

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Report No. 14, 57th Parliament, *Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland*

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

On 27 May 2021, the Legislative Assembly referred an inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland to the Community Support and Services Committee (the Committee).

On 6 December 2021, the Committee tabled *Report No. 14, 57th Parliament, Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland* (Committee Report).

The Queensland Government tabled an interim response to the Committee report on 4 March 2022.

The final Queensland Government response to the recommendations contained in the Committee Report is provided below.

Recommendation	Queensland Government Response
1. The Committee recommends the Legislative Assembly note the report.	The Queensland Government thanks the Committee for undertaking the inquiry and notes that on 31 March 2022, the Legislative Assembly moved a motion that the House take note of the Community Support and Services Committee <i>Report No. 14, 57th Parliament, Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness</i> , tabled on 6 December 2021.
2. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government clearly define social isolation and loneliness to create a common discourse and ensure consistent language to enhance understanding of these issues across Queensland and to support appropriate policy responses.	The Queensland Government supports the recommendation. Concepts of social isolation and loneliness are not universally defined, which can make social isolation and loneliness more difficult to recognise and address. A review of existing research and literature shows that there is no accepted, standard definition for social isolation and loneliness in Australia or overseas. A functional definition of both social isolation and loneliness will assist in developing a common understanding and use of consistent language across Queensland government to inform and support future policy responses. These functional definitions will consider the unique experiences and challenges faced by diverse groups and communities, and recognise and embrace distinct perspectives, historical context and socio-cultural factors that have a significant impact on social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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<p>3. The Committee supports the establishment of a network of frontline professionals involved in preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness, with a view to building sector capacity through opportunities such as online professional development, supervision and structure mentoring opportunities.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>It is noted that there are a range of professional roles and functions currently involved in preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness across social and health service systems, including student wellbeing professionals, frontline police, positions, paid and volunteers supporting seniors social isolation services, positions in health and medical clinics, primary health networks, hospitals and other community organisations and support services.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will explore existing models of support for frontline professional roles involved in preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness, across sectors and levels of government to identify current capacity and capability. The extent to which existing capacity and capabilities can be leveraged in addition to identifying specific gaps or other opportunities to further build capacity and capability will be explored.</p> <p>The Queensland Government recognises the important role that the tertiary sector plays at both an undergraduate and post-graduate level and professional bodies that oversight registration, supervision and ongoing professional development for roles such as social workers, psychologists, nurses and teaches in contributing to capability building in these professions.</p>
<p>4. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government explore opportunities to place social work students in Neighbourhood and Community Centres across Queensland, to nurture university partnerships, build capacity of workers, attract staff and support programs responding to social isolation and loneliness.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>The Queensland Government is supportive of social work university placements in neighbourhood and community centres noting this has been an existing and well-established practice in Queensland for over 20 years, assisting neighbourhood and community centres in a wide range of programs and activities specific to the centre or their client cohorts.</p> <p>Student placements in neighbourhood and community centres are managed by the participating universities and community organisations, where issues such as insurance, liabilities, screening, and supervision requirements for meeting curriculum and professional board criteria/assessments are negotiated and agreed to.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will work with the neighbourhood and community centre sector and the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) to understand if and where potential enhancements of the existing model of social work placement practice in neighbourhood and community centres could be made.</p>

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	<p>The Queensland Government will also seek to understand, in consultation with the University sector, the extent to which other professional roles such as psychology graduates or human service graduates might be able to support programs responding to social isolation and loneliness in neighbourhood and community centres.</p>
<p>5. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government review the funding model for Neighbourhood and Community Centres across Queensland including consideration of measures to help stabilise the workforce, retain corporate knowledge and help ensure centres are best positioned to meet the emerging needs of their communities in preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>The Queensland Government is currently working with the Neighbourhood and Community Centre Strategic Repositioning Committee to develop an investment framework to support a contemporary and networked service system that responds to a wide range of community needs.</p> <p>As part of this, the Queensland Government is reviewing the funding model to support the long-term viability of neighbourhood and community centres and their ability to continue to respond to local, placed-based community need.</p>
<p>6. The Committee encourages the Queensland Government to reflect on the work and the research in other jurisdictions to identify best practice in addressing social isolation and loneliness.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation, noting alignment with Recommendation 14(b).</p> <p>There is extensive existing and emerging work and research nationally and internationally on 'best practice' strategies and mechanisms to prevent and address social isolation and loneliness.</p> <p>While key learnings from current work provides valuable insight into effective responses, any 'best practice' identified to address social isolation and loneliness must be appropriate and fit-for-purpose for the diverse range of Queensland communities and vulnerable groups, including in regional and remote areas of the state.</p>
<p>7. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government consider partnering with other levels of government to implement a state-wide trial of the social prescription model similar to that occurring</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation in principle, noting alignment with Recommendation 14(f).</p> <p>The Queensland Government recognises that there are a number of different models of social prescribing in Australia and internationally. Social prescribing enables professionals to refer people to a range of community-based, non-clinical organisations to enable participation and social connection.</p>

