STATE OF THE NATION 2026

Understanding and Rebuilding Social Connection in Australia

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ABOUT ENDING LONELINESS TOGETHER

Ending Loneliness Together was founded in 2016 by a collaboration of established leaders and experts in the field of loneliness, with a vision to create an Australia where everyone feels a sense of connection and belonging. Now a national peak body underpinned by lived experience, research, community, government and health expertise, Ending Loneliness Together brings people and organisations together to drive and coordinate Australia's response to loneliness.

Acknowledgement

Ending Loneliness Together acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters, and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.

MESSAGE FROM CEO AND SCIENTIFIC CHAIR

The 2026 State of the Nation report Understanding and Rebuilding Social Connection carries a message that is both important and uncomfortable: the proportion of people living in Australia experiencing loneliness and social isolation has not meaningfully changed since our last State of the Nation report in 2023.

The environment in which we are trying to meaningfully connect with each other is under pressure. Time, cost, and the relentless demands of modern life make it harder to do the things that matter most - to see friends, to be present for family and to contribute to our communities through volunteering or simply looking out for our neighbours. These are not optional social extras; they are the everyday practices that protect our physical and mental health, extend our lives, and hold our communities together.

When these healthy social habits erode, the consequences for individuals, families, and communities are profound. Our risk of chronic disease, serious mental illness and premature death increases, and the sense of connection and belonging to people and places disappears.

The continuously high prevalence of social disconnection in Australia demands a response that is equal to its scale. Piecemeal interventions may be effective in isolation but they cannot turn a tide that is driven by systemic forces. Australia is in dire need of a national strategy - one that is informed by lived experience, treats social connection as a fundamental determinant of health and coordinates effort across government, community, and the private sector.

The evidence in this report is a foundation. The findings are clear, the protective factors are well understood, and the case for investment in prevention has never been stronger.

What this moment calls for is not more evidence. It is action - collective, coordinated, and backed by national will.

Associate Professor Michelle Lim

MESSAGE FROM HUGH MACKAY AO

There's so much to admire and be grateful for about living in Australia – our stable democratic institutions, our public health and education systems, our freedom of belief and expression – and yet, as this latest report from Ending Loneliness Together reminds us, we are in the grip of an epidemic of loneliness.

The figures are not new, but they are still alarming. Loneliness and social isolation have become major public health issues, because of all the health consequences that flow from a lack of social connection. We readily acknowledge the role of diet and exercise in health: why have we been so slow to grasp that social connection is equally important?

Over the past fifty years, we've been making decisions about how to live that have eroded social cohesion and taken a heavy toll on our health. We've been living in ever-smaller households (in ever-bigger houses), allowing busyness to become a barrier to social connection, devoting less time to volunteering and participation in community organisations, substituting online connections for personal interactions, even in our working lives.

There's an urgent need for change. Partly, it's up to each of us to look for ways of reconnecting, but it's also a challenge for governments (especially local governments), urban planners, housing developers, business and community leaders to create the systems and structures that encourage healthy social connection – in our local neighbourhoods and communities, and in our workplaces.

This report is like a blueprint for action. So let's act!

Hugh Mackay AO

4 ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Aim

This study examines how loneliness, social isolation, and social disconnection are spread across Australia in 2026, and what roles and relationships with family, friends, and in the wider community, play in shaping those experiences.

Methodology

This study includes cross-sectional data collected from January to February 2026. The sample comprised a nationally representative selection of 4,001 Australians aged 12-95 years old. Following the completion of the cross-sectional survey, the data was weighted by age, gender, and region to reflect the latest Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS) population estimates.

Measuring Social Disconnection

Loneliness and social isolation are forms of social disconnection. We measured loneliness and social isolation by using established cut off scores for psychometrically validated scales. To define loneliness, the University of University of California Los Angeles Loneliness Scale 4 items (UCLA-LS-4) cut off score equal or more than 11 was used.

To define social isolation (or social isolation risk), the Lubben Social Network Scale-6 items (LSNS-6) scale cut off score equal or lower than 12 was applied. Multiple imputation was used to impute missing data on loneliness and social isolation.

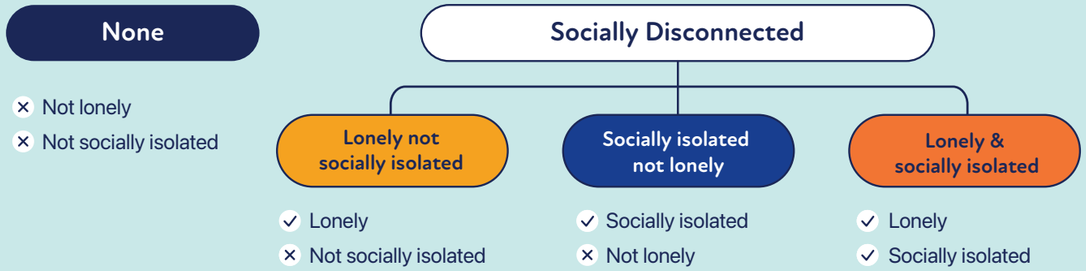
From these two variables, we created social disconnection types as follows:

- **None (Neither lonely nor socially isolated)** where the participants **do not** meet the loneliness **or** social isolation criteria;
- **Socially disconnected** in one of the following ways:
  - **Lonely not socially isolated** where the participants meet loneliness criteria **only**;
  - **Socially isolated** not lonely where the participants meet social isolation criteria **only**;
  - **Both lonely and socially isolated** where the participants met **both** loneliness **and** social isolation criteria cut offs.

Note that for ease of interpretation, the report refers to 'Lonely not socially isolated' as 'lonely' or 'loneliness'; 'Socially isolated not lonely' as 'socially isolated' or 'social isolation'. The 'None' category (above) will be referred to as 'socially connected' in several instances. For simplicity and interpretation of some graphs, we do not show the results for the 'None' category.

When interpreting the data in this report, it is helpful to refer to this graphic.

Understanding Social Disconnection



Statistical Data Analyses

The weighted proportion of each social disconnection profile was calculated and compared according to selected demographic factors, health status indicators, friend and family relationships, pro-social behaviours, indicators of social cohesion, levels of community engagement, and volunteering frequency.

The quantitative findings are presented as weighted percentages (and as adjusted odds ratios (aORs)). The latter were calculated using multivariable logistic regression, which enabled assessment of whether differences observed were statistically significant after adjustment for the possibility that relationships were caused by underlying socio-demographic differences (e.g., age, sex, marital status, chronic conditions, etc.).

The aORs can be interpreted as the odds that each social disconnection profile is related to another variable; to facilitate understanding the term 'risk' is used in preference to 'odds'. For ease of interpretation, continuous scales (without validated cut-off points) are presented as 'having more/less' instead of 'higher/lower scores of'.

Ethics Approval

This study protocol was approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Approval 2024/HE001497).

Researchers

The study was developed and led by:

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Supported by Wallis Social Research
Josephine Foti, CEO
Joshua Flack, Chief Research Officer
Tori Hunt, Senior Consultant

SOCIAL DISCONNECTION IN AUSTRALIA

SNAPSHOT 2026

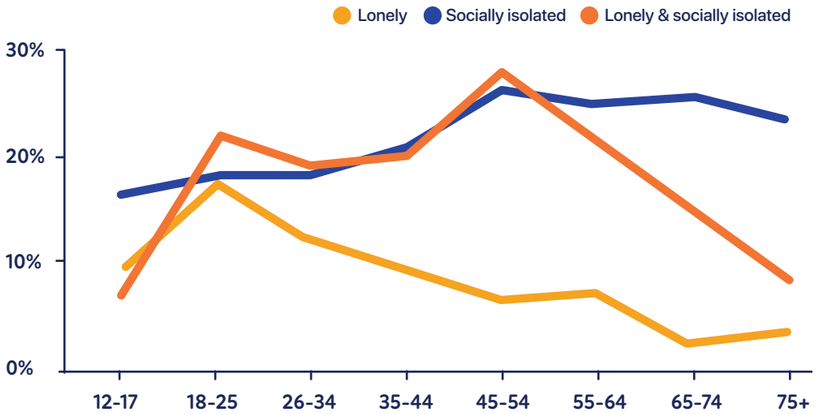
1 IN 2

People living in Australia report some form of social disconnection - being either lonely or socially isolated, or both (51%)

1 IN 5

Almost 1 in 5 people are both lonely and socially isolated (19%)

ACROSS THE LIFESPAN



18-25 YRS are the **loneliest**, but least socially isolated

45-54 YRS are the **most lonely and socially isolated**, as well as the most socially isolated

65-74 YRS are the second most **socially isolated** age group

WHO IS MOST IMPACTED?

REGIONAL/ REMOTE

People living in **regional** and **remote areas** are

1.3x

more likely to be both **lonely and socially isolated**

LIVING ARRANGEMENT

29% of people living with housemates are both **lonely and socially isolated**

15% of people living with their partner are **socially isolated**

27% of people living alone are both **lonely and socially isolated**

16% of people living with family are both **lonely and socially isolated**

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

15% of people who are married or in a relationship are **socially isolated and lonely**

22% of people who are single are **lonely and socially isolated**

26% of people experiencing divorce/ separation or loss of a partner are both **lonely and socially isolated**

HEALTH STATUS

1 IN 4 of people who have **chronic illness** are **lonely and socially isolated**

Chronic illness increases the risk of being **lonely and socially isolated** by

3x

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Loneliness and social isolation increase the risk of mental health challenges

6x Risk of **depression**

4x Risk of **social anxiety**

WHAT MAKES US FEEL DISCONNECTED?

Both infrequent contact and poor quality relationships such as having conflict with others can increase the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

Negative friendships increase the risk by **38%**

Conflict with family increases risk by **12%**

Infrequent (never/rarely) contact with friends, family and neighbours increases risk by nearly **18x**

> **Relationships that are poor in quality as well as those with minimal contact, make us feel the most socially disconnected.**

WHAT HELPS US FEEL CONNECTED?

