

Discussion Paper

Overcoming Loneliness in South Australia

March 2021

Don't leave loneliness alone.

Summary

The state of loneliness: Key points

Loneliness	Over a half of South Australians feel lonely “some of the time” or “often”
COVID-19	8% increase in the number of South Australians who were lonely at least some of the time as a result of COVID-19 isolation, in April 2020. Levels have ‘normalised’ since then.
Age	Ages 18-24, 50-54 and 75+ experience feelings of loneliness most often, with 18-24 year olds stating they ‘often’ feel lonely, more than any other age group.
Gender	Within the age groups noted above, females tend to experience measures of loneliness more ‘often’ than males.
Location	Regional South Australians face aspects of loneliness ‘at least some of the time’ more commonly than those in metropolitan Adelaide.
Income	The frequency of all loneliness experience decreases as income increases.
Employment	Those who are unemployed, on the pension or receive disability support, as well as students, tend to have the highest experience of measures of loneliness ‘often’. Whilst those on home duties display high rates of experience loneliness and isolation ‘at least some of the time’.

Call to Action

There is no single solution to overcoming loneliness, a shared responsibility is needed.

The report proposes a call to action to overcome loneliness in South Australia that recognises responses to 3 key age groups:

- 18-24,
- 50-54,
- 75+
- as well as the general public.

In addition, a hierarchy of four levels of response is identified based on work from Prof Jane Farmer and her team at Swinburne University, the four levels being:

- Foundations
- Spaces and places
- Activities
- Connectors

The “Call to Action” consists of strategies that target the priority age groups for each of the four response levels. Overarching structures and strategies are also needed to maintain a focus on overcoming loneliness and test the progress being made. Uniting Communities intends to publish annual progress updates and to seek community input to evolve the “Call to Action” each year.

The establishment of Wellbeing SA reporting to the Minister for Health is a very positive structural approach to dealing with loneliness and a wider range of well-being issues. We suggest that their work can be enhanced with the following actions:

- Establish an SA Commission for Overcoming Loneliness that includes representatives from larger businesses, small and medium size business, community organisations, State and Local Government, sporting and recreation bodies and academics from relevant design and humanities disciplines.
- This Commission would oversee the development and implementation of an Overcoming Loneliness strategy for South Australia.
- Recognising that young people are more likely to be lonely and quite possibly experience greater risk factors as result of their sense of isolation and separation, a public health campaign should be conducted to inform the broader community about the extent of and normality of loneliness amongst younger people, seeking greater openness and understanding.
- A part of the state's COVID-19 recovery strategy should include a targeted number of, say 1000, "festivals, fetes and frolics" to help reconnect us all.

Background

This discussion paper starts with acceptance that loneliness is widespread in communities across the world and that left unchecked, there is a high probability of growing levels of loneliness. The report does not seek to explain why loneliness occurs and certainly does not seek to apportion blame for loneliness. (For an excellent discussion on debates about causal factors for loneliness and potential responses see "The Lonely Century - Coming Together in a World that's Pulling Apart" by Noreena Hertz).

This paper is based on data collected from South Australians across 2020, and is informed by perspectives from the many community services that are provided by Uniting Communities.

Loneliness, as a public health issue, has similar health impacts to obesity or smoking 15 cigarettes a day, meaning that loneliness can decrease a person's life expectancy by up to 15 years. This observation is reported by Douglas Nemecek, MD, Chief Medical Officer for Behavioral Health, Cigna,¹ a global health services company.

Loneliness is a complex experience to define because it means different things for different people. Uniting Communities understands loneliness to leave people feeling unwanted, empty and that there is no place for them. Lonely people are desperate for human connection and a sense of belonging. Loneliness is therefore quite different from being alone – and comfortable 'in your own skin'.

In early 2020, Uniting Communities engaged local market research firm, Square Holes, to conduct a general population survey of adults across South Australia with the following baseline questions asked:

1. How often do you feel lonely?
2. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
3. How often do you feel left out?
4. How often do you feel isolated from others?

Responses to each question were 'hardly ever or never', 'some of the time,' or 'often'. These baseline questions are drawn from respected international research, providing a benchmark from which to compare South Australian responses. These are the same questions as those asked by the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics to help inform the UK loneliness strategy.

People struggling with loneliness have significantly worse health status, both physically and mentally, than those with strong connections. Lonely Australians are 15.2% more likely to be depressed, while 13.1% are more likely to be anxious about social interactions than those who don't feel lonely according to the Australian Loneliness Report² produced by the Australian Psychology Society and the Swinburne University for Psychology Week 2018.

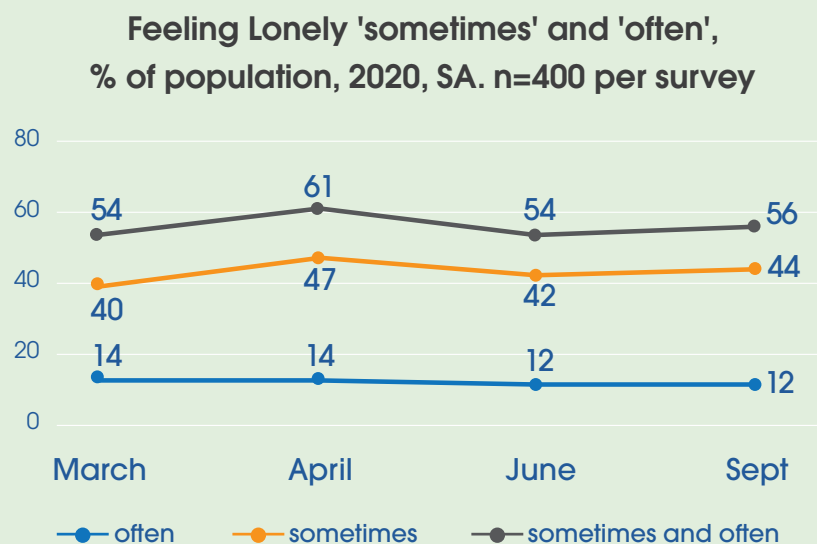
A Scientific American article from March 2019 written by Claire Pomeroy³ states "Biologists have shown that feelings of loneliness trigger the release of stress hormones that in turn are associated with higher blood pressure, decreased resistance to infection and increased risk of cardiovascular, cognitive and functional decline and can serve as a preclinical sign for Alzheimer's disease."

In short, loneliness destroys lives for individuals, their families and communities; it frays the very fabric of our society. There is growing evidence that some aspects of modern life are contributing to increased loneliness. Uniting Communities is committed to overcoming loneliness as a means of enabling people to be more resilient and participate in the development of stronger, healthier and inclusive communities that thrive.

Data

To develop an understanding of the levels of loneliness and isolation in South Australia, and as a basis for measuring progress, Uniting Communities commissioned surveys to provide baseline data to identify the current situation and for assessing change over time. This process commenced before the arrival of COVID-19 and the subsequent isolation and social distancing responses, with the first survey in mid-March 2020 and the second survey in late April, the time that we have subsequently regarded as "peak-COVID" in South Australia. Further surveys were conducted in late June and September 2020.

