

Q: How can we move beyond broad concepts like wellbeing to address social isolation and loneliness in the workplace? Are there specific research insights or approaches that should be considered?

The Mental Health Commission of NSW is yet to evaluate any research or strategies specifically focused on addressing social isolation and loneliness in the workplace.

Q: What are the types of technology-based or online initiatives that have proven effectiveness?

Compeer

Compeer is a social engagement program designed to connect adults living with diagnosed mental health issues (referred to as Compeer participants) with volunteers from the community. The goal is to foster social connections, enhance community engagement, and improve the overall wellbeing and quality of life of participants through meaningful relationships. Each match between a participant and a volunteer offers the participant access to social activities, a supportive friend, and a link to community resources. Most activities are shared between the volunteer and the participant on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, Compeer organises bi-monthly gatherings and events for all participants and volunteers to attend together. Participants and volunteers commit to meeting for at least four hours each month over a 12-month period. After this time, the relationship may continue independently of the program. Recognising that friendships may take time to develop, participants and volunteers may also choose to extend their involvement in the program for an additional year.

Seniors Connected Program

The Seniors Connected Program was established by the Australian Government Department of Social Services as a time-limited initiative to explore different approaches to reduce loneliness and social isolation among older Australians. With a total budget of \$10 million allocated between 2019-20 and 2023-24, the program focused on two main activities:

- The G'Day Line (1300 920 552), a free national phone support service.
- The establishment of 12 Village Hubs across Australia, offering members a peer support network to help them age well within their communities.

Funding was evenly distributed between these two activities. The Village Hubs concluded on June 30, 2024, while the G'Day Line remained in operation until September 30, 2024.

Support for the G'day Line program has been highly valued. Although the service will cease, a new resource Community and Connections has been launched. This digital resource aims to continue supporting older community members by providing a comprehensive directory of services and programs dedicated to enhancing social connections and combating isolation. Additionally, telephone support will still be offered to callers through the request-a-call-back service.

FriendLine 1800 4 CHATS

FriendLine is available to anyone who needs to reconnect or have a chat. The service is operated by volunteers who are screened and trained with all conversations casual and

anonymous. This is not a mental health crisis service, rather provides an opportunity for those seeking social connection and conversation prior to reaching the point of crisis or distress.

In addition to the existing support that is offered to people experiencing loneliness, organisations can consider their role in addressing loneliness through an early-intervention model. Services such as the G'Day Line and FriendLine can intentionally screen for risk factors and signs of social isolation and loneliness during their interactions. This could also extend to all frontline NSW government, non-government and community-based organisations. By incorporating questions about loneliness and social connectedness, organisations can identify individuals who may be at risk and provide them with appropriate referrals to programs such as Compeer or Village Hubs, that foster community engagement. Existing services are well-positioned to intervene early, offer pathways to deeper social connections and ensure individuals are linked to supportive networks that address both emotional and social needs.