



PACIFIC ISLANDS COUNCIL QLD INC

Pacific Islands Council of Qld Inc. (PICQ) is an incorporated community civil society organisation with the mission to represent the voice and views of Queensland based Pacific Island national organizations, and in close consultation with them, at all levels of government and other agencies, on matters that affect their communities and individual wellbeing; and continue to work at enhancing the capacity of her members to participate fully in all aspects of Queensland society.

As a voice for our communities, through a volunteer management committee, PICQ connects governments (local, state and federal) and service organizations to Pacific Islander and Maori (PIM) community committees and in the process information from governments is shared to communities, contributes to government submissions on behalf of Qld Pacific Islanders (PI) and Maori communities, is the secretariat for Pacific Islands networks namely Church Leaders, Youth, Climate Change and Support for PIM and their families in the Justice System, provide public liability insurance for communities and their events, assistance in grant applications, collaborate with governments, universities and service organizations on initiatives and projects relevant to their communities in Qld and manage the Pasifika House, a Brisbane City Council property leased by PICQ as a Pacific community hub used by seniors in our communities as a space to maintain connection and overcome isolation. PICQ welcomes the call to contribute to this submission on Social Isolation and Loneliness.

1. Nature and extent of the impact of social isolation and loneliness in Qld

PICQ includes in this submission the vulnerable and disadvantaged peoples in the Pacific Islands and Maori communities are those who have shared their challenges around social isolation and loneliness through PICQ networks (Church Leaders Network, Justice Support Network, Pasifika Women's Alliance and Climate Change) and those who have been identified by Aged Care services and other service organisations (Women's Refuge). This submission also draws from the findings and recommendations of solution based forums and consultations in 2014 by Blue Care (CALD Seniors Ageing in Australia, 2015). Social isolation and loneliness are challenges faced by PIM community members who are categorised in this inquiry as the vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups identified as the following: elderly; international students; unemployed women (mothers); Pacific labour programs workers – seasonal workers and Pacific Labour scheme; Seniors who are retirees – those living on their own or in Aged Care facilities or with family and are expected to help in taking care of children; sick people in hospitals and hospice; disabled people who don't have access to support due to visa status (example, Pacific Islanders and New Zealanders); widows and widowers; families of PIM who are in correction and detention centres and New Zealanders who can't get support. There are also segments of PIM communities that are refugees, that is, PI peoples that have applied for refugee status and are still awaiting approval of visa category. In addition, a small (but growing) number of Asylum seekers – women fleeing from DV situations in their countries, example, PNG.

2020 COVID-19 lockdowns and those following have created challenges to Pacific Islander community members whose cultures innately builds on communal lifestyles where people connections play vital roles in cultures. Pacific cultures include Melanesians (PNG, Solomon Is,



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Vanuatu, Fiji, Kanaks), Micronesia (Kiribati, Nauru, Marshall Is, Palau, Guam, Mariana Is) and Polynesia (Cook Islands, Fiji, Maori, Niue, Samoa, Tahiti, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu). The following examples are a snapshot of the challenges that several sections of our Pacific Islands communities and individuals have experienced during these challenging times:

- a. Pacific Islands men were more isolated as there were no or limited men's support programs for PI and Maori men to allow those struggling during these challenging times when job losses, lack of income, lack of family and friends' support/interactions and increased pressures of family responsibilities have caused some to sought drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues (including suicide).
- b. Seniors, those who live on their own and those living with family have been isolated in various ways. The examples shared in this submission have come from members who have experienced forms of isolation due to the lack of the continued connections that their cultures are used to in having human connections either on a daily or weekly basis. COVID 19 has heightened social isolation of seniors living with their families and relatives because of the lack of interactions with their peers and other seniors on a regular basis. There is a lack of spaces for CALD and Pacific Islands seniors to interact. In SE Qld there is only a handful of PI community groups and mainstream services that provide a regular get together for seniors. It is important that support for more CALD focused initiatives for seniors are developed and maintained.
- c. Seniors living in Aged Care facilities have shared their isolation and loneliness due to the lack social interaction and in most have found that programs are focused on western and mainstream cultures while CALD seniors tend to have little or no programs in resident. In most cases, CALD seniors in aged care facilities are normally left isolated even when there are other CALD residents in the same facility. There is a lack of culturally responsive services in aged care facilities that encourages and values cultural differences (Blue Care, 2015).
- d. Pacific Labour Program and Seasonal workers are socially isolated because of the remoteness of their work locations and the lack of interactions with peoples of the same cultures and languages. As a result of these issues, workers tend to resort to drug and alcohol abuse.

