

Making Loneliness a Major National Cause

and create a Ministry dedicated to Loneliness, Fraternity, Friendship and Sustainable Love



Open Letter to the French Government

Paris, July 11, 2024

Mr. President of the Republic,
Mr. Prime Minister,
Madam Minister of Labor, Health and Solidarity,

We, the undersigned representatives of **Action Solitude France**, supported by the Fortuite Foundation, The Alliance pour l'Amour Durable, Cupdom and Agoras, wish to draw your attention to a crucial and growing problem affecting our society: **Loneliness**.

Loneliness is neither a left-wing nor a right-wing issue. It affects us all, directly or indirectly, from childhood bullying to the all-too-often neglected elderly. Nearly **one elector in two suffers from it**, and more particularly two-thirds of our young adults, the generation most affected. In fact, a study by the Fondation de France and CRÉDOC shows that between 2010 and 2020, **chronic relational isolation among 18–29-year-olds increased by over 600%**.

And the pace is accelerating!

That is why we're urgently calling for loneliness to be declared a major national cause.

Loneliness is just as harmful as other major health risks. Indirectly, it kills almost as many people as cancer does, which, if international ratios are applied, means a potential death toll of over 100,000 French people every year.

This day, July 11, 2024, is symbolic because it coincides with Cheer Up the Lonely Day in the USA and comes just four days after the election of the new parliament. It is therefore the perfect time to launch our action and, for you, to seize the opportunity to co-build a fairer, more fraternal and more sustainable society.

Our 3-step action plan: (1) raise awareness by launching a national petition, (2) bring strategic recommendations to your attention and, (3) ask you to set up a **Ministry or a State Secretariat dedicated to Loneliness, Fraternity, Friendship and Sustainable Love**.

A misunderstood health crisis

Mr. President, last month, your government launched the Conseil national de refondation en santé mentale (National Council for the Refoundation of Mental Health) and rightly made the **mental health of young people a priority**.

However, loneliness is often misdiagnosed or misunderstood, as it is often equated with the psychological discomfort associated with social isolation. Due to inadequate staff training, proposed solutions often aggravate rather than treat the problem.

We can assure you that this is much more than a psychological problem, as it is a vital physiological need deeply rooted in the genetics of our species.

Indeed, not feeling connected to others, the so-called sense of belonging, or lacking significance generates stress that constantly releases cortisol into our bodies. **This has serious physical consequences, increasing the risk of premature mortality by more than 50%** (Psychology Today, 2019).

Alarming statistics

The recent IFOP/Goodflair study (January 2024) shows the extent of this problem:

- 44% of French people regularly feel lonely, 18% of them frequently. **This far exceeds the global average of 33% published by the WHO in 2021.**
- Women (48%) report this more than men (40%).
- Loneliness is particularly prevalent among 18–24-year-olds, with 62% experiencing it regularly.
- Isolation strongly affects the economically inactive (60%) and the most precarious categories (59%).

However, there are no **social class boundaries**. Other studies reveal that burn-out among top executives is often aggravated by loneliness, despite their many social activities. Indeed, loneliness does not spare those who seem to have a social life rich in human contact.

A vastly underestimated cost to the economy

Beyond the disastrous health impact, loneliness has a major economic impact. For example, it feeds depression and thus absenteeism, resulting in substantial losses for the private sector.

In the United States last year, the authorities released some impressive figures. In the absence of precise statistics for France, if we relate them by a simple rule of three to the French population, **we are talking about a social cost for the public and private sectors of over 30 billion euros**, or three times the social security debt. And it is probably much more if we consider all the consequences that follow.

We firmly believe that the fight against loneliness, through a targeted and well-planned intervention, can quickly **produce a positive balance in the state budget**. By reducing healthcare costs and cutting sick days due to depression caused by loneliness for both public and private employers, this initiative will be beneficial.

What is more, fostering socialization and integration boosts productivity and work quality.

Unsuspected social ramifications and challenges

Particularly among young people, loneliness or a lack of a sense of belonging increases the feeling of rejection, generating anger, and can even serve as a breeding ground for insurrection.

