

# LCSA responses to Questions on Notice

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

6 March 2025

## Question 5

**Please explain how a government consultation process on loneliness would differ from a co-design or community development process.**

More often than not in consultation processes, government is the starting point. It is LCSA's position that communities must be the starting point of any meaningful process to reduce loneliness, facilitated by trusted, place-based community organisations; and that co-design and community development processes are the right fit for this kind of work.

Consultation processes tend to involve consulting with relevant stakeholders on solutions that governments, bureaucrats or experts have designed to combat something they identified as a problem and decided needed action. How well or meaningfully that consultation impacts the end result ranges on a scale from not-at-all, to greatly impactful. There are often no benchmarks or scrutiny around the integration of consultation on decision-making processes. We are all familiar with the idea of 'box-ticking' processes that are more concerned with the appearance of consultation rather than the integration of it. As of March 2025, there is no NSW Government guide on what standard government consultation processes should involve.

Co-design and community development are closely linked, as both emphasise participatory approaches, local empowerment, and collaborative problem-solving. They share principles of participation, inclusion, empowerment and collaboration.

'Co-design' refers to a participatory approach to designing solutions, in which community members with lived experience are treated as equal collaborators with experts in the design process. However, the co-design process does not always invite participation from communities in the initial identification of issues, which may be decided by governments or experts. It is also known as generative design, co-creation and participatory design. It can be used to create, redevelop and evaluate a product, service or system. Co-design is a tool that is often used in community development.

Community development is a practice or framework based on human rights principles and social justice frameworks. Therefore, community development is broader than co-design and should underpin all aspects of an authentic co-design process

Within a community development framework, social issues are addressed on a grassroots level from the 'bottom up', usually guided or facilitated by community development practitioners. It aims to do things **with** people, rather than **for** people or **to** them. Neighbourhood centres support communities to flourish by fostering independence, focusing on capacity building and helping communities identify issues, aspirations and solutions, which may turn up entirely different

priorities to what governments or other top-down authorities might identify. Communities are at the centre at each stage of community development processes.

When co-design is underpinned by a community development framework, it results in:

- Stronger social connections by fostering relationships, trust and a shared sense of purpose
- More effective programs, as solutions co-created with communities are more likely to be adopted and sustained over time; and
- Greater social equity through amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, making development efforts more inclusive.

LCSA would be happy to work with the Committee or the Government to further explore how community development practices can be applied to addressing loneliness, with implementation occurring at the local level by trusted, locally-based organisations.