



Living Longer, Better

The senior living series

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Myth-busting resident engagement: Translating programming into evidence-backed health interventions

Live webinar



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Goals of this presentation

- You already see the impact of your work. This session puts research behind it.
- The work you do is powerful, but often hard to measure. We'll talk about how to make it visible.
- You'll leave with language and tools to advocate for your role and your impact.
- Together, we'll connect what you do every day to whole-person wellness.

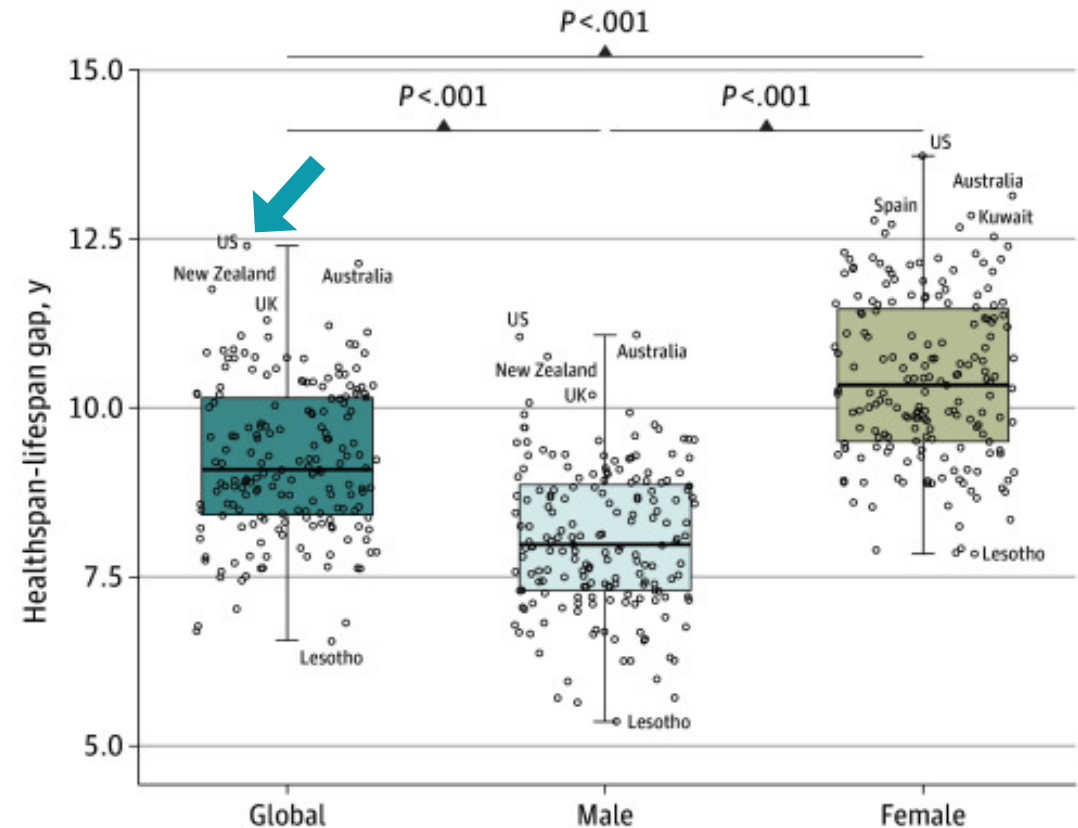


*After an activity, a resident pulled me aside and told me I was her best friend. **I think about that every day.***