The following four charts show responses to each of the four questions posed in the responses "often," "sometimes" and with both of these measures combined. The responses are shown for each of the four months during 2020 in which the survey was conducted. The sample size is 400 responses for each survey meaning that a total of 1600 people contributed over the 4 surveys.

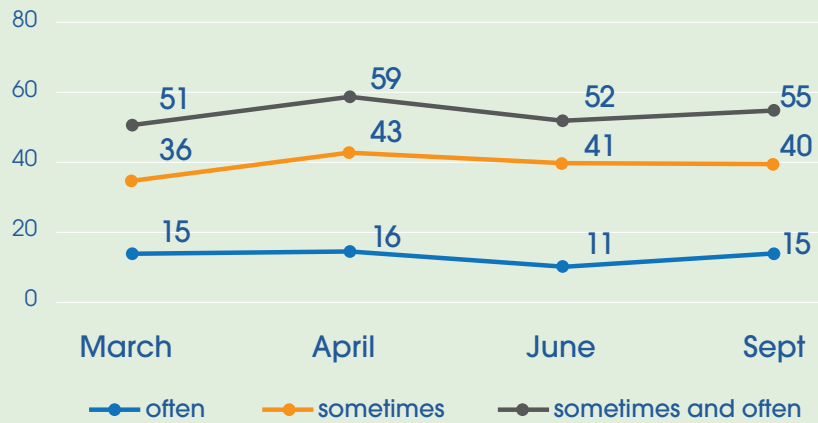


¹<https://www.webmd.com/balance/news/20180504/loneliness-rivals-obesity-smoking-as-health-risk>

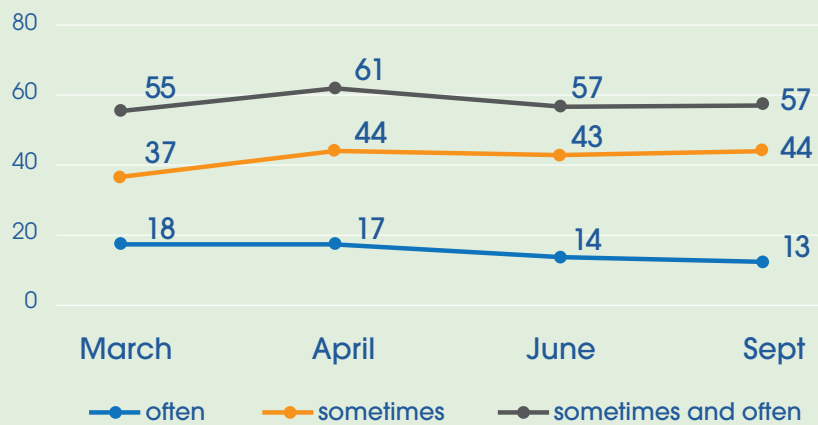
²<https://psychweek.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Psychology-Week-2018-Australian-Loneliness-Report.pdf>

³<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/loneliness-is-harmful-to-our-nations-health/#:~:text=Biologists%20have%20shown%20that%20feelings,of%20cardiovascular%20disease%20and%20cancer.>

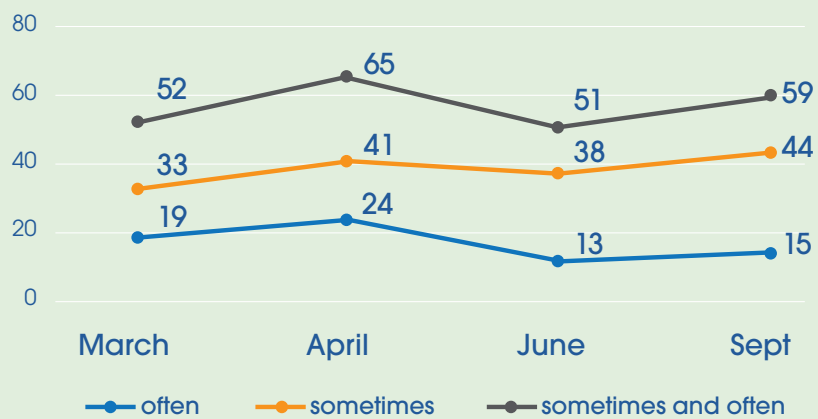
Lacking companionship 'sometimes' and 'often',
% of population, 2020, SA. n=400 per survey



Feel left out 'sometimes' and 'often',
% of population, 2020, SA, n=400 per survey



Feeling isolated 'sometimes' and 'often',
% of population, 2020 SA. n=400 per survey.

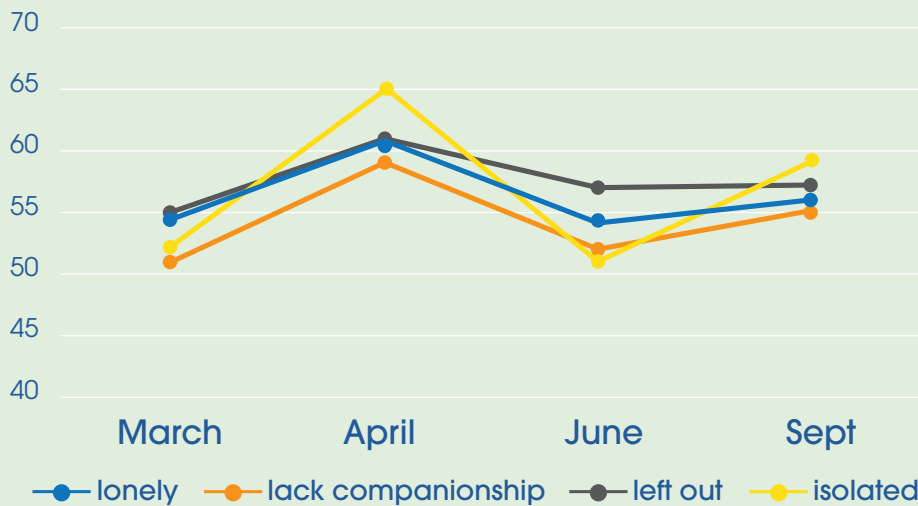


COVID-19 Impacts

The following chart combines the four measures of loneliness and isolation and shows the series for “sometimes and often” responses during 2020. This chart shows that each of the four measures follow similar patterns with responses to “how often do you feel isolated?” being the most volatile.

Each of the series show a peak in late April, when COVID-19 related isolation and shutdown measures were at their peak in South Australia. There was a return to pre-COVID-19 levels by late June 2020, though all measures except “feeling left out” had increased over the three months to late September. The reasons for this may be related to the persisting shutdowns in Victoria at this time or there may be other factors. Suffice to say that over half of the South Australian population feel lonely, lacking companionship, left out and isolated at least some of the time.

