

# Mental Illness Caregivers and Loneliness

Recognizing the significant differences as compared with other caregivers



At least **8.4 million** Americans provide care to 1 in 25 adults with an emotional or mental health issue.

**48%**

of those caring for someone with mental illness report that caregiving has made their health worse and made them feel "alone."



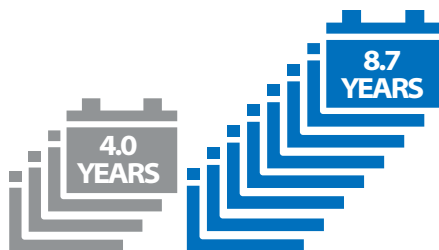
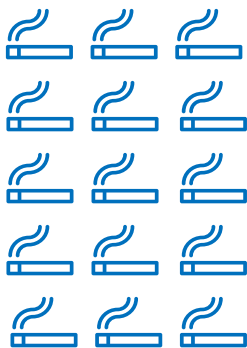
Loneliness related to caregiving has many dimensions and real health consequences, including reduced well-being and the increased risk of:

- **Poor health**
- **Mortality**
- **Depression**
- **Cognitive decline**



The associated health risks of loneliness is the equivalent of smoking

**15**  
CIGARETTES  
PER DAY



The average length of time a caregiver of an adult with a mental or emotional health issue has been in their role is over double that of caregivers of any other condition.

**24.4 HOURS**

Average weekly caregiving hours across all conditions.

**31.8 HOURS**

Average weekly caregiving hours for mental health caregivers



Nearly 1 in 5 mental health caregivers spend more than **40 hours** per week – the equivalent of a full-time position.

Caregivers of those with mental illness face challenges that can put them at still greater distance from others, including:

- The social stigma around mental illness
- Feelings of shame, embarrassment and guilt related to struggling with the behaviors and other obstacles of caring for the mentally ill and
- Reluctance to seek help; many are caring for a child — and don't want to worry or task other children with caretaking.



## The Healing Power of Creative Expression

Even when the day-to-day can be especially challenging for caregivers, there are a number of things that can be done to help feel less lonely and minimize isolation— especially through creative expression.

The arts have long provided emotional context for the human experience. In fact, research has shown that creative expression also contributes to overall improvements to health and wellbeing.

The founder and president of the Foundation for Art & Healing, Jeremy Nobel, MD, MPH, shares this perspective:

*“Despite the explosive growth of social media networks that offer ‘connection,’ it’s amazing how disconnected many individuals are feeling.*

*By enabling the use arts-based creative expression to connect authentically with others, we look to dissolve some of the barriers that create isolation and loneliness.”*

THE **UnLonely** PROJECT | Spark Program