Life Engagement Manager

We are living longer, but not necessarily better

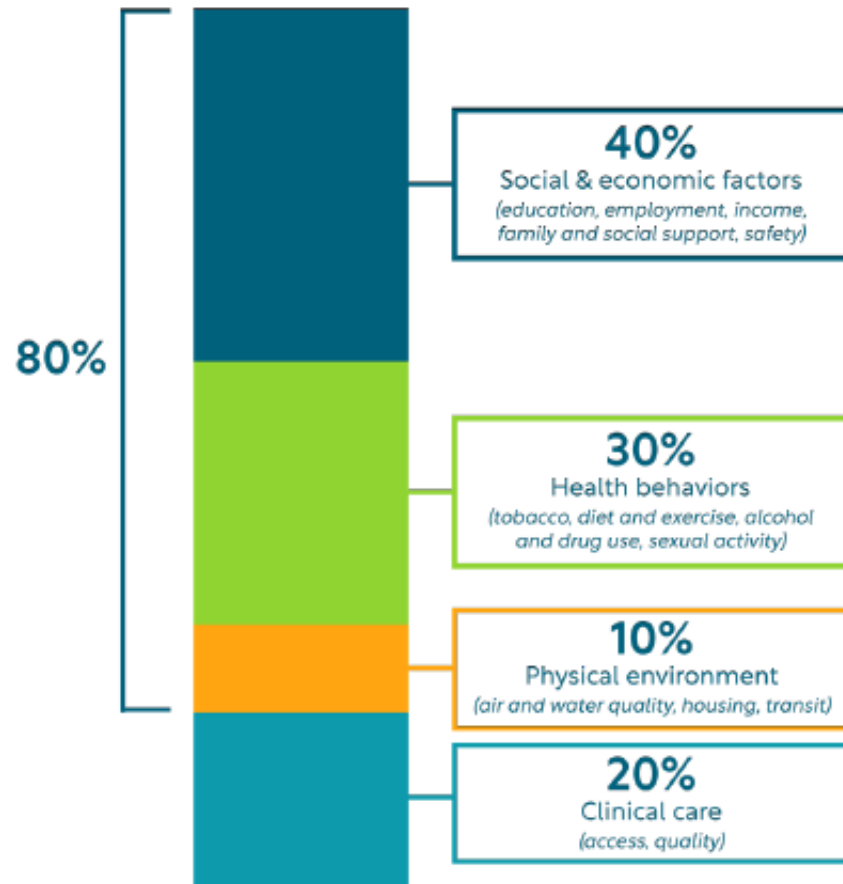
- U.S. has largest gap between lifespan and healthspan (12.4 years) among 183 WHO member states
- U.S. global ranking for healthy life expectancy is forecasted to decline from 80th in 2022 to 108th in 2050
- 24% of older adults socially isolated
- 43% of older adults report loneliness



Cudjoe et al., 2020; Garmany & Terzic, 2024; IHME, 2024; NASEM, 2020

Health is not primarily driven by clinical care

What drives health outcomes?



80% of health outcomes are driven by non-clinical factors

Remington et al., 2015; UWPHI, 2014

What is social wellness?

- Social wellness reflects **quality of relationships, sense of belonging, and meaningful engagement**
- Encompasses **trust, reciprocity, communication**
- Support systems sustain **whole-person well-being** across social, emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, environmental, and vocational dimensions
- Built through **reciprocal relationships** that foster **purpose, identity, connection, and sense of mattering**

The costs of not prioritizing social wellness



Health risk of loneliness is comparable to smoking **15** cigarettes/day^{1,2}



Social isolation increases risk of mortality by **29%**^{2,3}

Social isolation & loneliness increase health risks:

↑ 50% increase in dementia^{2,4}

↑ 32% increase in stroke^{2,5}

↑ 29% increase in heart disease^{2,5}



Socially isolated and lonely older adults have **36%** greater odds of inpatient admissions⁶



Socially isolated older adults drive an estimated **\$6.7B** in excess Medicare spending annually⁷

¹Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; ²Office of the Surgeon General, 2023; ³Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; ⁴Lazzari & Rabottini, 2021; ⁵Valtorta et al., 2016; ⁶Barnes et al., 2022; ⁷Flowers et al., 2017

Myth #1

**Life enrichment is
primarily entertainment**





“One of my most meaningful memories as an Activities Director involves a resident who had spent his entire career working at the local train station....

When he was approaching his 100th birthday, he shared that he had always wanted to stand next to a train, hold onto the railing, and call out, “All aboard,” just like a conductor. Our activities team knew we had to make this happen. We coordinated with the local train station and planned a surprise celebration....

He spent time talking with employees, sharing stories from his years of service, and reminiscing about the trains that had been such a big part of his life.

Dressed in his conductor hat and overalls, he stood proudly beside the train. At 100 years old, he held onto the railing, smiled broadly, and confidently called out, “All aboard!” just moments before the train departed. It was an incredibly emotional and joyful moment not just for him, but for everyone who witnessed it.

That day reminded us that activities aren’t just about filling time; they’re about honoring a person’s story, passion, and lifelong dreams, no matter their age.”

