

## Briefing note: Scales for measuring loneliness and isolation

**This briefing note provides information on two scales health and wellbeing boards can use to measure loneliness and social isolation.**

Self-reporting is regarded as the best means of measuring social isolation and loneliness amongst older people. Direct questions, such as 'do you feel lonely?' can lead to an underrepresentation in the data set as respondents may not wish to admit to it.

There are a number of scales that can be used to measure levels of loneliness. All produce similarly accurate results with different questions, but should:

- Use self-report measures
- Be confirmed for use with older populations
- Be reliable across a variety of research designs

Two scales are used extensively; these have been validated for use with older people and have demonstrated reliability:

The **de Jong Gierveld Scale** is a self-reported measure of loneliness. The scale recognises that loneliness is substantially different from simply being alone, and highlights the gap between the affection and intimacy desired and experienced. The larger the gap between these, the greater the degree of loneliness. The scale consists of 11 items. It is widely used in Europe and has been tested and reviewed.

For further information on the scale and how to use it see:

[http://home.fsw.vu.nl/tg.van.tilburg/manual\\_loneliness\\_scale\\_1999.html](http://home.fsw.vu.nl/tg.van.tilburg/manual_loneliness_scale_1999.html)

The **UCLA Scale** is originally 20 items long but is often used in a shortened form of 3 questions. It was developed with students but was updated in 1996 to try and make the questions easier for older people to understand. It has been peer-reviewed and found reliable.

For further information about the scale see:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2394670/>

Some research projects have developed a questionnaire which combines different scales. For example:

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/communityservices/seniors/cross-government-project-to-reduce-social-isolation-of-older-people>

Another useful resource is the **Older People's Quality of Life Questionnaire (OPQOL-3)**. These measures of quality of life have been developed after in-depth interviews with older people:

[http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/index.php/publications/publication\\_details/good\\_neighbours\\_measuring\\_quality\\_of\\_life\\_in\\_old\\_age](http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/index.php/publications/publication_details/good_neighbours_measuring_quality_of_life_in_old_age)