

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute For Mental Health Education to Host Annual Conference Addressing the Growing Crisis of Loneliness**

**EVANSTON, IL, April 20, 2026** – The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education at The Chicago School (NRCI), a leading Chicago-area organization that promotes mental health education and suicide prevention programs, announces its 24th Annual Community Mental Health Conference, [\*Alone Together: Confronting Loneliness Across the Lifespan\*](#). The full-day event will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at Evanston Township High School, located at 1600 Dodge Ave.

This conference, which is open to the public, brings together practitioners, educators, researchers, students and community members to explore how loneliness affects people at every stage of life, and ways to strengthen connections across clinical practices, schools, workplaces, families and neighborhoods throughout Chicagoland communities.

“Loneliness affects individuals, families, and communities across every stage of life, from children to older adults,” said NRCI Executive Director Tracy Levine. “Recognized as a growing public health crisis, it was the focus of a 2023 advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General, which highlighted both the risks of social isolation and the healing power of connection. This conference offers practical strategies to reduce stigma, strengthen belonging, and promote well-being across clinical settings, schools, workplaces, families, and the communities we serve.”

This year’s featured panel, moderated by Dr. Alisha DeWalt, dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies at The Chicago School, will bring together leading voices across research, clinical practice, and lived experience to explore loneliness across the lifespan. Panelists include Nell Compennolle, Ph.D., senior research scientist at The Bridge at NORC at the University of Chicago; Sarah Bier, PMHNP-BC, CNM-FPA, APN, psychiatric nurse practitioner and certified nurse midwife at Psychiatry Studio; and Erin Arnheim, founder of Lense Advisory. Together, the

panel will examine how loneliness manifests from adolescence to older adulthood and how social change, life transitions, and cultural expectations contribute to disconnection.

Additional presenters will lead two afternoon rounds of breakout sessions exploring loneliness across a wide range of contexts and life stages, from workplace systems, late life, and substance use to children and young adults, neurodivergence, adoption-related grief, nutrition, violence prevention, and culturally responsive approaches to belonging in Hispanic/Latino communities. Designed for professionals, caregivers, educators, advocates, and community members, these sessions will offer research-informed perspectives and practical strategies to strengthen connection, support well-being, and respond to isolation in real-world settings.

NRCI, established through a partnership with the Naomi Ruth Cohen Charitable Foundation and The Chicago School in 2008, is committed to reducing stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide throughout the Chicagoland area by expanding access to education, fostering understanding, and encouraging open, honest conversations about mental health.

To purchase tickets and learn more about NRCI's 24th Annual Community Mental Health Conference, *Alone Together: Confronting Loneliness Across the Lifespan*, visit [naomicoheninstitute.org/conferences/2026-conference](https://naomicoheninstitute.org/conferences/2026-conference). Prices range from \$10 to \$45, with scholarships available. Attending licensed professionals have the option to obtain continuing education credits for attending.

### **About The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education at The Chicago School (NRCI)**

The Naomi Ruth Cohen Institute for Mental Health Education (NRCI) at The Chicago School is dedicated to advancing mental health education and reducing stigma associated with mental illness and suicide. Founded by Marilyn and Larry Cohen in memory of their daughter Naomi, and established at The Chicago School in partnership with the Naomi Ruth Cohen Charitable Foundation, NRCI engages individuals, families, and organizations across the Chicagoland area through community-based education, evidence-based training, and its annual Community Mental Health Conference.

In the past five years, NRCI has hosted more than 280 events, reaching over 7,500 participants, including more than 1500 Mental Health First Aid trainees and 1800 QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) suicide prevention-trained gatekeepers, equipping communities with tools to support mental health and well-being.

## **About The Chicago School**

The Chicago School is a leading nonprofit university dedicated to training professionals for careers that improve the health of individuals, organizations, and communities. By combining education, innovation, community, and impact, The Chicago School approach provides students with a practical and solutions-oriented education in an array of academic programs across psychology, medicine, business, counseling, and behavioral sciences. With more than 6,000 students and locations in Chicago, Dallas, Southern California, and Washington, D.C., the university's extensive network of community partnerships provides applicable training and networking opportunities.

The Chicago School is accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission. The Chicago School is a proud member of The Community Solution Education System, an integrated nonprofit system of colleges and universities working together to advance student success and community impact. To learn more, visit [www.thechicagoschool.edu](http://www.thechicagoschool.edu).

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