– Senior Activities Director

Research recognizes engagement as intervention

Effective evidence-based interventions include:

- Social support groups
- Social cognitive training
- Meditation & mindfulness
- Community-based activities
- Technology-based engagement

Gardiner et al., 2018; Ibarra et al., 2020; O'Rourke et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2021; Veronese et al., 2021

Example: U.S. POINTER Trial

A structured lifestyle program with:

- Social engagement
 - Cognitive stimulation
 - Exercise
 - Accountability/support
-
- Produced greater cognitive improvement than a self-guided approach
 - Researchers concluded this model could be “readily adopted by communities in their activity programs”

Baker et al., 2025

Social connection creates measurable value

Review of Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses found that

\$1 invested in social wellness programs
=
\$2.28–\$13.72 in social value

Examples included:

- Art-based programs
- Dementia support groups
- Social prescribing
- Pet therapy programs

**Senior living
already
delivers
interventions
like these
every day**

***Connection is
built into daily life***

Senior living communities naturally embed:

- Daily social interaction
- Shared meals
- Structured engagement
- Relationship-based support
- Purposeful routines
- Cognitive stimulation

“

*We have a resident who moved into our community in his 70s, initially planning to stay only for six months. He loved it here so much that he's been with us for almost four years and doesn't plan to leave. **He fell in love with the sense of community.***

Staff member

Myth #2

**Life enrichment is
separate from clinical care**

Social wellness influences health outcomes

Mortality

- Strong social relationships associated with 50% greater odds of survival
- Psychosocial support interventions increased survival odds by 20% and survival time by 29% compared to standard medical care
- Cancer mortality reduced by:
 - 25% with strong perceived support
 - 20% with larger social networks

Chronic disease management

- Better medication and dietary adherence in hypertension with strong social support
- 36% lower risk of developing high blood pressure with greater social support

Harding et al., 2022; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Magrin et al., 2015; Pinguart & Duberstein, 2010; Shahin et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021

Social wellness influences health outcomes

Cognitive health

- Increased social activity associated with:
 - 38% reduced risk of dementia
 - 21% reduced risk of mild cognitive impairment
- Dementia onset delayed by nearly 5 years in highly socially active older adults
 - Translates to savings of about ~\$500k in healthcare costs per person
- Lower dementia risk associated with:
 - Greater social memberships (35%)
 - More frequent social participation (29%)
 - Greater engagement in cognitively stimulating activities (42%)

Chen et al., 2025; Duffer et al., 2022; Zissimopoulos et al., 2014

Social wellness influences health outcomes

Mental health

- Greater social connectedness associated with:
 - 27% lower risk of depression
 - 18% lower risk of anxiety
- Social support can reduce symptoms of depression



*I must tell you, I **didn't** know I was lonely until I moved into [a senior living community]....I found my people...We care for each other....**It's like an extended family, really and truly.***

Resident



*“[My aunt] is 94 years old and prior to the move to [a senior living community] she lived independently quite successfully -- that is, until last winter/spring when things broke down in a major way. She had **stopped taking care of herself and was lonely and depressed, mostly as a product of no longer being able to take long walks to shop at local stores or to visit with neighbors. She stopped cooking and doing laundry. She kept asking why God didn't just take her.***

I had always supported her independence but it was clearly time for a change. At first she didn't want to leave the home she had always known...I finally convinced her to...give [senior living] a try...When she arrived for the move in, she was elated to see all of her familiar furniture in her new apartment.

*Since then, we have our aunt back! **She is no longer lonely or depressed. She tells us that staff treat her like royalty and that the place is heaven on earth.** She loves her apartment but **the thing she really enjoys are all of the activities throughout the day -- exercise class, arts and crafts, cooking club, social hours, therapy dogs, and trips to church, local parks, restaurants, etc. By the time dinner is done, she gets ready for bed and is excited about the next day. She is taking care of herself again -- picking out clothing and wearing makeup and taking pride in her appearance. She is living again!...***

She has a TV in her room but hardly ever turns it on because she is always so busy during the day with the activity staff (and if she forgets that something is happening they are so good about going to find her and the other residents). My aunt is happy, engaged, well cared for thanks to [the senior living community] and I don't think that we could ask for more than that!”

– Family member

Myth #3

**Engagement data
doesn't matter**



*“Prior to moving into a [senior living community], Joann M, age 88, a widow of 18 years, lived alone independently in her own home. The **isolation took a toll on both her physical health as well as her cognitive health.** Because of the social isolation, she spent most of her time sitting in her chair, reading or watching movies on her iPad. **Family noticed that she started to become withdrawn and showed a lack of interest with most things.***

She also became less sturdy on her feet and at times they would notice bruises on her face and body, as well as watching her walk in pain concealing that she had fallen.