Loneliness and isolation measures 'sometimes' and 'often' during 2020, % of population, 2020 SA

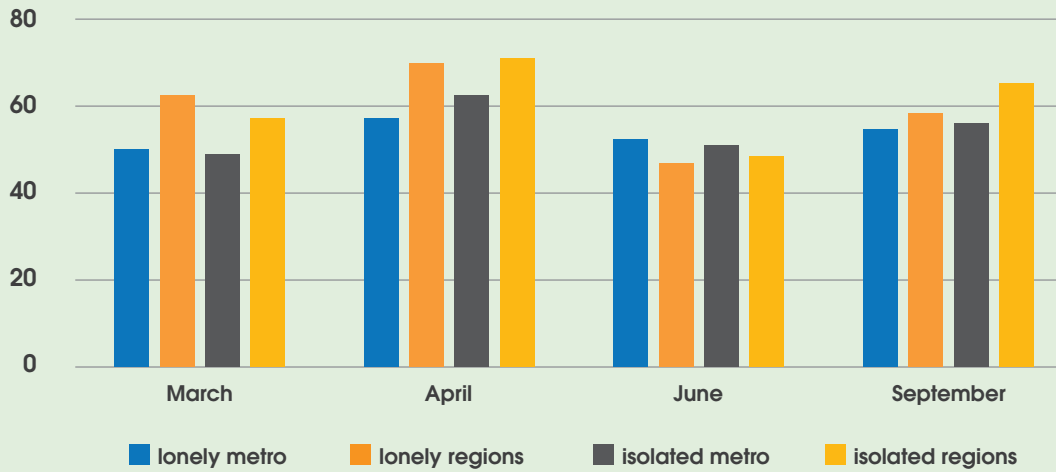


The following data explores the relationship between loneliness and isolation measures for some key demographic and economic factors.

Regions

The following figure shows responses to feelings of loneliness and isolation for both regional South Australia and metropolitan Adelaide for the four months in which survey data was collected. Regional data is aggregated across the state so does not include comparisons between various regional rural and remote locations. Both measures show higher levels in regional areas except for June when levels of isolation were reported to be slightly higher in the metropolitan area. In general however, it is clear that feelings of loneliness and isolation are statistically greater in regional locations than in metropolitan Adelaide.

Feeling lonely, isolated 'sometimes' and 'often',
Metro & Regional South Australia, % of population

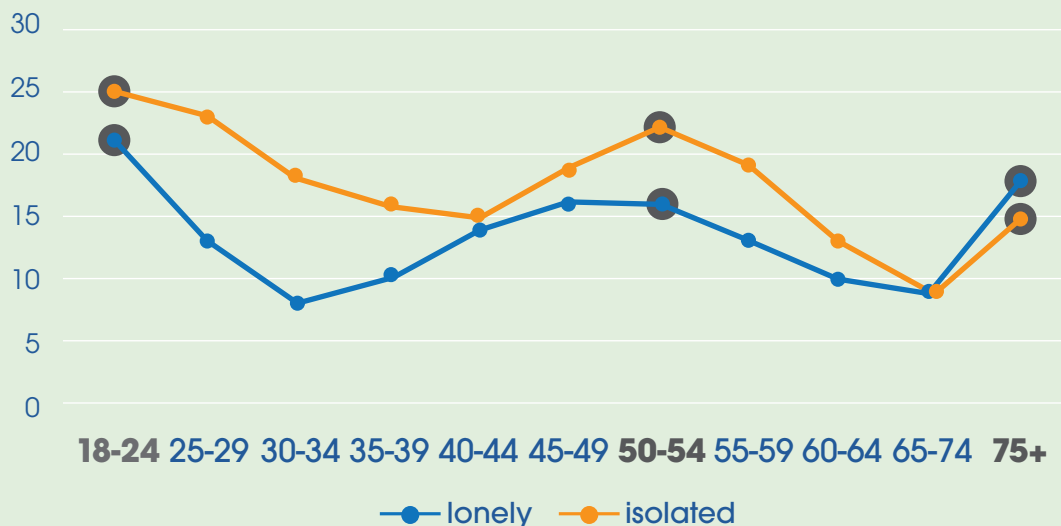


Age

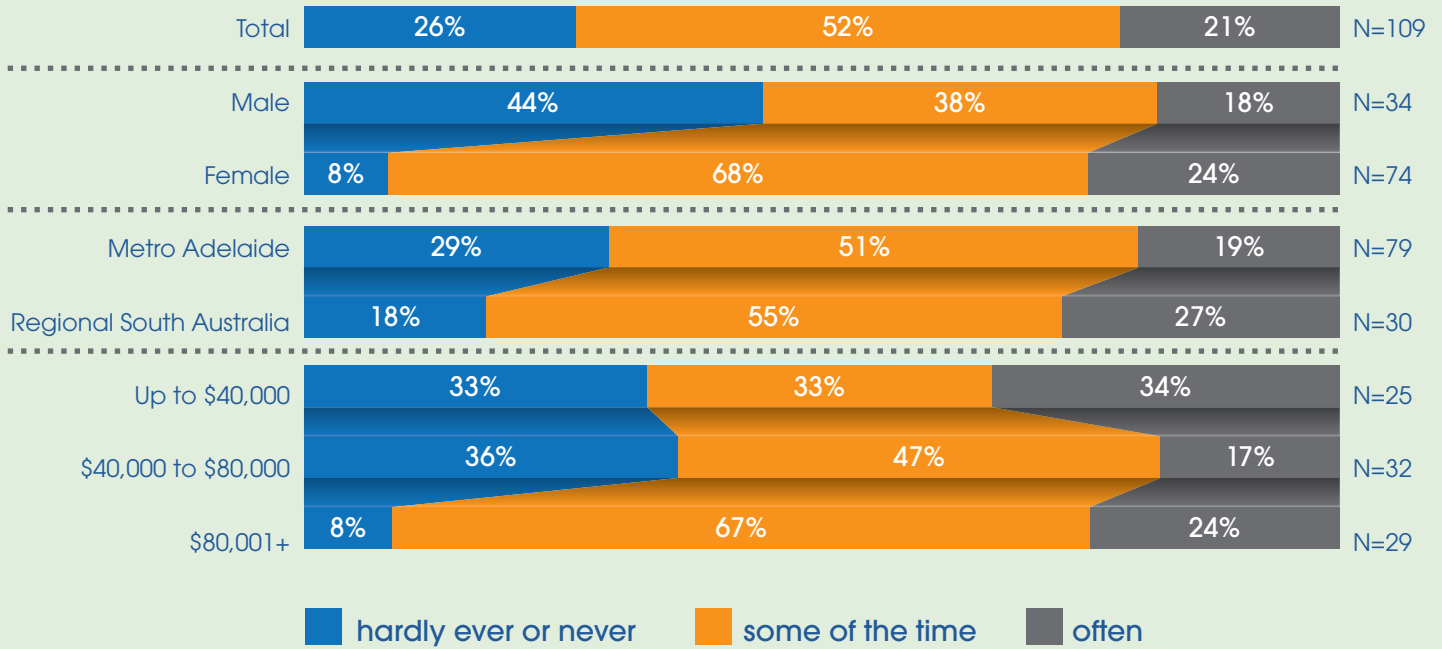
In order to better understand loneliness and isolation, with a view to developing proactive responses, the following chart shows the percentage of people from each age cohort who experience these feelings “often.” The results are from an aggregation of the four waves of the survey that were conducted and show three age cohorts that stand out as having higher levels of isolation and loneliness (the data also showed similar results for “lacking companionship” and “feeling left out.”)

