

16 August 2021



Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

By email: CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Please find attached our submission into the Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland.

Please send any correspondence regarding this submission to my email [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED] to discuss directly with me.

Yours faithfully,

Jennifer Thomas
Executive President

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY

By your side



16 August 2021

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

Submission prepared by:

The Services Union

By your side



Who we are

We are the Australian Municipal, Administrative, Clerical and Services Union Queensland (Services and Northern Administrative) Branch and the Queensland Services, Industrial Union of Employees trading as The Services Union.

Currently our members work in a wide variety of industries and occupations because the Union's rules traditionally and primarily cover workers in the following industries and occupations:

- Disability support
- Social and community services
- Local government
- Transport, including passenger air and rail transport, road, rail, and air freight transport
- Clerical and administrative employees in commerce and industry generally in North Queensland
- Electricity generation, transmission, and distribution
- Water industry

Over 50% of The Services Union members are women, the exact percentage varies between industries, e.g., in social and community services 75% of our members are women.

Our Union forms part of The Australian Services Union which is one of Australia's largest unions representing 135 000 members.

Who we represent in the Social and Community Services Industry

In Queensland, The Services Union is the largest union of employees in the Social and Community Services (SACS) Industry representing frontline employees and managers in non-government organisations across multiple sectors of the Industry such as:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Services
- Child Protection, Youth and Family Services
- Community Legal Services
- Community and Neighbourhood Services
- Disability
- Employment Services
- Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services
- Homelessness, Housing and Tenancy
- Mental Health
- Migrants and Settlement Services
- Policy, Advocacy Campaigning
- Women's Services

Our members in the Social and Community (SACS) Industry are constantly looking for ways to shape and improve their Industry, not just for themselves, their families, and the communities they support; but to provide a better way of life for future generations.

By your side



Our Submission

The Services Union is pleased to provide this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

Our union suggests that the Queensland's Neighbourhood Centre Sector should be a central component to any future strategy implemented by the Queensland Government to tackle loneliness and social isolation. Queensland's Neighbourhood and Community Centres (NCC's) are key social infrastructure that reduce loneliness and social isolation around the state. By their very nature, their core purpose is to build connection, belonging, participation and inclusion in local communities. Their place-based community development approach means they have unique insights into local expressions of loneliness and social isolation and can co-design responses and utilise community resources, networks, and partnerships.

Neighbourhood Centre activities are evidence based and build social capital in localities. Their welcoming and inclusive nature means they are especially effective in supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups and emerging issues.

To enhance the effectiveness of NCC's and reduce the loneliness epidemic across the state, further strategies must see increased investment into NCCs through operational funding and physical and digital infrastructure together with a communications campaign placing NCC's at the centre of community connection and further investment into NCC's peak body, the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA). This investment will build better employment opportunities for our members working in NCC's and a more sustainable workforce for our communities.

The NCC Workforce

Neighbourhood Centres are the most underfunded community service in Queensland that notwithstanding the level of funding give the most to their communities. Their potential is incredible, but they are hamstrung by incredibly low resourcing.

With an average Queensland Government funding amount of \$134,000 for each centre, some Neighbourhood Centres struggle to employ one worker plus overheads and program costs. The current ratio of one funded worker to 262 community visitors is unsustainable (NCC Annual Survey), especially when this worker is responsible for centre operations, policy, community development, volunteer management, IT, programs, and communications.

A base level of funding to cover at least 2.5 staff members, plus costs to cover overheads means that Neighbourhood Centres have the foundation required to respond to the loneliness epidemic across the state.

The provision of additional programs through additional funding will lead to an increase in social connection for communities and strengthen the NCC workforce, a workforce that is predominately made up of women by:

- providing safer work practices with more than one staff member onsite.
- creating consistency of arrangements and comparable wage conditions across NCCs at the correct award classification that appropriately values the work.

By your side



- funding that incorporates core operating costs of providing services that acknowledges the need for resources that provide for direct and non-direct delivery of services. For example, funding that supports partnership activities, operating costs for the recruitment of additional staff to services and ongoing professional development investment that will be needed to support a committed workforce.

Our Recommendations

The Services Union makes the following recommendations in response to the inquiry into the Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation.

1. Queensland's Neighbourhood and Community Centres (NCC's) should be a central component to any future strategy implemented by the Queensland Government to tackle loneliness and social isolation.
2. Future strategies to tackle loneliness and social isolation must back our frontline services. Services that are adequately resourced will provide more effective services and improve outcomes for Queensland communities. An increased NCC investment through operational funding and physical and digital infrastructure together with a communications campaign placing NCC's at the centre of community connection and further investment into NCC's peak body; the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA), will build better employment opportunities for our members working in NCC's and a more sustainable workforce for our members.
3. Invest in skills and safer workplaces. Investment in staff development and staff support including appropriate supervision and safe workplaces will ensure Queenslanders have the skills and support they need for the future.
4. We support the submission prepared by Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) to this parliamentary inquiry.

Conclusion

The Services Union and our members want to see the Queensland's Neighbourhood Centre Sector as a central component to any future strategy implemented by the Queensland Government to tackle loneliness and social isolation.

We want the employment conditions within the sector to be fair, equitable and safe to allow these staff to support the common goals of this inquiry and the core purpose of neighbourhood centres, which is to build connection, belonging, participation and inclusion in local communities.

Our Union would welcome any opportunity to provide further information or clarification on the contents of our submission.