

ABOUT LONELINESS

COMMUNITY CENTRES SA POSITION STATEMENT 2020



During COVID-19 loneliness has reached epidemic proportions globally. Community Centres SA recognises that part of the cure to loneliness and social isolation lies in the power of meaningful connections formed across SA's 105 Community Centres.

Loneliness is the deep distress people experience when their social relationships are not the way they would like. It is a personal feeling of social isolation¹.

IN AUSTRALIA

- 21.4% rarely or never feel close to people
- 22.1% rarely or never have someone to talk to and;
- 21.4% rarely or never feel they have people they can turn to².

LONELINESS AND HEALTH

Neurologically, the pain of loneliness is similar to physical pain³.

It is linked to increased risk of multiple chronic health conditions including heart disease, stroke, lung disease, immune disorders, cognitive decline, paranoia, anxiety and depression^{4,5}.

It increases the length of recovery time from illness and disease, the risk of relapse, the duration of hospital stays, the risk of readmission⁶ and increased GP visits⁷.

It presents a higher risk to premature mortality than smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, flu, physical inactivity and poor air quality⁸.

WHO IS AT RISK

Loneliness affects people of all ages, education levels, gender and cultural background.

People who may be more at risk are those leaving the family home to live independently, moving to a new city, starting a family, becoming 'empty nesters', the death of a partner, declining health, or retirement^{9,10}.



AUSTRALIAN ADULTS
ARE LONELY
AUSTRALIAN LONELINESS
REPORT, 2018

“
The most terrible
poverty is
loneliness, and the
feeling of being
unloved
Mother Teresa
”

CAN CONNECTEDNESS CURE LONELINESS?

Social connectedness provides safety and security, support, a sense of belonging, and meaning and purpose.

It can reduce the incidence of relapse for people suffering depression¹¹ and addiction¹², and also the risk of premature mortality amongst retirees following the loss of their work social identity¹³.

WHAT KIND OF CONNECTIONS COUNT?

The quality, quantity and diversity of relationships all play a role in increasing social connection and addressing loneliness¹⁴.

Beneficial relationships are those that are in-person, positive, have meaning to the individual and value the individual¹⁵.

The groups we belong to - ethnic, religious, family, friends, work, social interest - all contribute to our social identity providing a sense of self and a sense of belonging as part of a collective. This shared sense of identity is also a basis for both giving and receiving support, which provides a sense of control and purpose and builds resilience to deal with adversity¹⁶.



BEING MORE SOCIALLY
CONNECTED LEADS TO A

50%

REDUCTION IN RISK OF EARLY
MORTALITY FOR PEOPLE OF
ALL AGES¹⁷.

A WHOLE-OF-COMMUNITY-APPROACH

Loneliness and social isolation, like other public health issues, does not have one causal influence or treatment¹⁸ and requires a collaborative whole-of-community approach to raise awareness of its impacts, prevention and cure, across all stages of life¹⁹.

Many people who are socially isolated find it difficult to build meaningful connections with others independently.

Evidence highlights the need for social scaffolding to raise awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of groups, help identify potential connections (existing and new) for social growth, provide training to develop skills to connect with valued groups, and provide follow-up support to address any potential barriers to continual group membership²⁰.

COMMUNITY CENTRES WORKING TO PREVENT LONELINESS

“
 I never used to invite people to my place. I didn't have the confidence. But I've had some of the ladies from the craft group over for morning tea, so I think socially the Community Centre has helped me be more open with people, I just feel a bit more connected with others now.
 Josie, Wandana CC
 ”

In South Australia there are 105 community and neighbourhood centres actively working towards reducing social isolation in their local communities, through education and training, social groups, volunteering opportunities, community events and personal support programs.



OVER 35,000
 PEOPLE ARE IN CONTACT WITH COMMUNITY CENTRES ACROSS SOUTH AUSTRALIA EVERY WEEK, AND MORE THAN **20,000** HOURS OF VOLUNTEER LABOUR ARE CONTRIBUTED TO CENTRES. WE ARE PART OF A NATIONAL NETWORK WITH OVER **1000** COMMUNITY CENTRES ACROSS AUSTRALIA.

CALL TO ACTION

Community Centres SA (CCSA) calls upon:

- 1 Local government, NFP's and other organisations that shape and manage local interventions and services:
 - a) To base project scoping on a community needs assessment and mapping of local assets to understand who is at risk of loneliness.
 - b) To develop interventions and projects around "place" – meaning they should be undertaken in the context of the neighbourhood ecosystem, and make best use of local community capacity.
- 2 State and Local Government:
 - a) To develop a clear plan of action with measurable targets for a reduction in loneliness over time, including consideration of loneliness in formal referral systems.
 - b) To recognise the increasing community reliance on Community Centres to provide community-led solutions to loneliness. Ensure their eligibility for ongoing funding that reflects the increasing demand on their services.
- 3 CCSA commits to promoting discussion and research about loneliness. We will continue to run the 'Loneliness Cure Award' that recognises innovative approaches to supporting meaningful connections; and to develop systematic alliances that build interventions addressing loneliness.

“ I looked forward to every weekly class at Artworks Inc and appreciated the sense of connection and inspiration. In such a challenging time I felt less isolated. I thank you for thoughts and fulfillment in my life, giving me such support and great inspiration in lonely times.

B, found herself alone in social isolation during 2020 ”

“
**Loneliness –
 the Solution is
 Community**
 ”

¹² Psychweek.org.au. (2018). Australian Loneliness Report. [online] Available at: <https://psychweek.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Psychology-Week-2018-Australian-Loneliness-Report.pdf>

^{3,5,7,8,9,15,17,19} Holt-Lunstad, J. 2018, Loneliness in the 21st Century, video recording, Australian Coalition to end Loneliness, viewed 10 July 2019, <https://www.endloneliness.com.au/professor-julianne-holt-lunstad-presents-loneliness-in-the-21st-century-keynote>

⁴⁶ Petitte, T., Mallow, J., Barnes, E., Petrone, A., Barr, T., & Theeke, L. (2015). A Systematic Review of Loneliness and Common Chronic Physical Conditions in Adults. The open psychology journal. Vol.8(Suppl 2), 113–132. doi:10.2174/1874350101508010113

^{10,16} Haslam, S. (2018). 'Unlocking the social cure'. the psychologist. Vol.31, 28-31 [online] Available at: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-31/may-2018/unlocking-social-cure>

¹¹ Cruwys, T. (2018). 'How groups beat depression'. the psychologist. Vol.31, 40-43 [online] Available at: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-31/may-2018/how-groups-beat-depression>

¹² Dingle, G. (2018). 'Addiction and the importance of belonging'. the psychologist. Vol.31, 36-39 [online] Available at: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-31/may-2018/addiction-and-importance-belonging>

¹³ Haslan, S. (2018) The health effect of social contact [ABC Radio National: Big Ideas] 6 June, 2018 [online] Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bigideas/the-health-effect-of-social-contact/9720152>

¹⁴ Full Frame Initiative. (2013) 'Five Domains of Wellbeing: Social Connectedness' Fact sheet [online] Available at: https://fullframeinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/SocialConnectedness_Factsheet.pdf

¹⁸ Stillman, T. F., Baumeister, R. F., Lambert, N. M., Crescioni, A. W., DeWall, C. N., & Fincham, F. D. (2009). Alone and without purpose: Life loses meaning following social exclusion. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45(4), 686–694

²⁰ Haslan, C (2018) 'Scaffolding a stronger society'. The psychologist. Vol.31, 44-47 [online] Available at: <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-31/may-2018/scaffolding-stronger-society>