

# LCSA responses to Questions on Notice

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

6 March 2025

## Question 1

**Please detail the strengths and limitations of social prescribing in connecting health and community services to address loneliness.**

The UK Government states that social prescribing enables organisations to refer people to a range of services that offer support for social, emotional or practical needs (UK Government 2018, p. 25). A more critical definition describes it as ‘a mechanism for linking patients with non-medical sources of support within the community’ (Lynne et. al. 2009, as cited by Russell p. 2).

Social prescribing can be a helpful paradigm to expand understanding of human health as having a core social and community component. It can take pressure off the health system and refer patients to social services that they may have missed out on otherwise.

However, practitioner Cormac Russell from the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, DePaul University in the USA argues that social prescribing is limited in that it centres on individuals and individual outcomes, rather than health promotion or population health more broadly. It still operates primarily within a medical model, which isn’t informed by the incredibly important social determinants of health.

While we can contribute to caring communities, ultimately caring communities cannot be prescribed or programmed. Russell asserts that we don’t have a health problem, we have a village problem (p. 7):

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*Redirecting people into community activities without simultaneously doing much-needed community building and forming relationships with isolated citizens is doomed to fall short...*

*‘We must restore the social fabric of our communities and do so as collective citizens and not as isolated clients of healthcare systems and partner institutions.*

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Ultimately, walls between institutional siloes need to come down to allow for more organic connections between health and community services to reduce loneliness and meet the needs of specific communities.