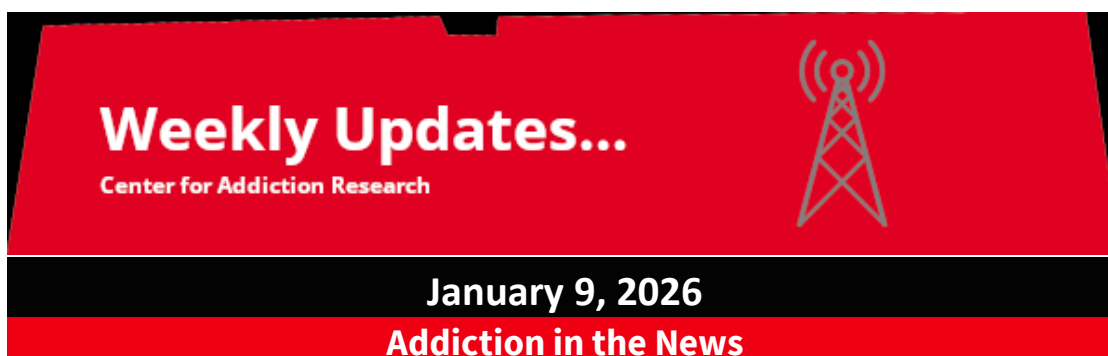


Welcome to the weekly newsletter from the Center for Addiction Research! Each newsletter includes highlights from addiction in the news topics, active funding opportunities offered by NIDA/NIAAA, and information about any new publications from CAR members. Please email Jen Rowe (roweji@ucmail.uc.edu) to change your communication preferences. Thank you.

Thank you for your interest in the Center for Addiction Research - our mission is to accelerate scientific progress in the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders and their consequences by fostering research collaborations across: 1) UC departments, colleges, and centers including Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center; 2) Local, regional, and state community and governmental partners; and 3) Other academic institutions and industry."



UC/ Regional News

Longer treatment with medications for opioid use disorder associated with greater probability of survival

A new study of over 32,000 US veterans has found that the longer people stay on medications for opioid use disorder (buprenorphine, methadone, or extended-release naltrexone), the greater the probability of short- and medium-term survival. This benefit continues to increase for at least four years of ongoing treatment, considerably longer than most patients currently stay in treatment. People with opioid use disorder run the risk of dying from accidental overdose, but opioid use disorder also increases the risk of death from other health conditions, most notably infectious disease. People who receive buprenorphine and... **(co-author, Dr. T. John Winhusen, CAR Director, see publication below in the newsletter)**

Smoking-reduction strategies could ease loneliness and social isolation

Health behavior experts have a question: If loneliness results in the same risk of dying early as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, could the strategies that greatly reduced smoking in the United States a half century ago also potentially ease the loneliness epidemic today? To get closer to the answer, a team led by the Texas A&M University School of Public Health built on a recent benchmark study on social isolation, loneliness and smoking by aligning its strategies for reducing tobacco use with those of the U.S. Surgeon General's advisory on the current epidemic of loneliness and social isolation. "What I think might shock people..." **(co-author, Dr. Ashley Merianos, CAR Member, see publication below in the newsletter)**

Cuyahoga County's leading overdose killer is now cocaine. How do we treat it?

CLEVELAND, Ohio — For the first time in decades, cocaine is killing more people in Cuyahoga County than opioids – including fentanyl – and the drug is going to require a different type of treatment and prevention strategy to combat it. But what could that look like? Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Gilson started to notice a shift in overdose deaths early last year. As opioid overdoses continued to fall, cocaine-related deaths were rising, accounting for 63% of cases, compared with 46% involving opioids, including some overlap from drug mixtures. At the time, he predicted cocaine would kill 399 Cuyahogans by the end of the year. During...

New drug epidemic emerging in Ohio

It is breathtaking to watch the manner in which the substance abuse epidemic in our region continues to evolve. Just last month, officials in Gallia County, Ohio, warned a growing danger has reared its head — Xylazine. The powerful veterinary sedative, which is, of course, not intended for human use at all, has been found in the region; sometimes mixed with fentanyl and other opioids. This is a drug meant for large animals such as horses. There is no safe dosage of “tranq” for humans. In fact, overdosing is all too easy. The Gallia County Health Department says symptoms of an overdose include very slow or stopped...

