

**QUEENSLAND MEN'S SHED ASSOCIATION Inc****ABN 82 659 067 088**

Patron

His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC
Governor of Queensland**Submission to the Queensland Legislative Assembly
Community Support and Services Committee
Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland****INTRODUCTION**

The Queensland Men's Shed Association Inc. (QMSA), as the peak state body representing the interests of individual men's sheds in Queensland, is pleased to submit the following information for the Community Support and Services Committee Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland.

CONTEXT

QMSA submits that Australia is in the midst of a loneliness crisis, with many in our population experiencing a deficit of social connection, i.e., they do not enjoy meaningful relationships in their lives to sustain and nurture them, particularly through difficult times. The Australian Loneliness Report released in 2008 revealed that one in four Australians are lonely, which affects their physical and mental health, and that nearly 55% of the population feel they lack companionship at least sometime (see [2017 Psy Week Survey \(psychweek.org.au\)](https://www.psychweek.org.au/2017-Psy-Week-Survey)). It also found that loneliness increases a person's likelihood of experiencing depression by 15.2%, and the likelihood of social anxiety increases by 13.1%. Those who are lonelier also report being more socially anxious during social interactions. Having meaningful contact with other people and being part of a community can help one feel more positive and avoids loneliness.

Annual survey data over the last decade shows that the number of Australians feeling lonely is increasing over time. Building and maintaining good social connections at any age is important, but as people get older, the risk factors for experiencing loneliness increase.

Beyond Blue, in its research paper "Connections matter: Helping people stay socially active" found that strong ties with family, friends and the community provide people with happiness, security, support and a sense of purpose. Research shows that being connected to others is important for mental wellbeing and can be a protective factor against anxiety and depression. More recently, the Red Cross annual Social Connection Survey released on 7 December 2020 reports that 22 per cent of Australians are worried they will feel isolated or lonely over the upcoming festive season. See <file:///C:/Users/Desktop/Downloads/GW-Loneliness-PRIM.pdf>

MEN'S SHEDS INVOLVEMENT

Men's Sheds have long been recognised for their demonstrated success in contributing to improvements in male health and wellness by reducing social isolation and increasing social engagement and connectedness. Maintaining strong social connections is vital for good mental health, so isolation and loneliness are serious problems. Sheds provide men with a safe, male-friendly environment for men to come together and have a meaningful purpose, to share experiences and sometimes share their problems.

The Men's Shed movement's rise to prominence is viewed as a response to the gradual loss of the traditional backyard shed that, in previous generations, was central to some men's social, familial, cultural, occupational, and masculine role. While not for all males, each Shed differs in the range of activities available; central to every Men's Shed is the creation of a space for social and occupational engagement.

Men's sheds provide a range of activities with the dominant purpose of advancing mental health and preventing or relieving depression, loneliness and social isolation. Studies confirm that participation in a Mens' Shed program improves mental health and combats depression, loneliness and isolation.

Men suffering from loneliness or anxiety have the need for social and physical connection, often due to retirement after years of work activity or suffering grief following loss through death of a partner. Men are often the last ones to make their health and well-being a priority, which is why groups like Men's Sheds are integral to the community. All too often, men become increasingly isolated as they age, particularly when they retire. This means they don't always have a trusted mate to discuss what they find to be difficult subjects like their own health and well-being. Men's sheds provide a safe, friendly space for those lonely or living alone and socially isolated to come together. Having meaningful contact with other people and being part of a community can help one feel more positive and avoid loneliness.

Men's Sheds provide men with a place of belonging and a feeling of connectedness, a factor often overlooked in inner-urban localities where there are many older single or retired men living alone in boarding houses and apartments with limited spaces for hobbies and recreation.

There is a well-established link between loneliness and both mental and physical health. Research has found that lonely people, in comparison to their non-lonely counterparts:

- are more likely to report symptoms of depression
- are admitted to hospital more frequently
- have double the risk of obesity
- have higher blood pressure and a greater risk of heart attack.

Social connections are closely tied to physical and mental wellbeing: having someone to talk to and give support is important. Older people who remain connected with others and have strong relationships are likely to:

- report better quality of life and satisfaction with their life
- have delayed progression of dementia and mental decline
- need less domestic support and enjoy greater independence.

CONCLUSION

Simply put, social connections, interactions and networks matter. Overall, social connections can improve physical and mental health and wellbeing. Joining a Men's Shed in group activities can be particularly effective at reducing and protecting against loneliness.



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QMSA is the State Association member of AMSA



ATTACHMENT 1**Benefits of men's sheds to physical and mental health and wellbeing**

National Men's Shed health study: Better sheds equals better physical and mental health, and this is now being proven by a current academic study with Queensland men's sheds.

