



Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland

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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value people of all cultures, languages, capacities, sexual orientations, gender identities and/or expressions. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion:

salvationarmy.org.au/about-us

The Salvation Army is an international movement and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.



About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in over 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further Information

The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from Major Paul Hateley, National Head of Government Relations, at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED].

Introduction

The Salvation Army thanks the Community Support and Services Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission on the issues of social isolation and loneliness in Queensland.

The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services in Australia and has extensive services across Queensland. In addition to social services, we provide ministry and pastoral supports and spaces for community connection through our corps (churches). Social isolation and loneliness are a recurring theme for those we work alongside.

Our observation is that social isolation and loneliness are prevalent in our society and have lasting physical and mental health impacts on the people who experience them. Social isolation and loneliness also have negative impacts on society more generally and can lower the resilience and connectedness of whole communities.

There are many drivers of social isolation and loneliness, and each individual circumstance will be distinct. Social isolation is classless and impacts people across our whole society. In this submission we are focussing on interrelated drivers of social isolation that present most starkly in our specific services:

- Disadvantage is both a driver, and consequence, of social isolation; and
- Connection is necessary for resilience in individuals and in groups.

We have made several recommendations focussed on how to address disadvantage in a way that recognises the impact of social isolation and loneliness, how to address stigma and ensure services are accessible for people experiencing social isolation and how to build and empower the community to provide the connection necessary to help individuals feel belonging.

In 2021, it is also important to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our experience is that social isolation and loneliness were emerging as major wellbeing issues in Queensland long before the pandemic, however COVID-19 has amplified and exacerbated the impact. Necessary public health measures, such as lockdowns, social distancing and border closures have introduced a much wider group of Queenslanders to the hardship of social isolation.

Although prevalent, we do not believe these issues are hopeless.

Everyone has a role to play in addressing social isolation in Queensland – individuals, community groups and the government – and together there are concrete steps that can be taken to address social isolation and loneliness.

Loneliness and disadvantage

In working with those who experience disadvantage, The Salvation Army has seen how social isolation and loneliness can be both drivers and consequences of disadvantage. All forms of disadvantage can push people to the margins or cause them to withdraw from their community. Where multiple and complex areas of disadvantage merge, the sense of exclusion and the need for services to develop community connection, becomes more acute. The Salvation Army believes that by addressing significant disadvantage, the incidence of social isolation and loneliness can be reduced.

Poverty

People who are experiencing poverty or financial hardship are often forced into a position of isolation and develop feelings of loneliness.

Throughout Australian culture, there remains a stigma around talking about money. People who are experiencing financial disadvantage feel unable to talk to their family or friends about money, and when they do, they or their friends feel uncomfortable about the topic.

The Salvation Army has done extensive research around the impact of poverty on people reliant on the Commonwealth JobSeeker Payment as their main or sole source of income. People on JobSeeker live well below any recognised poverty line and must cut back on spending by focusing on their most basic needs – food and shelter. Money for almost all social activities (excepting social activities for children in some cases) is sacrificed. With no money for social activity and as the stresses of poverty become more dominant in their lives, those experiencing financial disadvantage withdraw. People we work with report being unable to afford to go on normal social outings, but also that they feel like they are a burden to their friends.

“

“I couldn’t even shout a friend a cup of coffee. It was easier to stay home as much as possible so I didn’t spend any money...it [the JobSeeker Payment] cut me off from my friends and family.”

”

- Maria, Community Member

Unemployment more generally has an impact on a person's social life, as there is a significant degree of comradery and connection in the relationships between co-workers in most workplaces. A person who is unable to find employment faces additional stigma from the fact of unemployment, as well as the financial pressures of unemployment. The Salvation Army has observed that the longer a person remains unemployed, the more susceptible they become to deteriorating mental and physical health and increased social isolation.¹ Financial distress and uncertainty exacerbate existing barriers to both social connection and employment making it more challenging to successfully re-enter the workforce.

While income support is a Commonwealth responsibility, all governments must work to ensure that those experiencing unemployment can afford to live with dignity, and not become socially isolated while searching for employment. In addition to working with the Commonwealth, one way the Queensland Government can assist is in ensuring there are a range of affordable and free community activities and events. Encouraging, and actively supporting, community events that are free and accessible to those with little income can help address the financial precursors to social isolation and loneliness.

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government work with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that the base rates of the JobSeeker Payment and the Youth Allowance are raised to allow recipients to live with dignity, and connection to their community.
- The Queensland Government provide financial supports where possible to ensure Queenslanders experiencing financial hardship can continue accessing their community and social connections.
- The Queensland Government work toward to maximising the affordability of community events and activities for people experiencing financial hardship.

¹ Kamerāde, D., Wang, S., Burchell, B., Balderson, S. U., & Coutts, A. (2019). A shorter working week for everyone: How much paid work is needed for mental health and well-being? *Social Science & Medicine*, (241). University of Cambridge. (2019). One day of employment a week is all we need for mental health benefits. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/06/190618192030.htm.

