

**IP 21 Staying Clean in Isolation Review and Input Draft**  
**For review from 22 January – 15 May 2025**

**Hello from Your World Board!**

We are pleased to offer a review and input draft revision of IP #21. The revision of IP #21 was long overdue—and the timing of the project has allowed us to account for the many resources for addicts in isolation that didn't exist before the pandemic in 2020.

The draft is based on the original piece and the input we received both through the survey process and through focus groups held with members who expressed interest in the project. This was the first time we had an online form for any interested member to sign up to be in a focus group to gather input. We held two webinars in which members shared, and that allowed us to hear voices as well as ideas. We reached out to everyone who had expressed interest in the project, and those who joined us had a lot to say. There is no substitute for members' own words. Those conversations, along with the responses to the original survey, formed the backbone of the draft. The review and input process allows all interested members to read and offer feedback on the draft as it now stands. We are always grateful for the members who make time during the Review and Input window to share their ideas and help us to ensure that the draft is correct and as true to all of our experience as possible.

We will read all the input, and then do our best to improve the draft based on that feedback. The resulting draft will be offered in the *Conference Agenda Report* for Fellowship-wide consideration at the 2026 World Service Conference.

This cover memo is intended to give you some background information on the IP and some questions to guide your discussions as you review and offer input on the draft.

**Project Background and Purpose**

IP #21, *The Loner: Staying Clean in Isolation*, was selected by the 2020 WSC as the information pamphlet to be revised during that conference cycle. We surveyed the Fellowship during that cycle about changes that members would like to see in a revision of the IP. The project was then suspended as a result of the resource shortage brought about by the pandemic.

Even so, during the 2020-2022 cycle survey, we received 505 responses from 33 countries.

In 2023, the WSC once more prioritized this IP, and we are grateful to bring this project to fruition. Since the Conference, we were able to review that survey data and to hold focus groups with members from across the Fellowship who expressed interest. We want to thank all those who shared their experiences of staying clean in isolation for helping to shape a draft that reflects our current experience.

**What's in the Draft?**

The revisions of this informational pamphlet may have been long overdue, but the project is also right on time. In the past few years our collective understanding of what it means to be isolated in recovery has grown—and we have embraced new methods of creating and experiencing connection.

From our earliest efforts at reaching out to isolated addicts, it has been clear that geography isn't the only thing that can set us apart from our fellows. From our beginnings, members have written letters to the World Service Office from locations where there were not yet meetings—but the office also received many letters from members within established communities who couldn't get to meetings because of physical disabilities, caregiving, neurodivergence or mental health issues. We saw even more evidence in the survey results that isolation is not just a geographic issue. Just as the Basic Text tells us there is no model of the recovering addict, there is no single version of the addict who defines the experience of staying clean in isolation.

In that spirit, the title of this IP was also revised. Throughout the survey and focus group process, we heard again and again that using the term “Loner” to describe NA members experiencing isolation was outdated—and we agree. We have dropped “The Loner” from the title and left “Staying Clean in Isolation,” which feels much more inclusive and positive.

At the end of the day, it is connection that keeps us coming back and helps us stay clean even in the hard times. The revised IP offers insight into how members who experience isolation at some point in their journey are able to stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way of life. Sometimes the connections that make that possible are within ourselves. Sometimes isolation brings us closer to a Higher Power. And sometimes it's finding ways to connect with other NA members even when we can't get to a meeting.

One of the greatest transformations we have experienced as a Fellowship also has transformed the experience of recovering in isolation. The rise of virtual NA, through phone and online meetings, has offered members who once felt disconnected a way to reach out not only to people down the street but to members all over the globe who have shared experience. The ability to attend meetings at any time of day or night, anywhere in the world, has revitalized the recovery of members who were languishing at home; it has also produced a new generation of NA members who have “gotten clean on the screen” and whose whole experience of membership is online. Way back when, in our White Book, Jimmy shared that “Never before have so many clean addicts, of their own choice and in free society, been able to meet where they please, to maintain their recovery in complete creative freedom.” Today this is truer than ever and, like so many of our experiences of connection and transformation, it began from deep loneliness.

## Review and Input Questions

Sharing your personal response to the draft will help make it more useful and beneficial for members. If you are reading this with a group or committee, we look forward to hearing about the experience of reading the IP together.