Kentucky must enforce implementation of anti-vaping law by Jan. 1 deadline

As a high school student from Taylor County High School, I've seen firsthand how vaping and nicotine addiction has taken over schools and communities. What used to be something only a few students did has now become part of daily life for many teens. You can find kids vaping in bathrooms, at football games, even during class when teachers aren't looking. It's become normal, and that's not okay. That's why I joined other young people across Kentucky to help push for Senate Bill 100, a law that requires retailers to have a license to sell tobacco and vape products. When the bill passed with support from the legislature, it felt like our...

Addiction recovery takes center stage as New Year's resolutions begin

LEXINGTON, Ky. (LEX 18) — As 2026 begins, many people are setting resolutions for the new year, but some goals are more challenging than others. For those battling addiction, the decision to seek help represents one of life's most difficult but crucial choices. At the Shepherd's House Recovery Center, individuals are working to overcome their addictions and rebuild their lives. The facility traditionally sees an increase in people seeking help during this time of year, as the new year often serves as a catalyst for change. Military veteran James Stevens knows this struggle firsthand. Alcohol changed his life. "I was doing extremely...

Addiction-stricken community struggles to keep a syringe program going after Trump's order

JEFFERSONVILLE, Ind. (AP) — Inside a storage room at the Clark County Health Department are boxes with taped-on signs reading, “DO NOT USE.” They contain

cookers and sterile water that people use to shoot up drugs. The supplies, which came from the state and were paid for with federal money, were for a program where drug users exchange dirty needles for clean ones, part of a strategy known as harm reduction. But under a July executive order from President Donald Trump, federal substance abuse grants can't pay for supplies such as cookers and tourniquets that it says "only facilitate illegal drug use." Needles already...

National News

Mixing lab rigor with real life, researchers craft new recipe for groundbreaking alcohol studies

Nearly 80% of Americans aged 12 and older have consumed alcohol at least once in their lives, and 10% of the population suffers from alcohol use disorder. And yet, scientists still know surprisingly little about how alcohol shapes our social experiences in the moment, such as how we feel, behave and connect with others while drinking, and how this might translate to risk of developing alcohol problems. But Carnegie Mellon University's Behavioral Health Research Lab hopes to change all of that by treating a simple vodka-cranberry cocktail as a carefully controlled scientific instrument. "We only recruit people that find vodka..."

Disrupted brain balance in alcohol dependence involves two signaling pathways

A new study by Scripps Research reveals that alcohol dependence disrupts two signaling pathways in a stress-related part of the brain—and offers insights on developing drugs to treat this condition. The research, conducted in animal models and published in *Frontiers in Pharmacology*, helps explain why people with alcohol use disorder (AUD) struggle to stay sober, especially under stress. "We think that alcohol dependence changes these systems, and that's why individuals are prone to seek out alcohol even if they've gone without it for some time," says senior author Rémi Martin-Fardon, an associate professor in the...

Incretin Therapies After Bariatric Surgery Linked to Lower Risk of Alcohol Disorder

Treatment with incretin-based weight-loss medications, like GLP-1 receptor agonists, after bariatric surgery was associated with significantly lower risks of alcohol use disorder (AUD) and initiation of medications for AUD compared with other anti-obesity drugs, a large U.S. retrospective cohort study found. In a propensity score-matched analysis of nearly 8,000 patients, treatment with GLP-1 receptor agonists or dual incretin therapies was linked to a 55% lower risk of new-onset AUD (HR 0.45, 95% CI 0.25-0.81, P=0.006) and a 41% lower risk of initiating AUD medications (HR 0.59, 95% CI 0.46-0.75, P<0.001) compared with...

How binge drinking triggers gut damage and inflammation so quickly

Research shows that a single drinking binge—roughly four drinks for women or five for men within about two hours—can disrupt the gastrointestinal tract in

measurable ways. Even in healthy adults, such a rapid influx of alcohol can weaken the gut lining, making it less able to perform one of its core jobs: keeping bacteria and toxins from entering the bloodstream, a phenomenon known as "leaky gut." Now, investigators at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) have identified how binge drinking damages the gut, and why those leaks in the system may set off harmful inflammation long after the last drink is poured. The...

Cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome found to have increased from 2012 to 2021

From 2012 to 2021, there was an increase in the prevalence of cannabinoid hyperemesis syndrome (CHS) in Massachusetts, with the highest 10-year prevalence among young adults, Hispanic individuals, Black individuals, and men, according to a study published in the American Journal of Gastroenterology. Akari Miki, from Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, and colleagues conducted a retrospective study to estimate the rates of CHS from 2012 to 2021 across >15 million emergency department visits using data from the Massachusetts Center for Health Information and Analysis. The researchers found that...

What Trump's executive order on marijuana could mean for medical research

Earlier this week, President Donald Trump signed an executive order reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug. The order moves cannabis from a Schedule I drug, a category that includes heroin and LSD, to a Schedule III drug, a category including ketamine, Tylenol with codeine and steroids. The executive order does not, however, legalize marijuana under federal law. Cannabis is currently legal in 40 states for medical use and in 24 states for recreational use. Some pharmaceutical experts and addiction specialists told ABC News that the reclassification could remove stigma of the drug and open the doors to more...

More than a quarter of college students use CBD products at least once a month

Nearly half of college students have tried CBD products, according to new research from the University of Georgia. Researchers found more than 29% reported using CBD monthly or more to handle anxiety, stress and sleeping problems. Published in the Journal of Substance Use, the study is the largest survey ever conducted on college students' CBD use. "People look back on college as a time of fun and freedom, and we sort of forget the anxiety that can come with it," said Jennie Pless, lead author of the study and a doctoral student in the UGA School of Social Work. "We have students who are taking on a whole new world and..."

FDA Authorizes 6 Nicotine Pouch Products, Completing Review in Record Time

Today, FDA authorized the marketing of 6 nicotine pouch products through the premarket tobacco product application (PMTA) pathway. These authorizations mark the first decisions from a pilot program launched in September to streamline the review process for nicotine pouch applications while maintaining the agency's

rigorous scientific standards. By implementing several changes to FDA's review processes, including real-time communication with the applicant, the FDA was able to complete scientific review in record time. "Today's marketing authorizations confirm that rigorous and efficient standards of scientific review..."

Text messages could be key to helping TB patients quit smoking, according to study

Tuberculosis (TB) patients who smoke will recover far more quickly if they can quit—and help could come from their mobile phones, according to new research. As part of the trial, patients were sent encouraging and supportive text messages to see if it would help them to quit smoking more quickly. The results, published in the JAMA, revealed that nearly three times the number of participants who received text messages quit smoking for six months, compared to participants receiving the standard printed information. The study, part of the RESPIRE project, was led by Professor Kamran Siddiqi, a professor of public health in...

Opioid Use Among Pregnant Women Shows Alarming Rise, Study Says

Twice as many expecting mothers are using opioids as there were a decade ago, a new study says. The rate of opioid use during pregnancy doubled between 2008 and 2020, researchers recently reported in the Journal of Addiction Medicine. Such opioid use puts both mother and child at risk of dire health problems. "Sadly, we know many people who are using opioids while pregnant hesitate to ask for help due to the fear of judgment, and we hope to see that change," senior researcher Dr. Jamie Lo said in a news release. Lo is an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. For the...

Scientists find a safer way for opioids to relieve pain

Scientists at USF Health are making major progress in understanding how new opioid compounds interact with the body to relieve pain. Their work is raising optimism that future pain medications could deliver relief without the life-threatening side effects associated with today's opioids. Their latest findings were published December 17 in Nature under the title "GTP release-selective agonists prolong opioid analgesic efficacy." A companion study, "Characterization of the GTPyS release function of a G protein-coupled receptor," appeared the same day in Nature Communications. "Our overarching research aims to understand..."

Gene therapy 'switch' may offer non-addictive pain relief

A preclinical study uncovered a new gene therapy that targets pain centers in the brain while eliminating the risk of addiction from narcotics treatments, a breakthrough which could provide hope for the more than 50 million Americans living with chronic pain. Dealing with chronic pain can feel like listening to a radio where the volume is stuck at maximum volume, and no matter what you do, the noise never seems to dull or lessen. Opioid medications, like morphine, work by

turning down the volume, but they also affect other parts of the brain, sometimes leading to dangerous side effects or even addiction. The potential new...