Helping others, connecting with our community and quality time with friends can reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

Having **1 friend** reduces risk by **89%**

Spending **1-3 hours** per week with friends reduces risk by **90%**

Having a **strong sense of community** reduces risk by **70%**

Regularly **contacting friends and family** reduces risk by **94%**

CONNECTION MATTERS

Having a family that **openly shares, expresses, and discusses things** with each other reduces risk by **34%**

Chatting with neighbours reduces risk by **88%**

Attending community events reduces the risk by **89%**

Volunteering regularly reduces risk by **62%**

> **Intentional connection which includes making and maintaining contact with friends, family, neighbours and the wider community can boost social connection.**

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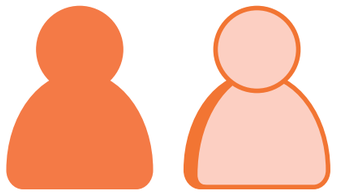
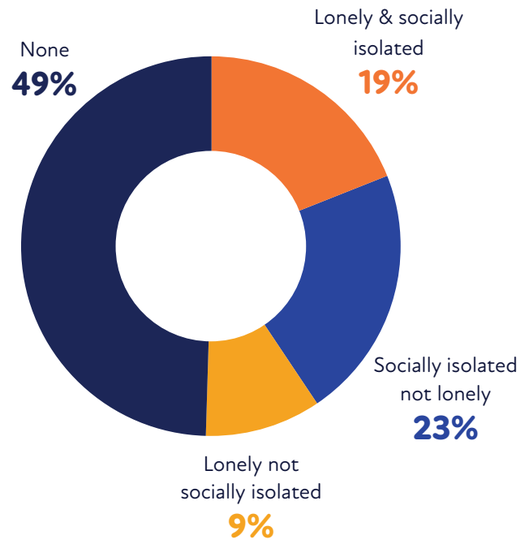
LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION IN AUSTRALIA

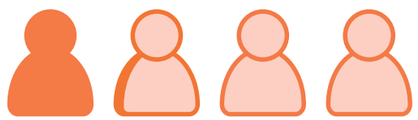


1 in 2 people (51%) living in Australia report some form of social disconnection, that is being either lonely or socially isolated, or both.

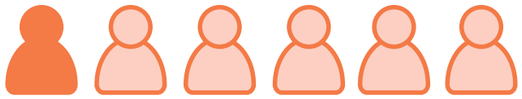
Almost 1 in 5 people (19%) are both lonely and socially isolated.



Who feels lonely[1]?



More than 1 in 4 people are lonely (28%)[2]



Nearly 1 in 6 people are severely lonely (16%)[3], showing very high scores on the loneliness scale.

Who is socially isolated[4]?

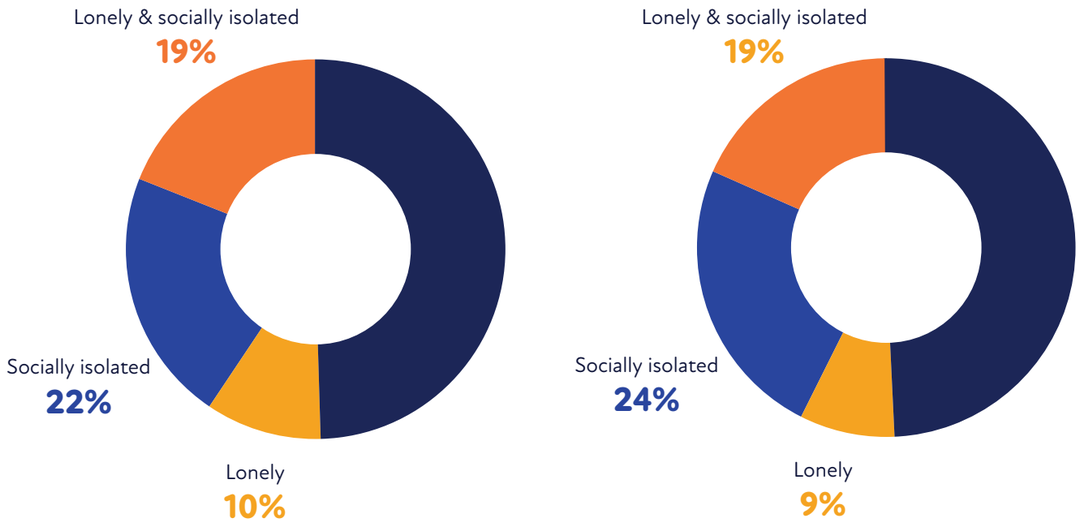
More than 2 in 5 people are socially isolated (42%)[5]

DIVING DEEPER

Gender

Men and women report similar levels of loneliness and social isolation.

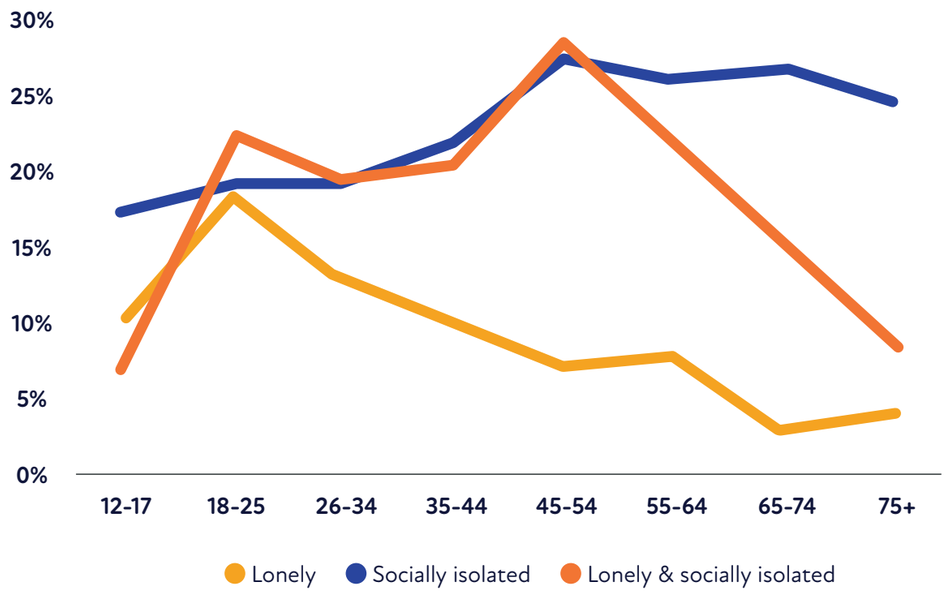
Men and women experience loneliness and social isolation at similar levels.



Age

Loneliness and social isolation is prevalent across the lifespan, but there are particular age groups at higher risk.

- **18-25 year olds are the loneliest** (18%) but the least socially isolated
- **45-54 year olds are the most socially isolated** (27%), followed closely by people aged 65-74 (27%)
- Interestingly, **45-54 year olds are also the most lonely and socially isolated** (28%)

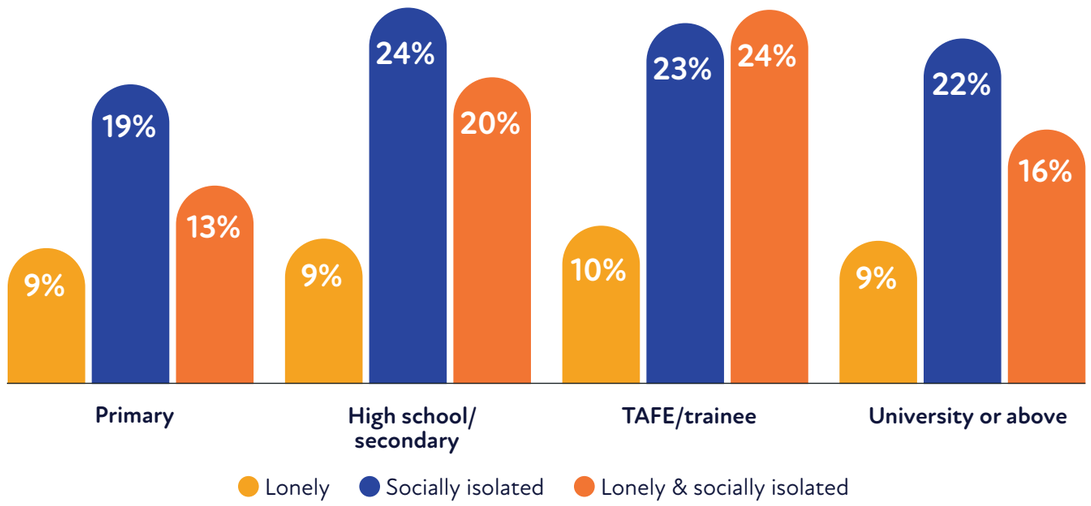


Those who have TAFE/ traineeship may be at risk of loneliness and social isolation

Those who are part-time or casual workers are at risk of loneliness and social isolation.

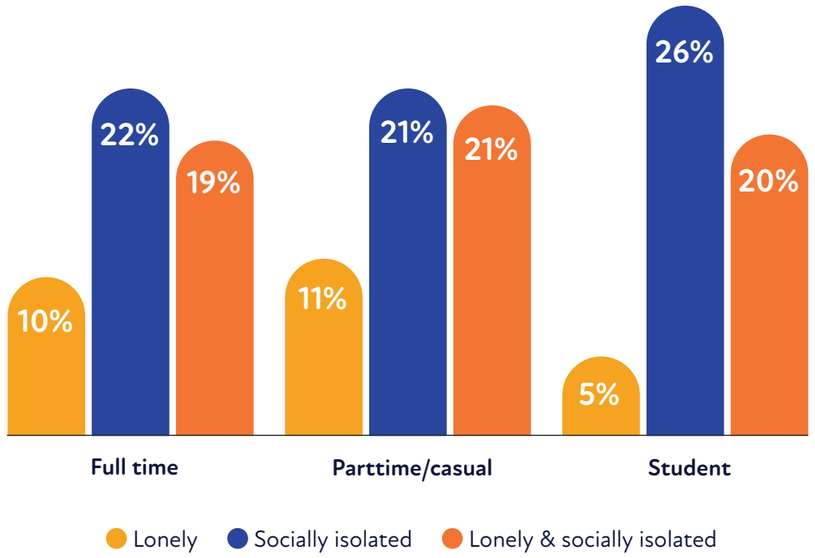
Education

- More than 1 in 5 people (21%) with high school, TAFE or University education are lonely and socially isolated
- People with TAFE/ traineeship level education show the highest levels of being both lonely and socially isolated, and lonely on its own



Employment

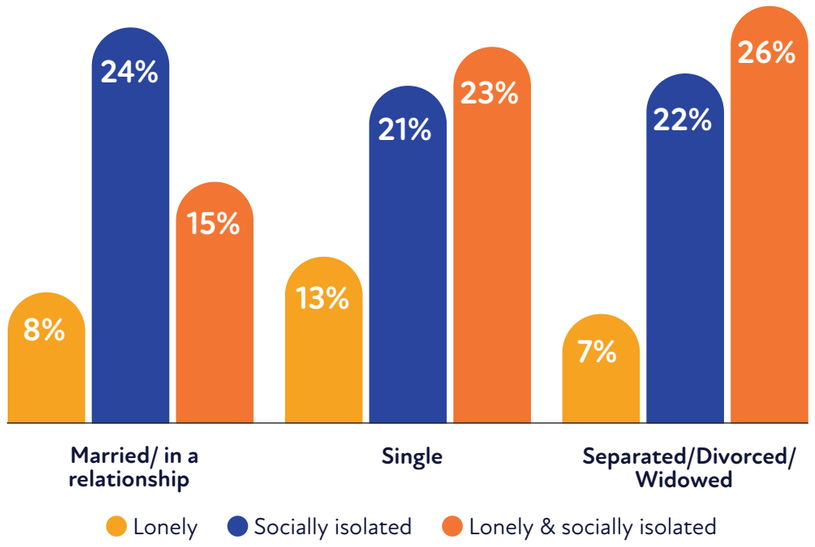
- Part-time or casual workers experience the highest levels of both loneliness and social isolation
- While students (full time or part time) are more likely to be socially isolated than workers, they're 64% less likely to be both lonely and socially isolated than those working part-time or casually, and 67% less likely to be both lonely and socially isolated than those working full-time



Relationship status shapes loneliness and isolation differently: single people feel the loneliest, partnered people are the most socially isolated, and those who have experienced a relationship breakdown face the greatest combined risk of loneliness and isolation.

