



Submission to the

Community Support and Services Committee

**Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in
Queensland**

18 August 2021

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INTRODUCTION

PeakCare Queensland Incorporated (PeakCare) welcomes the opportunity to provide information in response to the *Queensland Parliament's Community Support and Services Committee's* invitation calling for submissions in response to the *Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland*.

ABOUT PEAKCARE

PeakCare is a not-for-profit peak body for child and family services in Queensland, providing an independent and impartial voice representing and promoting matters of interest to the non-government sector.

Across Queensland, PeakCare has approximately 50 member organisations which include small, medium and large, local and state-wide non-government organisations which provide prevention and early intervention, generic, targeted, and intensive family support to children, young people, adults and families. Member organisations also provide child protection services, foster and kinship care and residential care services for children and young people and their families who are at risk of entry to, or who are in the statutory child protection system.

A network of registered supporters also subscribe to PeakCare. Supporters include individuals and other entities with an interest in child protection and related services, and who are supportive of PeakCare's policy platform around the rights and entitlements of children, young people and their families to safety, wellbeing and equitable access to life opportunities.

PEAKCARE'S SUBMISSION

There is clear evidence demonstrating social factors including family poverty, living in substandard housing and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, low parental education, parental unemployment and social isolation increase the risk of children and young people from such environments being subject to child abuse and neglect.

With a longstanding history in advocating for better understanding and management of the complex structural influences and social determinants of health and wellbeing for Queensland's children and young people, PeakCare's strongly encourages the Inquiry to give consideration to the following important focus areas throughout the Inquiry activities:

- The need for approaches to address social isolation and loneliness for Queensland's children and young people to focus not just on the consequences of social isolation and loneliness, but on their cause at a structural and social level
- The importance of ensuring the voice of children and young people who experience social isolation and disadvantage are included in the consultation activities undertaken by the Inquiry

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- The critical need for approaches to addressing social isolation and loneliness to include a focus on the rights and entitlements of children and young people (and their families) to understand and participate in the processes of the Inquiry
- Acknowledgement of the important role of strong community development in addressing social isolation and loneliness, including the positive contributions Neighbourhood and Community Centres currently provide, and may continue to provide as part of future strategies and approaches
- the importance of underpinning any future policy directions and reforms with research evidence, undertaking appropriate evaluation and acting on evaluation findings in a progressive and transparent manner.

PeakCare also acknowledges the critical role inclusive formal and informal social networks have in supporting preventative and responsive child protection interventions. Given the overlap between the approaches that address the causes of social isolation and the consequent risk of social isolation for Queensland's children and young people, PeakCare recommends the Inquiry investigate opportunities to further strengthen and expand Queensland's current investment in pro-active and preventive strategies that build community cohesion, reduce exclusion, break down barriers to accessing services and assist each and every child in Queensland to be able to reach their full potential.

PeakCare firmly holds the view that now more than ever, it is critical for the Queensland Government, with bi-partisan support, to develop a well-articulated and cohesive social policy framework that places children's rights and entitlements to safety, well-being and equitable access to life opportunities and the support of their families, and communities at the centre of all government-led decisions and activities. It is a framework that should be used to powerfully influence financial investment and decision-making across all areas of Government activity and used to hold all government agencies and the non-government sector to account. Without a bi-partisan supported overarching framework of this type, Queensland children and families are at risk of becoming victims of reactive and fractured policy decisions that place greater importance on expediency and politics than on an evidence-based and values-driven vision for Queensland's greatest resource - our children.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland.

Yours sincerely,



Lindsay Wegener
Executive Director
PeakCare Queensland Incorporated