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<p>through the Mount Gravatt Community Centre.</p> <p>The Committee also recommends that the Queensland Government seek the support of the University of Queensland to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the model, with a view to government reviewing the findings of such evaluation.</p>	<p>Pending the definitional and research work in response to recommendations 2 and 6, the Queensland Government will make representation to the Commonwealth Government to support Primary Health Networks to deliver initiatives to address social isolation and loneliness in Queensland.</p> <p>The social prescribing model currently in place at the Mount Gravatt Community Centre offers one approach to social prescribing and is being monitored and evaluated as part of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project led by the University of Queensland.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will consider the evaluation of this work, anticipated in 2022-23, in considering a state-wide trial of a social prescription model. In addition, the Queensland Government will further consider the role of neighbourhood and community centres and other research and evaluation activity on other social prescribing models to inform an approach to a state-wide trial.</p>
<p>8. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government identify the most suitable tool to measure social isolation and loneliness, in order to gather longitudinal data for the Queensland context, which will assist in the allocation of resources in the future.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>It is noted that a significant body of work has already been undertaken nationally and internationally regarding measurement of social isolation and loneliness. This work has identified a range of challenges associated with measurement of these constructs.</p> <p>The Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE) will continue to work with the Queensland Government Statistician's Office (QGSO) to deliver the Queensland Social Survey that commenced in 2021 and delivers key information on social isolation and loneliness. The objective of the social isolation survey questions is to capture information about social groups and connections with neighbours, friends and family.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will further explore other approaches, including those that incorporate the perspectives of diverse groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in particular, to measuring social isolation and loneliness, taking into consideration existing tools and measurement approaches, appropriateness for a range of vulnerable cohorts, and measurement at an individual, program and community level. It is noted that measurement of social isolation and loneliness is closely related to Recommendation 2 regarding the definition of both social isolation and loneliness.</p>

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<p>9. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government the work of federally-funded primary health network nurses and other Commonwealth- funded positions in addressing social isolation and loneliness, including for primary health network nurses to be allocated to major medical centres where needed.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>Primary health networks (PHNs) are primarily funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health to strengthen primary health care and improve patient-centred service integration through leading the commissioning of a wide range of services to address local needs and improve the health outcomes of the communities.</p> <p>Funding of primary health network positions is primarily the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The Queensland Government will make representation to the Commonwealth Government in relation to the recommendation.</p>
<p>10. The Committee encourages the Queensland Government to advocate to city councils of major centres to ensure adequate provision of green space, parks, toilet access, infrastructure and planning, access to transport and meeting places such as libraries, and social infrastructure, to promote mitigating factors that alleviate social isolation and loneliness.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>The Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (DSDILGP) administers Queensland's land use planning framework, established in the <i>Planning Act 2016</i>. The planning framework consists of three main systems: plan-making, development assessment and dispute resolution. State and local governments share the responsibility for the delivery and operation of these systems.</p> <p>Local governments plan for green space, parks and infrastructure through a local government infrastructure plan (LGIP) in their local planning schemes. State and regional planning matters are articulated through the <i>State Planning Policy 2017</i> (SPP) and regional plans.</p> <p>The SPP contains 17 state interests, including but not limited to, the <i>Liveable communities</i> state interest. All Queensland local governments are required to appropriately integrate the state interest policies in their local planning instruments, where relevant. Policies contained in the <i>Liveable communities</i> state interest seek to ensure that communities are well designed and serviced with necessary infrastructure to support wellbeing and enhance quality of life.</p> <p>In 2020, DSDILGP released the Model code for neighbourhood design: a code for reconfiguring a lot. The model provisions contained in the document are designed to assist local governments to address aspects of the <i>Liveable communities</i> state interest in the SPP by providing a contemporary set of standards that can be used by local governments to assist in integrating the state interest. The</p>

