



RSL QUEENSLAND SUBMISSION

# Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness



**RSL**  
Queensland

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

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## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

### Submission details

This submission is made by RSL Queensland. RSL Queensland has worked in collaboration with the Defence Force Welfare Association (Qld) in the preparation of this submission.

- Prepared by Margaret Jenyns, Head of Veterans Services Support, Veterans Affairs and Policy Division
- The submission is made on behalf of RSL Queensland and has been approved by Robert Skoda, General Manager VA&P
- Mailing address for RSL Queensland – PO Box 629, Spring Hill, Qld, 4004
- Email [REDACTED]
- Daytime telephone number [REDACTED]



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### Defence Force Welfare Association (Qld) contact details

John Lewis

PRESIDENT

RUSI Hall

Victoria Barracks BRISBANE

ENOGERA MC Qld 4051

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]



Written submissions to be emailed to [CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au) or can be sent to:

Committee Secretary

Community Support and Services Committee

Parliament House

George Street

Brisbane Qld 4000

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

## 1 Introduction

On 27 May 2021, the Queensland Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Community Support and Services Committee (Committee) inquire into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland.

RSL Queensland is very pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. Our research has established that the challenge in reporting on social isolation and loneliness stems from a lack of information about these experiences. Also, it appears that there are no universally agreed definitions of these terms.

Our research has established that the connection between loneliness and social isolation is not a simple one. A paper by Aged and Community Services Australia outlines the issues and we will make further reference to this document in relation to our more elderly members. *‘While previous definitions of loneliness have viewed it as a direct consequence of social isolation, more recent studies have highlighted that loneliness is associated more with the quality of social bonds than the number of connections that a person has. Social isolation may lead to feelings of loneliness but at the same time, it may not; people who have very few social connections may not feel lonely at all. On the other hand, a person with many social connections and interactions can still experience loneliness.’*

*As well as differentiating loneliness from social isolation, it is worth noting that feelings of loneliness come in many different forms. For example, a study based on the views of older people and service providers, identified five distinct “dimensions” or components to feelings of loneliness. They were:*

- *Private and personal feelings;*
- *The quality of relationships;*
- *A sense of connection with the broader community;*
- *time of day, time of year or time of life;*
- *Adjusting to changing circumstances such as loss and declining health.<sup>6</sup>*

*In addition, loneliness can be felt with differing levels of intensity and severity. Passing feelings of loneliness are common and do not necessarily reflect a significant underlying problem. It has been argued that loneliness becomes a serious issue, however, when it is persistent and leads to a cycle of self-reinforcing negative thoughts.’*

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<sup>1</sup> Aged and Community Services Australia – Social isolation and Loneliness among older Australians – Issues Paper No 1, October 2015



## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

### 2 RSL Queensland Structure

RSL Queensland is uniquely structured to contribute to this Inquiry. RSL Queensland is divided into ten Districts and these Districts provide administrative support to the Sub Branches within their boundaries. Each District offers support in:

- Advocacy for DVA pensions and benefits
- Emergency financial assistance
- Welfare and accommodation assistance

There are 233 Sub Branches spread across the ten Districts. The services provided by the Sub Branches include, but are not limited to:

- Hospital visits
- Aged care facility visits
- Home visits
- Crisis welfare assistance – accommodation
- DVA claims assistance
- Welfare support
- Friendship
- Poppy Services (funeral)
- Anzac Day Services
- Remembrance Day Services

The below diagram lists the Queensland districts and sub branches and demonstrates our footprint across the whole of Queensland. We have sought feedback from members across the State in the preparation of this submission and we make use of the views of veterans across all demographics. The feedback was sought via a questionnaire constructed in Microsoft Forms and details of the questions and a statistical analysis of responses is included. Our focus is also on the families of these veterans (both current serving and ex-serving) and the issues which affect their feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Extracts of the feedback from members give a unique insight into the issues confronting individuals across the whole State and are included in this report. Whilst the needs of veterans are unique in some respects, this submission proposes the excellent insights of our members give an indication of the problems confronting the whole community.

## RSL QUEENSLAND BRANCH



### 3 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the Inquiry are that the committee inquire into and report on:

1. the nature and extent of the impact of social isolation and loneliness in Queensland, including but not limited to:
  - a. identification of and consultation with vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals or groups at significant risk across the life course
  - b. the interplay of COVID-19 with this issue
2. the causes and drivers of social isolation and loneliness, including those unique to Queensland
3. the protective factors known to mitigate social isolation and loneliness
4. the benefits of addressing social isolation and loneliness, examples of successful initiatives undertaken nationally and internationally and how to measure social isolation and loneliness in Queensland to determine if implemented strategies are effective
5. how current investment by the Queensland Government, other levels of government, the non-government, corporate and other sectors may be leveraged to prevent, mitigate and address the drivers and impacts of social isolation and loneliness across Queensland, including:
  - a. services and programs such as health and mental health, transport, housing, education, employment and training, sport and recreation, community services and facilities, digital inclusion, volunteering, the arts and culture, community development, and planning for accessible, inclusive and connected communities
  - b. targeted support to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and those most at risk
6. the role, scope and priorities of a state-wide strategy to address social isolation and loneliness, considering interactions with existing Queensland and national strategies.

### 4 Our Focus

A key focus for RSL Queensland and our partners in this submission is the quality of life of current and former Australian Defence Force members and their families. Our research has established the Quality of Life (QoL) for veterans after leaving service is inherently lower than the National Average.

This inquiry is timely as it focusses on the key issues which can have an impact on quality of life. As such, RSL Queensland is particularly interested in the potential for working together with the State Government to seek solutions. With the depth and breadth of the ESO footprint across the State, we are pleased with the excellent feedback received from our members and we believe the information regarding their individual experiences will provide powerful input to this discussion.

In this submission we focus on the unique needs of the veteran community, however, it does not escape us that social isolation and loneliness is a problem across the whole community and many of the solutions are identical.

We are exceptionally pleased to note that this year's census marks the first time respondents will be asked if they are serving, or have ever served, in the ADF or Reserves. We anticipate the 2021 Census will provide us with a clearer picture of exactly how many veterans there are among the Queensland population, as well as demographic data such as their ages and locations. These insights about the veteran population and their needs will enable support resources to be targeted to where veterans are located, and help services meet their needs more effectively.

As the findings of this Inquiry are implemented, the excellent portal (Queensland Veterans' Portal) developed by the State Government could be enhanced as a reference tool regarding available services.

[Veterans | Community support | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.qld.gov.au/veterans)

The website [My Community Directory](#) also contains a wealth of information and could be utilised to ensure current details of local services are readily available for the broader community.

