



17 August 2021

Mr Karl Holden
Committee Secretary
Community Support and Services Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
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Dear Mr Holden

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Isolation and Loneliness in Queensland

Queensland Walks welcomes the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Community Support and Services Committee on social isolation and loneliness in Queensland.

Social isolation and loneliness can affect people's mental and physical health in many different ways. The World Health Organization lists the lack of social support networks as a determinant of health, and it is encouraging to know that this is being acknowledged by the Queensland government as a public health issue that needs addressing.

Queensland Walks acknowledges three critical factors that help to mitigate social isolation and loneliness:

- Free opportunities for physical and social activity available in all local neighbourhoods: inclusive, equitable and accessible;
- Building resilient, connected and walkable neighbourhoods: accessible, inclusive, connected, shaded, active and safe environments, and green or blue spaces available to all Queenslanders, *and*
- Support and encouragement programs.

All three factors work hand in hand to assist people to develop and maintain physical, social and mental health, connections with others and improve their quality of life.

The last year and a half has proven across the globe, that people need to maintain healthy lifestyles especially during Covid19 lockdowns and restrictions, particularly when normal routine is changed. We continue to see the increasing need and demand on our footpath networks, open parks and beaches and other open spaces where Queenslanders aim to stay active, and feel connected outside the home.

Critically, at a city and town scale, it is the accessible and safe local neighbourhood footpaths and key walking and cycling corridors that have allowed Queenslanders to continue to be active and to have indirect and regular connection with neighbours, thus alleviating some sense of isolation. In neighbourhoods where connected, active and safe environment are not available, we know that loneliness and social isolation has occurred. Vulnerable groups such as older people, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse families, and single parents all need walkable neighbourhoods which allow physically and socially connected environments.

As such, Queensland Walks recommends increasing the current investment by the Queensland Government and other organisations to leverage existing policy, strategy and programs that prevent, mitigate, and address social isolation and loneliness through investment in walkable communities. Including:

1. **Investment in The Queensland Walking Strategy (and associated):** a positive example of a whole of government response to supporting people to walk more, and the commitment to providing accessible and connected infrastructure to support walking and encourage positive behaviour change.

Queensland Walks recommends:

- *Increase the budget commitment to the Queensland Walking Strategy Action Plan, and continue the excellent policy and infrastructure investment outcome/s already achieved from the first Queensland Walking Strategy Action Plan 2019- 2021.*
- *Increase budget allocation on walking infrastructure and programs which are needed to support increasing uptake in active transport, active recreation and exercise, and to support the social connections these programs provide.*
- *Encourage local councils through policy and co-investment to deliver walking infrastructure (place-based design, footpaths, crossings, wayfinding, kerb ramps, shaded paths and more) that helps to connect communities.*
- *Increase the commitment of the Works for Qld (W4Q) program to deliver necessary walking infrastructure proportionate to other transport investment.*
- *Continue the work of the [Mandatory Provision for Walkable Neighbourhoods](#).*

2. **Investment in partnerships that support and encourage.** The Queensland Walking Alliance (QWA), funded under the Queensland Walking Strategy, Action Plan for Walking, is a coalition of partner organisations and individuals committed to a healthier and more connected Queensland by encouraging and supporting better walking facilities and more walking every day. The QWA is hosted by Queensland Walks, an organisation with a purpose to bring together important stakeholders that relate and interact with walking in Queensland. The aim of the QWA is to get more people walking everyday by providing a central voice for walking (urban, regional and rural) with a focused approach to improving the walkability of Queensland. The responsibility of the QWA is to commit to a healthier and more connected Queensland by encouraging and supporting better walking facilities and more walking every day.

Queensland Walks recommends:

- *Maintain State Government funding to continue the Queensland Walking Alliance.*
- *Increase funding to action Queensland Walking Alliance ideas and initiatives across the State, for example to address accessibility and safety for communities of people with high needs and who are subject to increased social isolation.*

3. **Support organisations, campaigns and programs and policy** that connect directly with socially isolated groups. Healthier lifestyle programs (such as 10,000 Steps, Heart Foundation Walking, parkrun, My Health for Life, and Queensland Walks Month) can connect individuals to programs and concepts of using the local

neighbourhoods as an avenue to free physical activity (e.g. going for a walk around the neighbourhood, connecting community to programs).

Queensland Walks recommends:

- *Increase and continue the investment of programs such as 10,000 Steps, Heart Foundation Walking and more.*
 - *Leveraging off local government infrastructure strategies, budgets and programs to prioritise walking and active transport ahead of other transport infrastructure*
 - *Further planning reforms that require improvements in the assessment phase of development should be supported by local government to provide a high standard of path and open space systems to encourage active recreation and transport every day connected to every home.*
 - *Local government and developers working together to create connected and walkable neighbourhoods with a formed and connected footpath network and associated infrastructure in every street. Completing missing links in systems can easily create healthy and connected neighbourhoods – physically and socially.*
4. Queensland Walks strongly supports the development of a state-wide Social Isolation and Loneliness Strategy to strengthen a whole of government and community response.

Queensland Walks would like to acknowledge the submission by the Heart Foundation, and we reiterate the recommendations of the Heart Foundation, as one of the many participants of the Queensland Walking Alliance.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute, and look forward to hearing about the next stages of The Inquiry. For further information, to discuss this submission or request a witness to the inquiry, please contact Anna Campbell, Executive Officer, Queensland Walks on [REDACTED] Ph. [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely



Anna Campbell

Executive Officer, Queensland Walks