We are asking for your overall impression and your response to several specific questions:

1. My overall impression of the draft is positive.

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1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Comments regarding your overall impression:

2. Are there any thoughts, ideas, or spiritual principles missing or that should be elaborated upon in this pamphlet?
3. Are there any ideas or experiences that you believe are inadequately explained?
4. Is there anything in the pamphlet that should be omitted or deleted?
5. This pamphlet addresses staying clean in isolation, whether that isolation is physical, geographical, or as the result of some other barrier to in-person participation in NA. Do you believe we have addressed these issues adequately, or that there's something more that needs to be said?

It is always easiest for us to collect input online. You will find the online input form at [na.org/survey](https://na.org/survey).

You can also send your comments and suggestions directly to:

[worldboard@na.org](mailto:worldboard@na.org)

or

**World Board**  
**19737 Nordhoff Place**  
**Chatsworth, CA 91311 USA**

Please respond by 15 May 2025.

## Introduction

*Every time I feel like I am all alone, I remember that there are others in the Fellowship who also feel alone, possibly in the same exact moment as me.*

Narcotics Anonymous is a program of connection—so much so that some people say NA stands for “never alone.” But most of us, at some point in our recovery, have experienced deep loneliness and isolation. Whether we are isolated emotionally, physically, or geographically, we can still stay clean and find a new way of life.

There are many reasons we may be isolated: we may live far from any NA meetings; our health or the health of someone we care for may prevent us from coming to meetings; we may be in a job or a living situation that we cannot easily leave. But if the NA message has found us, we can find our way to the message. Today and every day, addicts are staying clean in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. Our Basic Text reminds us that “there is no model of the recovering addict,” and our experience has shown that we can stay clean and recover from the disease of addiction “no matter what.”

More than ever before we have the resources to stay in touch, participate, work steps, and be of service, regardless of physical, geographical, or other limitations. Some of us have experienced the kind of total isolation where none of that was possible, but the program of Narcotics Anonymous gave us tools to get through. Connection looks different to different people, and it may be different at different times in our recovery. Being honest about our circumstances, open-minded about what can work for us, and willing to try new ways of thinking about our program give us the opportunity to experience our isolation as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

## Staying Clean in Isolation

Some of us begin our recovery physically isolated from other NA members; others of us find ourselves isolated after we’ve been part of NA communities for a long time. And the experience is very different: for the member who finds NA online or in print and cannot attend meetings in person, virtual meetings and long-distance sponsorship may feel “normal,” whereas for an addict accustomed to being part of an in-person community the same experience may feel profoundly alienating.

Some of us may be far from in-person meetings, and we may be in a position to bring NA into our local community by starting meetings; others of us cannot attend meetings in person for other reasons, even if they’re nearby. The experience of isolation may be very different in each of these situations, but there are some things we all have in common.

The first, of course, is that we need to stay clean no matter what. Whether we reach out by phone or online, whether we can find our way to a virtual meeting or share with an individual member, NA is here for us when we are struggling. Seeking NA through virtual meetings or social media, calling people we’ve met at meetings or events, even writing letters allows us to make contact with another member who believes in us and wants to help us in our recovery.

There are times when we can’t reach another addict in recovery. One member spent their first winter clean in geographic isolation. “In the stillness,” she shared, “I came to know that I’m part

of the world. I'm part of something bigger than me. At night, in pain, I would think, there are others out there feeling what I'm feeling and staying clean. In the day I could watch the trees and know I'm alive just like they are. It's a clarity that hasn't left me."

We all have tools we can use if we want to stay clean. NA literature is available to us online or by mail; meetings are online if we can't get to them in person; and NA members are here to help us. For many of us, staying clean in isolation deepens a relationship with a power greater than ourselves. A time of isolation provides an opportunity to dive deep into stepwork and into the study of our guiding principles. But that's not to say it's easy.

### Crises

Some NA members find themselves isolated when caring for a sick or disabled loved one. The combination of being isolated, in a state of "high alert," and feeling like the only one going through something so difficult can be deeply challenging. "My husband was in intensive care, and I was at the hospital in a strange town where I didn't know anyone," a member shared. "In that time, I noticed I could pay attention to the miracles all around us. Every breath is a miracle. When someone is really sick it's easier to see that."