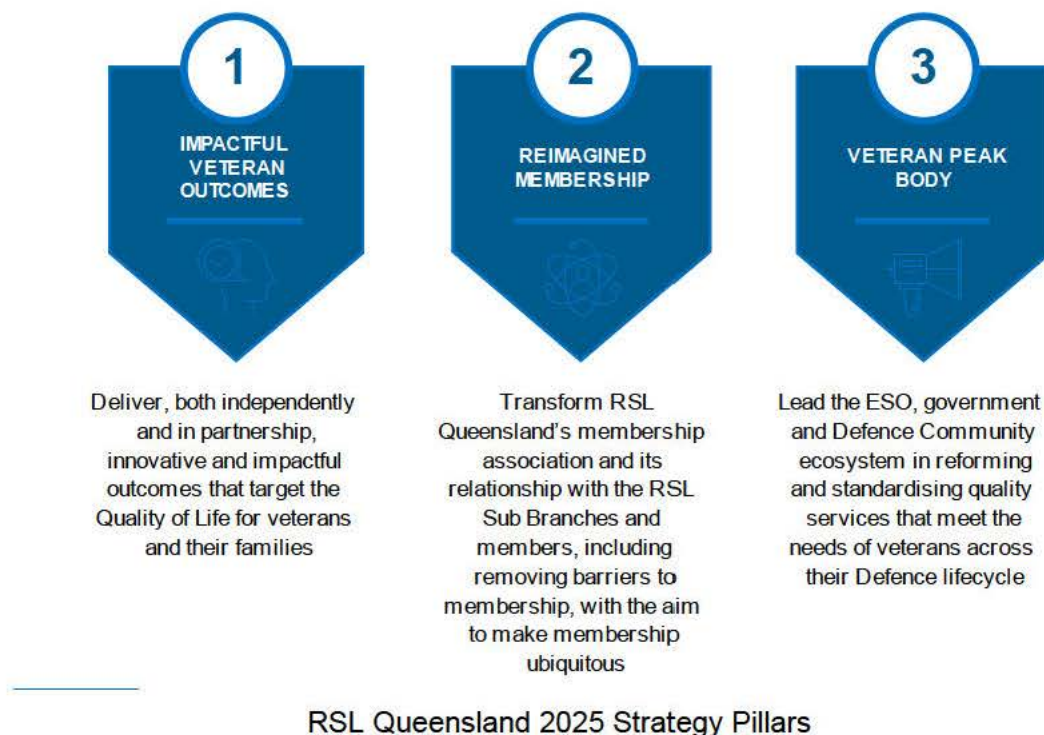
## 5 RSL Queensland – Partnering with Government for the broader community.

### 5.1 RSL Queensland 2025 Strategy

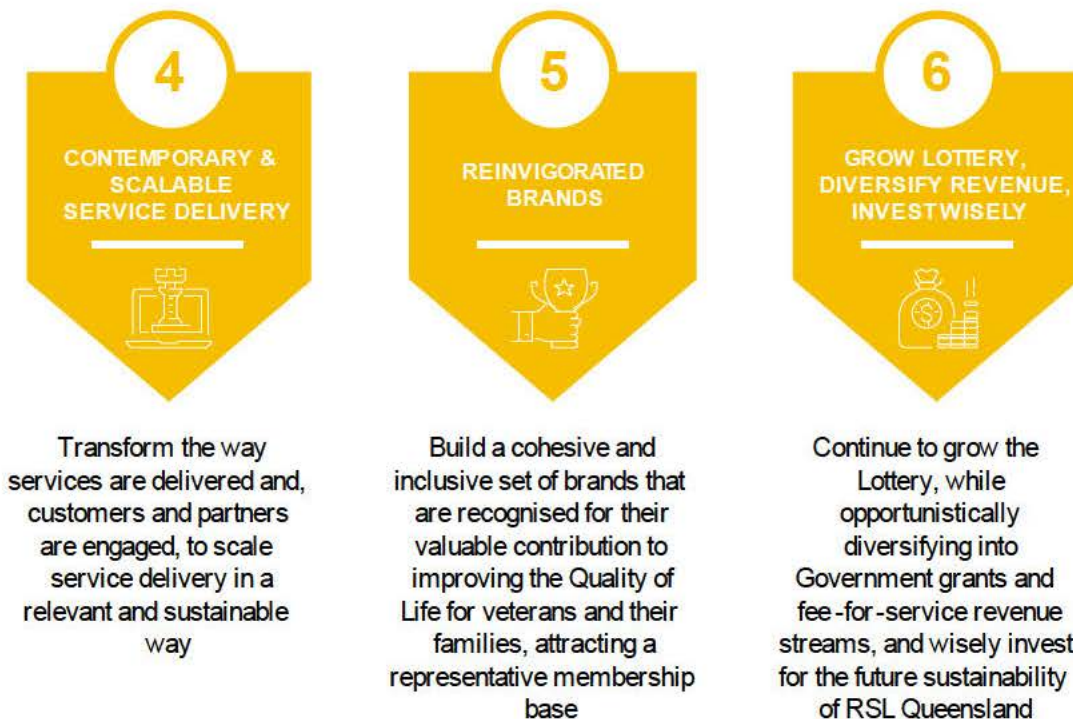
RSL Queensland has embarked on an ambitious strategy with the vision;

*Be the most valued and trusted partner to enrich the Australian Defence Families Quality of Life.*

In order to realise this strategy investment is being made in building out the pillars and enablers to realise our vision.







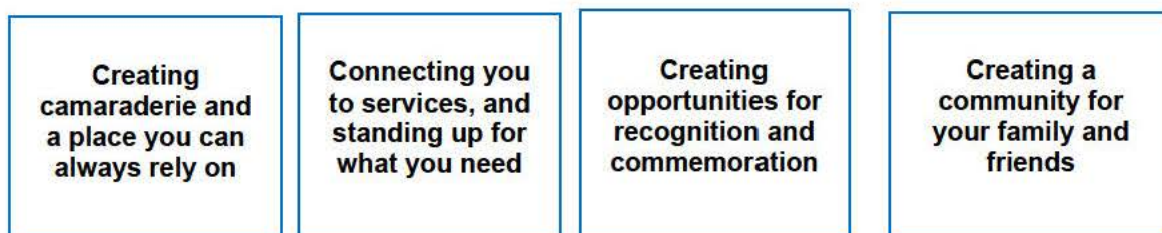
### RSL Queensland 2025 Strategy Enablers

## 5.2 The Member Value Proposition

As noted previously in this report, RSL Queensland has community infrastructure across Queensland.

Whilst our objects are orientated towards veterans, our proposed Member Value Proposition (MVP) encourages all members of the community to be a part of the RSL through a new membership model.

The objects of our new member strategy have been described under the headings of Connection, Support, Pride and Evolving Needs and have the following objectives.



## 5.3 Membership Categories

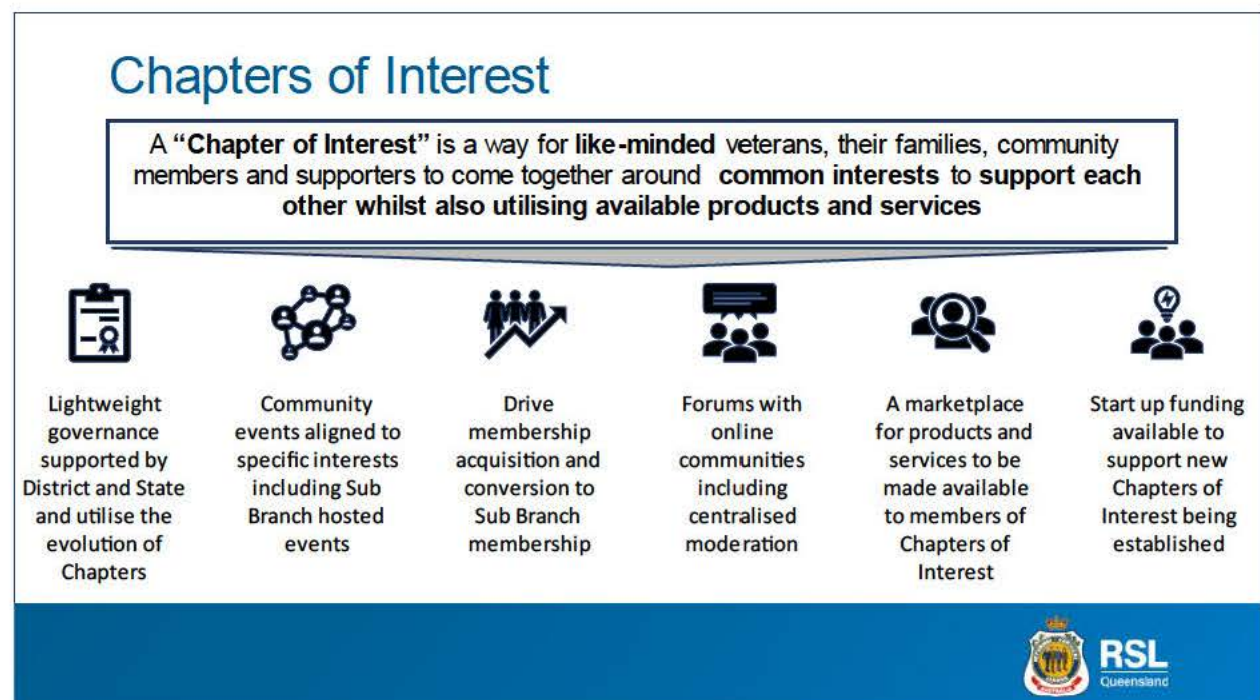
There are three non veteran membership categories in the proposed model. Sub branch service membership is the pinnacle category and allow veterans to govern the sub branches whilst creating a strong community connection through the other categories. This is displayed in the below diagram.