Relationship status

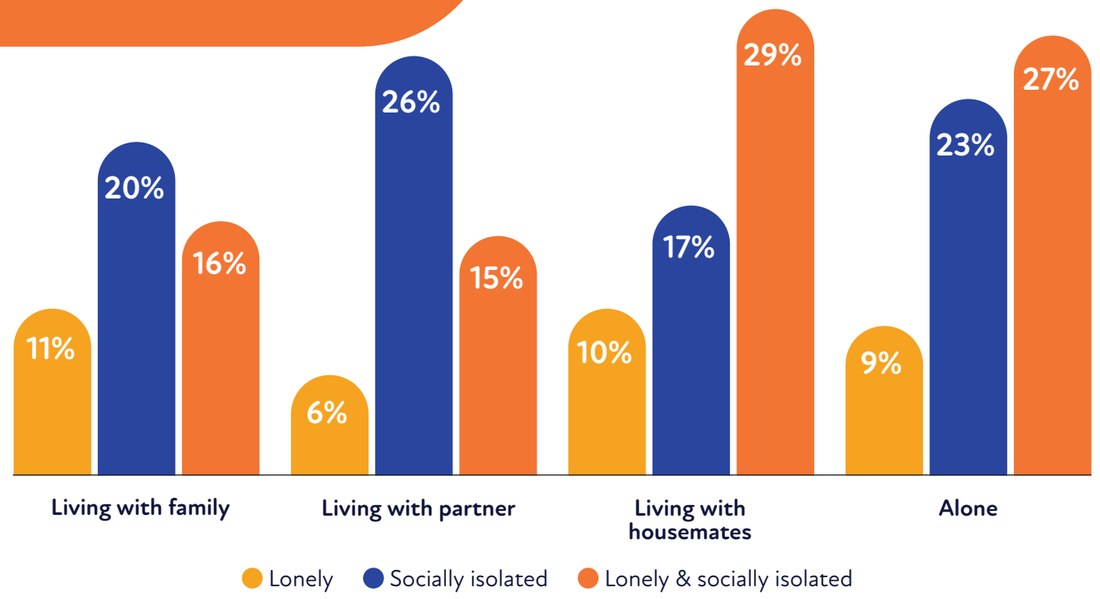
- 1 in 4 people (25%) who are married or in a relationship are socially isolated; about 15% of them are both lonely and socially isolated
- People experiencing a relationship breakdown such as separation, divorce, or the loss of a partner are about 2 times more likely to be lonely and socially isolated and nearly 2 times more likely to feel lonely, compared with those who are married or in a relationship
- Single people are 2 times more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, and nearly 2 times more likely to feel lonely, compared with those who are married or in a relationship



Living arrangement

- People living in shared accommodation (i.e., housemates, in college/university, residential homes) are about 1.5 times more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated than people living with family. They're also more likely to feel lonely than those living alone.
- People living alone are about 2 times more likely to be lonely and socially isolated, and almost 1.5 times more likely to be socially isolated than those who live with their family

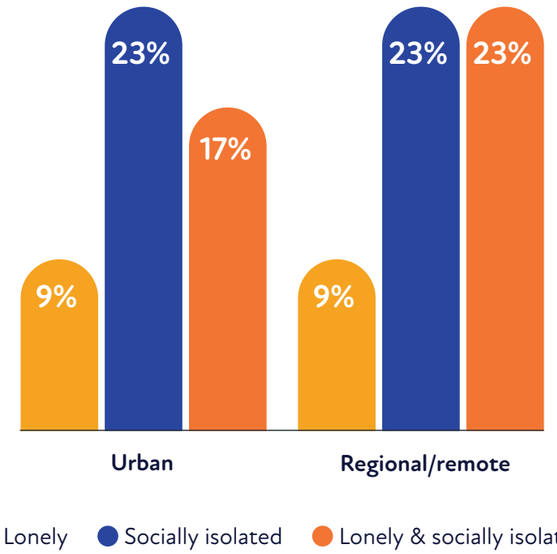
Living in shared accommodation is associated with a higher risk of being both lonely and socially isolated.

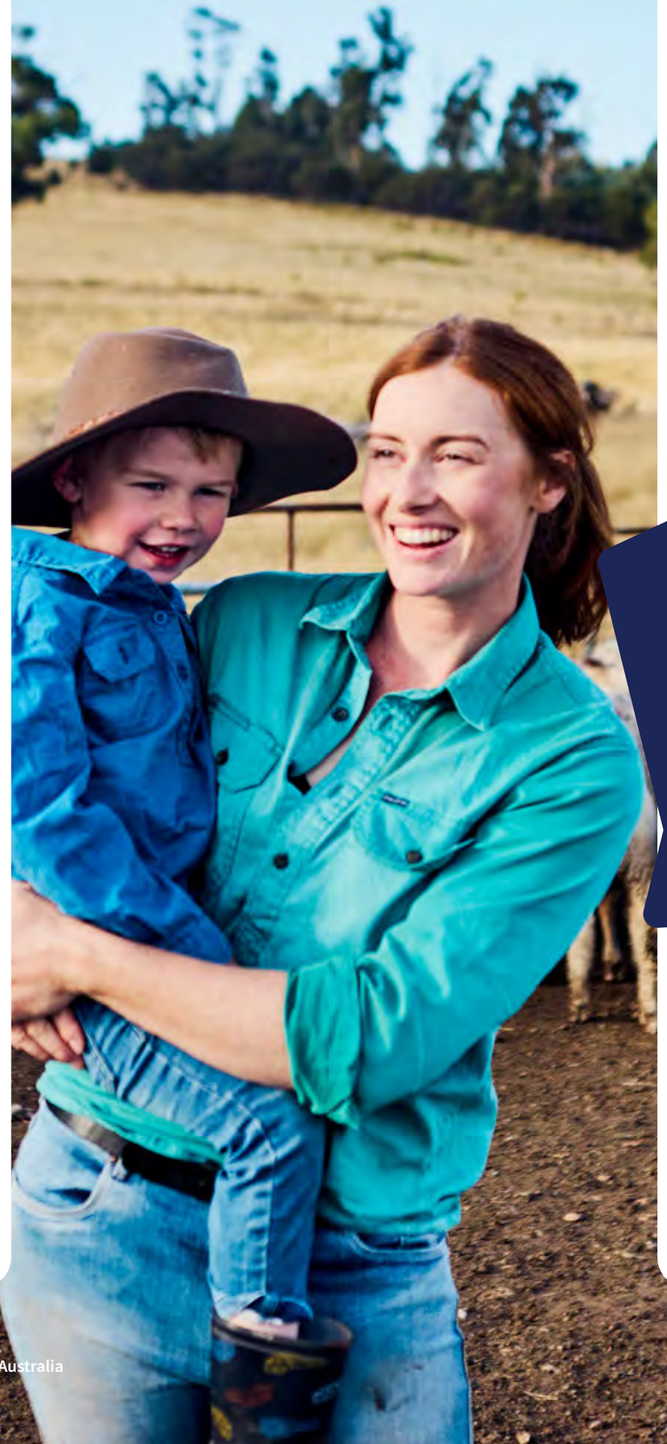


Urbanicity

- People living in regional and remote areas are 1.3 times more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated than people living in urban areas

Where you live is critical - people who live in regional and remote areas are at higher risk of both loneliness and social isolation

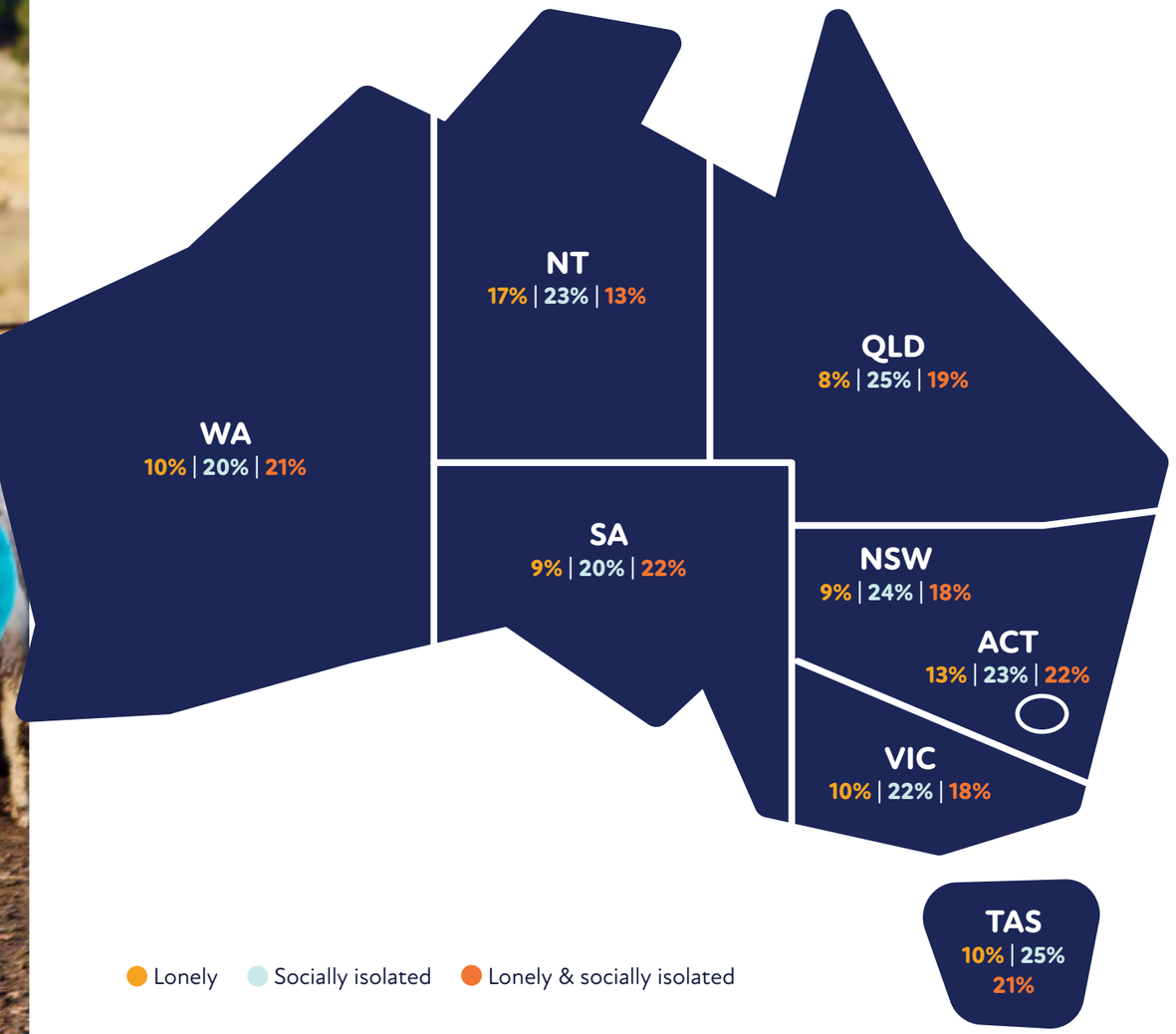




People experience loneliness and, or social isolation similarly across our nation.