For us, there's no doubt that **"where we socialize, we civilize"**, as *Jean-Claude Artonne*, one of our founders, put it at two recent TEDx talks (<https://youtu.be/kk856WkKb6k>). The fight against loneliness is therefore also a virtuous means of prevention to ensure public peace, a particularly important topic for you and one that animated public debate during the last elections.

Faced with the scale of the problem, some are speaking out

Famed American actor *Robin Williams* said shortly before his death that he believed ending up alone was the worst thing, but that actually ending up surrounded by people who make you feel alone is even worse.

Since then, many French celebrities have publicly testified to this suffering, including *Noa Dorian, L éna Situations, Marion Cotillard, Florence Foresti, Guillaume Canet, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Sophie Marceau, Michel Cymes, Daphn é Bürki, Raphaël, François Cluzet and Cristina Cordula, Justine H énin, Paul-Henri Mathieu, Olivier Giroud, Stromae, Slimane, Nicolas Anelka, Vianney, Christine and the Queens, Aliz é e, Soprano, Shy'm, Patrick Bruel, EnjoyPhoenix, Nattoo, Sananas, Je ne suis pas jolie (Lola Dubini), Andy Raconte, Caroline Receveur, Emma Cakecup, Mylène Farmer, Louane*, and many others.

Unfortunately, in the face of misunderstanding or judgment, some choose more tragic expressions. The above-mentioned study reveals that half (50%) of respondents mention depressive states, a third (**34%**) **suicidal thoughts**, and 30% libido dysfunctions, which are also significant causes of divorce or domestic violence.

We offer them a platform

To really get the word out, we've decided to launch a national petition, with the aim of collecting over 100,000 signatures, making this initiative a genuine citizen demand. We invite all our fellow citizens to support this initiative by signing the petition on www.actionsolitude.fr today and for the next three months.

A petition for immediate and lasting government action

We appeal to you to, like the UK in 2017 and Japan in 2019, create a **Delegate Ministry or Secretariat of State dedicated to Loneliness, Fraternity, Friendship, and Enduring Love**, under the aegis of the regal Ministry of Health.

A first series of measures to consider

1. **Understanding:** An exhaustive audit of the health and economic impacts of loneliness.
2. **Communicate:** An awareness campaign so that no one is ashamed to talk about this feeling.
3. **Training: Provide** medical and paramedical staff with additional training on the mechanisms of loneliness, to **avoid underestimating it** and making mistakes such as pushing people suffering from social anxiety to socialize, which can exacerbate the problem, as demonstrated by Dr. John Cacioppo.
4. **Prevention:** Reinforce preventive measures to combat insecurity at social events, which discourages young people from going out, by including regulations requiring measures to limit the risk of drug abuse, for example.
5. **Enhance :** Promote and subsidize intergenerational interactions to recreate the family and social fabric.
6. **Consolidate:** Widely share solutions to help couples and duos strengthen their love and connection.
7. **Dare to innovate:** As was the case with the powerful alcohol and tobacco lobbies, dare to regulate social networks to reduce isolation by imposing advertising restrictions and financially supporting alternative solutions that encourage real social interaction.

Beyond these first concrete measures, the moral mission of this ministry should also include promoting the development, sharing and transmission of solutions aimed at :

- Loving each other more than yesterday and less than tomorrow,
- To be more fraternal than yesterday and less than tomorrow,
- Be more friendly than yesterday and less friendly than tomorrow,
- More solidarity than yesterday and less than tomorrow.

To those of you who are going to govern, we invite you to give serious consideration to this citizen's proposal and to **take urgent steps to create this ministry or secretariat of state**.

We would be honored to discuss this initiative at a meeting or working group.

We passionately believe that this initiative will have a significant positive impact on our society and can also serve as a model on an international scale. France, the founding country of human rights, can become a beacon and a source of inspiration for a healthier, more caring world.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to a positive response.

For the happiness of our fellow citizens and fraternity, a value of the Republic!

Stanislas de Quercize
Jean-Claude Artonne

Co-presidents

