



Anthem's *Member Connect* program offers seniors the healing power of human connection – helping individuals make social connections and access community resources to help address and mitigate the factors contributing to loneliness and social isolation, and subsequently improve their health.

BLUE MEDICARE SPOTLIGHT:

ANTHEM ADDRESSES SENIOR LONELINESS THROUGH THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTION

THE CHALLENGE

Loneliness and social isolation, particularly for older adults, create serious health risks. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, social isolation significantly increases the risk of premature death, dementia, heart disease, stroke, and mental illness.¹ Anthem seeks to address social isolation and loneliness through the power of human connection.



Anthem: Anthem, Inc. is an innovation leader dedicated to improving health and serves affiliated health plan members in states including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Through its affiliated health plans, Anthem serves
**MORE THAN 43 MILLION PEOPLE
NATIONWIDE AND OVER 1.5 MILLION
MEDICARE ADVANTAGE (MA) MEMBERS**

**FOR MORE THAN 75 YEARS,
ANTHEM HAS WORKED TO ENHANCE
THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

of the people and communities it serves.
Learn more [here](#).

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>;

THE INNOVATION

ADDRESSING LONELINESS THROUGH THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTION

In 2017, the Anthem health plans launched a program aimed at improving health for its Medicare Advantage (MA) members through human connections. Under this program, members are identified at risk for senior loneliness by looking at factors such as having little to no social support system and/or complex health and/or psychosocial conditions, such as congestive heart failure, cancer or depression.

These members receive routine phone calls from Anthem's Social Care Partners – community health workers with backgrounds in social work, counseling and community resources. The Social Care Partners perform assessments and screen for barriers to connectivity (such as lack of transportation). The Social Care Partner continues to work with the member to address more complex needs, calls at least once a week, and designs a personalized plan to address barriers to social activity.

In addition to connecting members at risk for senior loneliness with a Social Care Partner, Anthem offers a Phone Pal program in which Anthem's employee volunteers make weekly calls to the members who have been assessed and determined to be low-to-medium risk for loneliness. Phone Pal employee volunteers are matched with members based on factors such as geography and shared interests. The Phone Pals and members connect at least once a week on 15- to 30-minute phone calls. Members who are high-risk for loneliness are not paired with a Phone Pal but, instead, continue working with Social Care Partner.

The Member Connect program doesn't just help members. It gives Phone Pals an opportunity to directly help members and is another way Anthem associates are supporting our mission to improve lives and communities. Phone Pals have shared that it is rewarding to just spend a few minutes talking to their pal, who doesn't normally have anyone to talk to. Some Phone Pals said they traded gardening tips, swapped recipes, and exchanged other information once they identified common interests with their pals.

Members are continually referred to the program by case managers and other Anthem associates as well as home health agency partners who believe a member may be dealing with loneliness. Individuals who participate in the program tend to be individuals who live alone, are socially isolated, or self-report feelings of loneliness.

In addition to connecting members with Social Care Partners and Phone Pals, Member Connect also encourages members to participate in other social activities, from joining a virtual group on social media to attending SilverSneakers, a fitness program tailored to the needs of older adults. Social Care Partners work to find activities that are a good match for each member's interests and passions.

Below are highlights from a survey of 95 members in the program from May through June 2020²:

- **Social Connections:** 78% of members agreed/strongly agreed that they have had more meaningful connections with people since joining the program.
- **Activities** – 79% of members agreed/strongly agreed that they have had an increase in activities that bring them joy or a sense of purpose since joining the program.

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² <https://generations.asaging.org/healthcare-should-reduce-loneliness-and-isolation>

- **Health care Engagement** – 75% of members reported that they have changed how they take care of themselves since joining the program. The top three activities identified are: increase in exercise, healthier eating habits, and increase in medication adherence.
- **Happiness** – 66% of members reported that they are happy/very happy when taking all life aspects into account over the past seven days.

COVID-19 UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN CONNECTION

During the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Anthem experienced a nine-fold increase in participation in the program because members were feeling more isolated and were having trouble getting access to food due to local stay-at-home orders and social distancing guidelines. Anthem quickly adapted the Member Connect program to create new ways for individuals to connect with each other through online trivia games and other electronic modes of engaging, and connect members lacking access to food and/or medications to these necessities. Member Connect organized virtual groups and found that this platform could be a powerful way to stay connected during the pandemic. Post-pandemic, these virtual options may continue to be good ways for people to stay connected, especially those who have limited access to transportation or have challenges with mobility.

These changes to the Member Connect program were part of Anthem, Inc.'s overall effort to help health plan members impacted by the pandemic, which included making outbound calls to individuals at high risk for COVID-19 complications to see if they needed access to food and other services to improve their health and wellbeing.

NEXT STEPS – EXPANDING THE REACH

Initially targeted for members who saw providers in the CareMore network, Anthem expanded the program in 2018 to include any member of its affiliated Medicare Advantage plans who are at risk for loneliness. Now, Anthem is looking for more ways to expand the program in order to reach an even broader universe of members, including, potentially, Medicaid beneficiaries. Anthem continues to train new groups of Phone Pals to participate in the program and continues to refine and enhance the program to the benefit of our members – and our associates.