The subsequent charts show three age groups with highest levels reported being; 18 -24 -year-olds, 50 to 54-year-olds and people aged over 75. These three charts provide some greater detail about feelings of loneliness for each of the three age cohorts.

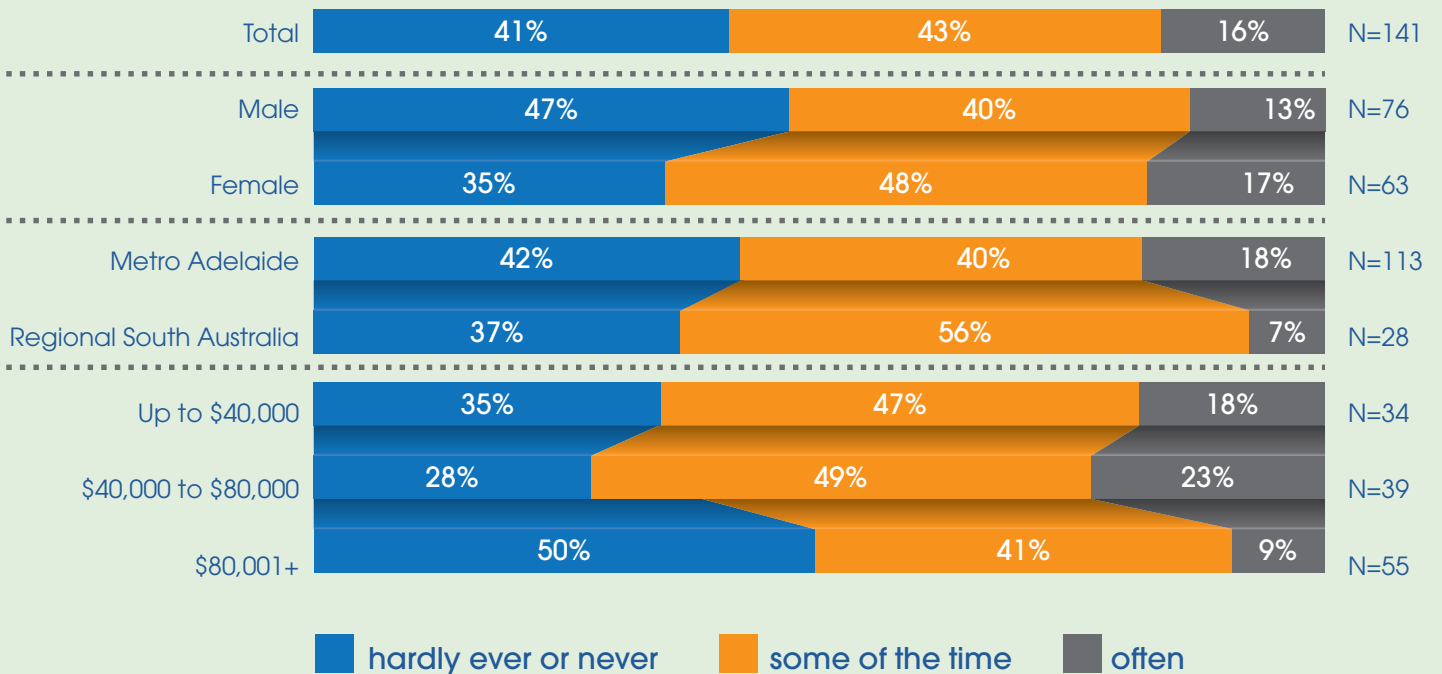
Feeling lonely / isolated, 'often,' by age,
% of population, 2020 SA



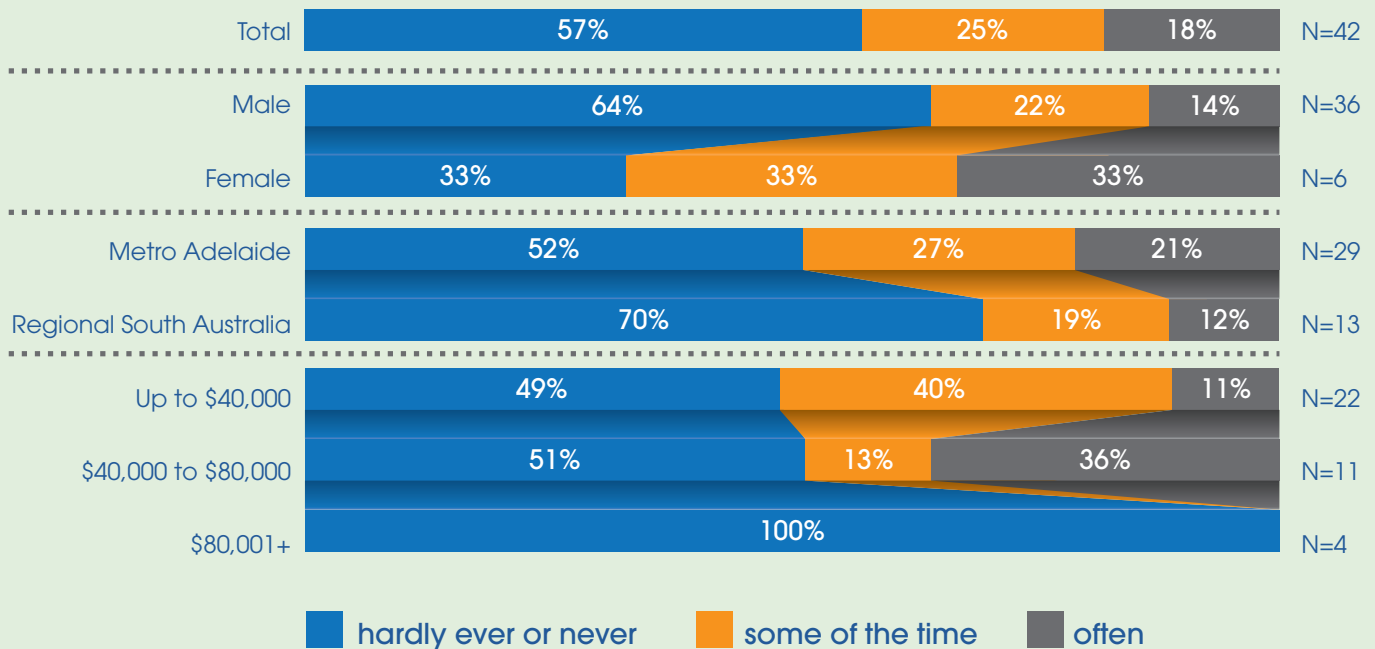
Feeling lonely 18-24 years (by gender, region and income)



Feeling lonely 50-54 years (by gender, region and income)



Feeling lonely 75+ years
(by gender, region and income)



The relatively high reported levels of loneliness and isolation measures amongst the 50 - 54-year-old age cohort is perhaps a little surprising and may reflect adverse situations being experienced by a growing number of middle-aged to older women who are increasingly marginalised in the labour market and have less wealth, such as homeownership and superannuation, than males.