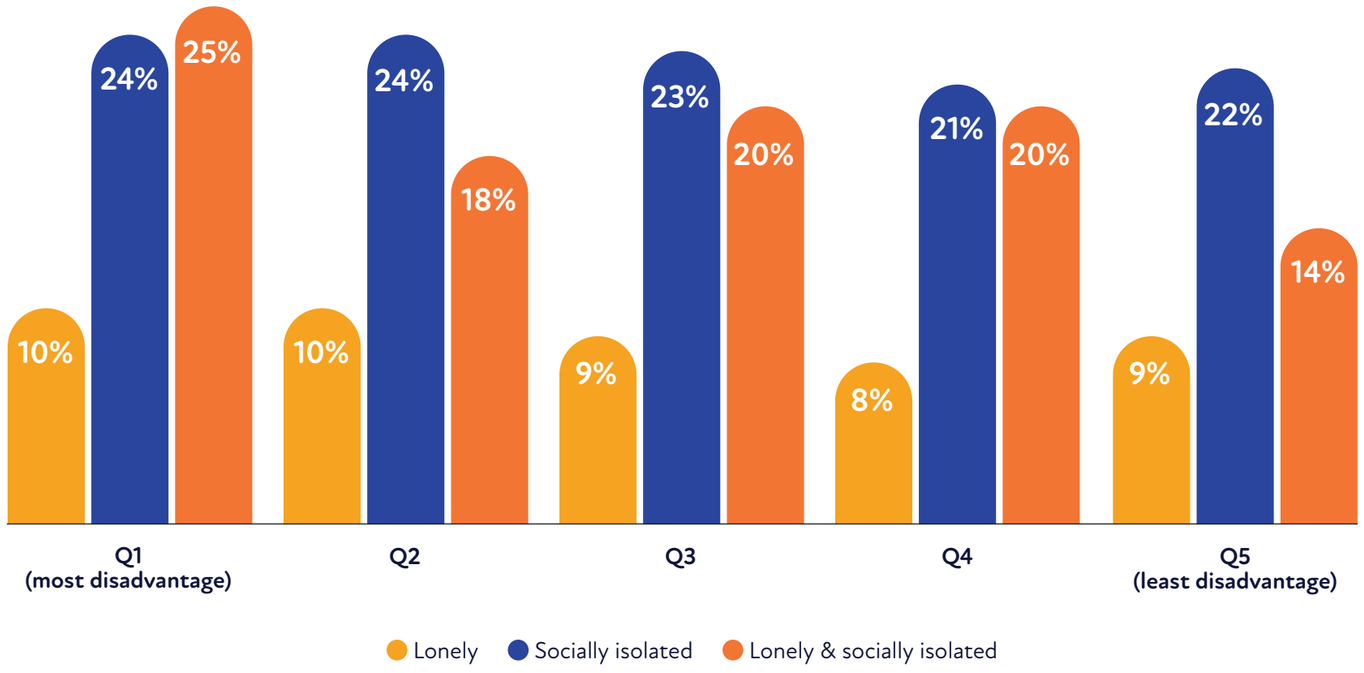
Across States

Levels of loneliness, social isolation, and both loneliness and social isolation slightly vary but the differences are not statistically significant across states.



Neighbourhood disadvantage

People living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods (*neighbourhoods with most limited access to material and social resources, and lower social engagement*) are nearly 2 times more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, and nearly 1.5 times more likely to be socially isolated on its own, compared with people living in the least disadvantaged or most advantaged neighbourhoods.



Neighbourhood advantage makes a difference to the risk of loneliness and social isolation

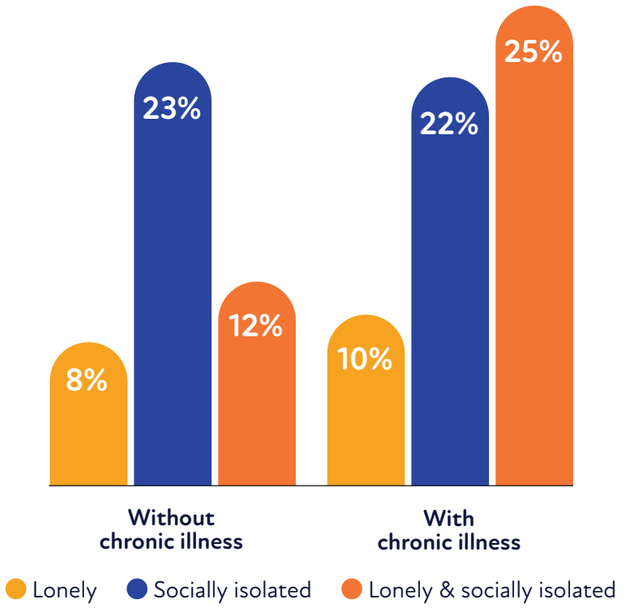
7 HEALTH STATUS

Having a chronic condition increases the risk of loneliness, and the combination of loneliness and social isolation

Chronic disease

The proportion of people who are both lonely and socially isolated is higher in those with chronic illness (25%) compared to those without (12%)

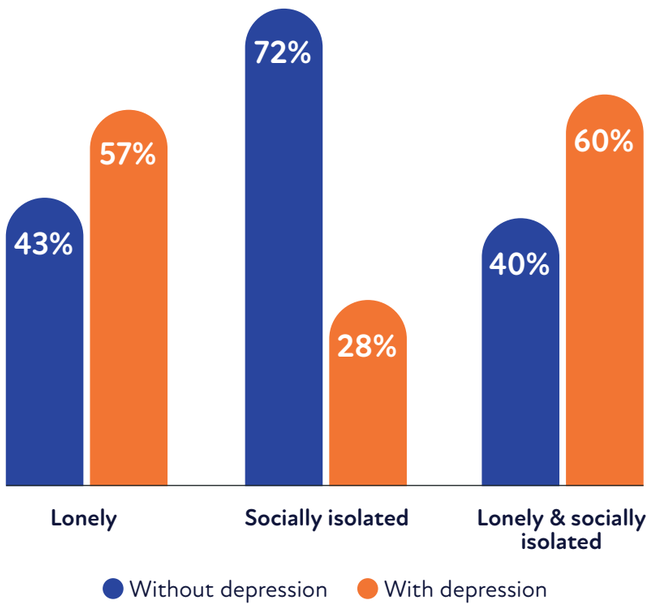
People living with a chronic illness are nearly 3 times more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, and more than 2 times more likely to be lonely, compared to those without a chronic illness



8 MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

Depression as an outcome

- 3 in 5 people (60%) who are both lonely and socially isolated have depression
- People who are both lonely and socially isolated are nearly 6 times more likely to experience depression than those who are socially connected
- People who are lonely are 4.5 times more likely, and those who are socially isolated are nearly 2 times more likely to experience depression, than those who are socially connected

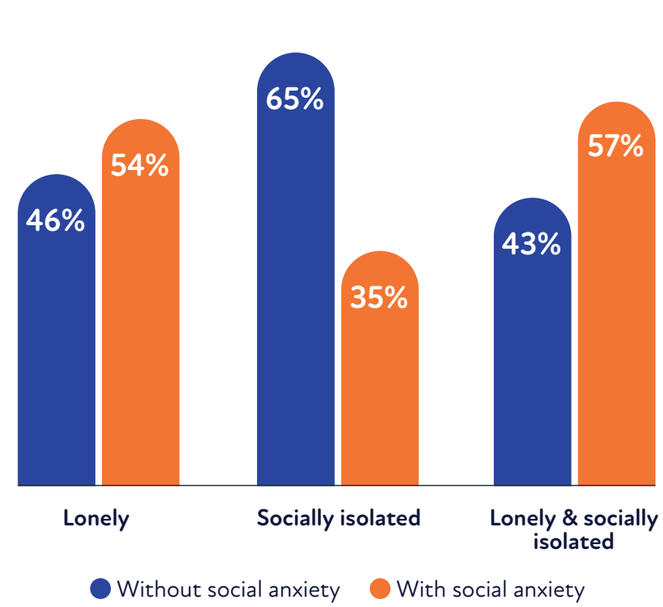


Loneliness combined with social isolation poses the greatest risk of depression, with loneliness alone more harmful than social isolation alone.

Loneliness combined with social isolation poses the greatest risk of social anxiety, while loneliness alone is more harmful than social isolation alone.

Social anxiety as an outcome

- More than 1 in 2 people (57%) who are both lonely and socially isolated have social anxiety
- People who are both lonely and socially isolated are 4 times more likely to experience social anxiety than those who feel socially connected
- Those who are lonely are nearly 3 times more likely, and those who are socially isolated are nearly 2 times more likely to experience social anxiety



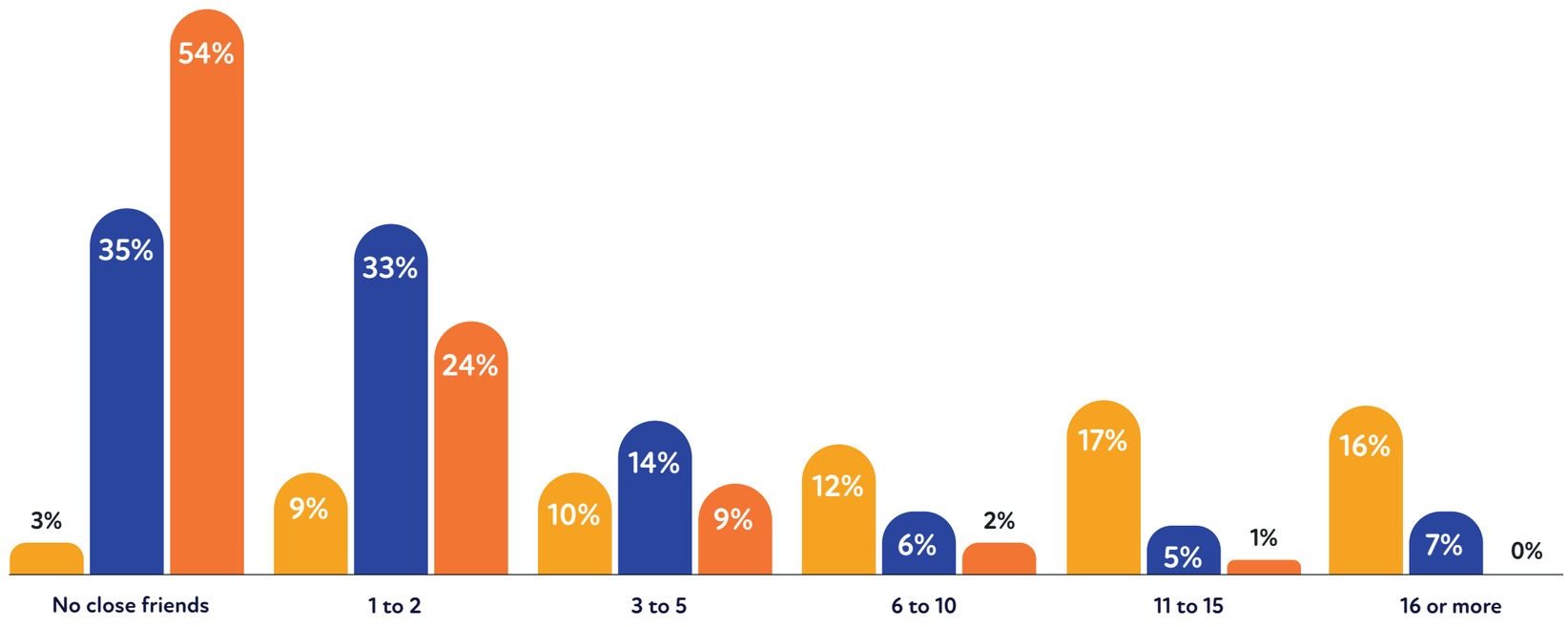
9 FRIENDSHIP

Close friendships are important.