Additional membership options for non-current and former Australian Defence Force members which facilitate:

- Inclusion of family and friends
- May be members of RSLQ or a Sub Branch supporting their local community
- Participation and involvement in community events

Our MVP specifically calls out the approach of 'Chapters of Interest' which facilitate all members of the RSL (including non-veteran members) to align and conduct interest group activities. These can vary from craft to sports and recreational activities, bridging social divides that contribute to isolation and loneliness. An overview of these is held below.





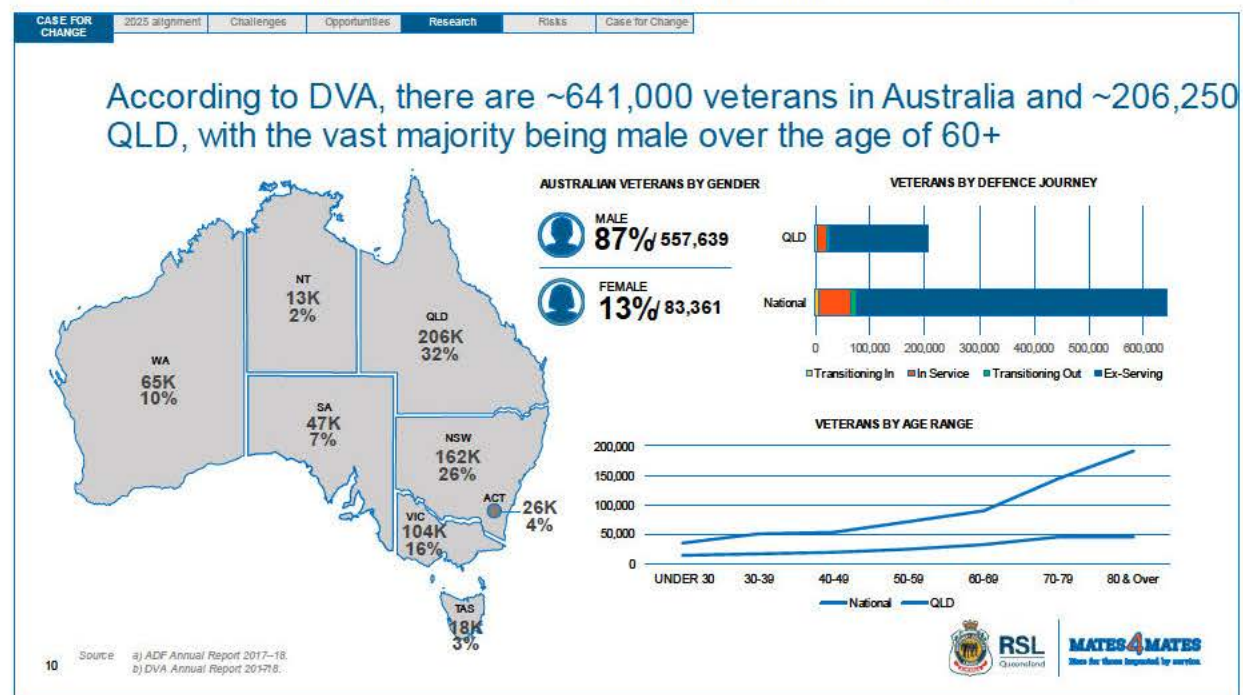
Whilst the details of the MVP are awaiting final approval, the new membership model would align with this proposal to work closely with Government and other community bodies to create Sub Branch 'hubs' where all members of the community can feel welcome to gather and share information and common interests.

It will be noted from member comments in Part 8, that transport is an issue for many people. RSL Sub Branches are usually centrally located in regional towns and may assist in reducing transport requirements to access our services and those that may collaborate with our Sub Branch community.

## 6 Veteran demographic

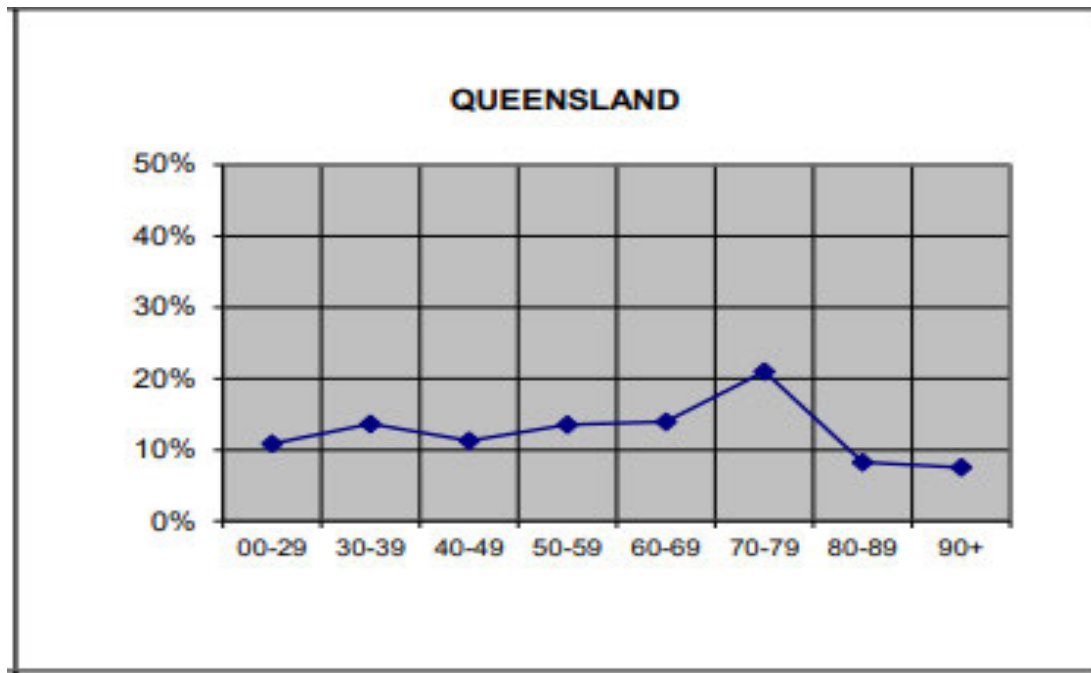
Membership of RSL Queensland is diverse. Whilst 76% of our members are over the age of 60 and the median age is 72, the demographic of serving members and younger veterans seeking assistance with claims, wellbeing and financial issues is quite different. These veterans do not need to be members of the RSL to receive our help. RSL Queensland statistics reveal the average age of veterans seeking assistance is 46. The results of our survey establish that most veterans and widows seeking wellbeing services are over the age of 70.