The situation of older people aged over 75 years is also of interest particularly with comparatively low levels of loneliness for people in regional South Australia while women continue to show higher levels of loneliness than men⁴.

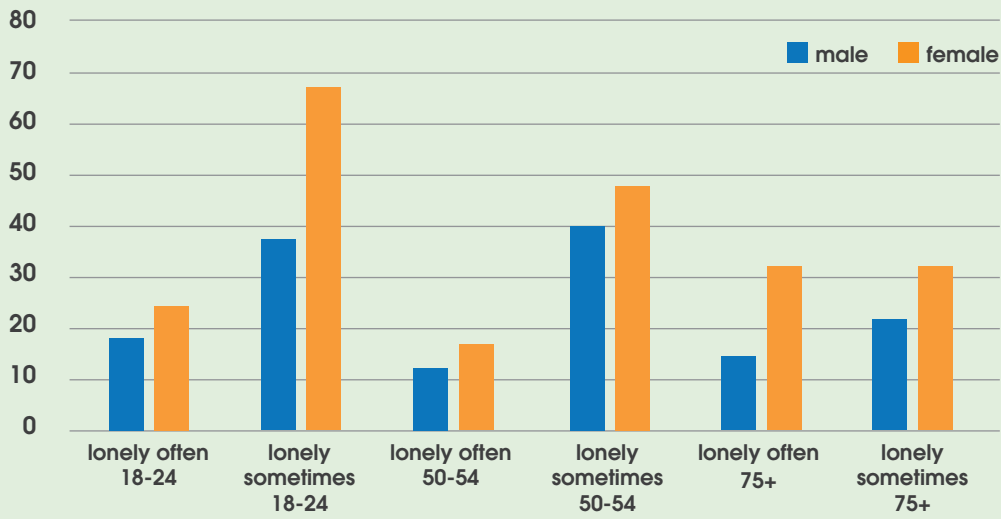
The evidence is clear that the age group experiencing loneliness and isolation the most is younger people aged 18 - 24 years of age. The result is consistent with levels of mental health concern for that age group.

⁴note that the sample size is quite small for people aged 75+ and so inferences need to be treated with caution. The data does however suggest value in better understanding the situation for this older age group

Gender

Survey data shows that for the survey responses of lonely “often” and “sometimes” for the age cohorts of particular interest, women report higher levels of loneliness than men for every measure.

Lonely 'sometimes' and 'often' by gender for selected ages, %, 2020 SA



Income

Analysis of the data also shows a consistent trend for each survey being that higher levels of loneliness were experienced by lower income people. There are three income ranges that were used in collecting the data, less than \$40,000 per year, \$40,000 - \$80,000 per year and over \$80,000 a year.

These income ranges were informed by the median weekly personal income for people aged 15 years and over in Greater Adelaide from the 2016 census (\$617.50 per week, \$32,084 per year.)

While in May 2020, Full-time adult average weekly ordinary time earnings per week for South Australia was \$1522.90⁵ which is \$79,190 per year. So in income distribution terms, the three income bands used translate approximately to:

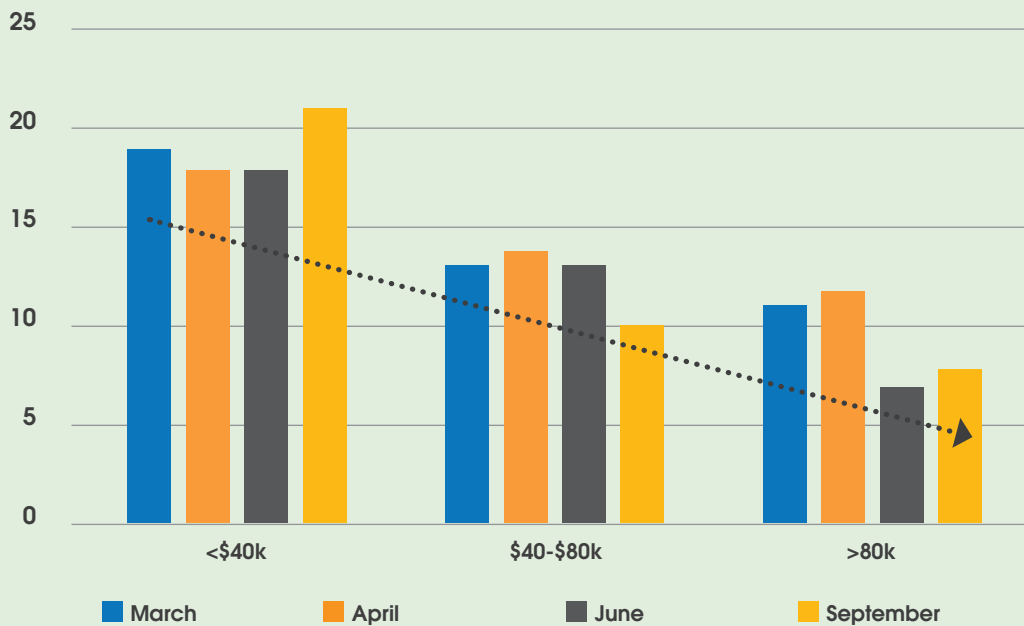
- <\$40k - less than median weekly personal income (all people) for South Australia. This income band includes all people receiving government income support including aged pension, disability support payment and Job Seeker. This income band accounts more than half of all South Australians.
- \$40k-\$80k - median weekly personal income to average full-time weekly earnings for South Australia.
- >\$80k - greater than average weekly full-time earnings for South Australia.

⁵https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/4GADE?opendocument

⁶<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/average-weekly-earnings-australia/latest-release>

The data summarised below clearly shows that lower income people are much more likely to experience frequent loneliness than higher income people.

**Feeling lonely 'often' by income,
% of population, 2020 SA**



Employment status

The data also shows that employment status is significant in determining the likelihood of feelings of loneliness as well as isolation, feeling left out and lacking companionship.

Retirees are the least likely people to feel lonely, though this changes after about 75 years of age. People working full-time are also less likely to experience loneliness “often” than other groups.

