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**Testimony
Senate Select Committee on Aging
Breaking the Cycle of Senior Loneliness: Strengthening Family and
Community Support**

Suzanne McCormick, President and CEO, YMCA of the USA

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Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gillibrand: I want to thank you for inviting me today.

I am here representing the nation's 2,600 YMCAs, which serve 10,000 communities across our country. I am grateful for the opportunity to share the story of how they connect and support our older adults every day.

At the Y, we are committed to strengthening communities by connecting people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to their potential, their purpose and each other.

This has been at the core of who we are for 175 years in the U.S. But today, we know that people are struggling to make these connections.

Forty percent of adults say they feel lonely sometimes or even more often than that.

The mortality rate of being socially disconnected is similar to the impact of smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and greater than the impact associated with obesity and inactivity.

The health risks for our older adults are heightened, because they are more likely to feel isolated and disconnected than younger Americans.

But at the Y, older adults find the support and meaningful relationships they need to feel connected and be healthy.

YMCAs engage 17 million Americans annually, and nearly 4 million are over age 55. Almost 2.5 million are over 65. Seniors make up nearly one-quarter of our members.

A few years ago, the Y partnered with NORC at the University of Chicago to find out whether older adults report better quality of life and social connectedness when they visit our facilities or participate in our programs.

Results of this study showed significant increases in overall well-being and social connectedness, a decrease in loneliness, and observed improvements in social well-being, spiritual well-being, physical health and mental health.

The results were even better for older adults who were able to engage more frequently with their YMCA.

Our programs not only help participants build friendships and connections that we all need to thrive, but they also can help prevent, delay or control chronic disease.

Thanks to a 20-year partnership with CDC, the Y is the leading in-person provider of evidence-based chronic disease prevention and management programs, which address issues like diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, falls and cancer.

These programs have been proven to improve health outcomes and quality of life, and they often save health care dollars.

In fact, the Y is recognized for its work with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. During a national study of 8,000 Medicare recipients, the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program saved \$2,650 per participant while preventing or delaying diabetes among the majority of recipients.

The Y is also the leading provider of the Medicare Advantage fitness benefit -- larger than the next seven providers combined.

But for as much as we are able to accomplish on our own due to our national scale and community-level credibility, the Y is always looking to maximize our impact through partnerships.

So, in communities across the country, YMCAs collaborate with partners like senior centers, libraries and places of worship to reach and engage more older adults.

The Y looks forward to also partnering with the Select Committee on Aging to improve both the physical and emotional health of our nation's older adults.

We urge Congress to continue supporting the highest level of funding for the CDC to help the Y innovate our evidence-based chronic disease prevention and control programs, uphold Medicare Advantage's ability to offer supplemental benefits like fitness and socialization opportunities, and enable Medicaid to help low-income seniors improve their physical and mental health.

Every dollar invested in community-based organizations like YMCAs – organizations with trusted relationships and on-the-ground credibility – pays a dividend in the form

of improved health and wellness, especially for our older adults.

Again, thank you for this opportunity today, and thank you for your leadership.