Having at least 1 close friend guards against loneliness and social isolation. The risk of any form of social disconnection declines with the number of close friends one has.

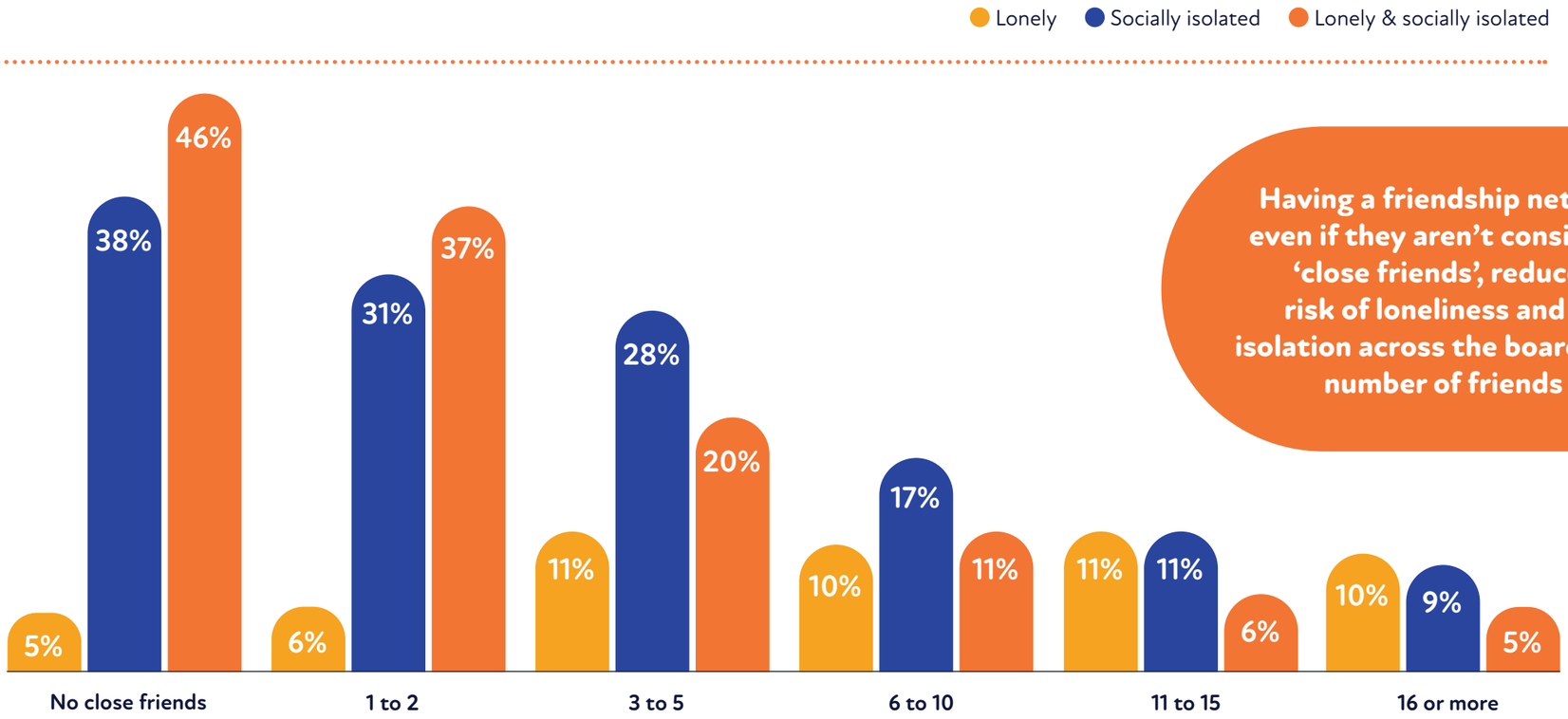
Close friends

- People with no close friends are most likely to experience both loneliness and social isolation, or social isolation on its own
- Having just one or two close friends can reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation by 89%, and social isolation by 77%
- People with three or more close friends have even stronger protection - a 99% reduction in the risk of loneliness and social isolation, a 96% reduction in social isolation, and a 69% reduction in loneliness



Extended friendship network

- People without an extended friendship network, that is friends that are not considered close, are likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, or socially isolated on its own
- Having a friendship network of one or two people, even if they are not close friends, reduces the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 60%, and social isolation by 61%
- Having an extended network of three or more friends reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation by 94%, social isolation by 89%, and loneliness by 56%

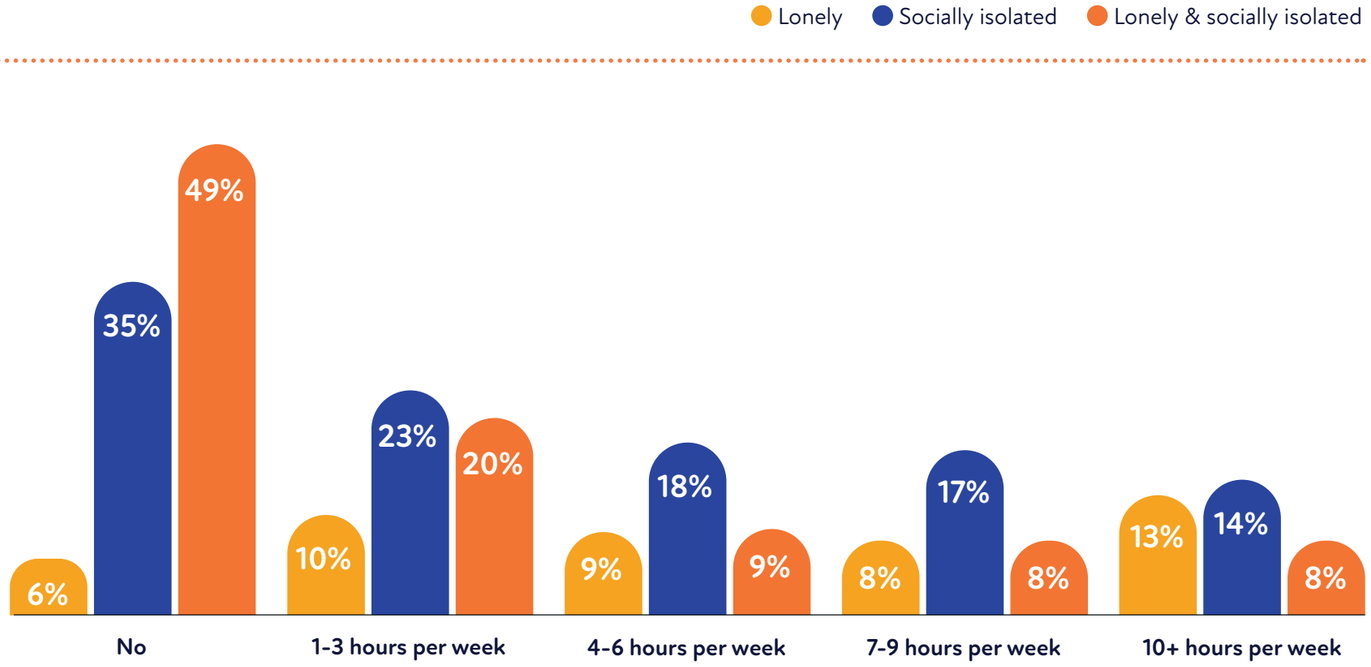


Having a friendship network, even if they aren't considered 'close friends', reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation across the board. Any number of friends helps.

Spending time with friends every week reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

Time spent with friends

- People who spend no time with friends are most likely to be both lonely and socially isolated
- Spending just 1 to 3 hours per week with friends can reduce the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 90%, social isolation by 84%, and loneliness by 63%



Friendship quality

- Having **positive**, good quality friendships, where you feel supported, encouraged, and share enjoyable experiences[7], can reduce the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 86%, social isolation by 71%, and loneliness by 55%

Having positive friendship quality protects you from loneliness and social isolation.

The quality of friendships matters in both directions - not just when they are positive, but when they are also negative.

- Those with **negative** quality friendships, that is marked by conflict and demands[8], are 38% more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, 45% more likely to be socially isolated, and 36% more likely to be lonely

Negative friendship quality puts you at risk of all forms of social disconnection

10 FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family conflict[9]

- People who have more family conflict[10] are 12% more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, 8% more likely to be socially isolated, and 10% more likely to feel lonely

Having family conflict significantly raises the risk of loneliness and, or social isolation.

Family cohesion[11]

- Feeling close and connected to family[12] reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 20%, being socially isolated by 12%, and being lonely by 11%
- People who are both lonely and socially isolated reported the weakest sense of family cohesion, that is the least closeness and connection with their family

Being close and connected with family can reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Family expressiveness[13]

- Having a family that openly shares, expresses, and discusses things with each other[14] reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 34%, of being socially isolated by 21%, and of being lonely by 20%
- People who are both lonely and socially isolated also have the lowest levels of family expressiveness, meaning their families are least likely to openly discuss things, share feelings, and express themselves with one another

Being able to express oneself to your family can help reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

11 BEING PROSOCIAL

Prosocial behaviours

In people aged 18 or over (N=3,600)[15 16]

- Acting *more* prosocially[17], that is showing kindness, compassion, cooperation, and generosity towards others, reduces the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 5%, social isolation by 4%, and loneliness by 2%
- People who are socially disconnected (either with loneliness, social isolation, or both) report lower tendency to show kindness, compassion, cooperation towards others compared with those who are socially connected

Showing kindness, compassion, cooperation, and giving to others can reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation

Prosocial actions[18]

- Being willing to help others[19] reduces the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 8%, social isolation by 5%, and loneliness by 3%
- People who are socially disconnected (either with loneliness, social isolation, or both) report significantly fewer prosocial actions, that is they have a lower tendency to do things that benefit others - such as showing kindness, offering help - compared with those who are socially connected

Prosocial feelings[20]

- Feeling empathetic and paying heed to others' needs or feelings[21] can reduce the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 12% and social isolation by 8%
- People who are both lonely and socially isolated report significantly fewer prosocial feelings, including empathy, compassion, and care for others compared with those who are socially connected

Prosocial feelings can help prevent social isolation, with or without loneliness.