Research has identified that Queensland contains the greatest number of veterans, in comparison to other States, at 32% of the overall veteran population. This indicates over 200,000 veterans residing in Queensland with a majority being over 60 years of age.



The chart below is taken from statistics produced by the Department of Veterans Affairs. It identifies the high proportion of veterans over the age of 65, but it should be noted that there is a percentage of the younger population who have never contacted DVA and hence may not be represented in this chart. Information from the recently conducted Census will be invaluable in this regard.

### Age range of Veterans residing in Qld who are in receipt of benefits from DVA



#### 6.1 ADF Families as a Distinct Group

The views in Section 6 have been expressed by DFWA and are supported by the RSL

ADF Families face the same issues in life as do other families in Australia and, of course, Queensland. In most studies related to social isolation and loneliness, certain groups have been identified as being vulnerable, and at risk. These include those:

- of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin,
- living with disability,
- carers, and
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex.<sup>2</sup>

Families of serving ADF members posted to and serving in Queensland would include people from a range of demographics in about the same proportion as the rest of the population. They would logically be also, at risk, as would those accompanying an ADF member posted to a remote and rural area of Queensland.

By the nature of ADF postings, a family relocating into a new area, starts off already socially isolated and vulnerable. They face the challenge of not only physically settling into the community and accessing normal services, but also being accepted, welcomed to be a valued part of that community – and all the time knowing that they will be moved on, yet again. This added factor of vulnerability and consequent risk to all members of the family increases the risk of isolation for these families.

The unique nature of military service and the families that support that service has been recognised in the latest census, seeking data about ADF service, as well as data from other, at-risk groups. However, there are still significant politico/cultural barriers to ADF Families



being brought into the umbrella of this Inquiry. In discussions, the following views have been expressed:

## 6.2 Current Serving Members and their Families

While those still serving are generally looked after by the ADF, their families generally are not. Often the families will access state provided services. Because of the transient nature of Defence service, families can bear the brunt of loneliness and social isolation and often are not aware of the significant level of support available through state provided services, DVA., Legacy and ESO.

There are significant politico/cultural barriers to ADF Families being brought into the umbrella of this Inquiry. In discussions, the following views are often expressed:

- *Serving ADF are a Federal responsibility, and the commonwealth should bear the expense and responsibilities for families. ADF families just have to fit in with state provided services. We can't adjust to suit them. They are not disadvantaged. ADF are well paid and have access to lots of benefits.*
- *Serving ADF Families are only in Qld location for a short period, they are not long term residents, so State has no long term responsibilities for them now or in later life.*
- *ADF will not be making a submission about social isolation of ADF Families in Qld. They indicate - 'We have The Defence Community Organisation which looks after families in all states, we can't enter an arrangement just with Qld, therefore it is irrelevant.'*
- *There is no point in getting transient ADF families involved in community organisations or on committees as they are only here for a short time and don't know the ropes so cannot add value or make a long commitment needed for those organisations.*
- *Expense and resources used to address inclusivity problems and get ADF Families being included in local/state communities are wasted, as the family will be moved on and therefore no long-term inclusivity with the community is possible. Their moving away will be disruptive to the community organisation. That's their life, they chose it.*

There are many counters to those views. Expression of and acting on such views only contributes to social isolation. ADF Families are Qld residents. They pay taxes, including stamp duty on home purchases and are heavily penalised if they are posted and have to sell before the stamp duty concession period lapses. They contribute to local government rates. They vote.

An understanding of ADF Family life experience and challenges faced - which can contribute to feelings of social isolation and loneliness of ADF members, partners and their children - may assist Inquiry considerations.

### a The ADF Posting System

Serving ADF members are moved frequently to new jobs as part of gaining experience and for career progression. While members may express interest in a particular next job and location, the decision rests entirely with the ADF "system". Any posting is compulsory. The needs of the service take priority over individual interests. A posting cannot be refused by the member. When the member is moved, the relocation service covers the cost of moving the member and his or her family to the new location. The posting normally occurs in the December-January period. While a notice of posting of 6 months is about average, giving time for planning, as little notice of a couple of weeks is not uncommon.

The ADF family may choose to stay in the old location. This is a personal decision as it involves separation of the family unit. It occurs most frequently, when a move would disrupt children's education, especially an interstate move in the latter years of secondary school and apprenticeship/TAFE/ university courses. Other factors influencing such a decision is the ADF member's partner's employment or education plans. The "staying" partner becomes, for much of the time, a single parent with all that entails, including social isolation and loneliness.

#### **b The Challenges for the ADF Family Moving to a New Location, often Interstate**

The following scenarios show the challenges faced by ADF Families which can lead to long term disadvantage. The ADF Member moves into a new job and will be absent from home for varying and unpredictable periods. The Member's partner and their children may be on their own. The partner and the family are without the extended family support, have no connections in the local community and may have no established connections in the local ADF community. There is social isolation and the ill-effects of this are exacerbated in "many little ways". Akin to death by a thousand cuts.

##### **Family accommodation**

- While Defence Housing provides some Married Quarters, not all families are catered for and many families, often with the ADF member away, face the prospect of finding rental accommodation in the new location/state and rules and practices. Common difficulties include:
  - providing references for agents,
  - last addresses being interstate,
  - a sometimes "stigma" of unruly "military" as bad tenants,
  - the need to be able to break a lease if the ADF suddenly posts the ADF member to a new location,
  - to meet family needs suitable schooling.

##### **Education of Partner and Children**

- Common difficulties include:
  - Children with Special Needs, which were being addressed in the family's previous location, may require re-assessment in the new school or state system, but find that the assessments for the coming year have been completed and fund/resources are already allocated for that school
  - Changing schools, especially in secondary schools, the subjects available may not be same as in previous location. While some schools have employed Defence School Mentors (funded by Defence), DSM are not available at all schools.
  - Technical and Apprenticeships. The training available and the requirements for apprenticeships and trade qualifications can vary between states. While there is general recognition of completed qualifications in each state, the situation is less certain for incomplete qualification and subject recognition.
  - Staying Put. Often, to avoid disruption to education, the ADF member may be posted away, but the family remains in situ so as not to disrupt children's or partner's education.

##### **State and Local Government Provided Services**

- Apart from education, families are also dependent on state provided services.

- Health Services, incl NDIS. For many of these, there can be waiting lists in the state or particular locality. Members of the arriving family may be placed at the bottom of the local list even after being on the waiting list for considerable period in the previous location. They may even have been receiving treatment/support at the previous location, which is not available at the new location. This occurs in both interstate and intrastate moves
- Medical and Other Appliances. As with health services, there are often waiting lists. Additionally, when posted away, there may be a requirement to hand-back an appliance already provided, mobility equipment.

### Employment

- While this is mainly concerned with the accompanying partner (male or female) of the ADF member, it can also apply to dependent children.
  - For some occupations there is a requirement to register separately in each state if one wants employment in that state, generally at a cost and sometimes at a disadvantage as they may go to the bottom of the totem pole in that state regardless of time in the occupation elsewhere.
  - *Employers may be reluctant to hire ADF wives because they are short term. Definitely not worth training. Apprentices too*

### Social Inclusion

- Many are familiar with joining an established group, be it work, organisation, sport or social group. Cliques are common and often form a barrier to new people joining. There are jokes about people moving to a village and being regarded as a newcomer, even after 20 years. For many spouses/partners and children, it is totally new experience.
  - For many new ADF Families, the first posting is away from where the ADF Family formally got together, where they met and the social groups they were in, and probably, where the new partner's family was located. The social infrastructure that supported them in the old location is no longer there. They are no longer part of a social infra structure able to assist, advise and explain how things work and where you could find a good GP, dentist or mechanic etc.
  - For the family, it involves engaging with completely new people at work, school and in social settings. The civilian groups they are engaging with are well established in the community and social settings. There is often resistance to newcomers, especially those who aren't going to be permanent and will only temporarily feature in their lives. Engaging can be difficult, especially with new ways of doing things
  - One ADF partner lamented that ADF kids were treated differently and were often excluded at school. A sympathetic local parent explained it was not personal. She had told her kids it was better to make friends with local kids rather than the military kids because they would be posted away and that friendship would be lost. Apparently, her eldest child was very upset when her best friend (a veterans child) left at short notice and contact had been lost, and she did not want her other kids to suffer the same.
  - Others had reported that some established families have preconceived unfavourable opinion of ADF members and their families (and Police families.)