Could Next-Generation Medicines Help Cure Opioid Addiction?

On June 11, 2018, seeking relief from chronic pancreatitis pain, Ashley Romero took what she believed to be half a pill of Percocet. Within minutes, she was dead. The pill, which Romero's boyfriend had acquired on the black market, was packed with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that can be fatal in doses the size of a dozen grains of salt. Romero left behind a then seven-year-old son. The next day, her boyfriend fatally shot himself. "Two families, from this little half a pill," says Andrea Thomas, Romero's mother, sadly musing on the devastation. In the seven years since her daughter's death, Thomas has become an antifentanyl advocate...

Scientists Warn Popular Painkiller May Do More Harm Than Good

Researchers say the drug likely increases the risk of serious side effects, including heart disease, and that its potential harms probably outweigh any benefits. A large review of existing studies suggests that tramadol, a strong opioid frequently prescribed for chronic pain, offers only limited relief for the conditions it is commonly used to treat. The findings come from a pooled analysis of available research published online in BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine. The analysis also points to a higher likelihood of serious adverse effects, including heart disease. Based on these results, the researchers conclude that the risks associated...

Coloradans snap up over-the-counter naloxone while hospitals offer the overdose-reversal drug to more patients

Colorado is coming closer to universal access to overdose-reversing medication as residents snap up an over-the-counter version and hospitals offer it to more patients. Naloxone, sold under the brand name Narcan, counters the effect of opioids so that a person who is overdosing doesn't stop breathing. For the last decade, Colorado has had "standing orders" that allow anyone to buy it without a prescription. In 2023, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration allowed over-the-counter sales, sparking additional public discussion about the option to carry the lifesaving drug. Colorado residents bought 743.7 doses of naloxone...

Downward Dog for Opioid Withdrawal?

Yoga alongside standard buprenorphine therapy hastened opioid withdrawal recovery and improved autonomic regulation compared with buprenorphine alone, an early-stage randomized trial in India showed. Among 59 participants with opioid use disorder (OUD) in the intent-to-treat analysis, those in the yoga group recovered from withdrawal faster than those in the control group (HR 4.40, 95% CI 2.40-8.07, $P < 0.001$), with a median stabilization time of 5 days versus 9 days, respectively, reported Hemant Bhargav, MD, PhD, of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences in Bengaluru, and co-authors. Participants...

ADHD drugs don't work the way we thought

Prescription stimulant drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall are commonly used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), including among children. In the United States, an estimated 3.5 million children ages 3 to 17 take medication for ADHD. That number has risen as diagnoses of the neurodevelopmental disorder have become more common. For decades, stimulant medications have been thought to work by directly influencing brain regions responsible for attention. New research from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis calls that explanation into question. The study was led by Benjamin...

Scientists discover why mental disorders so often overlap

A large international team of scientists is shedding new light on a long-standing puzzle in mental health: why many people are diagnosed with more than one psychiatric disorder over their lifetime. In research published December 10 in the journal *Nature*, the group presents the most extensive and detailed investigation so far into the shared genetic foundations of 14 psychiatric conditions. The work was led by the Psychiatric Genomics Consortium's Cross-Disorder Working Group. The group is co-chaired by Kenneth Kendler, M.D., a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Medicine...

One doctor's experience shows the battle for the future of addiction medicine

NEW ORLEANS — Dr. Elyse Stevens had a reputation for taking on complex medical cases, including people who'd been battling addiction for decades. Some were chronic-pain patients on high doses of opioids; others were sex workers and people living on the street. "Many of my patients are messy, the ones that don't know if they want to stop using drugs or not," said Stevens, a primary care and addiction medicine doctor. While other doctors avoided these patients, Stevens — who was familiar with New Orleans from her time in medical school at Tulane University — sought them out. She regularly attended 6 a.m....

