

Social connectivity and isolation

Background summary

An ageing population is a significant issue for both Banyule and Nillumbik local government areas, and less pronounced for Darebin. Older people who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and face inequity are more likely to experience poor health and are less likely to access appropriate support (World Health Organisation, 2017). Both Darebin and Banyule have areas experiencing significant disadvantage.

At the North East Healthy Communities healthy ageing forum in February, three broad priority areas were identified:

- Social connectivity and isolation;
- Transport; and
- Older carers.

What we know about social connectivity and isolation

- The risk of social isolation increases with age
- It is estimated that 10% of older people in Victoria experience significant detrimental impacts from isolation and loneliness (Commissioner for Senior Victorians, 2016)
- Poor health is a risk for social isolation and social isolation is a risk for poorer health
- Loneliness is as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is worse for you than obesity (Holt-Lunstad, 2010)
- Lonely people are more likely to suffer from dementia, heart disease and depression (Valtorta et al, 2016) (James et al, 2011) (Cacioppo et al, 2006)
- Loneliness is likely to increase your risk of death by 29% (Holt-Lunstad, 2015)

- Fostering relationships in later life is an important protective factor against social isolation and loneliness
- Consultations conducted by the Commissioner for Senior Victorians (2016) and the City of Darebin (2018) found the strongest theme reported by older people was the fear of becoming socially isolated and lonely
- People who attend a formal social support program say they often do because they are “lonely”. They also report that they are still lonely even after participating in the program (Bowers, Bailey, Sanderson, Easterbrook, and Macadam, 2008)
- Stopping driving and giving up the car are important losses of independence and can affect social inclusion (Bowers, Bailey, Sanderson, Easterbrook, and Macadam, 2008)
- The research shows a clear link between transport options, social connection, community connectedness and psychological wellbeing (Commissioner for Senior Victorians, 2016)
- Given the multifaceted nature of the issue, strategies to end loneliness are most effective when they are undertaken in partnerships as part of a strategic approach to the wider issues facing older people (Local Government Association, 2012).

Those most at risk

Older people at particular risk of social isolation and loneliness include those:

- On low incomes
- Living with disability
- Living in low socioeconomic and/or rural areas
- Living with housing stress or homelessness
- Who are single, childless or living alone
- Who are vulnerable and at risk of elder abuse
- With low levels of literacy where this reduces their access to information and services
- With limited or no information and communication technology skills, where this reduces their ability to locate and access services (Commissioner for Senior Victorians, 2016).

Useful social connection program examples

1. Matching isolated people with “Community Connectors” to link them to community activities and volunteers

- <https://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article5050-compassion-is-the-best-medicine.html>
2. The development of “community connectors” to link isolated older people to community activities (City of Whittlesea and Mornington Peninsula)
<https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/Api/downloadmedia/%7BE991636B-7181-4FE3-9488-83CA418B64F1%7D>
 3. An evaluation report from a social connectors project in the UK
<https://moderngov.lambeth.gov.uk/documents/s91004/6a.%20APPENDIX%20III%20Project%20Smith%20Phase%20One%20Evaluation%20November%202016.pdf>
 4. Good Neighbour Program <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/coventry/our-services/friendship/good-neighbours-coventry/>
 5. A befriending service from the UK <http://www.fote.org.uk/our-charity-work/befriending/>
 6. A 1:1 connector program for people in the early stages of dementia
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/coventry/our-services/friendship/11-friendship-support-schemes/>
 7. Connecting young people to assist older people develop their use of technology
<http://lively.org.au>
 8. Linking older neighbours together through local social activities
<http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/seniors-register-linking-neighbours-program.htm>
 9. Developing a network of ‘Welcoming and Age Friendly’ community groups in the City of La Trobe
<https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/Api/downloadmedia/%7BE991636B-7181-4FE3-9488-83CA418B64F1%7D>

Useful links

1. Age UK Oxfordshire, (2011). *Safeguarding the Convoy: A call to action from the Campaign to End Loneliness*. Age UK Oxfordshire: Oxon. Available at:
<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Safeguarding-the-Convoy.-A-call-to-action-from-the-Campaign-to-End-Loneliness-1.pdf>
2. Age UK Oxfordshire, (2012). *Loneliness – the state we’re in: A report of evidence compiled for the Campaign to End Loneliness*. Age UK Oxfordshire: Oxon. Available at:
<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/brandpartnerglobal/oxfordshirevpp/documents/loneliness%20the%20state%20we%20are%20in%20-%20report%202013.pdf>

3. Age UK Oxfordshire, (2015). *Promising approaches to reducing loneliness and isolation in later life*. Age UK Oxfordshire: Oxon. Available at: <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Promising-approaches-to-reducing-loneliness-and-isolation-in-later-life.pdf>
4. Bowers, H., Bailey, G., Sanderson, H., Easterbrook, L., and Macadam, A. (2008). *Person centred thinking with older people: Practicalities and possibilities*. Stockport, UK: HSA Press. Available at: <https://www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/PCPOPweb3.pdf>
5. Campaign to End Loneliness,(2016). *Loneliness and isolation: Guidance for Local Authorities and Commissioners*. Available at <https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance>
6. Commissioner for Senior Victorians, (2016). *Ageing is everyone's business: a report on social isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians*. Commissioner for Senior Victorians: Melbourne. Available at: <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/-/media/seniors/files/commissioner-for-senior-victorians/ageing-is-everyones-businessweb.pdf?la=en&hash=E7A9C37DB2DEA4D1ACDA9EE2D52670C644B24635>
7. Department of Health and Human Services, (2016). *Healthy ageing literature review*. Department of Health and Human Services: Melbourne. Available at: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policiesandguidelines/healthy-ageing-literature-review>
8. Local Government Association, (2012). *Combating loneliness: A guide for local authorities*. Local Government Association: London. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/loneliness-research-and-resources/>
9. Marotta, M., and Reid, C., (2015). *Guidelines and toolkit for social connection initiatives: To assist service providers and community groups to initiate, strengthen, and maintain social connections for older people*. Hume Region Integrated Aged Care Collaborative and the Hume Region Office of the Department of Health and Human Services: Wangaratta. Available at: <http://www.gvpcp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2016-Social-Connections-Toolkit.pdf>
10. Pope, J., (2018). *Review of the needs of older people*. Available from the <https://www.yoursaydarebin.com.au/29105/documents/68780>
11. Windle, K., Francis, J., and Coomber, C., (2011). *Preventing loneliness and social isolation among older people: interventions and outcomes research briefing*. Available at <https://www.scie.org.uk/almost-there>

A framework

The Campaign to End Loneliness has developed the following Loneliness Framework to consider the range of interventions available in the prevention of loneliness and social isolation (2015).