- Recent publicity concerning allegations of war crimes by ADF members in Afghanistan has affected ADF children attending schools. Other children have said words to the effect of “your father is a murderer”. The Trials concerning the alleged war crimes will last for at least 5 more years.

While many of these issues are in themselves small, they are encountered to a greater or lesser extent when the ADF family is relocated intra- or interstate. These issues are not necessarily encountered by the comparatively static established communities. They are common to all transient families and contribute to social isolation and loneliness and the issues that spring from it.

While the ADF has made attempts to address many of these issues, most are related to state service delivery and local government type services provided to Queensland residents and local communities generally. Co-ordinated and complimentary work by all levels of government is required. In some areas, this has been addressed, e.g., Defence provides funds to schools with a high ADF student population to enable them to employ a Defence School Mentor to assist in educational issues of the transient (often interstate) ADF children moving from school to school.

### 6.3 Transitioned from the ADF

Those veterans who have transitioned from the ADF may be located anywhere in the state and they are unique in that they may be able to access services that are not available to the general population, because of their service. Specifically, these services may be provided through:

- Department of Veterans Affairs for treatment of service caused injuries and if entitled payment of pensions, children's education assistance and more. A comprehensive list of all DVA support to veterans is on their web site [www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au).
- Open Arms for counselling and mental health support as well as wellness programs. Access to Open Arms - veterans and families counselling is through their web site [www.openarms.gov.au](http://www.openarms.gov.au) or on their 24hr crisis support number 1800 011 046. Not only do Open Arms provide counselling, their web site contains numerous tools to assist veterans maintain a sense of wellbeing.
- Long-term social, emotional, developmental, and financial support to veterans and their families through Legacy and the various ex-service organisations that offer a variety of services throughout the State.

As previously noted, veterans may reside anywhere in the state and will also be accessing the wide variety of State Government services which are available – e.g., Employment, Education, Family support, Health services and financial and legal support. It is important that Veterans (and the wider community) are fully aware of the services and support that is available. It is equally important the State Government entities are aware of a person's veteran status so they can be referred to the full range of services they are able to access.

DFWA support this assertion through the following statement.

*'It behoves the state to ensure that those agencies that provide services to Queenslanders are aware that some may be veterans. If a veteran accesses such services such as health and mental health, transport, housing, education, employment and training, sport and recreation, community services and facilities, the state should record it and then, with a veteran's permission suggest they contact an advocate to enable forensic examination of their service to find out if they may be able to access any veteran unique support. All veterans who have served in the ADF for more than one day will be entitled to treatment for but not necessarily compensation for mental health issues and some cancers.'*



*The veterans most at risk are those who live in country areas, although a veteran and their family in a city, who are cut off from their support network because of being transitioned or relocated can also feel social isolation and loneliness. They may not have any veteran specific support near them, or if they do, know how to access it. The RSL often has a presence in country towns but if the Sub Branch is only small they may not have the advocates to help them. The enormous challenge is for state, local government employees or other philanthropic organisations to be aware of the full range veteran unique support that may be available.'*

It is also important that the State Government include the Dept. of Defence in any conversation regarding the services available to support the families of Defence members. The RSL Qld submission into the Qld Veterans Council noted the importance of including younger members (former or current) of the ADF in that membership. This current Inquiry should note the pressing need to be aware of, and responsive to the pressures which are faced by Defence families.

#### 6.4 Our Elderly Veterans, Wives and Widows – From the WW2 and Vietnam era.

As noted in the chart at page 12, a high proportion of veterans and their dependants are over the age of 65. This has been discussed in the paper prepared by Aged and Community Services Australia – Social isolation and Loneliness among Older Australians

*'Some older people are more at risk than others. People in the oldest age brackets are more likely to feel lonely, while men are more likely to experience loneliness than women – even though it is less likely that they live on their own.'*

*Another group at higher risk of experiencing social isolation and loneliness is older people receiving professional care and support in their own homes. They tend to be older, have poorer health and more issues with mobility and cognitive impairment than their counterparts who are not aged care consumers.*

*Among the managers and care staff who coordinate and provide care in older people's own homes, social isolation and loneliness are significant concerns. Organisations providing home care have reported that as many as 41 per cent of their new clients are lonely. People working in home care, who spend time with at-risk older people and are trained to understand their care needs, also believe older people worry about the effects of loneliness. The staff of a franchised care provider in Australia identified social isolation and loneliness as the biggest concern for older people living at home. Tellingly, the next biggest concern, according to the staff surveyed, was mobility and access to transport – both key indicators of social engagement and interaction.'*

The final pages of this report is devoted to actual comments made by our members. The findings made in this paper by Aged and Community Services Australia is borne out by the comments of our members. The important issue of access to transport to be able to partake in social interaction is highlighted.

## 7 Leveraging State Government and non- government entities to prevent or mitigate social isolation

We have noted the submissions of various Qld government departments to this Inquiry. Comments and supplementary information are provided where opportunities for better co-operation and service delivery exist and may assist in leveraging existing silo and solo efforts by individual entities.

## 7.1 Dept. of Premier and Cabinet

The submission dated 28/6/21, prepared by Rachel Hunter, Director General, Dept. of Premier and Cabinet is noted and RSL Queensland expresses its gratitude in the renewed focus on veterans' issues via the Office for Veterans. An extract from the report is copied below:

*'One area that DPC does play a role in addressing social isolation and loneliness is via the work of its Office for Veterans. The Office for Veterans helps support veterans to better connect with their communities, including coordinating the delivery of an additional \$10 million in Queensland Government commitments over four years.*

*Programs being delivered by the Office for Veterans may, either directly or indirectly, reduce social isolation and loneliness for veterans.*

One of the key initiatives for the Office of Veterans has been identified as -

- *A veterans' health and wellbeing research program, which may assist veterans to better connect with their communities.*

This initiative will be invaluable in identifying the issues relating to social isolation and loneliness.

RSL Queensland regards the Office of Veterans within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) as the key connection to working together to address the issues of social isolation and loneliness. We will also seek to work with the Office of Veterans to publicise the availability of services via ESO communications, senior magazines, local papers, websites, and social media. It is noted that the DPC is the lead agency in the Qld Public Service and that it works closely with other Departments.

## 7.2 Department of Community Support Services

The submission made by the Department of Community Support Services notes that:

*'Social infrastructure also plays a critical role in the provision of essential social services as well as providing places for the community to connect with each other and seek support. The Queensland Government's Strategy for Social Infrastructure (SSI) released on 23 July 2019, provides a policy framework for coordinated, place-based social infrastructure planning and investments.'*

*'In particular, integrated services hubs can provide a place for people to make connections through 'soft entry' approaches to service delivery which focus on creating a neutral and non-threatening environment that individuals can engage with at will, and on building foundational trusting relationships to be able to support and empower people to identify and address more complex issues as they arise.'*

RSL Queensland refers back to the footprint which it and other ESOs have across Queensland and would appreciate the opportunity to consider whether the various Sub Branches could form the basis for a social 'hub' where information regarding community services and activities could be made readily available to the local public.