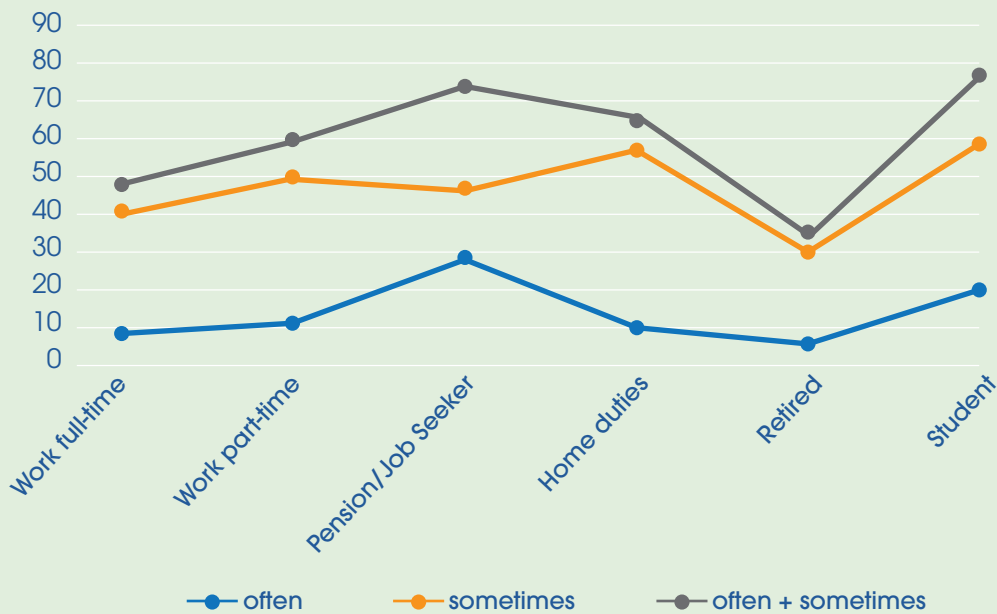
Students (over 18 years of age) are most likely to experience loneliness at least some of the time and people reliant on pensions and benefits as the primary source of income are also highly likely to experience loneliness, with this group being the most likely to experience loneliness “often.”

People reporting their main occupation as “home duties,” predominantly women, are most likely to experience loneliness “sometimes” compared with “often.”

⁷It is recognised that the \$40,000 per annum level is higher than median weekly personal income.

Employment status and income are highly related and the survey data shows that both factors have a substantial impact on the likelihood of a person to experience loneliness.

**Lonely 'sometimes' and 'often' by employment status,
% of population, 2020 SA**



How does South Australia compare?

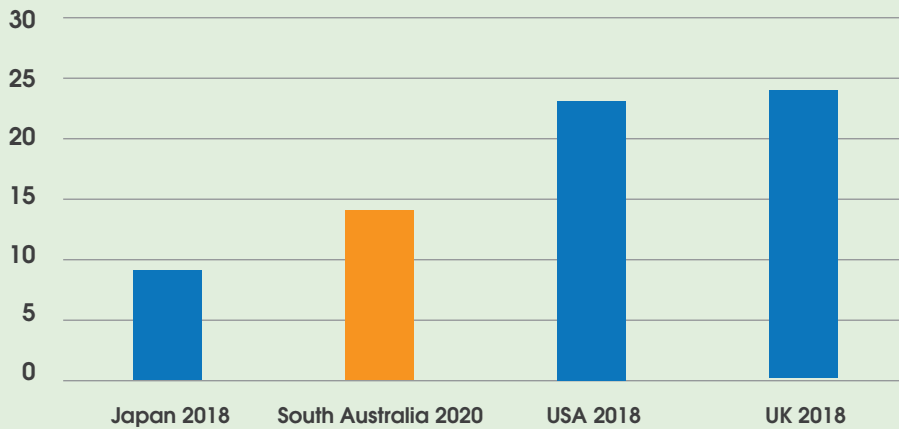
A brief check about how the South Australian data compares with the rest of Australia shows that the measures of loneliness and isolation described above are similar to those of the Australian Loneliness Report (Nov 2018) produced by The Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University of Technology. This report stated that 50.5% of Australians feel lonely for at least one day a week, compared with 54% in South Australia in the Uniting Communities survey who felt lonely often or some of the time in March 2020, which was just pre-COVID-19 and so more comparable than recent survey data.

In response to being asked how often you feel that you lack companionship, 51% of South Australia responded 'often' or 'some of the time', compared to 55% nationally in 2018.

In considering how SA compares with the rest of the world, one source of comparison is research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), an American non-profit group.

In 2018, The Economist and the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), surveyed people in three countries. They found that 9% of adults in Japan, 22% in America and 23% in Britain 'always' or 'often' feel lonely. This compares with 14% for South Australia, suggesting that by international comparisons, South Australians are "doing OK," but we face risks of moving in similar directions to countries that are lonelier now.

Lonely "often" and "all the time, " % of population, 2018/2020



This data suggests that South Australia and Australia more generally, have less loneliness than the United States of America and United Kingdom, but still have high levels of loneliness.

Overcoming loneliness, responses from interviews with SA people

Uniting Communities is interested in understanding the extent of loneliness in our communities, but more interested in how to overcome loneliness. In order to explore strategies that people use to overcome loneliness, or the potential of loneliness, people were interviewed from metropolitan and rural South Australia. Some of the responses to a question about how individuals overcome loneliness are shown as follows:

Structure to overcome loneliness

"I think a lot of it's about planning. I'm a great advocate, again for structure. You've actually got a plan: I want to do this on that day."

(regional, aged 51)

"just making sure to stay in contact with people, really, and making sure to continue organising, to do things with your friends and make sure that you're still spending time with them and that you're not isolating yourself."

(Metro, aged 18)

Self esteem and confidence to overcome loneliness

"definitely self esteem and resilience. Because if you can be confident in yourself, you can be confident in your ability to fit in with others and being able to keep those connections open. And also need to build up the idea that your friends don't want to push you away, and that you can still trust them."

(metro, aged 18)

Support networks to overcome loneliness

"I got a lot of help and support from my friends and my family. And then this year going to university and that, has really been able to support feelings of loneliness and isolation being in a new environment with also new people that have very similar interest to myself. And then being able to just spend a lot of time there and working on stuff with a lot of other people has definitely helped."

(Metro aged 18)

"This whole COVID thing would've been eye opening for a lot of people because a lot of people wouldn't have ever had to have done that. They'd just work or they've just always sort of... They've never had to spend time alone"

(Metro aged 19)

Talking to overcome loneliness

"I did notice that when I was feeling the most lonely, if someone were to, for instance, to turn around and focus the attention on me and just talk to me, I wouldn't feel lonely at all anymore ... It's having the connection with someone, to one-on-one connection with someone that really, really helps. Just knowing that they're thinking about me."

(Metro aged 25)

Understanding emotions to overcome loneliness

"It might be really hard for (individuals) to identify where feelings (are) coming from. Is it from a sense of loss? Is it from a broken relationship? So having those feelings where everybody else around us thinks that we look like we're doing okay because we are participating, we are functioning, but it's those inner feelings that we may not be sharing or simply don't know how to even articulate to ourselves."

(Uniting Communities program manager, regional)

Benefits of connection

People interviewed identified 'connections' with other people as providing several benefits:

- Different points of view
- An opportunity for education, learning and personal growth
- Accessible support network
- Improved mental health and wellbeing

"I know times when I haven't felt as connected and how that's affected me.. (You just) get to a really busy point in your life and you're working or something. It makes you feel not as happy if you aren't able to bring (things) up with your friend, or get together and have a chat and stuff like that... You need those connections... It's part of enjoying life, I guess"

(Metro 18 to 35)

“(Connection is) almost like a soundboard, where if you've got questions that you're trying to answer, you've got all these people that you can try and figure out the answer with you and that gives you a better understanding. If you've got something to share, that can also go so much further and so much faster if you've got all these people together versus just yourself”

(Metro 18 to 35)

Overcoming loneliness

When asked about the actions or behaviours that help to overcome loneliness, many of the responses referred to the following two factors:

- For many, a big step to overcoming feelings of angst and loneliness is to openly talk through their issues
- This involves having access to good quality relationships (i.e. friends or family) who are willing to listen and possess genuine care, or through the availability of appropriate mental health services and resources (e.g. counsellors, medical centres etc.)