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	<p>model provisions provide guidance to local governments in the design of neighbourhoods to support community health and wellbeing by providing opportunities for increased daily physical activity and proximity to parks and open space.</p> <p>Also in 2020, DSDILGP amended the Planning Regulation 2017 to include new benchmarks for new residential development to advance healthy and active communities by requiring street trees on both sides of streets, footpaths on at least one side, access to parks and open space, maximum street block lengths and connected street patterns that respond to the landscape of the local area.</p> <p>The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) leads transport planning to move and connect people, places, goods and services safely, efficiently and effectively across Queensland, providing a single integrated transport network accessible to everyone.</p> <p>TMR's <i>Creating Better Connections For Queenslanders</i> is a 10 year plan for passenger transport in Queensland. Specific priorities include: reliable and safe services; being responsive to changing community needs; seamless end to end journeys; and an easy and accessible network.</p> <p>Through this plan, TMR will continue to work with local Councils and other stakeholders to improve access to passenger transport, acknowledging the role these services play in connecting people to key destinations and each other. TMR works with a range of stakeholders including local councils when considering the types of transport infrastructure and services that the community can access.</p>
<p>11. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government consider the development of online induction and training opportunities for volunteers who contribute to programs aimed at preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>DCHDE will develop online induction and resources for volunteers who work in programs which help prevent and address social isolation and loneliness in communities. The online induction training and resources will take a trauma-informed, culturally safe and responsive approach that is informed by, and reflective of, the community where the volunteers will be providing the support.</p> <p>Induction training for volunteers is currently provided by the organisation employing them as training is tailored to the specific knowledge and skills required by the role, and which provides information about compliance with the organisation's policies and procedures, and covers site-specific occupational health and safety issues to ensure that volunteers can fulfil their tasks safely and effectively.</p>

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	<p>DCHDE will work with stakeholders including Volunteering Queensland to develop resources and make them available to organisations that involve volunteers.</p>
<p>12. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government investigates the opportunities to co-locate State and Commonwealth Government funded, and non-government organisations where possible, to support efficiency and client access across communities.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>Partnership arrangements with Commonwealth, State and local government and other stakeholders can support efficient and effective service delivery.</p> <p>Co-location of government and non-government services has the potential to leverage infrastructure and resources, supporting the delivery of a diverse range of programs that are accessible to local communities. There is also opportunity to deliver government funded services through Neighbourhood and Community Centres to support improved access to joined-up services.</p> <p>The Queensland Government will explore other opportunities for co-location when designing, commissioning, establishing or re-locating services where this approach serves to improve efficiency and access for service users.</p> <p>The Queensland Government notes that co-location of services and programs is often driven at the organisational and community-level and does not require Government endorsement or approval to form such arrangements.</p>
<p>13. The Committee recommends that the Queensland Government consider a consistent approach among neighbourhood and community centres, mapping services and programs available locally, to support place-based responses to social isolation and loneliness.</p>	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>The Queensland Government recognises the important role that neighbourhood and community centres play in providing social and community services to Queenslanders. Neighbourhood and community centres are community-led and take a place-based approach, responding to the individual needs and priorities of their local communities. They provide a place where people feel safe and are able to connect to other community members, groups and services.</p> <p>The Queensland Government supports the locally-driven and place-centric approach adopted by neighbourhood and community centres in addressing community need.</p> <p>In accordance with Recommendations 5 and 14(e) the Queensland Government will consider how neighbourhood and community centres can best support place-based responses to social isolation and loneliness, and how this is best supported through the Queensland Government's funding model.</p>

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<p>14. The Committee recommends that the government develop a 10-year state-wide strategy to address social isolation and loneliness which should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Identify the social determinants and preventative factors of social isolation and loneliness b) Detail examples of successful strategies through published case studies to help guide best practice c) Encourage communities to access, publish on and utilise My Community Directory or similar resources to raise awareness of the organisations who provide local support for individuals who experience social isolation and loneliness d) Identify opportunities for improved digital access and inclusion in preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness, including in regional, remote, and very remote communities e) Explore the role of infrastructure that supports strong social outcomes, including Neighbourhood and Community Centres, in implementing place-based approaches to preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness f) Investigate and analyse the research related to the effectiveness of a social 	<p>The Queensland Government supports the recommendation.</p> <p>DCHDE will lead development of a whole-of-government strategy to address social isolation and loneliness, including the issues noted in sub-sections (a) to (g) of this recommendation and preceding recommendations.</p> <p>The strategy will outline current and future Queensland Government activities, services and initiatives to address the drivers of social isolation and loneliness.</p>

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<p>prescribing model of addressing social isolation and loneliness in Queensland through the use of link workers, including social workers</p> <p>g) Further investigate the socio-cultural factors causing social isolation and loneliness in remote First Nations communities, including access to housing.</p>	