## 7.3 Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy

The submission below reaches into the essence of the issues that have been raised by our members in the questionnaire they completed (see Section 9). Access to community

services and activities, the arts sector, digital services and housing featured very strongly in the responses. We urge the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy to consider the comments in detail as they provide powerful insight into the needs of the various communities.

*'The Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy's vision is to have thriving communities where all Queenslanders can have a safe and stable place to live and enjoy high levels of social and economic wellbeing, supported by a strong digital economy and a vibrant arts sector.*

*The purpose of the department is to improve the lives of Queenslanders by increasing social, economic and digital inclusion. The department's service areas include:*

- **Arts Queensland** - Invest in opportunities that create greater access for Queenslanders to experience arts and culture, support the growth of the arts sector and showcase the state's stories and artistic talent
- **Community Services** - Support communities to thrive through investing in quality community services that are connected and support the social and economic inclusion and wellbeing of people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds
- **Customer and Digital Services** - Put Queenslanders and their businesses at the heart of government service delivery and oversee investments to enable successful delivery of a digitally enabled economy
- **Housing and Homelessness Services** - Benefit Queenslanders and their communities by providing housing and homelessness services that are responsive, integrated and accessible.'

## 7.4 Department of Corrective Services

Their submission has been noted:

*'Social isolation and loneliness can be key drivers of antisocial behaviour including substance abuse and linked offending. Further, people transitioning in and out of custody experience social isolation due to loss of friends and family, loss of freedom and loss of income/employment due to their incarceration and have a higher rate of suicide than people in the general community'.*

For those veterans who have come to the notice of law enforcers, RSL Queensland proudly works with the Qld Police Force to address the relevant needs of those who have been identified as needing assistance. We would welcome any enhancement to this process whereby we could be made aware of veterans who are experiencing isolation due to the prospect of being incarcerated – or having been incarcerated and are now having trouble in re-integrating with society.

*'QCS offers a range of intervention programs and services designed to assist prisoners to positively reintegrate into the community and reduce their risk of reoffending. These supports may also contribute to reduced social isolation and loneliness, particularly if individuals did not have access to similar supports prior to their incarceration.'*

Information regarding the range of intervention programs would be appreciated.

## 7.5 Dept. of Education

RSL notes a significant issue for our current serving veterans and their families is the isolation that comes from the regular posting and re-location of serving members (see Section 6)

We are pleased to note the Department of Education has a wellbeing framework, and we seek assurance that the children of serving members can be given the opportunity to be involved in these programs. Section 6 of this report deals with the challenges faced by the families of

serving members and we believe the Dept of Education can play a defining role in reducing those challenges.

#### *Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework*

*The department's Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework (the Framework) assists schools to implement a whole-school approach to supporting students' wellbeing and mental health. The Framework emphasises that a core component of a whole-school approach is to create an environment where all students feel safe, supported and included, and where:*

- social and emotional skills are explicitly taught and modelled to students to ensure they are well equipped to talk about their emotions and build trusting positive relationships with peers and adults.*
- students are taught coping skills and help-seeking strategies through the curriculum focused on mental health and wellbeing;*
- student help-seeking behaviour is actively promoted and encouraged; and*
- the support available from internal and external support services is promoted to students to ensure they know how to get help if they are concerned for their own or others' wellbeing.*

## 7.6 Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs

In its report, the Dept of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs noted that some young children are significantly at risk of social isolation and loneliness

*'Young people leaving care are also at significant risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation, particularly those who have experienced traumatic family experiences. Overall, these young people are more likely to experience a variety of poor outcomes, including increased social isolation and experiences of loneliness. A report by the Australian Government Department of Social Services noted studies generally show that young people transitioning out of care often lack networks of social support and this isolation'*

This report does not identify the children of veterans as being in a vulnerable class – but the submission at Section 6 describes the many challenges they face, and our request is, for the purpose of this inquiry, they also be considered 'vulnerable'

## 8 Summary

RSL Queensland acknowledges that much of its information about veterans in Queensland is via their approaches to us to lodge claims with DVA and also by our accessing DVA statistical data.

We are aware there are large numbers of veterans who have never sought assistance through DVA and may not be aware of their various entitlements. With the assistance of information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2021 Census we would hope to work with the State Govt. to target areas where veterans reside and be in a position to provide them with quality information regarding all the services (both State and Federal) which are available to them.



The paper by Aged and Community Services Australia provides some concise insight;

*A significant body of research has identified several strategies that have proven successful in fostering social inclusion and building social support. They include:*

- *Introducing interventions as part of a wider strategic approach;*
- *Targeting specific groups of older people;*
- *Using existing community resources;*
- *Using volunteers to run programs;*
- *Using targeted and tailored approaches;*
- *Involving older people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of programs.*<sup>35,36</sup>

*The concepts of agency and active participation alluded to in the last point are particularly important. A study on dementia and loneliness found that, when interviewed, people living with dementia talked about the importance of relationships and the value of interacting with familiar people. However, despite this, family members and carers of people with dementia often associated their loneliness with social isolation and sent them to noisy day activity groups with unfamiliar people.*<sup>37</sup>

*There are great benefits too in being occupied and engaged in meaningful activities, such as helping others. A series of qualitative interviews of older people living in Australia, Norway and the UK found an important distinction between those participants who did and did not identify as feeling lonely. The older people in the 'not lonely' group were much more likely to view social engagement as an opportunity to meet the needs of and demonstrate commitment to others, rather than simply meeting their own needs; to be givers of support as well as receivers. The paper concluded that policy interventions should be directed towards removing the barriers to active social engagement*

<sup>3</sup>

RSL Queensland would welcome the opportunity to work with the Queensland State Government to remove the barriers to the distribution of information and active social engagement.

## 9 Member Survey re Social Isolation and Loneliness

Our members across Qld were asked to provide their insight into the issues they are observing in their own local areas. A total of 68 responses were received and we are pleased to present these comments in the attached document for consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> Aged and Community Services Australia – Social isolation and Loneliness among older Australians – Issues Paper No 1, October 2015

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

## 9.1 Do you think that social isolation and loneliness is an issue in your local community?



*All focus is on commercialism towards shopping and shopping centres. If you are not financial enough to have "shopping" as a hobby, then there are limited events/workshop/avenues to have a reason to engage in the community. (Gold Coast)*

*The Mental Health First Aid educational roll out is a good start and has had positive results in my case and a good friend who benefitted from my recognizing his mental issues..... (Gold Coast)*

*Many of our disabled veterans are worried and vulnerable for their own safety which insures that they stay at home with social isolation being a big issue. We need a telephone call to all veterans and widows from the likes of Lifeline to check on them and that they are not forgotten. (Gold Coast)*

*There's little community support for people living alone, veterans specifically struggle. (Moreton)*

*Many of our disabled veterans are worried and vulnerable for their own safety which insures that they stay at home with social isolation being a big issue. We need a telephone call to all veterans and widows from the likes of Lifeline to check on them and that they are not forgotten. (Gold Coast)*

*The Government is currently advising all over 70's not to go to the shopping centres but the Government has not put anything in place to assist those who should not go shopping. At my Sub-Branch, the two Wellbeing officers cannot take that task on and run the Sub-Branch at the same time. (Brisbane North)*

*Trust is a big issue in this neighbourhood. Because people don't know their neighbours well or the people in the street, trust tends to go out the window. For example we have a couple of emergency houses near us. The majority of people who are put up in these are just out of jail, druggies supposedly getting clean or domestic violence problems. All of us have been robbed of something by these people. Every time they put new people in them, everyone gets nervous wandering what is going to happen next. Because there is a trust problem people don't tend to communicate with each other and most just shut the world out. (South Eastern)*

*Loneliness and isolation for various reasons is in my opinion prevalent in this community and is certainly exacerbated by covid lockdowns. (South Eastern)*

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

9.2 If you think there is a problem with loneliness and social isolation in your community, please give an estimation of the main age group where these problems are evident. You can provide more than one answer.

