Briefing Paper:
C2bMe and C2bMe@Home programs as solutions to combat loneliness in New South Wales

Overview

Loneliness is a pervasive issue in New South Wales, with substantial social and health impacts, particularly among older adults and individuals with chronic health conditions. Uniting's **C2bMe** and **C2bMe@Home** programs are evidence-based initiatives designed to reduce loneliness by fostering social connections, mental health resilience, and well-being. These programs are well-positioned to address the growing prevalence, underlying causes, and harmful impacts of loneliness in the state.

Loneliness in New South Wales

1. **Prevalence:**
   - Nearly 1 in 4 adults report experiencing loneliness, with older adults disproportionately affected.
   - Regional and remote areas see higher rates due to geographic and social isolation.
2. **Causes:**
   - Reduced mobility, chronic health conditions, and caregiving responsibilities.
   - Fragmented social networks due to life transitions, such as retirement or bereavement.
   - Barriers to accessing community services, including transport and cultural stigma.
3. **Impacts:**
   - Loneliness is linked to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.
   - Increases the risk of physical health conditions, including cardiovascular disease and cognitive decline.
   - Heightens demand for health and social care services.

How C2bMe and C2bMe@Home Address Loneliness

1. **C2bMe:**
   - **Community Integration**: Provides group-based activities to reconnect isolated individuals with their communities.
   - **Peer Support**: Builds peer networks where participants share experiences, reducing feelings of isolation.
   - **Education and Skills**: Empowers participants with mental health tools to foster resilience and self-confidence.

2. **C2bMe@Home:**
   - **In-Home Support**: Brings care directly to individuals unable to leave their homes, creating vital human connections.
   - **Telehealth Access**: Provides flexible, technology-driven services for housebound individuals.
   - **Holistic Care**: Integrates mental health support with broader social services, addressing the complex needs of those experiencing loneliness.

Objectives

- **Reduce Prevalence**: Connect isolated individuals with community networks and mental health resources.
- **Address Causes**: Tackle mobility barriers, chronic health challenges, and social stigmas.
- **Mitigate Impacts**: Improve mental and physical health outcomes while reducing reliance on acute health services.

Impact of C2bMe and C2bMe@Home

1. **Health Benefits:**
   - Decreases symptoms of depression and anxiety.
   - Enhances emotional resilience and cognitive function.
2. **Social Outcomes:**
   - Builds sustainable social networks, reducing isolation.
   - Encourages active community participation and engagement.
3. **Economic Value:**
   - Reduces demand on high-cost healthcare services by offering preventative and early-intervention solutions.
   - Strengthens community infrastructure, fostering inclusive environments.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Invest in Loneliness Initiatives:**
   - Secure funding for scaling **C2bMe** and **C2bMe@Home** to priority regions across NSW with high loneliness rates.
   - Provide additional funding for programs targeting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and First Nations communities to ensure culturally safe services.
2. **Expand Outreach:**
   - Establish partnerships with local councils and community groups to identify isolated individuals and connect them to these services.

- o Leverage existing health and social care networks to integrate loneliness interventions.

Conclusion

Loneliness is a pressing public health challenge in NSW, and **C2bMe** and **C2bMe@Home** are vital tools to combat its prevalence, causes, and impacts. These programs align with the NSW Government's commitment to fostering social inclusion, improving mental health, and building resilient communities. Scaling these initiatives will not only alleviate loneliness but also enhance the well-being and quality of life for thousands of vulnerable individuals across the state.

If Uniting can assist the committee any further, please contact Clark Cooley, Government Relations Manager, on