There are times when we need NA so desperately, and it's just not possible to get there. Whether we make contact online or on the phone, whether we reach out or withdraw, whether we build a whole new NA community around us or a new safe place within ourselves—the program is still with us, because it lives in us.

Unlocking our addiction through relapse or destructive actions in a time of hardship creates more problems, distracting us and the people around us from the crisis at hand. In contrast, when we stay clean, we can show up with grace and fortitude we may not even know we possess. We may find a deeper relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, a strength we didn't know we had, a kind of courage that perhaps we admired in others but never imagined for ourselves.

Our Basic Text reminds us that "We are not responsible for our disease, but we are responsible for our recovery." Even when we are isolated, we find the ways and means to connect: in person, virtually, or through prayer and meditation. There are a variety of online resources in addition to virtual meetings: recovery literature is available online; there are audio recordings of the Basic Text in a variety of languages; and recordings of speakers at meetings or conventions can be indispensable tools for learning and growing wherever we are. Local or zonal websites often have virtual links to events, recordings, and more.

Recovery in NA is a process that transforms our experience into tools for helping others. Sometimes it's as simple as being able to share with another member, "I've been through that, and I stayed clean." And sometimes it means that we have access to a whole new depth of empathy and understanding.

### Reaching Out for Help

How many times have we heard people say things like, "an addict alone is in bad company," or "NA means Never Alone, Never Again?" When we are isolated we may reflect bitterly on these statements, without considering the ways that we might find that sense of belonging we need so desperately. Many members who experienced isolation as a result of illness or aging shared

feelings of frustration. “My big beautiful life in recovery was ripped out from under me and nothing prepared me for it,” said one member. “I needed people to reach out to me to let me know I was still important to the fellowship,” shared another. We may want to believe people know how we feel or what we need, but in fact we need to tell them. Reaching out can be especially difficult when we are in pain, but it’s the most important thing we can do.

Some of us are isolated away from the technologies that might make reaching out easier. When we are incarcerated, or in places that are very remote or without electricity, we find different ways to connect. The publication *Reaching Out* is available by mail or on tablets to many addicts who are incarcerated. You can always write or email the NA World Service Office at the address listed among the resources at the end of this pamphlet. The personal stories in the Basic Text, the White Book, and the White Book Anniversary Edition allow us to learn from members’ experience. Many local NA communities have outreach committees dedicated to helping members in isolated areas or who are homebound. Another service many H&I committees provide links incarcerated members with someone outside who can provide guidance and support through the Steps.

### Starting an NA meeting

Recovering in isolation can motivate us to start meetings. We may feel unprepared or unqualified, but all that we really need is willingness. *The Group Booklet*, *Serving NA in Rural and Isolated Communities*, and the webpage on how to start a meeting all offer information and inspiration. You can receive a Group Starter Kit from your local service body or from NA World Services. (Follow the link to “how to start a meeting” at the end of this IP for more information.) Members from other NA communities are often willing to come help or support the effort. Even so, it takes patience to sit in a room regularly and wait for people to come. Consistency is key. So is getting the word out! Whether the meeting location is posted on community bulletin boards, on local social media, or whether you reach out to treatment organizations in your community, the meeting will not grow unless people know where to find it. In our Basic Text, a member who helped start NA in his community shared about the time spent holding space for the meeting: “It renews my commitment every time I find myself alone in a room—although most meetings, these days, have a minimum of four members (and sometimes even twenty).” Some of us are isolated by language, and we may find that starting a meeting in our language helps carry the message to others in the community. Although it takes patience and commitment, there is no joy quite like seeing NA take off in a community we helped to begin. Our gratitude speaks—and often it says exactly what we need to hear to make it another day.

### Virtual NA and the Addict in Isolation

Virtual NA has changed the experience of isolation for many NA members. An older member shared, “I had chronic illness and over forty years clean. I needed to matter. Being online allowed me to be of service again, to feel connected.” A member in a very rural country shared gratitude that “Technology makes connection possible even in very remote areas. Even when the internet doesn’t work so well it’s good enough to reach out and ask for help.” There are many members now whose whole experience with NA Fellowship is online, including being of service. When we can be open-minded about what will work for us, we often find that we have what we need—even when it’s not exactly what we want or expect. Online and telephone meetings have allowed NA to come to many of our members who cannot come to NA in person. Some people note that reaching out is different online, though: conversation before and after the meeting isn’t quite the same, and we might have to ask people to “hang out” virtually or be open to a phone

call before we are quite ready. Reaching out is always an act of courage, and feeling like we are a part of takes effort even when we are in person. When we are willing to take a risk and ask for help, we help the person we are asking as much as ourselves.

