

HEALTH JUSTICE



Reframing the Loneliness Epidemic

APRIL 2026



Dear friends and colleagues,

The “loneliness epidemic” has been making headlines. This is good and bad news.

Because of the role that mental health plays in health justice, increased attention to loneliness and social isolation is long overdue. **But the framing of the “loneliness epidemic” has obscured its causes and its solutions.**

As we think ahead to Mental Health Awareness Month in May, I'm sharing a new article with two strategies for framing conversations about loneliness and mental health that lead people away from “you should find a friend” fixes and toward systemic solutions.

[SHOW ME THE ARTICLE](#)

In short, the problem is that loneliness isn't just an individual experience. It's shaped by the conditions around us, from the strength of our community infrastructure to the stability of our economic lives. Painting a picture of sad, solitary people misses an opportunity to bring attention to all the ways our environments, communities, and systems can be better structured to support wellbeing.

In the article—*2 Better Ways to Talk about the “Loneliness Epidemic”*—I share a couple of strategies for broadening the frame to emphasize collective wellbeing, rather than self-care:

1. Emphasize *context* and the conditions that shape mental health,
2. Elevate solutions that are *collective* and *preventative*.

In doing these things, we can tell a more systemic story—and encourage more systemic thinking—about mental health.

Check out the article for more of the research and a deeper explanation of the recommendations. If you want to talk more about working together to shift narratives around mental health, please be in touch—and take care of yourselves this month.

In partnership,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy A. Evans".

Katy Evans

Senior Director of the Health Justice Program



UPCOMING EVENTS



Metropolitan Group
the power of voice



NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK WEBINAR

Protecting the Public's Health Strengthens Democracy—and Vice Versa

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

12:00–1:00 pm ET

With public health under ongoing threat, we need both immediate messaging to protect the public's health and a lasting narrative shift to build public will for a better system. Join us for tips and tools you can use now to do both.

- Dr. Julie Sweetland from FrameWorks will share new findings on how Americans think about trust in health—and framing that can shore up trust, inoculate the public against misinformation, elevate science, and spark collective action.
- Berkeley Media Studies Group will share lessons for how public health can build narrative power and break through the spiral of silence in this moment.
- Metropolitan Group will preview a new narrative linking the public's health with a functioning, inclusive, and participatory democracy. Learn core values and essential elements to strengthen your work, based on extensive narrative research and testing.

SAVE MY SPOT

TELL THE STORY

HEALTH JUSTICE FRAMING FORUM

Strategic Storytelling in Constrained Environments

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

12:00–1:00 pm ET

When certain words are off the table, we can rely on the way we frame stories to advance ideas about health justice. In this session, we'll explore:

- The mechanics of narrative: A look at how the stories we tell shape what the public believes is possible for our communities.
- Exposing injustices without the jargon: Techniques for building stories that reveal systemic barriers and point to structural solutions.
- Engaging the unpersuaded: Strategies for crafting stories that reach audiences who aren't yet bought into health equity.

SIGN ME UP



NEW FROM FRAMEWORKS



OP-ED

The “Affordability” Trap: Why Progressives Need to Talk About Design, Not Just Prices

Progressives often use the word “affordability” to talk about economic pressures, but affordability is a symptom. The problem is an economic system that wasn't built to work for everyone. In her latest piece for The Contrarian, FrameWorks senior advisor Dr. Julie Sweetland explains how shifting from affordability to the idea of unrigging the design can move the conversation from temporary relief to structural change.

[SHOW ME THE OP-ED](#)



FRAMING GUIDE

5 Tips for Building Trust When Communicating about Health

Trust in scientific knowledge and health expertise is an essential foundation of health justice. But trust is earned. ICYMI, our latest resource shares five framing strategies for strengthening public trust, including acknowledging past harms; responding strategically rather than defensively to misleading narratives; and building trust through explanation rather than appeals to scientific authority.

[SHOW ME THE TIPS](#)



HALL OF FRAMES



We believe that every person deserves the opportunity to have good mental health.

Good mental health is a platform for a full, healthy, productive life – and it matters at every stage of life. In the early years – even in infancy – children develop social and emotional capacities that last a lifetime. In adulthood, emotional well-being allows us to connect with family and friends, meet the challenges that life sends our way, and contribute to our workplaces, civic spaces, and communities. In adolescence – the period between 10 and 25 – young people’s sense of belonging, connection, and emotional well-being allows youth to learn, thrive, and grow into their identities and their place in our communities.