In adolescents aged 12-17 (N=401)

- In adolescents, higher levels of prosocial behaviour such as helping others and showing kindness, reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 16%, and the risk of being socially isolated by 9%
- Young people who are both lonely and socially isolated are also significantly less likely to act kindly, helpfully, or cooperatively towards others compared to those who are socially connected

Showing kindness, compassion, cooperation and giving to others protects young people against loneliness and social isolation.

12 SOCIAL COHESION[22]

- People who are both lonely and socially isolated have the weakest sense of community cohesion
- Conversely, those who have a stronger sense of community[23] are 70% less likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, and 52% less likely to be either socially isolated or lonely on their own

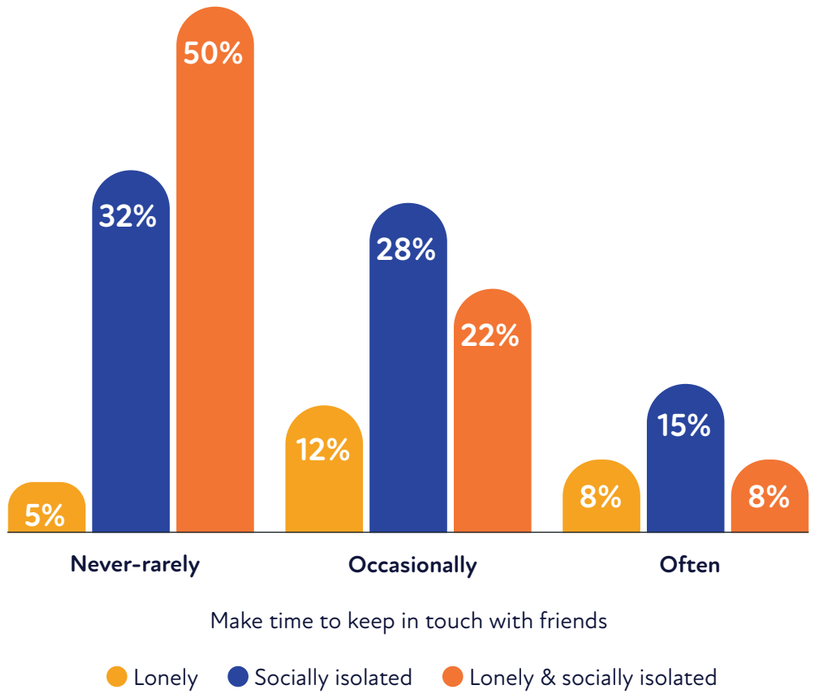
Living in a cohesive community where people can trust and help each other can reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

13 SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Spending time with friends, family and neighbours occasionally or more often, can reduce the risk of loneliness and, or social isolation

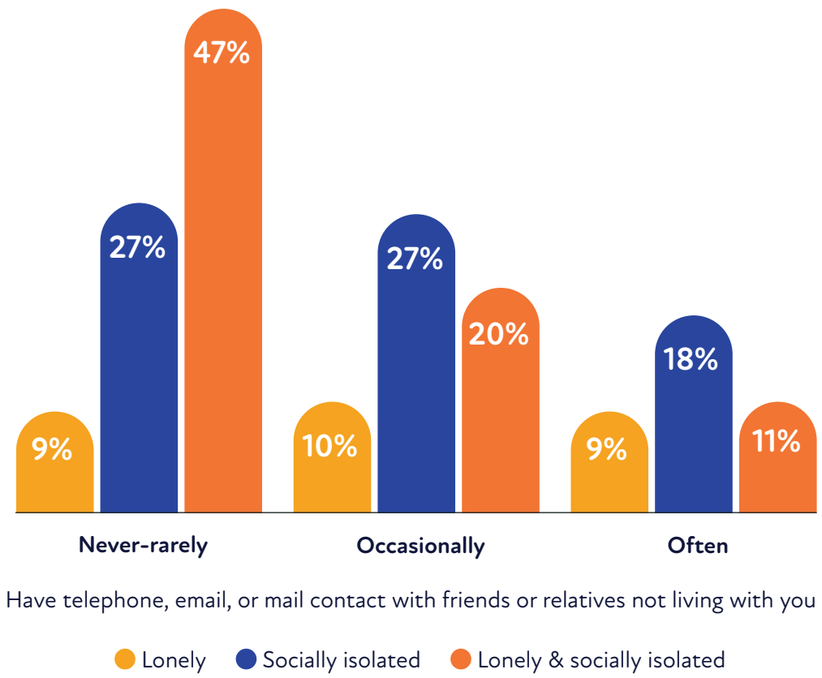
Friends and family

- Regularly contacting friends and family reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation by 94%, social isolation by 84%, and loneliness by 72%
- Making time to keep in touch with friends regularly reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation by 97%, social isolation by 91%, and loneliness by 74%



Make time to keep in touch with friends

Lonely · Socially isolated · Lonely & socially isolated

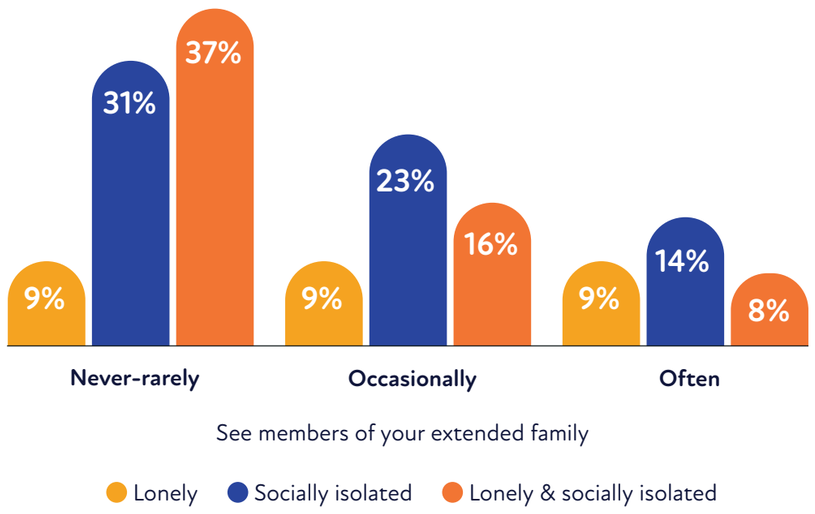


Have telephone, email, or mail contact with friends or relatives not living with you

Lonely · Socially isolated · Lonely & socially isolated

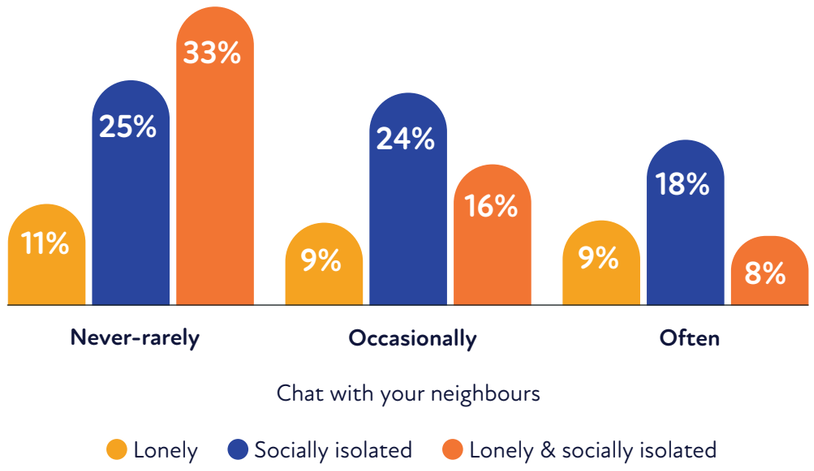
Extended family

- Regularly seeing extended family reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation by 93%, social isolation by 85%, and loneliness by 70%.



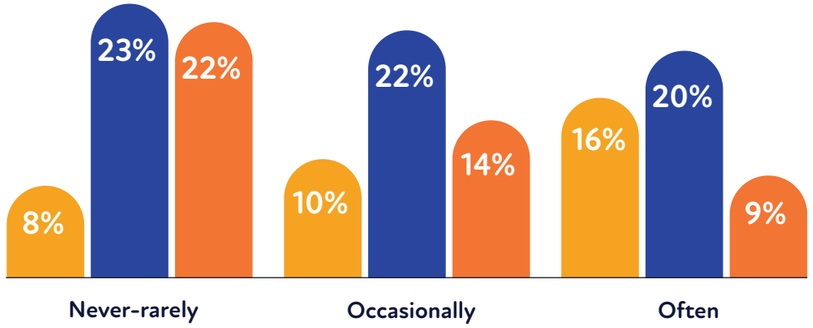
Neighbours

- Regularly chatting with neighbours reduces the risk of loneliness and social isolation by 88%, social isolation by 66%, and loneliness by 56%.



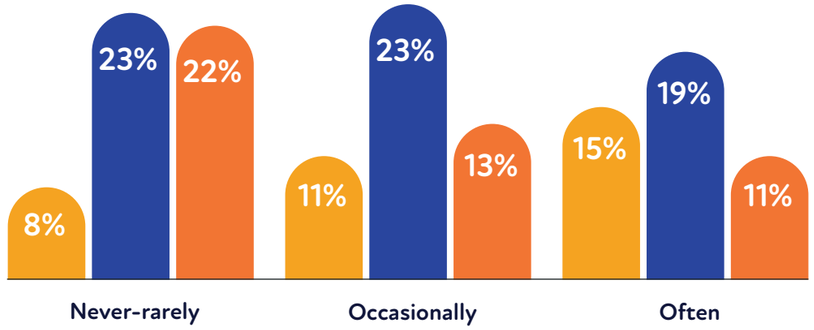
Political activities

- Regular involvement in political activities reduces the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 74%, and social isolation by 26%
- Regularly discussing current affairs with friends and family reduces the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 88%, social isolation by 66%, and loneliness by 39%
- Regularly contacting a local politician reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 62%
- People who never or rarely get involved with political activities and current affairs are more likely to be both lonely and socially isolated

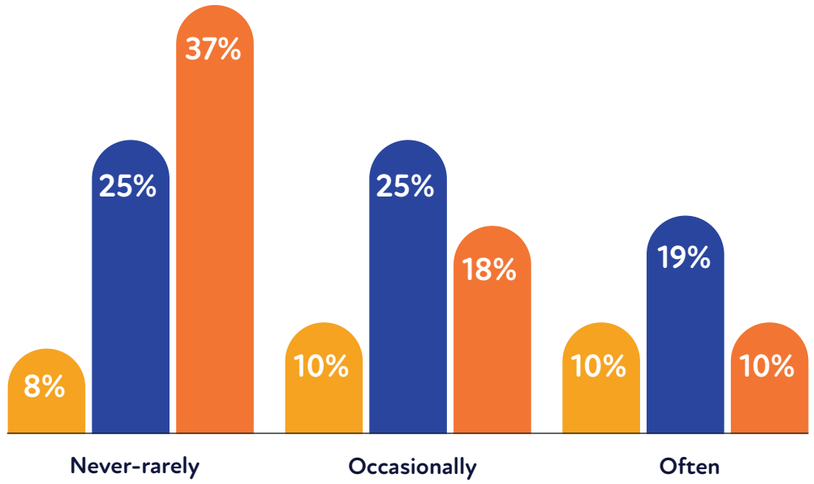


Get involved in activities for a union, political party, or group that is for or against something

Getting involved in political activities occasionally or more often can protect one from loneliness and social isolation. Talking about current affairs often is protective against loneliness and social isolation.