Within a few short months** of embracing the new community, her **strength and balance came back.** She started **going on all the outings, participated in all the social activities, and never missed a meal with her new friends.

*Family reported that **all cognitive concerns had gone away since she moved in,** and this resident **never had a fall during the two years** she moved to this senior living community. The community **described her as a resident that was aging backwards in real time.***

*When we talked to this resident and asked if she had any regrets about leaving her home and moving to the community, **she told us bluntly, YES, I regret not moving in five years sooner. This was the best decision she had made in the last 20 years, and she was having the time of her life.***

– Staff member & family member

Engagement patterns are health data

What looks like:

- “She stopped coming to bingo.”
- “He’s eating alone more often.”
- “They haven’t attended programs this week.”

May actually signal:

- Cognitive decline
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Illness
- Pain
- Grief
- Increased fall risk
- Functional decline

Engagement trends can function as an early warning system.



Wellness Navigator

Weekly Engagement Signals

TRENDING DOWN ↘

12

residents with negative activity changes in the past week

TRENDING UP ↗

10

residents with positive activity changes in the past week

ATTENDED 1 OR MORE

28%

residents who attended at least one personal or community based activity in the past week

Engagement Health

Average Social Engagement Index

6 ↘ -83% vs last month

[How is this calculated?](#)

Understanding SEI Score

This is a composite score from **0 to 100** that combines multiple engagement measures into a single, easy-to-understand metric. It takes into consideration activities attended, days with contact, time since last contact, and total time spent in activities over the past 7 days. A higher score indicates stronger engagement.

SCORE DISTRIBUTION

- 0-30 Low **35 (100%)**
- 31-70 Moderate **0 (0%)**
- 71-100 High **0 (0%)**

LOW ENGAGEMENT RESIDENTS ⚠

35

↗ 218% since last month

Residents below the SEI threshold may be at increased risk of social isolation. Review their recent engagement trends and consider proactive outreach such as a check-in, activity suggestion, or family contact.

SEI is calculated using the metrics below

ACTIVITIES ATTENDED 📅

0

↘ -100% since last month

Average number of activities attended per resident in the past 7 days

TOTAL TIME IN ACTIVITIES 📈

0.3

↘ -83% since last month

Average time spent in activities per resident in the past 7 days

DAYS WITH CONTACT 🗨️

0

↘ -100% since last month

Average number of days per resident with contact in the past 7 days

DAYS SINCE LAST CONTACT 🕒

6

↗ 43% since last month

Average number of days per resident since last contact

Examples of how you can use your data to identify patterns

Recent Engagement (Last 7 Days Snapshot) Last 7 Days Current Month

Average Social Engagement Index

52 ↗ 86% vs last month

[How is this calculated?](#)

Understanding SEI Score

This is a composite score from **0 to 100** that combines multiple engagement measures into a single, easy-to-understand metric. It takes into consideration activities attended, days with contact, time since last contact, and total time spent in activities over the past 7 days. A higher score indicates stronger engagement.

0-30 Low ● **31-70 Moderate** ● **71-100 High**

ACTIVITIES ATTENDED 📅

2

↗ 100% last month

Number of activities attended in the past 7 days

TOTAL TIME IN ACTIVITIES 📈

2

↗ 100% last month

Time spent in activities in the past 7 days

DAYS WITH CONTACT 🗨️

2

↗ 100% last month

Number of days with the contact in the past 7 days

DAYS SINCE LAST CONTACT 🕒

0

↘ -43% last month

Number of days since last contact

Social wellness is essential health infrastructure

We developed this report with Argentum to examine the role of social wellness in the future of older adult care.

Download the report to learn:

- Why social wellness is a core driver of health outcomes and cost reduction
- How to measure, operationalize, and integrate social wellness across senior living, healthcare, policy, and technology

lifeloop **ARGENTUM**

The case for social wellness:
Evidence, impact, and implications for senior living, healthcare, and policy

Download the report:

Questions?

Thank you!



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Merrill Gardens

A new way to prevent social isolation



Learn how the **Wellness Navigator** can help your teams deliver **measurable improvement to resident well-being:**





Living Longer, Better

The senior living series

June 23, 2026

Supporting well-being
in senior living through
skilled engagement

Live webinar

Scan to register



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