including improving internet access and providing training on how to use digital platforms. Developing and strengthening community programs aimed at combating loneliness and isolation among older adults will be critical. This includes promoting intergenerational activities and improving support services that facilitate social connections.

There is a pressing need for policies that protect older adults economically, particularly during public health crises. This could

involve improved unemployment benefits, protection from predatory financial practices and increased support for those in long-term care facilities. The pandemic has illuminated the importance of preventive healthcare services. Future policies should prioritize access to vaccinations, routine screenings and health education programs specifically customized for older adults. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the vulnerabilities and resilience of older adults. As we navigate the

aftermath of this global crisis, it is imperative to address the unique challenges faced by this demographic. By implementing policies that prioritize their health, well-being and social connectivity, we can ensure that older adults are not only protected in future health crises but are also empowered to lead fulfilling lives. The lessons learned from the pandemic must inform a more compassionate and comprehensive approach to caring for our aging population.