



## AP-NORC SURVEY FINDS CONTINUED CONCERNS ABOUT COVID-19 AND SOCIAL ISOLATION AMONG OLDER ADULTS

*Those who are worried about the virus are more likely to be social distancing and report poorer life satisfaction, mental health, and social relationships.*

**Chicago, IL, September 29, 2021** — As the country battles through another wave of COVID-19 cases, many adults age 50 and older remain worried about infection. These people are more likely to practice social distancing and to feel socially isolated, according to a new study of adults age 50 and older from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and funded by The SCAN Foundation.

Overall, majorities of adults age 50 and older rate their quality of life, mental health, and satisfaction with social activities and relationships positively. However, 18 months into the pandemic, 1 in 3 feels socially isolated at least sometimes. And 1 in 4 feels that their social life and relationships have gotten worse over the past year.

Those most worried about themselves or a loved one being infected by COVID-19 are more likely to avoid travel, stay away from large groups, and wear a mask, and more often experience feelings of social isolation. These practices may be taking a toll: these people also rate their quality of life, mental and emotional health, and social activities and relationships as worse than those less concerned about the virus.

Despite these struggles, a greater number of older adults report that their use of mental health services has declined (34%) rather than increased (6%).

To cope with isolation, older adults are using video chat and social media more often as the frequency of activities like visiting with friends and family in person, doing volunteer work, attending religious services, and talking with neighbors have declined. When it comes to getting health care, 63% have utilized telehealth since the start of the pandemic, up from 56% in March 2021. Fifty-one percent of those who have used telehealth are at least somewhat likely to continue using it once the pandemic is over.

“COVID-19 required us to bring care and support to people’s homes and communities. Whether due to necessity, more access and/or greater comfort levels, telehealth remains a bright spot in this continuing pandemic,” said Dr. Sarita A. Mohanty, president and CEO of The SCAN Foundation. “More than half want telehealth to be a sustained offering to meet people’s medical and nonmedical needs. Our nation must get to a place where majorities of older adults have access to basic technology and broadband to continue benefiting from these services.”

Though vaccines remain an effective way to prevent infection and serious illness, those who are vaccinated are more worried about infection from the virus, are more likely to be practicing social distancing, and are more likely to describe their mental health as worse than last year compared to those who are not vaccinated.

Still, 42% are optimistic they will be able to return to their pre-pandemic activities in the next year. Seventeen percent have already done so.

“Though we saw a dip in concerns about the virus earlier in the summer, worries have again increased along with the spread of the Delta variant,” said Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. “Even some vaccinated folks are not feeling a sense of relief. In fact, they tend to be more worried than unvaccinated older adults, despite the continued efficacy of the vaccine.”

Other key findings include:

- Overall, 34% have felt socially isolated and 38% have felt they lacked companionship at least sometimes in the past four weeks.
- 26% feel that their social relationships have gotten worse over the past year, and 23% feel the same about their emotional health. Just 15% feel these have improved.
- Those most worried about COVID-19 are more likely to have felt a lack of companionship (21% vs. 9%) and social isolation (21% vs. 7%) over the past four weeks.
- Those in households earning over \$50,000 are more likely than those in households earning less report better quality of life (69% vs. 41%) and mental or emotional health (68% vs. 50%).
- Those concerned about the virus are more likely to be staying away from large groups (87% vs. 48%), wearing a face mask (80% vs. 46%), and avoiding nonessential travel (79% vs. 39%) compared to those less concerned about the virus.
- They are also less likely to describe their quality of life (47% vs. 63%), emotional health (50% vs. 66%), and social relationships (37% vs. 52%) as excellent or very good.

### **About the Study**

This survey, funded by The SCAN Foundation, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and The SCAN Foundation collaborated on all aspects of the study.

### **Survey Methodology**

The nationwide poll was conducted in English between August 20 and August 23, 2021, using the Foresight 50+ Consumer Omnibus, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC’s probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population of adults age 50 and older. Online and telephone interviews using landline and cell phones were conducted with adults age 50 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia; 1,015 completed the survey—949 via the web and 66 via telephone. The panel excluded recipients of long-term care who live in some institutional types of settings, such as skilled nursing facilities or nursing homes, depending on how address are listed for the facility. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.1 percentage points.

For more information, please visit [www.longtermcarepoll.org](http://www.longtermcarepoll.org).

### **About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research**

Celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the

power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

[www.apnorc.org](http://www.apnorc.org)

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more.

#### **About The SCAN Foundation**

Supported by a grant from The SCAN Foundation - advancing a coordinated and easily navigated system of high-quality services for older adults that preserve dignity and independence.

[www.TheSCANFoundation.org](http://www.TheSCANFoundation.org)

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