Virtual NA allows us to find meetings anytime we can make it – but it also extends our reach in finding people with our experience. We may have to ask around a bit – but there is very little that we go through in recovery that someone else hasn't also experienced.

### The Value of Sharing

Narcotics Anonymous is a program of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions designed to help addicts find recovery, regardless of where they may be. By practicing these spiritual principles, we can achieve freedom from active addiction whether or not we are in contact with others. But our Basic Text tells us that “the heart of NA beats when two addicts share their recovery,” and finding a way to share with another addict in person, by mail, by phone, or online can make all the difference.

For some of us, isolation is not about geography or illness. Some of us have a hard time being around people at all; sometimes struggles with mental health or other issues can make the experience of in-person meetings too stressful. Some members share that a bad breakup or other relationship difficulties in the rooms make it hard to keep coming back, even when they desperately want what NA has to offer. One way or another a rupture happens and, as a member shared, “I suddenly found myself on an island.” One member caught in a violent relationship shared that while going to meetings in person was out of the question, virtual meetings provided a lifeline. “I can get to meetings when I'm at work, or when I'm alone in the house. I have a sponsor online and we're working on a plan to get free.” Language and culture issues often intersect, and it's possible that even when we can understand some of the words, we can feel unwelcome or afraid to share when a meeting is in a language other than our own. Finding a way to share and participate diminishes the feeling of isolation. We may discover that NA is bigger than we thought, and that our experience is not unique – even when we feel very alone.

### Living the Program

For some people, being isolated means learning deeper lessons about anonymity: “In the military, my calls and emails were all monitored. They couldn't know about my NA membership, and my NA people couldn't know where I was or what I was doing. Hearing a familiar voice sometimes had to be enough; I'd hold on till I was on leave and I could get to a meeting. I didn't know if I could stay clean that way, but I learned I could. Sometimes I'd be holding on for that next meeting, but I knew it would come.” Anonymity can protect our recovery not only by protecting us from stigma or notoriety; we come to see that NA lives inside us. It's not a product we consume or a place we go; as we practice the program we create it, experience it, and see it transform our lives even when we cannot speak it out loud.

Other members have found being away from an NA community created an opportunity to be more vocal and visible about their experience. Being an example to people who had never encountered recovery before can be a powerful way we carry the message.

“I learned that I could bring my recovery to wherever I was,” a member shared. “I could be of service wherever I was. I try to remember out here that old saying, I could be the only Basic Text

someone will see.” Almost everyone knows somebody who has struggled with addiction, and so many people in the world have lost someone to our disease. But not that many people know that recovery is possible. When we live the program of Narcotics Anonymous, just being ourselves can carry a powerful message.

“NA taught me how to connect, and being isolated taught me I can identify with people beyond NA: sharing from the heart, meeting the people around us where they are, looking for the places I could be of service: these skills translate into the larger world, and I can get the benefits even when I’m not around my Fellowship.”

Our Basic Text tells us that “NA is like a lifeboat in a sea of isolation, hopelessness and destructive chaos.” Because isolation and alienation are so much a part of active addiction, feeling isolated when we are in recovery can be painfully familiar. But the experience can be very different – and that difference has the potential to be transformative. Our relationship to ourselves, our Higher Power, and the world around us has changed. There are people who believe in us and want to help us in our recovery. We have spiritual principles to guide us as we navigate through the storms life sometimes brings. The storms don’t define our experience, but how we weather them does. We can stay clean in isolation—and find in the experience a new or renewed strength in our spirituality and our commitment to recovery. Just for today, we have nothing to fear.

#### Resources

<https://na.org/literature/>

<https://na.org/meetingsearch/virtual-meeting-search/>

<https://na.org/how-to-start-a-meeting/>

<https://na.org/vmb>

<https://na.org/servingrural>

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