Family and domestic violence

The experience of family and domestic violence is deeply isolating. Coercive and controlling behaviour is at the core of family and domestic violence. Perpetrators isolate victim-survivors from existing or potential support networks. This pattern of abusive behaviours leads to a complete loss of an individual's autonomy, self-esteem and independence. This makes leaving abusive situations more dangerous and it also makes recovery after leaving more difficult.

Leaving a situation of violence can sometimes involve a victim-survivor needing to be separate from much of their social network in order to remain safe. This can involve moving from their community, changing, or ceasing employment and, because of the threat of digital surveillance, losing access to online and social media communities. Relocating can force a victim-survivor into unemployment with the associated economic and social impacts that brings.

These impacts can be exacerbated for victim-survivors in rural parts of Queensland where there are fewer services and relocation for safety is more likely. Our services have reported cases where victim-survivors in rural areas have had to travel great distances to access a service and escape a coercive and controlling relationship. However, it is not uncommon for these victim-survivors to have to return because of the financial pressures and lack of social supports associated with moving to a new area. It is often the case that the perpetrator's control only increases after a victim-survivor returns and her safety put to greater risk.

Social isolation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experiencing family violence is a factor that the Queensland Government will also need to consider in some depth. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may not seek help or report violence because they fear isolation from community and family relationships, racism, and lack of understanding from support services in their region. As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often live in tight knit communities, the whole community can be affected by family violence and a shared sense of shame can reinforce the unspoken rule to keep silent, especially within the historical context of white settlement and colonisation and the continuing impacts of loss of traditional roles and status within communities.² Others may have to leave the community and their spiritual connections to the land, creating trauma for both women and their children. Due to this sense of loss of community, land and family, many women leave family violence services and return to unsafe and violent relationships.³ Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have also mentioned to our staff that there is a lack of culturally appropriate family violence services that enable victim-survivors to safely disclose and build trust.

² National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service. (2017). *Strong Families, Safe Kids: Family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families* (Policy paper). http://www.natsils.org.au/portals/natsils/Strong_Families_Safe_Kids-Sep_2017.pdf?ver=2017-10-18-111427-643.

³ Ibid.

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government work toward maximising accessibility of geographically appropriate and accessible family and domestic violence services.
- The Queensland Government work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to ensure that services are culturally appropriate.

Jess' story

Jess came to The Salvation Army for assistance after escaping a relationship of intense domestic violence that included substance use and required intervention from the Queensland Department of Child Safety.

She came into a Salvation Army store in the latter months of 2020, desperate to get off the streets and into her own accommodation so that she could sort her life out with the view of establishing contact with her children once again.

Jess has been in her own small flat, keeping it tidy and paying her rent regularly since late 2020, but social isolation and loneliness is a huge issue for her. Her family consider Jess a hopeless case and offer her no support whatsoever, and Jess' previous friends are still entrenched in an environment of substance use.

Jess' experiences have led to her developing trust issues, which limit her confidence and make her scared of interaction with the general public.

**Name has been changed*

Substance use (Alcohol and other drugs)

Our alcohol and other drug (AOD) services are dedicated to creating a platform and pathways for people to build their lives in ways that are meaningful and purposeful. A core part of our services is focused on encouraging physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual health.

Our observation from across our services reinforces the evidence that misuse of these substances is both a precursor and a result of loneliness.⁴ Those experiencing loneliness might 'self-medicate' with substance use. There is also a cohort whose use of substances drives them into self-isolation, whether due to shame or fear of discovery.

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“When you can no longer hide the problem, you hide yourself.”

- A Salvation Army officer

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We have also observed that the process of recovery for many who have struggled with substance use disorders often includes walking away from their former community connections. Fear of relapse can also lead people to withdraw or totally cut off connections with their social circles. Based on our experience, this is true for illicit substances, but also for alcohol, which plays a large part in many social gatherings.

A lack of access to treatment in remote and regional areas can also mean that people from these areas can be forced to travel long distances to receive AOD services.⁵ Our clients have told us that distance not only acts as a barrier to accessing treatment but travel times to appointments can reduce a person's available time to maintain social connection with positive social networks.

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government work with AOD service providers to ensure that service design allows for social and community connection both during and post treatment
- The Queensland Government works towards ensuring better access to AOD services in regional and remote areas, including outreach models where appropriate.

