

## **Standing Committee on Social Issues**

### **Inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in New South Wales**

#### **KPMG responses to supplementary questions following hearing on 15 November**

KPMG Australia was pleased to attend a hearing on 15 November 2024 as part of the Standing Committee on Social Issues' *Inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in New South Wales* to discuss [Connections Matters](#), a global research report by KPMG Australia in collaboration with the Groundswell Foundation.

#### **1. How do we best utilise green spaces and community spaces to combat loneliness?**

To best utilise green spaces and community spaces to combat loneliness, a number of strategies can be effective. As part of establishing clear policy directions across national, state, and local levels to raise awareness of loneliness, targeted action should be taken to integrate green and community spaces into urban planning and health initiatives.

It is also important to engage and consult with the community in the design and use of these spaces to foster a sense of ownership and belonging. This includes working with stakeholders from public, private and not-for-profit organisations.

It is important to prioritise the inclusive design of green and community spaces to be accessible and welcoming to all demographics, including young adults, older people, single parents, and minority groups. Features such as walking paths, seating areas, community gardens, and playgrounds can encourage social interaction. This should be coupled with regular activities and events in these spaces, such as group exercises, gardening clubs, and social gatherings, to encourage people to come together and build connections.

As with all policy initiatives, tracking progress is crucial. This includes building the evidence base for loneliness and interventions through dedicated data collection, research, and evaluation. This helps in understanding the impact of green and community spaces on reducing loneliness and improving mental health and can be used to inform future policy and investment decisions.

#### **2. In your evidence you referenced an awareness campaign, what would this look like and what impact do you feel it would have?**

An awareness campaign for the issues of loneliness would involve several key components and could have a significant impact on combating loneliness. This includes (1) clear messaging, (2) a multi-channel approach, (3) stakeholder engagement, (4) educational sources, (5) community involvement, and (6) monitoring and evaluation.

An awareness campaign should develop clear, consistent messages that highlight the prevalence and impact of loneliness on physical and mental health. This includes the use of statistics and personal stories to make the issue relatable and urgent.

It should adopt a multi-channel approach, including social media, traditional media, community events and public spaces to reach a broad audience. In addition, involving public, private, and not-for-profit organisations can help to amplify the campaign's reach and integrate loneliness awareness into existing health and wellbeing initiatives.

To help inform the public about the issue of loneliness, its effects, and ways to seek help or support others, the campaign should refer to educational materials and resources.

An awareness campaign should also leverage the existing infrastructure of community organisations, clubs and associations to drive reach and participation.

As mentioned above, tracking progress is crucial. The campaign's progress and impact should be tracked through data collection and research to refine strategies and demonstrate effectiveness.

An effective awareness campaign can help destigmatize loneliness, making it easier for individuals to seek help and for communities to support those affected. As a result, it can lead to improved mental and physical health, enhanced social connections and economic benefits, including reduced healthcare costs and improved workplace productivity by addressing the negative impacts of loneliness on employee performance and retention.

### **3. What are some of the specific issues around loneliness in regional areas and why is this experience different to metro/non-regional areas?**

Experiencing loneliness in regional areas presents unique challenges compared to metropolitan or non-regional areas. Regional areas often have lower population densities and greater distances between communities, which can limit opportunities for social interaction and access to services. There are often fewer healthcare, social services, and community support resources available in regional areas, making it harder for individuals to seek help for loneliness. This can be exacerbated by fewer public transport options, which are sometimes non-existent in regional areas, making it difficult for people to travel to social activities or support services.

As economic opportunities can be more limited in regional areas, there are often higher rates of unemployment, underemployment or economic insecurity, which can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

On the other hand, metropolitan areas may offer more diverse social opportunities and services, though they can also be more impersonal. In contrast, regional areas might have stronger community ties, but these can sometimes be exclusive or difficult to penetrate for newcomers. That said, metropolitan areas typically have better access to healthcare, mental health services, and community programs designed to combat loneliness, making it easier for individuals to find and receive help. They also often provide more diverse job opportunities, which can help reduce economic-related loneliness.

Ultimately, addressing loneliness in regional areas requires tailored strategies that consider these unique challenges, such as improving transport links, increasing the availability of local services and fostering inclusive community initiatives.

### **4. You mentioned programs like the Welcome Experience from the NSW Government could be extended to assist with problems like loneliness, could you expand more on how this would work and what it would look like?**

The Welcome Experience is a free service supporting essential workers and their families who are considering applying for or have accepted a job in regional New South Wales. It is designed to help new residents and visitors become familiar with services and communities. This initiative plays an important role in helping combat the issue of loneliness in regional areas.

Going forward, the program could form part of a loneliness awareness campaign and be integrated across national, state, and local policy initiatives to combat the issue of loneliness. The program could also be augmented to promote social networking and support in regional areas.

The government may consider expanding those who are eligible for the program. This could be complemented by tailored initiatives for those who are at a heightened risk of being impacted by loneliness, including young people, older people, parents, First Nations People, LGBTQIA+ Australians, migrants and single-person householders.<sup>1</sup> Further, consideration could be given to the rollout of the program across metropolitan areas and non-regional areas.

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<sup>1</sup> [Connections Matter - A report on the impact of loneliness in Australia November 2022](#)