“It's a social thing as well, like you've got a small tight circle, so you can just be with your circle and then that's all you need because you've all got each other. However you are feeling, you've got each other, it's kind of different, I think small circles are a really good thing”

(Metro 18 to 35)

“Taking the first step and just talking to someone, because then once you talk to them, you feel better about talking to them again... (Now you're) in a position where you have a person that you know you can talk to, because not everyone has that... Once you've talked about it once, then a week or two passes, whether you feel better or you feel worse you've (at least) said something once, so it's easier to bring up again, it's easier to talk about again”

(Metro 18 to 35)

When to seek help

Help seeking for loneliness was also discussed with the following key triggers being identified for when help should be sought out:

- The issue can't be resolved simply by the individual on their own
- Negative mental health and emotions are experienced over a prolonged period of time
- Feelings become too overwhelming and debilitating which ultimately negatively influence other aspects of life
- People need to be aware of the warning signs of loneliness so they can encourage those who are struggling to speak up and seek help if they do not possess the knowledge or capacity to pursue assistance on their own

“I've had people say to me you're just having a rough day, even though it's been months”

(Regional 50+)

“Will you have the motivation to seek help if you are that bad though? I would hope the community would band together and help people through it”

(Regional 50+)

Wisdom from communities

The following were identified, by focus groups and interviews across South Australia as key considerations for overcoming loneliness.

1. Be proactive: Amongst all the mechanisms utilised to overcome feelings of loneliness, the enactment of proactive behaviour was perhaps one of the strongest in getting the better of negative emotions.
2. Create structure: Enables focus and purpose to occupy time.
3. Seek strategies to improve self-esteem and confidence: Those who are better connected with their feelings and better understand themselves are better at adapting to poor emotions and have more clearly outlined strategies in place.
4. Build support networks: Getting involved with community groups if family and friends are not available. Seek ideas to build connections.
5. Help others: Often loneliness is viewed as a weakness in regional communities. Work towards supporting others and developing genuine care and accountability for each other.

Call to Action

Over a half of South Australians feel lonely “some of the time” or “often.” Loneliness has profound impacts on health and well-being.

This reality demands a response of action to overcome loneliness.

As human beings we know that people seek social connections and find these connections in communities. This call to action suggests some strategies that will help to improve our capacity to make connections, to then maintain these connections and in so doing reduce the number of people who experience loneliness and the loss of humanness that loneliness brings.

From our data, there are four groups of people that are identified as more likely to need assistance in building connections.

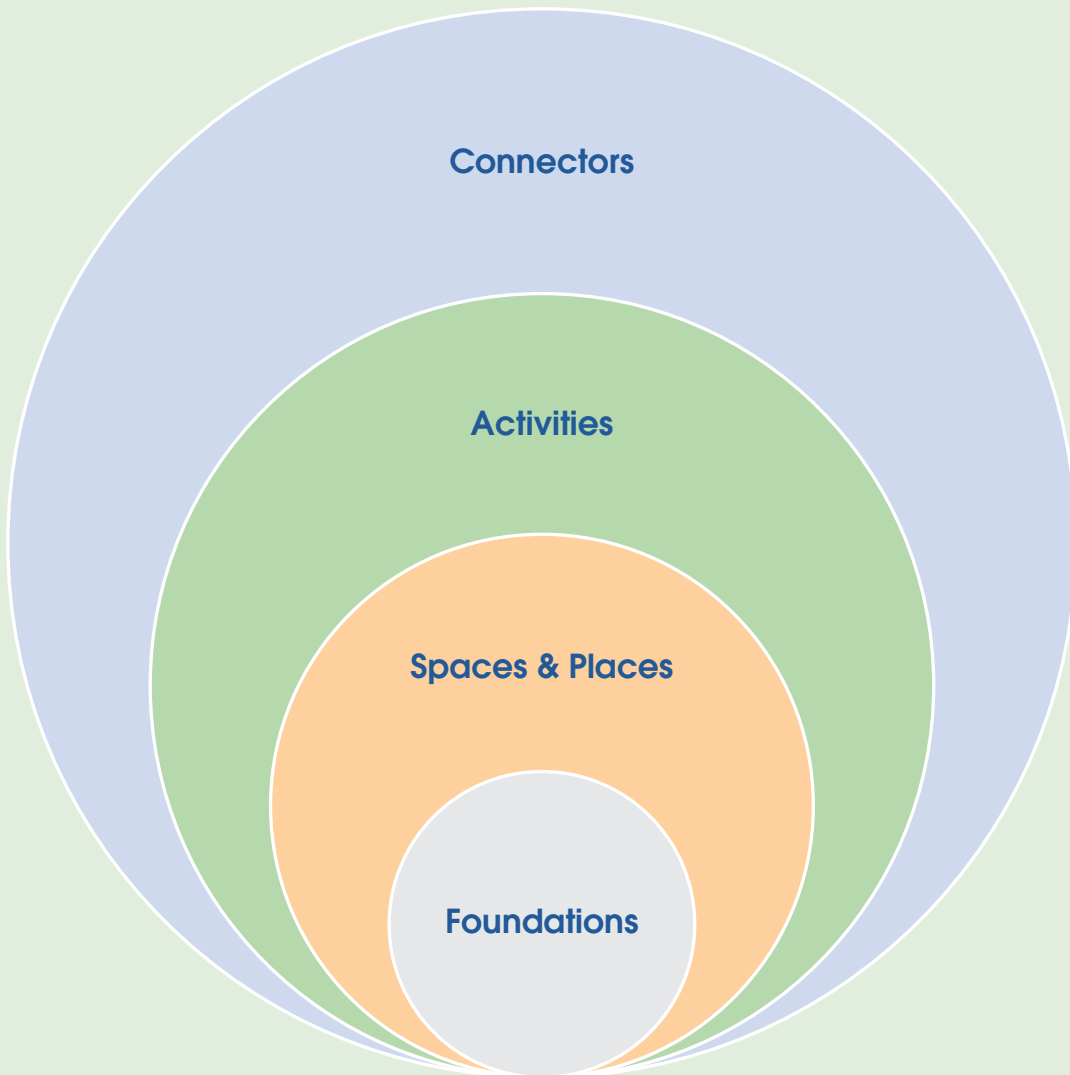
1. 18 to 24 year old people who experience the highest levels of loneliness and isolation of any age group and who are in critical life stage of developing their own identity self-belief and sense of self-worth. Note that the needs for young people, approx. 15–20 years can be different from those aged 20-25 years.
2. 50 to 54-year-olds whose appearance is the second most lonely and isolated age group in the surveys is surprising and suggests greater focus for future connection.
3. 75+, older people for whom physical health probably grief and loss of friends and partners also confront isolation.
4. The South Australian community at large because without community that cannot be connections. It takes a community to overcome loneliness.

