

As COVID-19 spreads in Ontario and other places, so does another serious harm: chronic loneliness, as a result of the necessity of self-isolation. No doubt, helping to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is an important objective, but for those for whom social isolation is a regular condition of life, the “epidemic of loneliness” (as some experts call it) might only be worsened.

## Effects of chronic loneliness

The condition sometimes called “chronic loneliness” arises where a person experiences social isolation over an extended period of time, lacking meaningful connections with other people. This is not the same as merely being alone. Being alone is something we all enjoy occasionally; but when cut off from other people, unable to experience the tender connection of meaningful relationships, people can suffer a range of damaging states, including lack of energy, inability to focus, decreased appetite, inability to sleep, depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and a sense of hopelessness. It can increase susceptibility to illness, and promote addictive behaviour in the effort to “fill the space inside”. It is reported that a lack of meaningful social connections can contribute to at least a 30% increased risk of early death.

[Information about the negative effects of loneliness, chronic or otherwise, can be found readily online. In making the foregoing comments, we have relied on the essay, “Is Chronic Loneliness Real?” by Crystal Raypole with the assistance of Timothy J. Legg, PhD, PsyD, on [healthline.com](http://healthline.com), articles and data provided by The UnLonely Project at [artandhealing.org](http://artandhealing.org), and the transcript of “The Epidemic of Loneliness” from the Aspen Ideas Festival 2017, found at [aspensideas.org](http://aspensideas.org).]

## What's that got to do with condos?

As a matter of law, loneliness is not an obvious concern of condominiums. No one is likely to sue a condo – or, not successfully at any rate – simply because they were lonely while living there. Nevertheless, it is also not outside the range of concerns that a condominium community can serve to address, and it’s not obvious that loneliness is outside the range of issues that a condominium community *should* (though, again, not as a legal obligation) want to address.

In fact, condominium communities are in a special position to be able to help improve conditions for relieving loneliness of at least some individuals (such as residents who are single, elderly, handicapped or otherwise in a condition that limits social mobility and availability).

A condominium is, inherently, a form of shared, or communal, living. In most cases, condominium owners and residents live in relatively close quarters to one another. They share common property – often party walls, and possibly party ceilings and floors as well. They have common spaces to inhabit, from hallways and elevators, to driveways and lobbies. Even in a townhome condo, the common street front, parking and landscaped areas, form spaces of common interest and common availability.

It is not a difficult thing, in a condominium, to be aware of one’s neighbours and of the conditions in which they live. It is relatively easy to see if someone seems to be alone, and it requires minimal effort to be available to help ensure they are not also lonely.

It is even possible to read an implicit mandate – or, more accurately, an *allowance* – under the Condominium Act, 1998, for condo boards and community members to take concrete steps to help alleviate conditions that promote loneliness. This is suggestible from the direction that rules are to promote not only safety and security but also the “welfare” of the owners (see s. 58(1)(a)).

Of course, you can’t make a rule against feeling lonely, but it might be acceptable if a condominium board feels somewhat empowered by that implication to reach out – using such tools as community notice boards and newsletters, meetings, contact lists, and unit inspections – to provide some meaningful, caring contact, and connection, for community members who appear to be living in isolated, or isolating, circumstances.

No court of law will tell you that you have to do this; but undoubtedly the court of one’s personal conscience will also never say that you shouldn’t.