

Submission  
No 37

## INQUIRY INTO PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF LONELINESS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Mentoring Men  
**Date Received:** 31 October 2024

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## Submission from Mentoring Men: Addressing Loneliness in New South Wales through One-to-One Mentoring

### Introduction

Mentoring Men provides free, long-term, one-to-one life mentoring to support individuals facing challenges, among others, experiences of loneliness. Our program, in part, engages men before they reach crisis points, offering support that fosters connection, purpose, and improved mental well-being. This submission addresses the inquiry's terms of reference on the prevalence, causes, and impacts of loneliness in NSW, drawing on our experience and data from recent studies.

### The Prevalence of Loneliness and Opportunities for Improved Data Capture

#### Current Efforts and Data Capture

Mentoring Men actively collects data on loneliness, integrated into our intake and ongoing support processes. This systematic data collection has allowed us to track loneliness trends among our mentees and mentors, providing insights into the extent of loneliness in those that access the service of Mentoring Men. The inclusion of CALD and other vulnerable groups in our data collection ensures that the needs of at-risk populations are represented.

Additional Mentoring Men captures qualitative data from participants coming to the program. Loneliness is a significant factor men highlight as a factors to seek out the Mentoring Men program.

- "I feel completely alone in dealing with my challenges... feel isolated"
- "I just needed guidance and support as I felt abandoned in my struggles"
- "I felt like my life was missing connection and meaning, and I just needed help figuring it all out"
- "My marriage breakdown has left me feeling very isolated, and I wanted someone to talk to"
- "Dealing with stress from home and work, I feel so alone in handling all of it"

After having had a mentorship, mentee's report

- "I feel less lonely, I've gotten a job, I was able to rekindle my relationship with my little brother... I feel a sense of purpose"
- "I have enjoyed a different perspective and a different insight into situations"
- "The support... increased my ability to deal with challenging situations in life"
- "I usually feel tired attending social events, but...(after mentoring it) was different. I think it was the authenticity, openness, and inclusivity that made it special."
- "I felt safe to be open. Our conversations has gone farther than I imagined."

#### Opportunities for Enhanced Data Capture

Mentoring Men's data capture is constrained by resources with the organisation. There is great opportunity with NSW to have a larger, outcomes driven, research and data collective to draw on. This would enhance understanding of loneliness across diverse demographics, including age, cultural background, and socio-economic status, and provide valuable insights into the scale and nature of loneliness in NSW.

### [Addressing the Needs of Populations Most at Risk](#)

#### Targeted Support for At-Risk Populations

Mentoring Men has capacity to target populations most at risk of loneliness, including older males, those living with a disability, and individuals in regional areas. Our mentorship model is flexible and culturally sensitive, adapting to the unique needs of these groups. For example, our program has included culturally specific initiatives, such as Indigenous-led mentor training and bilingual support groups, which have proven effective in reducing loneliness among CALD and refugee populations.

#### Preventing Chronic Loneliness

Our early intervention approach targets men at risk of developing chronic loneliness and provides support before their situation worsens. Through proactive mentoring, we can help prevent the transition from transient to chronic loneliness by fostering connections, building resilience, and providing tools to navigate life's challenges.

### [The Psychological and Physiological Impacts of Loneliness](#)

#### Linking Social Connection to Health

Research shows that loneliness negatively impacts mental and physical health, contributing to conditions like depression, anxiety, and heart disease. Mentoring Men addresses these health impacts through mentorship, which provides emotional support, reduces stress, and promotes healthier lifestyle choices.

Our data indicates that 68% of mentees experienced a reduction in loneliness, demonstrating the effectiveness of mentorship in improving overall well-being. Opportunities to drive connection fosters growth and self-reflection into the factors that may led those seeking a mentor to experience loneliness. Building further resilience.

### [Financial Costs and Economic Impacts of Loneliness](#)

Loneliness is associated with significant financial costs due to increased healthcare utilisation, lost productivity, and reduced workforce participation. By reducing loneliness, Mentoring Men's program has the potential to indirectly lower these costs. Our mentorship provide opportunity for men to develop the problem solving skills, increase their ability and willingness to participate in vocational and employment opportunities, integrate further within their community thereby reducing the broader financial burden on the state. This exemplifies that loneliness is a factor in the withdrawal from productive lives for people and by addressing loneliness and factors correlating with loneliness the results can be significant.

#### Cost-Effective Interventions

Mentoring provides a low-cost, high-impact intervention that leverages volunteer mentors to support mentees. By expanding this model, NSW can reduce the economic impacts of loneliness upstream prior to further costs associated with the impact of loneliness for individuals and communities. The cost savings associated with improved mental health, reduced healthcare usage, and increased productivity highlight mentoring as a valuable component of public health strategy.

### [Promoting Existing Initiatives and Leveraging Technology](#)

### Showcasing Successful Programs

Mentoring Men's programs have been recognised for their effectiveness in reducing loneliness, particularly within CALD and vulnerable communities. Our approach, which integrates lived experience, community engagement, and continuous feedback, serves as a model for other initiatives. Sharing our success stories and methodologies can inspire and engage with similar programs, enhancing the collective effort to tackle loneliness.

### Harnessing Technology for Greater Reach

We are exploring technological solutions, such as mentoring apps, to enhance access to our services. Digital platforms can help bridge gaps for those unable to attend in-person sessions, providing continuous support and fostering connections in the digital age. This approach aligns with the inquiry's focus on steps community and technology companies can take to reduce loneliness.

### [Policy Recommendations and Community Engagement](#)

#### Advocacy for Mentoring as a Public Health Strategy

We advocate for the recognition of mentoring as a key strategy in public health approaches to reduce loneliness. By integrating mentorship into state policies and funding frameworks, NSW can strengthen support for those experiencing loneliness. Engaging with policymakers to include mentoring in broader social and health initiatives is crucial for scaling this effective intervention.

#### Community Education and Reducing Stigma

Mentoring Men actively engages in community education to destigmatise loneliness and encourage help-seeking behaviour. Through mentorships, events, and media campaigns, we promote the message that reaching out for support is a sign of strength, not weakness. This public-facing approach helps shift perceptions of loneliness and fosters a more supportive community environment.

### [Conclusion](#)

Mentoring Men's one-to-one mentoring model offers a scalable, evidence-based approach to reducing loneliness in NSW. Our program has the ability to address the needs of diverse and at-risk populations, provides measurable health benefits, and reduces economic burdens associated with loneliness. By expanding access to mentoring, integrating data collection, and advocating for mentoring as a public health strategy, NSW can make significant strides in mitigating the impacts of loneliness across the community.

We thank the Standing Committee on Social Issues for considering our submission and look forward to contributing to the efforts to address loneliness in New South Wales.

Sincerely,  
Cassandra Gray  
Chief Operating Officer  
Mentoring Men

### [Attachments](#)

Mentorship and Loneliness Report (2024)