Another perspective on our approach to identifying actions to overcome loneliness is a hierarchy that has been developed by Prof Jane Farmer and her team at Swinburne University. This hierarchy has four levels:

1. Foundations: Safe and accessible services and supports, with choice
2. Spaces and Places: Formal and informal “bumping” spaces as well as places for community events, indoors, outdoors and online
3. Activities: Activities that involve problem solving and negotiating help as well as helping to integrate new people

4. Community Connectors: People who help link people together, for services and structured support but particularly for activities where connection is a “by-product” of the purpose, eg. community gardens, choirs, walking groups and men's sheds.

Overcoming Loneliness Hierarchy



Putting these elements together produces the following framework with each cell in this matrix being a potential action or set of actions that can play a role in reducing loneliness for the relevant age cohort and “overcoming loneliness” hierarchy level.

This table demonstrates the framework that Uniting Communities intends to apply to developing comprehensive action plans and to suggests possible actions to initiate discussion.

Call to Action Examples	Foundations	Spaces and Places	Activities	Community Connectors
General Population	Campaign to promote youth inclusive businesses, government and organisations	Design award for urban planning and 'bumping spaces'	SA Govt small grant program to encourage local events.	Local Govt to foster increase in employment of Community Connectors
18-25	Mental Health support buses for rural and remote locations. State youth jobs strategy	Community organisations to develop safe on-line spaces for young people to connect. Increase safe, informal meeting spaces for young people	Grants to also support cultural events for young people	Funding for "Connectors" for young people, including linking on-line and face to face connections Research strategies to enhance connection on-line
50-54	Increased support for domestic violence support services to enable community connection	Engagement with this age group to better understand how they want to connect. Including regional areas	Employers and superannuation funds pro-active in advice about creating and maintaining connections	Community organisations and researchers to collaborate to better understand needs
75+	Develop and trial new shared housing options in metro and regional locations	Increase funding for Community Centres to teach IT communication skills. Local Govt ensure physical access to meeting spaces. Increase access to schools and facilities	Additional activities for men - men's sheds and alternatives. Support children and aged care links	Aged care funding to increase to employ Community Connectors

Note: There are excellent examples of most of the actions summarised above already occurring, the need is for funding and collaboration to 'scale up' the availability of these actions and to extend the links between various aspects.

Action Plan elements

The following provides some examples of potential actions that can be considered using this framework. Note that the examples of actions are not definitive, nor prescriptive, they are ideas to stimulate debate and ideas.

General public

Foundations

- Actively promote young people inclusive businesses, communities, government departments and media to help reduce the amount of isolation experienced by young people.

Spaces and places

- Small grants program from SA Govt to provide funding to support local events (Festivals, fetes and frolics) Maybe up to \$10k per event, simple application, quick response with main criteria that event organiser will have a plan to encourage attendance / participation from isolated people
- Work with Urban Development Institute of Australia (or similar) to actively promote and recognise the design of 'bumping spaces' in new developments

Activities

- Grants to also support cultural events for young people

Community Connectors

- Each local government to increase the numbers of community connectors to both encourage activities that promote connection and to reach out to people who are isolated or report as being lonely. It is recognised that local government plays this role, but the proposal is to 'scale up' the number and range of focus of "community connectors."

18-25 years

Foundations

- Two Mental Health services buses to be established to visit smaller communities and towns, possibly as part of the Headspace services.
- Jobs with career paths to be a state priority
- Participating employers to be funded for positions to support and integrate young people into their work places

Spaces and places

- Community services, in particular, can encourage safe online spaces for young people to meet and interact, including socially (eg. Zoom dances)

Community Connectors

- Increased funding for youth arts staff to involve young people in creative processes, both on-line and face to face

50-55 years

Foundations

- Increased funding support for DV and related services to be able to support DV victims to make connections and find ways of feeling safe in public

Spaces and places

- Noting that loneliness is significantly higher amongst women in this age group, engagement is needed with women to identify spaces and places that they are needing.

Activities

- Employers and superannuation funds to include information and advice about developing and keeping connections in 50's and into retirement.
- Uniting Communities to continue to have an advocacy and research interest in women over 50 years of age who are lonely or at risk of isolation.

Community Connectors

- Uniting Communities and collaborators to engage directly with clients in this age group who report feelings of loneliness and partner with researchers to better understand the needs of people in the 50's who are isolated or at risk of isolation.

75+ years

Foundations

- Design and build new shared housing options for lower income, older people in Adelaide and regional centres

Spaces and places

- Local governments to work with Chambers of Commerce to create indoor and outdoor places for informal meeting.
- Local government to ensure that there is easy physical access from car parking to community places where people meet both formally and informally. Ease of access includes well-maintained walkways that are able to accommodate wheelchairs and mobility aids, and good lighting.
- Community centres to be funded to teach older people how to use social media and to be a point of reference for queries about home computers, IT security and support.

Activities

- Develop specific activities for men, including and different from men's sheds
- Support of playgroups – kindergartens to link with aged care facilities.

Community Connectors

- Each local government and aged care facility to appoint a community connector to both encourage activities that promote connection and to reach out to people who are isolated or report as being lonely.

Connecting the elements

Some overarching structures and strategies are also needed to maintain a focus on overcoming loneliness and to test that progress is being made.

The establishment of a Wellbeing SA reporting to the Minister for Health is a very positive structural approach to dealing with loneliness and a wider range of well-being issues. We suggest that their work can be enhanced with the following actions:

- Establish an SA Commission for Overcoming Loneliness that includes representatives from larger businesses, small and medium size business, community organisations, state and local government, sporting and recreation bodies and academics from relevant design and humanities disciplines
- This Commission would oversee the development and implementation of a South Australian Overcoming Loneliness strategy
- Recognising that young people are more likely to be lonely and quite possibly experience greater risk factors as result of their sense of isolation and separation, a public health campaign should be developed to inform the broader community about the extent of and normality of loneliness amongst younger people, seeking greater openness and understanding.
- A part of the state's COVID-19 recovery strategy should include a targeted number of, say 1000, "festivals, fetes and frolics" to help reconnect us all.

Next steps

This “Call to Action” will be discussed at a workshop on 9 March 2021 and a revised version published, based on feedback from this workshop. The revised “Call to Action” will be widely circulated with groups and organisations encouraged to develop actions to overcome loneliness. This will be available at www.unitingcommunities.org/loneliness

Uniting Communities will continue to survey the South Australian community to maintain a population data base so we can track changes over time.

A second Overcoming Loneliness workshop will be planned for early 2022 to provide feedback about progress on actions and then contribute to the development of an enhanced "Call to Action" for the subsequent year.

Don't leave loneliness alone.

**Overcoming Loneliness in South Australia research report
developed by Uniting Communities, March 2021.**

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