At the QMSA Shed Cluster meeting at Sandgate in February 2020, Matthew Summers PhD, Associate Professor of Psychology at University of the Sunshine Coast, gave a presentation on the involvement of men's sheds in improving cognitive and mental health, including a most impressive account of a previous pilot study conducted at Buderim Men's Shed.

The underlying assumption in the presentation was the difficulty in getting older men (as individuals) to be involved in health research - which provides an ideal opportunity for men's sheds to play a role.

Relevant issues included:

- As men age, there is an increase in psychological distress, depression, negative health outcomes and accelerated cognitive decline.
- Social isolation and loneliness is a major risk factor, especially after men retire from work.
- Many deaths occur within first five years post retirement.
- Reduced social networks following retirement.
- Social engagement stimulates cognitive enrichment, is a positive physical reaction to counter stress, encourages physical activity, and improves mood behaviours

The Buderim study drew a positive relationship between social engagement and cognitive mood functionality and loneliness, with recorded checks every 3 months to assess loneliness and depression levels, anxiety symptoms, social networks and cognitive functioning.

The preliminary pilot study results indicated that older men participating in Men's Shed displayed a significant increase in social networks and a reduction in loneliness and social isolation. At the same time there was a measurable improvement in complex attentional processing arising from a reduction in anxiety levels.

Main findings of Buderim pilot study: the longer the association with men's sheds, the lower the levels of loneliness. Increase in attention spans, reduction in working memory deficiency errors concluded that there were definite health benefits through men's shed involvement.

A proposed national research project on the health of Men's Shed participants over 5 years commencing in 2021 will involve a larger sample of participants over a multiple number of men's sheds, comparing older and newer members with emphasis on frailty and quality of life.

ATTACHMENT 2**Extract from Irish Examiner 14 June 2021****Men's shed pilot programme significantly improved health and wellbeing**

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40313405.html>

Hundreds of men improved their physical and mental wellbeing through a 10-week pilot health programme that took place through the men's shed initiative, a new report has found.

As men's health week gets underway, a new report launched by the Irish Men's Sheds Association's (IMSA) has found that the physical and mental wellbeing of men's 'shedders' improved significantly through a pilot 'Sheds for Life' health initiative supported by the HSE and Sláintecare.

The pilot 10-week initiative ran in 22 men's sheds in Limerick, Waterford, Kildare, and Louth and involved 421 men, between 27-90 years of age.

An impact report launched today found that participants in the health programme increased their physical activity, improved their mental wellbeing, and reported higher levels of life satisfaction.

The research also highlighted the value of the men's shed initiative in itself, with levels of loneliness just 1% before the pandemic struck.

One year into Covid-19, however, loneliness levels increased significantly to 39% among those involved in the study.

The 'Sheds for Life' programme involved a health check as well as components on healthy eating and cooking, performing CPR, suicide prevention, diabetes and cancer awareness and digital literacy.

Of the men taking part in a health check, 80% were referred to their GP for a further check-up.

It is expected that the programme will be extended to a further four counties this year once Covid restrictions are further eased.

In a video message Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, welcomed the report findings and said such initiatives would be needed as the country emerges from Covid-19.

Minister Donnelly said Ireland was the first country in the world to roll out a national men's health policy and that the IMSA had played a "vital role" with the country now having the highest number of men's sheds per head of population globally.

"Today's report also makes the point that an emphasis on men's health promotion programmes in the wake of Covid-19 is going to be needed," Minister Donnelly said.

IMSA chief executive Enda Egan said the programme was successful as it was delivered on men's "own terms" and in partnership with them.

"The health outcomes of this group of men remain generally worse than women with higher mortality for almost all leading causes of death. This gender-specific tailored and targeted approach works on health and well-being in a meaningful and effective way, focussing risk factors and prevention through lifestyle changes," Mr Egan said.

"We are very encouraged that this targeted intervention produced such long-term positive change. We see this as a cost-effective template to roll out across the country," he added.

Aisling McGrath of Waterford Institute of Technology, who carried out the research, said the initiative was "scalable" and showed that men were willing to talk in the right environment: "There is no reason why it can't be implemented all over Ireland with the right backing and adoption by the right sectors. And it's good value for money. We know that it's going to be needed more than ever in the wake of Covid-19 to reconnect, particularly for more vulnerable older men".

The number of men's sheds has grown to 450 across the island of Ireland since the first shed opened in Tipperary in 2009. Today more than 10,000 men visit a men's shed every week.

See also: "Study protocol: evaluation of sheds for life (SFL): a community-based men's health initiative designed "for shedders by shedders" in Irish Men's sheds using a hybrid effectiveness-implementation design" <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-10823-8>