Sports betting worries grow as wagers skyrocket

Americans have taken an increasingly dim view of sports betting in the seven years since the Supreme Court overturned a federal ban, as online wagers have skyrocketed, igniting concerns over the personal and social costs. According to a recent poll from the Pew Research Center, 43% of U.S. adults say the fact that sports betting is now legal in much of the country is a bad thing for society. That's up from 34% in 2022. Harvard experts and others suggest that gambling addiction appears to be growing as a public health concern for individuals, and some see the likelihood of wider economic fallout. Counselors have...

Some patients face hurdles getting HIV prevention drugs. Here's what to know

A couple of years ago, Matthew Hurley got the kind of text people fear. It said: "When was the last time you were STD tested?" Someone Hurley had recently had unprotected sex with had just tested positive for HIV. Hurley, who uses they/them

pronouns, went to a clinic and got tested. "Luckily, I had not caught HIV, but it was a wake-up call," they said. That experience moved Hurley to seek out PrEP, shorthand for preexposure prophylaxis. The antiretroviral medication greatly reduces the chance of getting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The therapy is 99% effective at protecting people against sexual transmission when taken as...

Trump administration cannot slash NIH research funding, court rules

BOSTON – A federal appeals court on Monday ruled that President Donald Trump's administration cannot carry out steep cuts to federal grant funding provided by the Bethesda-based National Institutes of Health to universities engaged in scientific and medical research. A three-judge panel of the Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an injunction secured by 22 Democratic state attorneys general, medical associations and universities after determining the funding cuts NIH announced in February 2025 were unlawful. Those cuts were among a range of efforts the Republican president's...

Trump administration agrees to review stalled NIH research grants after lawsuit

NEW YORK, Dec 29 (Reuters) - The Trump administration on Monday reached a deal with researchers and Democratic-led states who sued over cuts to funding for diversity-related research, agreeing to review grant applications that were stalled or rejected during the legal battle. A federal judge in Boston previously ruled that the National Institutes of Health unlawfully canceled hundreds of millions of dollars in research grants because of their perceived connection to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. The U.S. Supreme Court in August partially put that decision on hold, ruling that legal battles over the terminated...

HHS & DEA Extend Telemedicine Flexibilities for Prescribing Controlled Medications Through 2026

WASHINGTON—JANUARY 2, 2026—The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), working jointly with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), today announced a fourth temporary extension of telemedicine flexibilities that allow patients to receive prescriptions for controlled medications without a prior in-person visit. The extension runs from January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026, preventing disruptions in care while permanent rules are finalized. This action ensures that patients who rely on telemedicine — including seniors, rural residents, people with disabilities, and individuals receiving treatment for mental...

Funding Opportunities



GRANTS & FUNDING

NIH Central Resource for Grants and Funding Information

There are no new NIH Grants Funding Opportunities to post this week.

CAR Member New Publications

Evaluating the optimal duration of medication treatment for opioid use disorder

Corey J. Hayes, Rebecca A. Raciborski, Mahip Acharya, Nahiyan Bin Noor, Edward V. Nunes, T. John Winhusen

Addiction

DOI: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/add.70211>

ABSTRACT

Background and aims: Clinicians have little guidance on the ideal length of time patients should remain on medication treatment for opioid use disorder (MOUD) before being able to safely discontinue MOUD. This study estimated how the risk of all-cause mortality changes with the duration of MOUD, controlling for patient characteristics that change the risk profile independent of duration of therapy.

Design, setting and participants: Retrospective cohort study using electronic health record data from the US Veterans Healthcare Administration. Veterans initiating MOUD with buprenorphine, methadone or extended-release naltrexone from October 2010 to September 2020. Our analytic sample included 19 666 buprenorphine initiators, 8675 methadone initiators and 4007 extended-release naltrexone initiators.

Measurement: Duration of MOUD was measured in days. Discontinuation was defined as a gap in any MOUD coverage exceeding 28 days, regardless of MOUD type initiated. The primary outcome was all-cause mortality. We estimated multistate survival models allowing for the modeling of multiple states (i.e. on and off MOUD, death) without having to consider censoring or competing events, while adjusting for sociodemographic, clinical, prescription and facility and provider characteristics.