2. Causes and drivers Social Isolation & Loneliness

- a. PIM individual and groups are not accessing services due to a lack of trust based on fear. This has been brought about from past experiences and have resulted in their lack of access.
- b. Language barriers – PIM community members have always cited language as a barrier to their accessing services.
- c. Transport – services are in locations that are inaccessible for PIM community members especially if they do not have their own means of transportation.
- d. Some are challenged by the communication mechanisms such as telephone and online forms



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- e. Personal choice not to access services because they don't want services knowing about their poverty or need for support. This is similar to community members that don't access support because of cultural pride where they don't want to show the community that they need help. This is generally seen with seniors and often they also do not want to be seen as bothering family members or support people.
- f. For mothers, no child care support for women workers, therefore, grandparents tend to have to step in the roles for child care. Where grandparents are unavailable, mothers tend to pass the roles for child minding to children to take care of younger siblings. Better CALD responsive mechanisms towards mothers and seniors who take on the responsibilities of child care.

3. Protective factors known to mitigate social isolation

- a. Helping our seniors by connecting with them regularly, better CALD responsive community initiatives that could include community organizations and Aged Care services partnering such as Blue Care and Tongan community
- b. Create and develop innovative initiatives around culturally appropriate mechanisms to include bringing seniors and isolated persons in similar language groups. Activities could include strategies around regular check in by aged care services or community groups funded to carry out regular check ins and group outings at parks and beach, storytelling, and craft & music. There are many other initiatives that could be developed based on the needs of seniors and their cultural and language preferences.
- c. The above suggestions need to be provided in all regions of Queensland where the Councils could be a key driver.

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

Currently in Australia church and service organisations do carry our seniors' weekly activities. In Queensland, there are a handful of culturally based churches/religions that are running focused activities for seniors, men's groups and women's activities. In PIM Qld communities, Logan community church runs a weekly program for its seniors while in Bridgeman Downs Baptist church runs a fortnightly church service for seniors called Inspire service. Fiji Seniors Association have a hub in Brisbane where seniors in the community can access regularly for catch up. Pacific Workers social isolation and loneliness -Seasonal Workers Community Connections Program has enabled connecting local community and isolated workers in regional Queensland in which PICQ is a partner to the Salvation Army DESE funded Program. Such community-service organisations & government initiatives can provide better outcomes for society issues that challenge governments.



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It is important that this inquiry creates centralised inventory of activities and contacts of CALD focused activities/programs that CALD community organisations can access to encourage and facilitate members accessing the services.

Measuring social isolation and loneliness can be done through the activities, initiatives and programs developed for Queenslanders. Obviously, the Queensland society is a multicultural one, services need to reflect the society in terms of workforce and the communication strategies to include CALD.

In measuring social isolation and loneliness, it is imperative that there are CALD focused strategies that includes communication (language translations & interpretations), workforce that reflects CALD Queenslanders and also involves community organisations as key partners providing cultural inputs for services. In measuring social isolation and loneliness, for long term initiatives/ programs need to include mechanisms to measure social isolation and loneliness. In doing so, it would need to include numbers of attendees to the regular activities such as church service and through those activities build mechanisms of checking in for attendees (Lubben J, Blozik E, Gillmann G, et al.2006).

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 and the role, scope and priorities of a state-wide strategy*

- i. Current investments by governments and services need to continue and be expanded to incorporate the Qld Multicultural Act on the needs of the CALD vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups in social isolation and loneliness. It is important that this emphasis is made so as to not become a budgetary burden later because it was not included in the commencement phase.
- ii. It is also imperative that Qld CALD community leaders are included in the developmental phase of government initiatives in relation to social isolation and loneliness.
- iii. Established and emerging Aged Care services to work effectively to become a culturally responsive service that encourages and values cultural difference. Services should explore engagement of bilingual/bicultural staff and/or volunteers, provide culturally appropriate food, explore co-locating CALD seniors from specific cultural backgrounds together both in respite and residential facilities, and consider cultural and personal traditions and rituals (Bluecare, 2015).
- iv. Aged Care Service providers to share their resources (premises, transport, venues) with CALD community groups so they can adequately support their seniors to run community programs addressing isolation, access and equity issues. Consequently,



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activities for seniors could be offered on weekends, evenings focussing particularly on single, isolated and vulnerable seniors (Bluecare, 2015).

- v. Better partnerships with CALD community organisations are enhanced to enable volunteers being paid for such services and not used by governments and services continuously as volunteers.
- vi. Establish a state wide strategy that incorporates culturally responsive mechanisms for addressing social isolation and loneliness.
- vii. It is important that this inquiry creates centralised inventory of activities and contacts of CALD focused activities/programs that CALD community organisations can access to encourage and facilitate members accessing the services.

References:

- i. Bluecare, UnitingCare Qld, 2015, CALD Seniors Ageing in Australia
- ii. Lubben J, Blozik E, Gillmann G, et al. Performance of an abbreviated version of the Lubben Social Network Scale among three European community-dwelling older adult populations. Gerontologist. 2006 Aug;46(4):503–13. PMID: 16921004. [[PubMed](#)]

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