20 - 40 years of age	14
40 - 60 years of age	23
60 - 70 years of age	27
70+ years of age	37
Cannot estimate	9



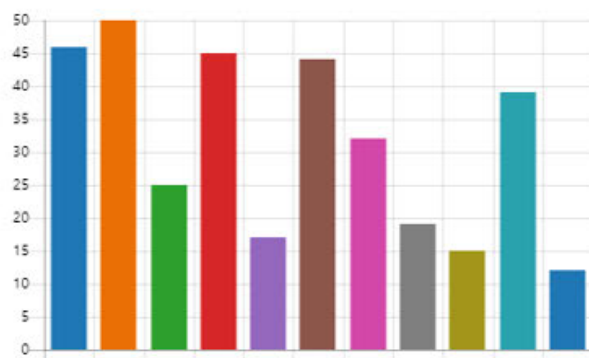
9.3 Do you think that Govt. and/or community services that are available in your local area are meeting all the needs of socially isolated people?

yes	3
no	59



## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

## 9.4 What do you think are the main causes of social isolation in your local community? Please tick up to five options.



*Living on an Island with 1 road access, proving difficult with the amount of traffic each day. Lack of mental and wellbeing services on the island. (Moreton District)*

*There's little community support for people living alone, veterans specifically struggle.*

*Access to public transport is not easy with physical disabilities. Getting to the train with no bus service to my area. I heard there maybe a taxi service but I do not know how it works or even if it is still available. COVID isolation does not help.*

*Individuals not wanting to ask for assistance. Some individuals do not know where to access assistance. Insufficient funding or resources for service providers to provide a service. (Moreton)*

*It's difficult when you can't have visitors. (Gold Coast)*

*The COVID crisis has resulted in a large number of elderly people who are afraid to leave their houses for fear of catching covid. Vaccine hesitancy due to official and media hype and scare tactics has contributed to these people feeling home isolation is the only option for them. (Moreton)*

*Nearest town is 35kms away and there are no bus services. Many do not have or cannot afford to have a vehicle so rely on other people to get groceries etc. The area is beautiful and is still relatively cheap to buy which prompted many to initially reside here. Now if one of the partners dies, the other finds that they are unable to sell up and fund another residence in town due to town property prices. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Not enough transport in the local area and not enough services to help veterans with life in the community and also programs to bring people from defence together. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Limited public transportation and what is available doesn't necessarily travel to where is needed or at a suitable time (travel times can be lengthy if at all possible). Anxiety about leaving the house not just COVID related reasons. Physical impairments. New to the area and difficult to make new social connections. (Sunshine Coast)*

*A pickup/set-down/pickup service for shopping for basics. (Sunshine Coast)*

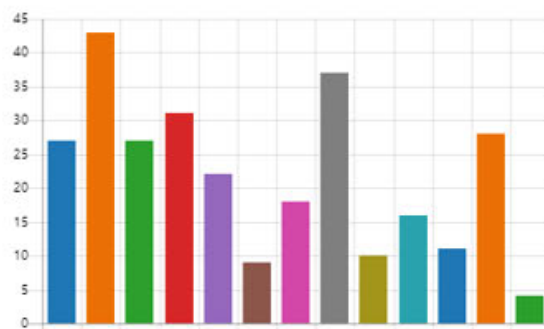
*The aged are not as well informed and when a snap lockdown is done the government (state and local) need to contact every aged person as most avoid the news and some are already in bed in the afternoon. (Moreton)*



## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

## 9.5 What are the main services which you believe need improving? Tick a maximum of five.

General health	27
Mental health	43
Housing	27
Transport	31
Employment	22
Education	9
Recreation	18
Community services and facilit...	37
Digital inclusion	10
Volunteering	16
Arts and culture	11
Inclusion in community planni...	28
Other	4



*Hosting free or cheap outings with free transportation - eg. a mini-bus to do door-to-door pick-ups. I cannot afford to spend much money on petrol and my desired outings, so I stay at home too much. It affects my mental health greatly. (Brisbane North)*

*More veteran support service to regional areas, Atherton Tablelands, Weipa, Cooktown etc. most VSS goes as far as Cairns not all can get to Cairns (Far Northern)*

*Balgal Beach is primarily a retirement area with the nearest shops 50 km away and several residents have passed the age. Need visits to socially isolated people. (Far Northern)*

*Better support services for mental health. (South Eastern)*

*Free seminars at local community centres/library: healthy nutrition, finance such as budgeting, mental and general health services available. Transport to and from seminars. Provide computer classes for beginners at library on library computers. (Far Northern)*

*I am not sure what further can be done by the RSL. Perhaps welfare checks on members who haven't checked into the club in a while. Social group activities held at the club - bridge club, chess club, book club, camping, fishing, and shooting group. Activities that promote connection and inclusion with community interests. (Sunshine Coast)*

*Give an attractive reason to entice people to venture out into the community. Don't fall back onto the "mental Health" scenario. Advertising of events or group activities, usually only occurs after the event. The public library is a government space that could offer free rooms to host "card games" or "craft workshops". Most events are targeted to young children during school holidays, there is very little offered to any adults of any age. People confuse loneliness without taking into consideration low confidence, shyness, social awkwardness, language*

*barriers, these have nothing to do with mental illness. (Gold Coast)*

*Personally I don't think enough welfare work is carried out in the community. There are a lot of veterans whom have because of medical and other problems do not venture outside their home space as much as they should and some become totally withdrawn from their community life. (Pioneer Fitzroy)*

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

## 9.6 Further Comments

## Further comments from our Members

*Access to public transport is not easy with physical disabilities. Getting to the train with no bus service to my area. I heard there maybe a taxi service but I do not know how it works or even if it is still available. COVID isolation does not help. (Moreton)*

*Government run mental health facilities*

*Physical activity based classes for veterans only*

*Access to psychiatric and psychological that are not booked out months in advance (Gold Coast)*

*Veterans and family of veterans run group physical and mental activities.*

*Provide trained health personnel and facilities to deal with DVA and other health requirements for Vets n families. (Gold Coast)*

*have mobile services attend area. (Sunshine Coast)*

*Phone calls to members to check in! I have been advised from members they appreciated the calls made during the previous lock down in 2020 from RSL QLD. Still having support services available through RSL QLD in the districts as many sub branches are operated by volunteers who themselves are vulnerable members and need to stay home. Have somewhere that is open and that people can contact in times of crisis. Everything closes during lockdown...VAN office, district office, sub branches etc and there is no where for people to go or contact! (sunshine Coast)*

*Lack of available support services ie My Aged Care services at full capacity and they can't take on new clients. (Sunshine Coast)*

*People who live alone and who were already socially isolated are now more so with COVID. More government funded support services for older population. With the younger generation perhaps more awareness through media and social media to advise of support services. (sunshine Coast)*

*The state government have access to set up media, radio, newspaper's, to advertise when an event is being hosted. RSL's also have access to transport within their community. Surely funding can be found to support this. (Gold Coast)*

*Veterans and family of veterans run group physical and mental activities.*

*Provide trained health personnel and facilities to deal with DVA and other health requirements for Vets n families. (Gold Coast)*

*A visiting group that can assist you in finding a group you can fit into. (Fitzroy-Pioneer- Highlands)*

*Establishing drop-in centre (traditional sub branches) and fostering online social activities when in lock down - like the "Friday Night Sippers" activity run by Hawthorn sub branch (Vic) for ALL veterans and not just sub branch members. (South Eastern)*