Findings: We observed approximately 226 000 person-years of time at risk for discontinuation or pre-discontinuation death, during which we observed 26 841 discontinuations (118.9 discontinuations per 1000 person-years). We similarly observed a total of about 106 000 person-years of post-discontinuation follow-up, during which we observed 3251 deaths (3.1 deaths per 1000 person-years). We found the largest marginal gain in probability of 6-year survival from an additional year on MOUD appears to occur around 2 years, as compared to 6 months on MOUD. Statistically significant gains continued through approximately 4–5 years of MOUD retention relative to 6-month MOUD retention. After 4–5 years, the marginal gain from one additional year of MOUD was not statistically significant.

Conclusions: Among US veterans, the benefit of retention on medication treatment for opioid use disorder (MOUD) towards overall survival continues through at least 4 years of MOUD treatment. Quality metrics based on 6-month MOUD retention may be insufficient.

Clearing the Air: Using Tobacco Prevention Lessons for Social Connection

Tyler Prochnow, PhD, Louise Hawkley, PhD, Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD, Megan S. Patterson, PhD, Ashley L. Merianos, PhD, and Matthew Lee Smith, PhD

Public Health Reports

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549251376268>

The public health risks and implications of loneliness and social isolation have gained increasing attention in recent years, with experts drawing comparisons to the health hazards of smoking. Much like how tobacco use was recognized as a major public health threat in the latter half of the 20th century, social disconnectedness is now being viewed as a critical health concern for the 21st century. Research has shown that lacking social connection can increase the risk of premature death comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day. This striking comparison underscores the severity of loneliness and social isolation as public health issues further strengthened by the bidirectional association between loneliness and tobacco use behavior.

The health consequences of loneliness and social isolation are wide-ranging and substantial. Social isolation and loneliness are associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke. Furthermore, chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase dementia risk by approximately 50% in older adults. These statistics parallel the well-documented health risks of tobacco use, which include increased risks of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and various cancers. Recent surveys estimate that 22% of US adults feel socially isolated and approximately half report experiencing loneliness. Despite growing recognition of loneliness as a public health crisis, societal responses have not yet matched the scale of the problem. While rates of tobacco use have declined substantially during several decades because of concerted public health efforts, loneliness appears to be on the rise, particularly among young adults. Addressing loneliness and social isolation may require similarly comprehensive and sustained efforts as those used to reduce tobacco use.

A recent study benchmarking the risk factors for tobacco use and social disconnection highlights macro-level (i.e., structural) interventions used to successfully reduce tobacco use and suggests the use of comparable strategies to promote social connection. These recommendations fit within the SOCIAL Framework and proposed strategies to unify communities to promote social connection; however, they would be strengthened by alignment with national strategies that have a history of success. Therefore, building upon this work, this commentary draws parallels between public health approaches to tobacco use and potential strategies for addressing loneliness and social isolation. By examining how policy implementation, environmental changes, systemic reforms, educational programs, and shifts in social norms have contributed to reducing rates of tobacco use, we can glean valuable insights for developing a holistic approach to promote social connection. This comparison (Table) will explore how lessons learned from tobacco control efforts can inform strategies to foster social connection, create environments that nurture belonging, and ultimately mitigate the health risks associated with loneliness and social isolation.

While social connection, social disconnection, loneliness, and social isolation are often used interchangeably in public discourse, research demonstrates important conceptual distinctions that inform this commentary. Social connection serves as an umbrella construct encompassing the structure, functions, and quality of social relationships, representing a continuum. This multifactorial concept includes structural elements (network size, relationship diversity, interaction frequency), functional aspects (degree to which relationships meet various needs), and quality dimensions (positive vs negative relationship characteristics). Social disconnection represents the opposite end of this continuum and has been defined as the objective or subjective deficits in social connection, including deficits in relationships and roles, their functions, and/or quality. Within this framework, loneliness and social isolation represent distinct but related manifestations of social disconnection. Loneliness constitutes a subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation, inadequate meaningful connections, or unmet need between an individual's preferred social experience and actual social experience. In contrast, social isolation is an objective condition characterized by having few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction. Critically, these conditions can occur simultaneously or independently. Individuals may be objectively isolated without feeling lonely or feel lonely despite having numerous social connections. Yet both represent important public health risks with comparable magnitude to established health hazards.

© [2020 Center for Addiction Research]

