Research evidence on the effectiveness of face-to-face visiting by a volunteer for improving social isolation and loneliness of older adults is very uncertain

We are unsure if friendly face-to-face visits by a volunteer can improve loneliness, social isolation, depressive feelings, life satisfaction and mental health-related outcomes in older adults. Decisionmakers who are considering friendly face-to-face visiting as a way to alleviate loneliness or social isolation in older adults should take this research uncertainty into account.

What is this review about?
Loneliness and social isolation are reaching epidemic proportions in both children and adults, despite the increasing connectedness in our 21st century world. Given their devastating impact on physical and mental health, it is important to identify and invest in feasible and sustainable options to decrease social isolation and feelings of loneliness.

Friendly face-to-face visiting, where people are matched to someone who visits them in-person on a regular basis, seems to be a realistic and sustainable option for providing social support.

What studies are included?
We found 13 relevant studies comparing friendly visiting by a volunteer to no friendly visiting, involving 470 older adults in total. Ten of these studies were conducted in the USA.

Friendly face-to-face visiting programmes ranged from six to 12 weeks in duration and mostly involved weekly visits by undergraduate students. Visits consisted mainly of casual conversation, but playing games and watching TV were also mentioned.

What are the main findings of this review?
The evidence is very uncertain about the effect of friendly face-to-face visiting by a volunteer on improving loneliness, social isolation, depressive symptom experiencing, life satisfaction and mental health-related outcomes in older adults.
None of the studies reported on the long-term effects (more than six months after the friendly visiting programme has ended) on loneliness or social isolation. None of the studies reported on the medium-term effects (1-6 months after the programme has ended) on mental health.

**What do the findings of this review mean?**

We have very little confidence in the evidence, because the studies were very small, used methods likely to lead to errors in their results, and often did not transparently report all data. Given the limitations of the available evidence, further research is very likely to change the results of our review.

**How up-to-date is this review?**

The authors searched for studies up to August 2021.

**What is the Campbell Collaboration?**

Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

**About this summary**


Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.