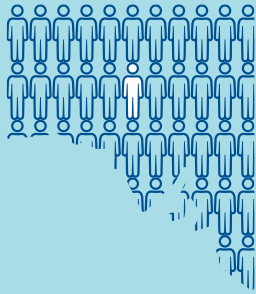# Loneliness by Numbers: A South Australian Snapshot

December 2023

UNITING COMMUNITIES

Recent Findings

South Australians are reporting their highest rates of loneliness since March 2020

↑ 66%

Over half of South Australians have reported experiencing loneliness (66 per cent)

Young adults (aged 18 to 29 year olds) experienced the highest rates of loneliness

91%

91 per cent of people (aged between 18 and 24 years old) reported experiencing loneliness often or sometimes
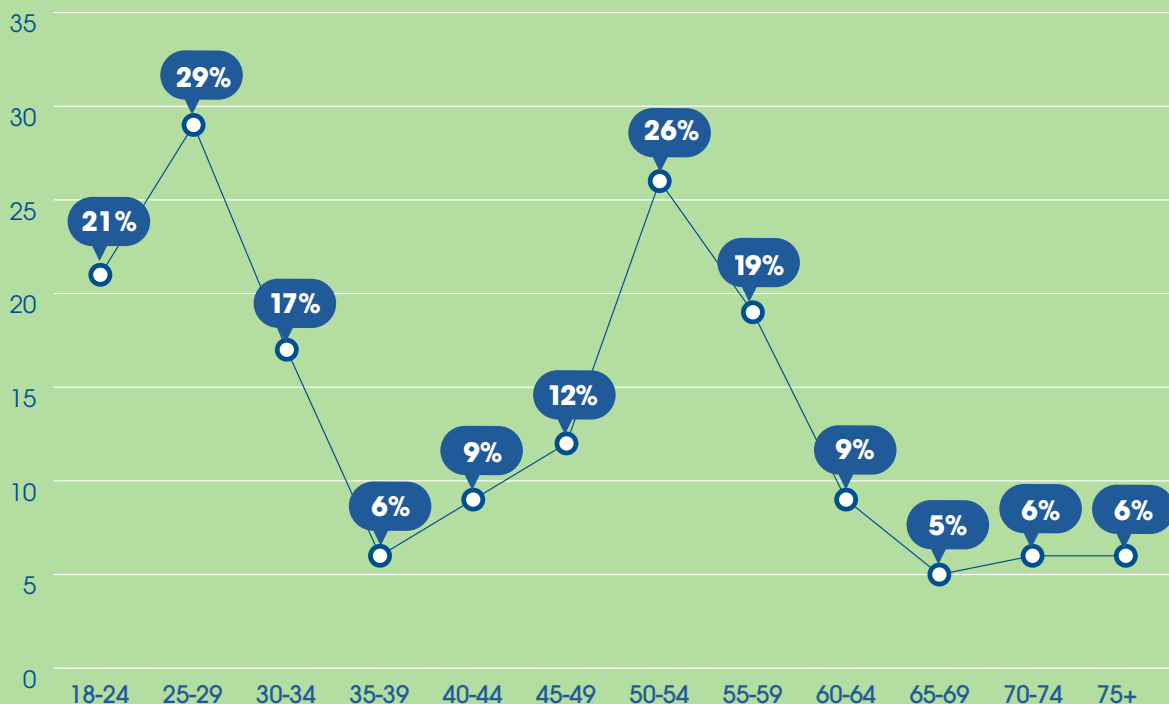
97%

97 per cent of people (aged between 25 and 29 years old) reported experiencing loneliness often or sometimes

South Australians located in regional areas reported higher levels of isolation than those in metropolitan Adelaide

Lonely 'often' by age

Age	Percentage
18-24	21%
25-29	29%
30-34	17%
35-39	6%
40-44	9%
45-49	12%
50-54	26%
55-59	19%
60-64	9%
65-69	5%
70-74	6%
75+	6%

General population: percentage 'often'

Category	Percentage
Lonely	14%
Lack companionship	18%
Feel left out	19%
Feel isolated	22%

What is loneliness?

There is no one universal experience of loneliness and, consequently, there is not one universal definition of loneliness.

For the purposes of this report, we refer to **Ending Loneliness Together's** definition of Loneliness:

> "
> Loneliness is a distressing feeling that arises when your current relationships do not meet your social needs. People have different social needs and for most people, they desire having closer relationships. You can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely."

Experiencing loneliness relies on the meaningfulness or quality of interactions, rather than just the quantity of interactions, connections or friendships.

Chronic loneliness is defined as a long-term and regular experience of loneliness as opposed to episodic loneliness, which can be the temporary, occasional feeling of loneliness.

While feeling episodic loneliness is quite natural, it can become problematic when experienced consistently for a longer period.

Research shows that chronic loneliness can lead to significant physical and mental health consequences. Studies have compared chronic loneliness to smoking 15 cigarettes a day and can have the same health impacts as obesity. Chronic loneliness can lead to an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, depression, cognitive decline and increased risk of Alzheimer's disease.

The Uniting Communities Loneliness by Numbers Snapshot asked South Australians to report their experiences of loneliness, lack of companionship, feelings of being left out or isolated.

What can we do?

As there is no one experience of loneliness nor one definition of loneliness, tackling this growing issue requires a whole-of-community approach.

1. **Support communities to identify place-based activities and services that will assist people to build and maintain social connections.**
   It is imperative that once these initiatives have been identified that they are continuously and appropriately resourced.

2. **Improve access to public transport.**
   Public transport can be infrequent, inaccessible, expensive or non-existent in many areas across South Australia. Those that do not have access to a car are forced to rely on public transport infrastructure. This adds an additional barrier to attending placed-based activities and visiting people in community, particularly in rural, regional and remote areas.

3. **Raise awareness of loneliness.**
   We need to encourage people to have meaningful conversations about loneliness in order to reduce the stigma associated with it. We all have a responsibility to actively connect with others, whether it's talking with a neighbour or reaching out to someone we haven't spoken to in a while.

4. **Improve infrastructure by having the places and spaces for people to connect.**
   Good community infrastructure can support community connection by providing a variety of spaces for people to come together. Including open spaces like parks as well as leisure and other facilities is essential. Local community activities and social groups rely on infrastructure to ensure their programs successfully address loneliness.

Contact: advocacy@unitingcommunties.org

www.unitingcommunities.org/loneliness

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