



EVERY *Life* **MATTERS**

Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Submitted by email CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Community Support and Services Committee Parliamentary Inquiry re: Social isolation and loneliness in Queensland

On 27 May 2021, the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the Community Support and Services Committee inquire into and report on social isolation and loneliness in Queensland (the inquiry). The committee is required to report to the Legislative Assembly by Monday, 6 December 2021.

As a proactive community-led mental health and suicide prevention network, the Whitsunday Suicide Prevention Network seeks to offer the following submission to this inquiry.

Listed below are some critical points in relation to the inquiry terms of reference and a key focus point that we seek to submit to be included as part of this parliamentary inquiry regarding the nature and extent of the impact of social isolation and loneliness in Queensland.

The impact of social isolation, particularly in regional areas of Queensland, has long been identified by those living and working in these communities. The effect of remote living outside of larger metropolitan areas is a quintessential factor that perpetuates and sustains regional vulnerability and disadvantaged individuals and or groups. Some key focus points that support this are as follows;

- Limited or no localised mental health services
- Little, limited or no localised access to higher education for youth
- Transient population due to lack of services
- Lack of housing and cost of living

- Limited or no access to support services
- Communication limitations, i.e. internet and phone service and or no service levels
- Limited or no aged care services

With the advent of COVID-19, in regional areas and the Whitsunday region in particular, there has been a large migration of population from the larger metropolitan areas, not just the south-east corner of Queensland, but also other significant population areas across Australia. This has seen the following impacts on the local community occur, all of which leave our most vulnerable members of our community feeling disconnected and isolated. Additionally, these factors can also feed into the feelings, not only in the individual but also the local community, of being neglected and discounted.

Some of the impacting environmental factors are;

- Low or zero housing availability
- Rental leases not being renewed or having significant increases in the rental cost
- High housing prices
- Low employment opportunities
- Increased pressure on critical services, such as health care, education, community support services, etc.
- The increased cost of living
- Increased homelessness
- Increased domestic violence
- Increased mental health issues
- High or increased alcohol and drug abuse

These impacting factors can often lead to feelings of social isolation on a regional level and within individuals, communities and peer circles. Highlighting one resulting factor of the external environmental influences is the need for urgent mental health support or suicide intervention in many cases.

Every year more than 3,000 people lose their lives to suicide in Australia, and suicide remains the leading cause of death for Australians between 15–44 years. In addition, one in five Australians will experience some form of chronic or episodic mental illness each year, with this number expected to rise significantly due to COVID-19. This is highly prevalent in regional and rural Queensland, where the resulting impact on the lives of individuals and their families, peers, and community is immense.

The need and the ability to seek assistance and care is, in many cases either delayed, non-existent or frequently requires extensive travel, often separating individuals not only from their community but also from their peer support such as immediate family and or close friends. This in itself adds to the intensiveness of feeling isolated and alone, not only for the individual but also has an emotional and mental health impact on the individual's immediate family and friends and the local community via ripple effect.

The inability to quickly, effectively, and easily access the required services, coupled with the identified items, sets the stage for a failure in support and care, which leads to increased mental health issues, feelings of isolation, separation, lack of support and loneliness. In addition, this can lead to increased alcohol and drug abuse and or increased self-harm and or loss of life through suicide.

In closing, the Whitsunday Suicide Prevention Network strongly urges the Community Support and Services Committee inquiry to consider, research and investigate these impacts and to consider a recommendation that the Queensland State Government seek to implement a Queensland State-based specific Ministerial Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Portfolio to address these issues and develop a state-based plan to address this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this preliminary submission. Please feel free to contact the undersigned should further information or dialogue be required.

Kind Regards



Ron Petterson
G.Dip.Strat.Ldrshp AMICDA

President & Chair
Whitsunday Suicide Prevention Network
P.O Box 55, Cannonvale QLD 4802

t: [REDACTED] | m: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

www.wspn.org.au