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

# Further comments from our Members (cont.)

*Additional roads out of our suburb - easier to travel to other destinations. Improved parks, playground equipment, and activities. (sunshine Coast)*

*More volunteers encouraging visits and phone calls to veterans and their families. More age related activities from the sub branches. Eg bus trips or functions. (Sunshine Coast)*

*funding for arts and entertainment, Bus trips to other areas. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Drop in and have a cuppa with those living alone.*

*When covid allows it, take them to do their shopping or just for a drive.*

*Could arrange social gathering within the community for those who need it. (South Eastern)*

*Free seminars at local community centres/library: healthy nutrition, finance such as budgeting, mental and general health services available. Transport to and from seminars. Provide computer classes for beginners at library on library computers. Far*

*Community events, festivals or street markets. Also, I like 'pop-up' food events. (South Eastern)*

*Working bees on older veterans homes. (Brisbane North)*

*Advertising services in other than RSL publications. Local papers. Sending out Birthday cards phone calls. Unfortunately home visits have been interrupted. Additional support and visits to nursing homes for veterans in care. (Moreton)*

*Living alone and/or with mental health issues leaves many people without the social skills to mix with and make friends of others. (North Qld)*

*Do not wait for these vulnerable to call we need to ring them. Funds should be made available on behalf of the RSL QLD for qualified people like Lifeline, Black Dog etc to carry this out. (Gold Coast)*

*I am 80 years of age, a Vietnam vet and have never received any personal communication from my sub branch. (Moreton)*

*Perhaps a phone call once a week to the homes of the Elderly could be of some help to those feeling lonely. (South Eastern)*

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

# Further comments from our Members (cont.)

*One to one visitation even for just a social connection with some of these folk. (South Eastern)*

*WEEKLY CONTACT WITH ALL MEMBERS AND THEIR PARTNERS AND IF NEED BE THEIR CHILDREN AND WAR WIDOWS South Eastern*

*Encourage them to come forward or establish a social network that will seek and communicate with these poor individuals. There is nothing nicer than human contact. Some of the older people are forgotten by their families, mainly children. Elder abuse is also an issue and even though there are various avenues in this regard they are frightened to come forward. (Sunshine Coast)*

*Ask their members of any known cases and try to make personal contact if this is allowable by the recipient. I would suggest if this scenario which must exist is done the lonely will benefit. It would also be not unrealistic for the government to fund such a move. (Sunshine Coast)*

*The local xxxx RSL needs to interact more with their members as they do not do anything now. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Men's shed, programs to help older veterans. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Appoint Welfare Officers to contact Ex-Service Members. Increase communication via a matrix of mediums. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Organise small groups of members for simple activities to encourage social interaction and discussion. (Western)*

*we have addressed the issue for our own veteran, but the help in the wider community could be a help for us. (Western)*

*Our local Sub Branch has no adequate facilities where members and families can meet to share a problem or a happy moment. (Western)*

*Maybe have a Social Worker check up on people. (Sunshine Coast)*

*phoning aged veterans to check on their welfare and mental health . (Sunshine Coast)*



## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

## Further comments from our Members (cont.)

*Attract a younger generation but maintain the core customer/members. Also, research and brand strategy have never been more important... because it's not ALL about 'traditions', 'diggers' and 'Vietnam Veterans & National Service'! Sorry...*

*We have a 'new' generation of 'defence', 'families' and 'communities'... Today, there is a lot of research suggesting that Millennials care about social issues, have a global mindset, and appreciate diversity. They engage with brands on a personal and emotional level. And they like brands that have a strong vision and who act on bigger issues.*

*Ask yourself, "Why did Light up the Dawn work so well?" I do not believe it was ALL about COVID-19 and it's restrictions...*

*In part, it was about 'How' you attract a younger audience based on how you speak to them and bring a product to life. But how and where you connect with an audience matters too—as do not only the words, but also the tone of voice used to convey them.*

*One of the reasons Starbucks is successful among Millennials is that it has embraced attractive Millennial concepts like ethical sourcing, social justice, and, proven it cares about more than profits—it cares about its employees by giving part-time workers benefits, encouraging diversity in its recruiting, and creating a study assistance programs.*

*Public Transport. Greater education of General Health Practitioners as to the needs of Veterans - especially those in younger age groups (less than 40 years of age).*

*Hold monthly veteran and family catch ups on weekend and or monthly weekday coffee catch ups and bus trips - supported and paid for by Districts and or SB. Mates for mates to hold veteran activities in remote areas ie hold similar veteran activities that occur from the Townsville Family Centre in Cairns. (Far Northern)*

*Advertising in ALL media platforms as to information, re how to contact your local Sub Branch and the facilities and services available. We tend to forget that many older veterans do not use social media as a form of news, information gathering ect. We need to remember radio and TV to get the message out. Most regional newspapers have now moved online and are not accessed by veterans with limited knowledge of e mail and social media platforms. (Wide Bay and Burnett)*

*Increased from Lockdowns and so the usual face to face friends and family interaction/supports do not occur. Require visitors onsite to enquire into wellbeing, assistance required: eg shopping, etc and or just spend time with to have a cup of tea. (Far Northern)*

*Living alone and/or with mental health issues leaves many people without the social skills to mix with and make friends of others. (North Qld)*

*Community events, festivals or street markets. Also, I like 'pop-up' food events. (South Eastern)*

*Some people have become more fearful of social interaction, it would be good to give positive information, especially in areas with low/no actual cases of Co-vid 19. (North Qld)*

*More home aged care opportunities, blue nurses etc. Better facilities for the aged. Better access to transportation to distant medical appointments etc. (Moreton)*

*Make it easier for elderlies to access government services such as half price transport to get out of the house safely. Assist elderlies to get more home care assistance to improve hygiene and dignity*

## RSL QUEENSLAND – SUBMISSION RE SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

### Further comments from our Members (cont.)

*The problems of age (little in common with neighbours), mental health and isolation from family and old friends become a self-fulfilling spiral into dark places. The tendency of business and Government to push people to dealing with people on-line and self-service are particularly threatening to the elderly who are not as technology savvy as young people exacerbate the feelings of isolation and add a dimension of frustration not envisaged nor appreciated by those who are perpetrating this move to automation. I am a person with values and dignity and I object strongly to those who simply see me as a profit or data centre for their own purposes. (Gold Coast)*

*there needs to be a gathering of all welfare groups as there are many groups duplicating their roles when if groups combined their resources a more cost effective service could be realised. RSL has this problem Sub Branches, Mates for Mates, Young Veterans, Wounded Veterans just to name some doing good but not streamlined to minimise waste of funds. (Moreton)*

*\* Determine if there are members that need support which in our case is under control but perhaps programs like the MHFA should be ongoing and updated as needed.*

*\* Social activities are plentiful but Covid Lock Downs has had an affect on participation and uncertainty.*

*\* Nevertheless one can always improve.... (Gold Coast)*

*Our Sub-branch has tried with monthly coffee mornings but even this has now been frustrated by COVID restrictions and other issues. (Gold Coast)*

*More community recreational activities.*

*Better access to community service providers.*

*Welfare officers be provided with funding to target ex-service members who are members on paper but never sighted to evaluate their needs, perhaps a funded local RSL Bus service with a paid driver.*

*Inability/restrictions to travel to loved ones or vice versa from other States or SE Qld. If Govt had not provided censorship relating to preventative "off label" treatment, FDA & TGA approved instead of waiting for vaccinations, may have been fastest and safest way to end pandemic reducing deaths and hospital admissions by 60+%. Unsure why Govt has not provided CSIRO research fact sheets during this time is criminal in our opinion.*