Get in touch with a local politician or councillor about issues that concern you

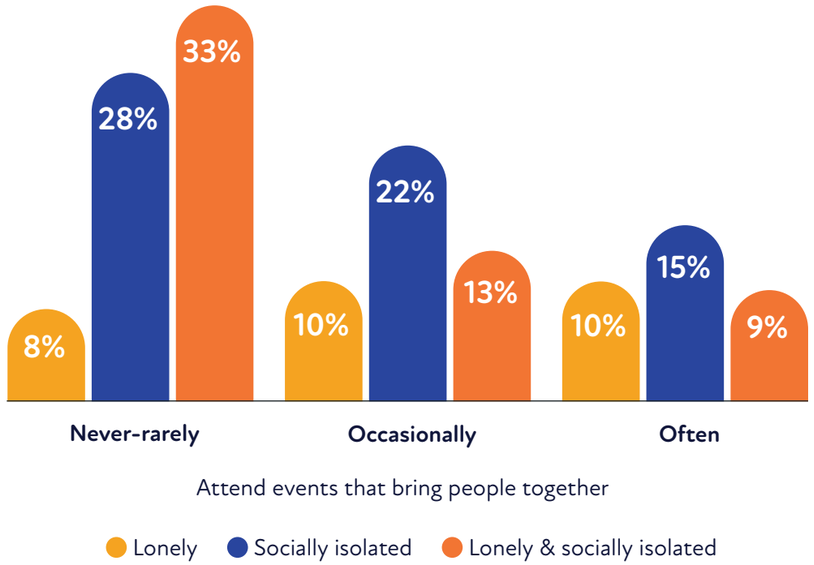


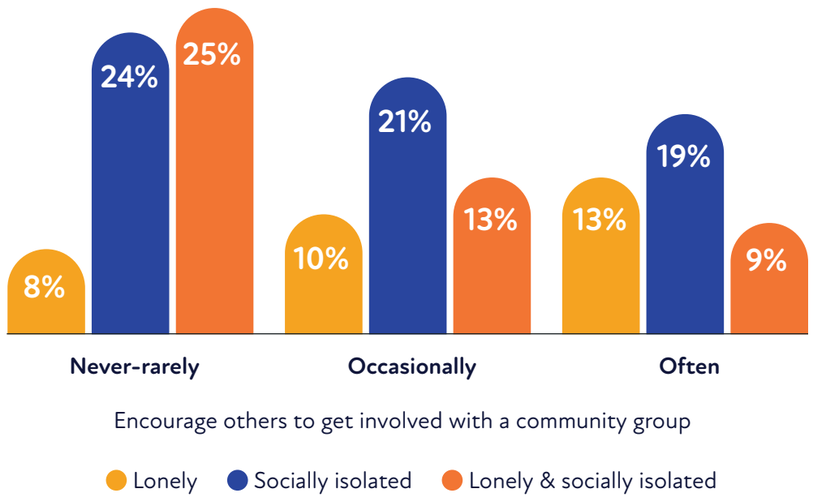
Talk about current affairs with friends, family or neighbours

Community, charity, and religious activities

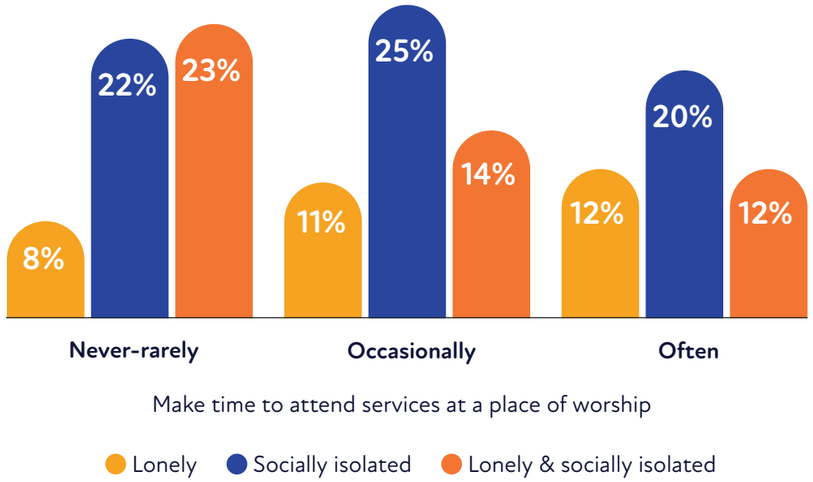
- Regularly attending community events reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 89%, social isolation by 75%, and loneliness by 56%
- Regularly encouraging others to join community or group events reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 77%, and socially isolated by 43%

Participating in community activities is protective of loneliness and social isolation.

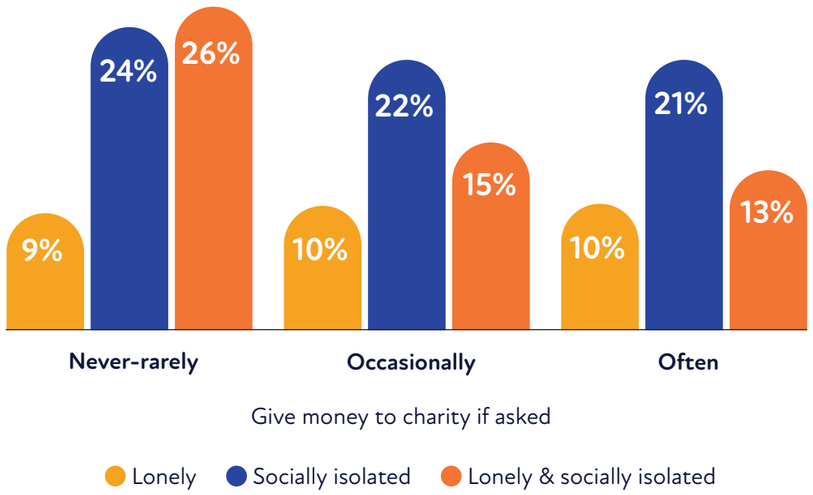




- Regularly participating in religious activities reduces the risk of experiencing loneliness and social isolation by 52%



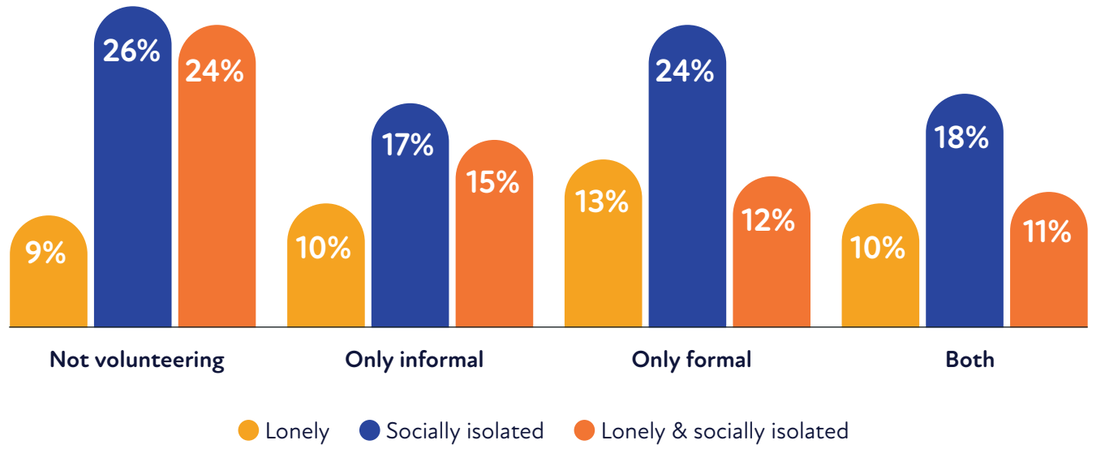
- Donating to charity regularly reduces the risk of both loneliness and social isolation by 66%, social isolation by 35%, and loneliness by 32%



Roles

- Compared with those who volunteer both formally and informally, people who do not volunteer in any form are more than 3 times more likely to experience both loneliness and social isolation, nearly 2 times more likely to be socially isolated, and nearly 1.5 times more likely to feel lonely

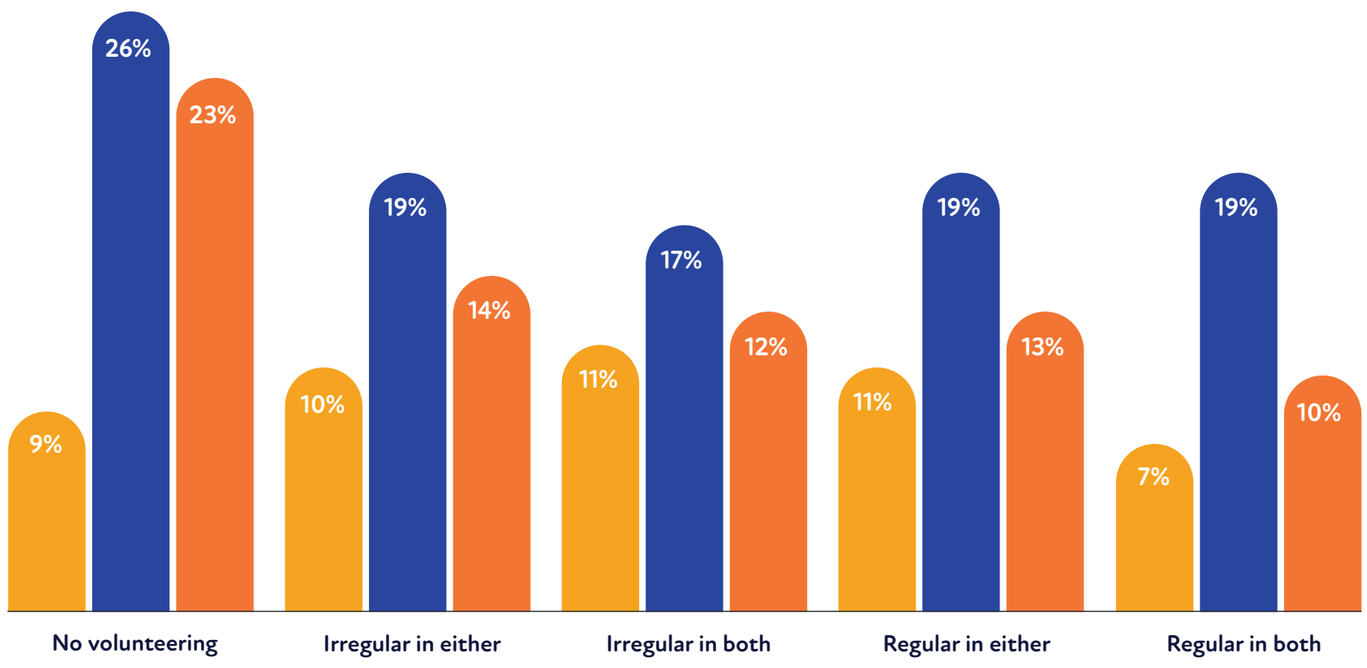
Any type of volunteering will reduce the risk of loneliness, and or social isolation.



