

Submission
No 87

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

Organisation: Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW

Date Received: 1 November 2024

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The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Dr Kaine

I am writing to provide our submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues' Inquiry into the Prevalence, Causes, and Impacts of Loneliness in New South Wales (NSW).

The Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW thanks the Standing Committee for undertaking this important inquiry. We recognise its significance, which is why we conducted a survey of older adults in NSW to gain a clearer understanding of the situation. Our findings are detailed in the attached report titled *Voices of Solitude: Loneliness and Social Isolation Among Older Adults in NSW*.

Our survey was completed by 2,245 people aged over 50 living in NSW. It reflects the older adult population of NSW and received strong participation from hard-to-reach communities, including those identifying as First Nations, CALD, LGBTIQ+, as well as regional residents, carers, and people with disabilities.

The findings of our research highlights a heartbreaking reality: 60% of older adults in NSW experience loneliness, 50% are socially isolated, and 25% suffer from extreme levels of loneliness. While these figures may not come as a surprise, they are deeply concerning and point to a significant social issue that requires well-resourced, targeted policy interventions.

Even more troubling is the finding that many older adults feel unvalued by society; in fact, 60% of lonely older Australians report this sentiment. This feeling of being overlooked exacerbates their loneliness and undermines their sense of identity and belonging. When individuals believe their contributions are not recognised, it can lead to despair and disengagement, making it difficult for them to seek help or connect with others. It is crucial that we foster an inclusive environment where older adults are acknowledged and valued for their rich life experiences.

Loneliness affects every aspect of life and is deeply felt by those experiencing it. It hampers individuals from undertaking everyday tasks, from simple chores to connecting with loved ones. The emotional weight of loneliness can make even routine activities feel overwhelming, leading to a withdrawal from social interactions and opportunities for engagement. Additionally, it can deter older adults from seeking necessary medical help, as feelings of isolation may lead to neglecting their health and well-being. This cycle not only impacts their physical health but also reinforces their sense of isolation, creating a barrier to recovery and support.

We appreciate the Standing Committee and the NSW Government for undertaking this inquiry into what is a pressing epidemic. I trust the inquiry will lead to meaningful policy outcomes that address the heart of the issue, and I look forward to collaborating to ensure that older adults in NSW benefit from the findings of this inquiry.

I welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence and should you have any questions please contact me on _____ or by email on _____

Yours sincerely

Gohar Yazdabadi
CEO, COTA NSW