

## Aging and Isolation: Exploring a Virtual Solution to a Growing Problem

A place where aging adults can  
dodge loneliness and isolation



As we get older, the risk of feeling lonely and isolated goes up. By age 65, people spend an average of 7.4 hours a day alone. This can happen for many reasons, such as living away from family, losing a partner, health and mobility issues, and a shrinking social circle. Plus, let's be honest, making new friends these days isn't easy.

Loneliness has become such a big issue that the US Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, declared it a national epidemic. Isolation can seriously impact physical, mental, and societal health. It's a fact that loneliness can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increases the risk of early death by 50%.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, we're diving into an option that might surprise you—a virtual space. You'll have to see if it's a good fit for you, but this place was designed from the ground up to tackle the isolation and loneliness many older adults face. And guess what? It's already helping a lot of people overcome these challenges.

### What We'll Cover

- A place to make friends
- Why it works so well
- How to get there



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Source: How Loneliness Is Damaging Our Health, The New York Times, 4/20/22. Most recent data available.

## First, a Place to Make Friends

The virtual place we're talking about is Thrive Pavilion. You enter with a VR headset, and unlike an online game, it's a fully immersive experience where you can interact with others in a realistic, 3D environment, attend events, and join activities that feel like the real thing.

Robert Signore, the creator of Thrive Pavilion, explains: "Our mission is to help older adults overcome social isolation and loneliness, especially those living at home. We do this by creating a vibrant, engaging community in virtual reality where you can make real connections, have fun, and feel part of something special."

Members often find that interacting in Thrive Pavilion feels very real. One member mentioned, "It's just like you're with them in person."

When you join Thrive Pavilion, you get to create and style your own avatar, a digital character in the metaverse that can look like a human. You and other members feel fully immersed in a 3D space, making gestures and moving your heads, just like you would in real life.

So far, this place has about 1,500 members and it seems to be helping aging adults make friends. Let's explore why it works so well.

## Second, Why It's Working

Sometimes, whether in real life or virtual, it's easier to meet new people if you're doing something fun. At Thrive Pavilion, there's always something fun to do. Members can join a variety of planned activities or even organize their own. But it's not just about scheduled events—people can hang out and spend time together whenever they want. It's all about making connections and enjoying each other's company.

Thrive Pavilion's calendar of activities is robust, with something going on almost every day. Here's a sample list of activities:



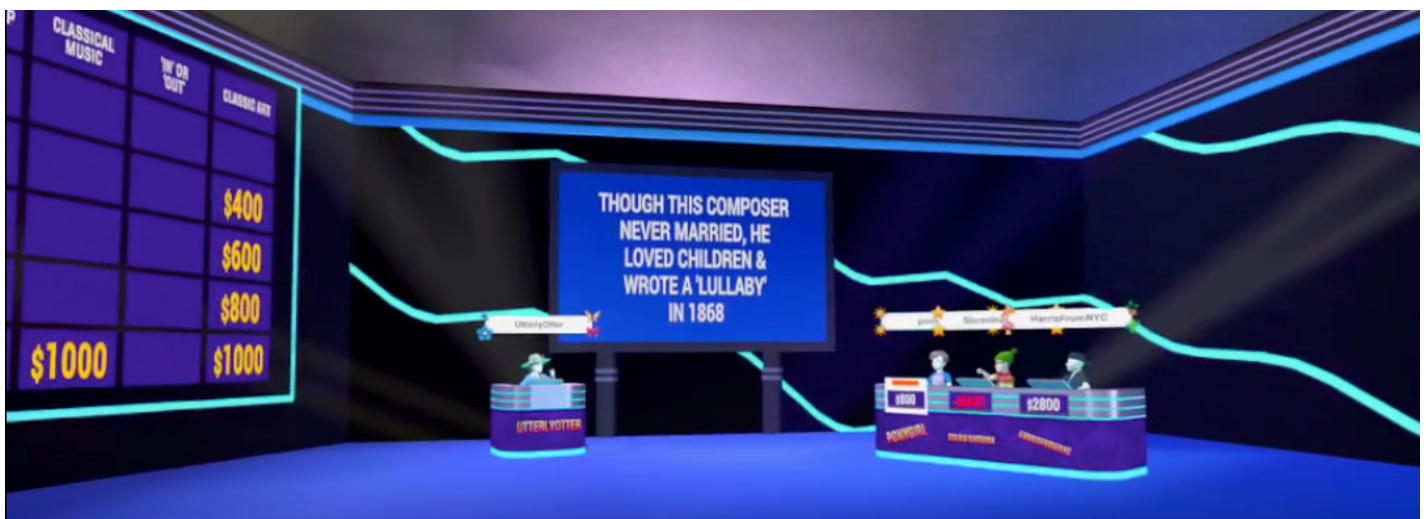
### Games:

- Bowling
- Mini golf
- Bocce
- Cornhole
- Card games
- Jeopardy
- Escape rooms



### Art

- Painting and drawing classes
- Craft workshops
- Art appreciation sessions
- Collaborative art projects



"Jeopardy" is an exciting VR game show in Thrive Pavilion that takes contestants into a fully immersive world where they compete in a fun Answer and Question format. With a variety of categories perfect for older adults, it challenges their knowledge.



*Plants!* is a chill, cooperative VR game in Thrive Pavilion about growing plants, catching bugs, and unwinding in a stunning virtual greenhouse.



**Entertainment**

- Theatre
- Karaoke
- Comedy shows
- Storytelling
- Health and wellness meditation
- Exercise
- Line dancing
- Coffee hours to hang out and chat
- Learning new things (e.g., Titanic, Alcatraz, Carnival Sideshow Acts of the Past)
- Monthly birthday parties

The other thing that makes Thrive Pavilion work is that everyone’s there for the same reason, making it super-welcoming. It’s a stark contrast to moving into a new neighborhood, where it might take a while to build relationships with your new neighbors. Nowadays, that kind of warm welcome is rare.

Jody Gorran, a Thrive Pavilion member, says many of his relationships in the virtual world are closer than those in the real world. He explains that connections are made quicker and deeper because “You meet people without the usual anxieties about appearance or social pressures you face in the real world.”

**Third, How to Get There**

You’ll need a Meta Quest headset. Quest 2 headsets are available from major retailers. Once you get the headset, download Horizon Worlds from the App Store on your Quest headset. Then open the Horizon Worlds app on your headset and search for “Thrive Pavilion.”

## “Virtual Reality Headsets Are Too Expensive”

Joining Thrive Pavilion is free, but you need a VR headset to join. Many people think VR headsets cost over \$1,000, but the Quest 2 headset is only \$199. Even if that seems steep, it’s important to consider the bigger picture. Loneliness isn’t just emotionally draining; it can also have significant financial repercussions.

Studies show that loneliness can lead to increased healthcare costs, with Medicare spending an extra \$6.7 billion annually on socially isolated older adults.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, loneliness is linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety, which can result in more medical bills and a decline in overall well-being.<sup>3</sup>

Investing in a VR headset opens the door to the Thrive Pavilion virtual community, where meaningful connections can be made, ultimately enhancing emotional health and reducing the financial costs of health challenges related to loneliness. In the long run, this small investment can lead to substantial emotional and financial benefits.

## Next Steps

1. If you experience loneliness, or have concerns about becoming lonely, consider trying Thrive Pavilion. Get yourself a Meta Quest headset.
2. Download Horizon Worlds from the App Store on your Quest headset. Then open the Horizon Worlds app on your headset and search for “Thrive Pavilion.”
3. Sign up for a new member welcome event in Thrive Pavilion



*Members can join the fun at Thrive Pavilion’s VR cornhole events, tossing bean bags and competing with friends in a virtual backyard setting*

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> How Loneliness Is Damaging Our Health, The New York Times, 4/20/22. Most recent data available.

<sup>2</sup> Medicare Spends More on Socially Isolated Older Adults, AARP, 11/27/17. Most recent data available.

<sup>3</sup> How Financial Stress Can Affect Your Mental Health and 5 Things That Can Help, The Conversation, 3/16/23

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