Many factors influence mental health – and cause or compound mental health challenges and serious mental illness. At Interact for Health, we work with partners and grantees to catalyze safe and supportive spaces for youth – at school, home, and the community. And, Interact for Health is working with partners to convene a regional, cross-sector collaborative, to improve mental health systems with a ten-year strategy to make our region a leader in supporting the well-being of our young people.

This work is urgent and necessary. Nationally, one in



WELL-FRAMED WEBPAGE

Interact for Health

The latest addition to the Hall of Frames comes from Interact for Health, whose explanation of mental health shifts the frame from individual illness to collective wellbeing. By defining mental health as a positive foundation for a full life and emphasizing the role of safe, supportive environments, they successfully move the focus toward the systems that shape our health. Bonus point: a carefully-chosen number nested in a broader narrative underscores the urgency of the issue without falling into unproductive "crisis" framing.

[SHOW ME THE SITE](#)

In *Hall of Frames* we highlight great framing we’ve spotted in public language—and what we can all learn from it. Have you seen something you think we should highlight? [Send us a link.](#)



POLL

For the past year, many of us have been working in environments where our language has come under new constraints—official or perceived. How are you making decisions about how to respond to this moment in your communications.

- Returning to our mission and values as our “north star.”
- Consulting framing research to find workaround language that sticks.
- Exchanging ideas and intel with peer organizations and allies.
- Waiting for explicit guidance from leadership or legal counsel.
- Engaging with community members and speaking to topics they raise.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Does Plain Language Undermine Expertise? The Research Says No | Livity Communications

In our last Framing Forum, so many of you asked for guidance on how to bring leadership along as you reframe important health justice issues. We loved this short piece from Livity Communications on how to make the case, particularly the point about plain language demonstrating expertise.

[LEARN MORE](#)

U.S. Adults Want Health Equity | AAMC Center for Health Justice

Recent polling from the AAMC Center for Health Justice shows widespread support for the concept of health equity. These findings also suggest that there is an opportunity for all of us to build Americans' understanding of the goals associated with the health justice movement – while 75% of Americans supported the goal of everyone having a fair opportunity to be healthy, only 52% indicated any familiarity with the term health equity. If you're looking for ways to more effectively communicate health equity goals, check out this toolkit.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Visible, Yet Vulnerable | Trans Journalists Association and Berkeley Media Studies Group

Despite the widespread coverage of transgender issues in the first 100 days of the Trump Administration, media failed to center – or even include – the voices of trans people and particularly trans youth. We appreciated this resource's attention to the ways in which intentional sourcing centers the voices of those most impacted and builds trust over time.

[LEARN MORE](#)

AT THE CORNER OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Public health has a long history of paternalistic interventions, particularly in communities already experiencing marginalization. This history has a long legacy, and our research shows that when distrust is high, Americans increasingly see public health measures as overreach. To build trust and advance equity, it is essential that our approach to communications honors the people who are central to our mission. As we prepare for Mental Health Awareness Month, here are some strategies for moving from paternalism to mental health justice:

- **Focus on changing systems, not people.** Offer people a vision and a pathway toward designing communities that foster belonging, support connection, and reduce isolation. Make clear that these approaches work not because they “fix” individuals but because they reshape the environments in which people live, work, and play.
- **Honor the dignity and autonomy of individuals who receive mental health services.** Shifting mindsets on mental health requires honoring people’s humanity across our communications and not falling into paternalism or judgment. Focus your stories on the agency of individuals, not the decisions public health or healthcare professionals make on their behalf, and hold their health and well-being as the central goal.
- **Avoid vulnerability framing.** People experiencing mental health challenges are problem solvers who can and should be active partners in creating solutions and designing better systems. Pay attention to how you describe communities in mental health distress, and ensure that you emphasize agency over vulnerability.

We know those of you working in governmental public health have particular needs and can face specific challenges. This space is designed to give you tailored support, and we encourage you to be in touch with questions or ways we can support you.



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Our mailing address is:

FrameWorks Institute
1319 F St NW, Suite 301
Washington, DC 20004



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