



Inquiry into Prevalence, Causes and Impacts of Loneliness in NSW

Hearing – 15 November 2024

Supplementary Questions

Mr Greg Jennings, Beyond Blue

Question:

1. Can you tell us more about why certain cohorts, such as single parents, seem to be “retreating back into themselves” and any measures you can suggest to halt this retreat?

Response:

“Retreating back into themselves” colloquially refers to the tendency for people experiencing significant stress or psychological distress to withdraw from relationships and community activities. It can be a natural and understandable human response designed to reduce exposure to further threats and adversity but often has the effect of making an individual further isolated and removed from positive experiences that can benefit their mental health.

Certain cohorts are more likely to be excluded simply because they are exposed to a greater number and intensity of social and economic stressors, such as financial insecurity. This includes but is not limited to single parents, people with poor physical or mental health, disabilities, First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and young people.

As outlined in Beyond Blue’s submission, response measures need to adopt a multi-pronged public health approach. Investments should be made to create a National Strategy to address Loneliness and Social Isolation to guide this work, along with investments in social prescribing initiatives and other initiatives that build connection and belonging. These measures will also be enhanced by investment in initiatives that address risk factors for loneliness, such as initiatives that promote both mental and financial wellbeing and are tailored to account for the unique risk factors faced by disadvantaged communities (for further information see Beyond Blue’s submission to the [Select Committee on Cost of Living](#)).



Appendix: Mr Greg Jennings Inquiry Quote

THE CHAIR: Mr Jennings, I can see your hand up again.

GREG JENNINGS: I think Elisabeth from Relationships Australia has made a fantastic point there. The other point that I'd make is, particularly in recent years, the complexity of what the community is dealing with is really challenging. We're now at a time where it's extraordinarily volatile and certainly complex and ambiguous. What we're seeing and what we're hearing, for example, in our support service is that people are approaching us around multiple complex and compounding issues. Using the cost-of-living crisis as an example at the moment, people are telling us that one of the first things they cut back on when they're experiencing financial distress is connecting with others. They're retreating into themselves. That might be because they're embarrassed, that might be because they don't have the same financial means to connect and to go and participate in activities. But they're telling us that they're kind of withdrawing and looking much more insular than they have in the past. I think one of the things that has certainly changed is the state of permacrisis that we're all living through at the moment and the state of polycrisis that we're all living through at the moment as well.