Volunteering regularly, regardless of whether it is formal or informal, will reduce the risk of loneliness and social isolation.

Frequency

- People who volunteer regularly both formally and informally are the least lonely and socially isolated
- People who do not volunteer are 4 times more likely to experience both loneliness and social isolation, and nearly 2 times as likely to experience either loneliness or social isolation, compared with those who volunteered regularly in both formal and informal ways
- Irregularly volunteering in either formal or informal types reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 56%, social isolation by 45%.
- Irregular volunteering in both formal and informal types reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 62%, and social isolation by 52%.
- Regularly volunteering in either formal and informal types reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 62%, and social isolation by 47%.
- Regular volunteering in both formal and informal types reduces the risk of being both lonely and socially isolated by 75%, social isolation by 50%, and loneliness by 47%.



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THE WAY FORWARD

More than half of us are experiencing some form of social disconnection and it is affecting our quality of life. Loneliness and social isolation are not personal failures - they are public health challenges that demand a coordinated public response.

Science tells us that healthy social connection protects us - from illness, from despair, from lives lived at a distance from others. The way forward is both a policy agenda and a cultural shift: a decision, made together, to value and protect our social lives as we would any other determinant of health.

1 The quality and frequency of our relationships matter

Not all social contact is equal. Seeing people we care about frequently, and feeling genuinely understood by them, buffers against loneliness in ways that casual contact cannot replicate. Equally, social cohesion - the trust, reciprocity, and sense of belonging that binds communities together - shapes whether people feel a part of something larger than themselves. We need to nurture the relationships that sustain us (friends, family and neighbours), and strengthen the social fabric that holds our communities together.

2 Reaching those most at risk

Any national response must be designed explicitly for those facing the greatest risk. This report identifies young people aged 18–25, people aged 45–54, and people over 65 as particularly likely to experience social disconnection. People who are separated, widowed, or divorced; people living with chronic illness; and rural and remote Australians also face elevated risk. A policy that ignores equity will leave the most lonely and isolated people behind.

3 Prevention in addition to intervention

Investing upstream before loneliness becomes depression, before social isolation becomes chronic illness, is both a health and an economic imperative. The evidence on the costs of loneliness is unambiguous. Prevention is not only more effective; it is cost-effective.

4 Building the conditions for healthy social connection

Individual behaviour change is not enough if the environments people live in make connection difficult. Urban planning, workplaces, schools, housing, transport, and digital infrastructure all shape our social lives. Systemic changes must empower people to make and maintain connection.

5 Strengthening communities and the social sector

Communities and volunteering organisations are the delivery infrastructure for meaningful social connection. To fulfil that role at scale, they need sustained, flexible funding - not short-term investment.

6 Empowering the people who can help

The people surrounding someone feeling lonely can do a great deal: check in, show up, invite, include, advocate. Meaningful and healthy social connection is built from consistent, small actions.

7 Research, data, and accountability

Population-level data, continued State of the Nation reporting, and investment in prevention and intervention research is essential. Commitments must be tracked and acted on and not announced and forgotten.

8 A national strategy

The foundation for reducing social disconnection and improving opportunities for connection is a nationally coordinated response. Australia needs a formal, government-led national strategy on loneliness and social isolation - one that learns from the UK's pioneering Loneliness Strategy and the US Surgeon General's advisory. It must appoint a designated lead, secure cross-portfolio commitment, dedicated funding, and real accountability mechanisms. We are overdue.

A BLUEPRINT FOR CREATING A **CULTURE OF CONNECTION** IN AUSTRALIA

Meaningful connections for every Australian at every age

Government

A National strategy with policies and frameworks across Federal, State, and Local Government to promote meaningful social connections and mitigate loneliness and social isolation.

Workplaces

Employers and employees are equipped with the knowledge and skills to develop and maintain meaningful social connections in the workplace.

Health

Health professionals understand loneliness and the health benefits of social connection, identifying at-risk individuals and responding with an array of solutions including social resources.

Education

Teachers and educators understand loneliness and prioritise initiatives like buddy and mentoring systems, focused learning sessions, and safe spaces for meaningful student connections.

Community

Local councils and services understand loneliness affects everyone and provide free and low-cost events, activities and accessible spaces to facilitate meaningful social connections.

Home/Family

A commitment to quality time (purposeful and focused) with partners, children, family, housemates, neighbours to strengthen bonds.

FOUR PILLARS

underpin and support the culture of connection. These pillars focus on developing knowledge, taking action, facilitating connection and creating safe spaces to make connections meaningful.

LONELINESS AWARENESS WEEK AUS

Understanding of loneliness

Knowledge and skills to recognise, prevent, or respond to loneliness that is distressing and, or persistent.

Quality time

Focused and purposeful time which enables people to feel valued, heard and seen.

Connectors

Peers or organisations that facilitate and maintain meaningful social connection.

Spaces for connection

Safe and accessible spaces (infrastructure, activities and initiatives) that bring people together to facilitate social connection.

FOOTNOTES

1. Not mutually exclusive of social isolation
2. Prevalence in 2023: 32%
3. Prevalence in 2023: 17%
4. Not mutually exclusive of loneliness
5. Prevalence in 2023: 46%
6. As measured by Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). This is an index relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage is defined as people's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society. The dimensions are constrained by what is collected in the Census; they include income, education, employment, occupation, housing, and family structure.
7. Statistically speaking, for any increase in positive friendship quality scores, the odd of reporting both loneliness and social isolation will be reduced by 86%
8. Statistically speaking, for any increase in negative friendship quality scores, the odd of reporting both loneliness and social isolation will be increased by 38%
9. The extent to which the open expression of anger and aggression and generally conflictual interactions are characteristics of the family interactions. Please note that we reverse the scoring of the original subscale here for interpretation purposes.
10. Statistically speaking, for any increase in family conflict scores, the odds of being both lonely & socially isolated will be increased by 12%
11. The extent to which family members are concerned and committed to the family and the degree to which family members are helpful and supportive of each other
12. Statistically speaking, for any increase in family cohesion scores, the odd of reporting both loneliness & socially isolation will be reduced by 20%
13. The extent to which family members are allowed and encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings directly
14. Statistically speaking, for any increase in family expressiveness scores, the odd of being both lonely & socially isolated will be increased by 34%
15. Prosocial behaviours are 'voluntary positive behaviors intended to benefit another', with empathy and care. They are characterised by acts of kindness, compassion, cooperating, helping, comforting, sharing, and giving.
16. We used two separated scales to measure prosocial behaviours in individuals aged 12-17 and those aged 18 or above (validated for each age group)
17. Statistically speaking, for any increase in prosocial behaviour scores, the odd of being both lonely and socially isolated will be reduced by 5%
18. Intentional actions aimed at benefiting others, rather than oneself, encompassing activities such as donating, cooperating, assisting, sharing, and volunteering
19. Statistically speaking, for any increase in prosocial actions scores, the odd of being both lonely and socially isolated will be reduced by 8%
20. Feelings that motivate someone towards prosocial behaviours, includes feeling empathetic towards others' needs, sensing their discomfort, taking perspectives of others' needs or feelings
21. Statistically speaking, for any increase in prosocial feelings scores, the odd of being both lonely and socially isolated will be reduced by 12%
22. Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept referring to social connectedness - the 'glue' that connects members of a society, solidarity and trust amongst individuals, within and across communities and organisations, and within society at large
23. Statistically speaking, for any increase in social cohesion scores, the odd of being both lonely and socially isolated will be reduced by 70%

APPENDIX

Cut-off scores

Loneliness is calculated using the University of California Loneliness Scale – 4 (UCLA-LS-4) cut off score of higher than 10

Severely loneliness is using the University of California Loneliness Scale – 4 (UCLA-LS-4) cut off score of higher than 12

Social isolation risk is calculated using the Lubben Social Network Scale -6 Cut off Score of less than 12

People who met criteria for clinical depression scored above a cut off score of more than 10 on the Patient Health Questionnaire -8 (PHQ-8)

People who met criteria for clinical social anxiety scored above a cut off score of more than 6 the MINI Social Phobia Inventory (MINI-SPIN)

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Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1993). Early emotional instability, prosocial behaviour, and aggression: Some methodological aspects. European Journal of personality, 7(1), 19-36. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2410070103

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Glossary of Key Terms

Loneliness is a subjective unpleasant or distressing feeling of a lack of connection to other people, along with a desire for more, or more satisfying, social relationships.

Social isolation is having objectively few social relationships, social roles, group memberships, and infrequent social interaction.

Social connection is a continuum of the size and diversity of one's social network and roles, the functions that these relationships serve, and their positive or negative qualities. (In this study, we only capture two dimensions of social connection - size and function).

Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept referring to social connectedness (the 'glue' that connects members of a society, solidarity and trust amongst individuals, within and across communities and organisations, and within society at large.

How to Cite the Report

Ending Loneliness Together (2026). State of Nation: Understanding and Rebuilding Social Connection in Australia. https://lonelinessawarenessweek.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/ELT_SOTN_2026.pdf

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JOIN US

1 in 2 people living in Australia are socially disconnected. If you're anything like us, you think it's time for that to change.

There are many ways you can join us in the fight to address loneliness in Australia, including by becoming an individual or organisational member, or supporting us as a donor or an organisational partner.

To make an immediate impact, consider donating online. By making a charity donation, you are supporting Ending Loneliness Together to lead a national, coordinated response to tackling persistent loneliness effectively.

www.endingloneliness.com.au

If you're looking for connection:

Search our National Directory to find groups, organisations and services that will help you, or someone you know, connect with others and build meaningful relationships.

endingloneliness.com.au/search/

If you need someone to talk to, call:

Lifeline on **13 11 14**
Men's Line on **1300 789 978**
Kids Helpline on **1800 551 800**
Beyond Blue on **1300 22 46 36**
Suicide Call Back Service on **1300 659 467**

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