⁴ Ingram, I., Kelly, P.J., Deane, F.P., Baker, A.L., Goh, M.C.W., Raftery, D.K. & Dingle, G.A. (2020). Loneliness among people with substance use problems: A narrative systematic review. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 39(5), 447-483. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13064>; Mohsen, H., Ardekani, S.M.Y., Bakhshani, S., & Bakhshani, S. (2014). Emotional and Social Loneliness in Individuals With and Without Substance Dependence Disorder. *International Journal of High Risk Behaviors & Addiction*, 3(3). doi: 10.5812/ijhrba.22688.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2019). *Alcohol and other drug use in regional and remote Australia: consumption, harms and access to treatment 2016-17*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/78ea0b3d-4478-4a1f-a02a-3e3b5175e5d8/aihw-hse-212.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

Homelessness

Individuals experiencing homelessness in any form – sleeping rough, sleeping in cars or shelters, or living in overcrowded dwellings – are highly susceptible to social isolation and loneliness.

Homelessness is experienced by different cohorts in differing ways. For instance, for a child experiencing homelessness, it can become increasingly difficult to stay engaged in education, with the increased likelihood of developing academic and learning delays, absenteeism or leaving school early.⁶ Based on our experience, children experiencing homelessness also tend to experience emotional isolation and difficulty relating to their peers, along with difficulties making and keeping friends. Most importantly, experiencing homelessness can have a lasting impact on both the physical and mental health of children.

Other cohorts, such as young people, face a fear of stigma that could lead them to hide their housing status, which may hinder their ability to enrol in services or find housing among their social networks.⁷

Our experience supporting people experiencing homelessness is that they often experience discrimination and exclusion due to their housing status, in addition to the financial hardship they face. This is also reflected in the interactions, or lack of interaction, they have with the community in general. Even highly visible forms of homelessness, such as sleeping on the street, can be ignored by the community or receive negative attention that can lead to further discrimination and stigma. People experiencing homelessness are also vulnerable to violence, exploitation and extreme social isolation. These factors in turn create further barriers to stable housing and employment, and increase the likelihood of triggering or worsening mental health issues.

Homelessness can often keep individuals from certain spaces due to the fear of being ridiculed or harassed. This deepens the marginalisation of people who are already struggling with meeting basic needs, such as food, transportation and clothing.⁸

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government increase social housing and affordable housing supply and the scale and capacity of homelessness services, to prevent homelessness forcing people, including children, into a scenario of social isolation and loneliness.
- The Queensland Government work with crisis shelters and transitional accommodation providers to develop and deliver initiatives aimed at improving inclusion and minimising social isolation amongst people experiencing homelessness.

⁶ Flatau, P., Thielking, M., MacKenzie, D., & Steen, A. (2015). *The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study: Snapshot report 1*. Centre for Social Impact. https://www.csi.edu.au/media/uploads/UWA_Cost_of_Youth_Homelessness_2_KuddSko.pdf.

⁷ Boyle, C. (2020). *A Welcome Home: Youth homelessness and mental health*. Orygen. <https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Population-groups/A-welcome-home-youth-homelessness-and-mental-health/A-welcome-home.aspx?ext=>.

⁸ Bower, M. (2018). *Homelessness, Loneliness and Intersectionality: An Australian study*. <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:52308/datastream/PDF/view>.

Where factors merge

Disadvantage and social isolation can interact in a way that leads to greater and more complex forms of disadvantage. For example, income insecurity may lead to loneliness, which can develop into serious mental ill-health, which can in turn impact on a person's ability to maintain housing. This is why it is important for loneliness reduction and intervention services, and community groups to be able to provide wraparound supports for people experiencing loneliness and social isolation. Early intervention can avert a downward spiral and prevent a person ending up in crisis.

Ending Loneliness Together has highlighted the need for wraparound support and The Salvation Army agrees that it is important to:

*"...equip current health, social, community, aged care and education service providers on how to identify, monitor, redirect, or intervene with respect to individuals at risk of distressing or enduring loneliness. We can do so via direct training of practitioners and workers who see individuals who are lonely and further support them through delivering sector-specific resources."*⁹

To prevent one form of crisis transforming into further isolation, service providers must be aware of the risks for people experiencing all types of hardship and be alert to the ways in which these factors can contribute to the severity of each form of hardship.

Recommendation

- The Queensland Government work with community groups, health, education, housing, and other service providers to ensure that those experiencing or at risk of experiencing crisis have wraparound support and access to loneliness reduction and intervention services.

⁹ Ending Loneliness Together. (2020). *Ending Loneliness Together in Australia: White Paper November 2020*. https://endingloneliness.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ending-Loneliness-Together-in-Australia_Nov20.pdf.

Community and connection

Connection with, and belonging to, community is the underlying solution to the issues of social isolation and loneliness. The Salvation Army's experience has shown that people can be brought back from feelings of isolation and loneliness through community and connection, and that all efforts to instil this must be made.

Patience and persistence

Building trust and a sense of community takes time. A long-term outlook for the issue of social isolation and loneliness is necessary to ensure these issues can be meaningfully addressed. Programmes and resources must be maintained to allow their impacts to develop and flow within the community.

From our experience, persistence and stability are critical characteristics for programmes to ensure that avenues for connection are reliable, accessible and known to those experiencing loneliness. Where loneliness reduction and intervention services are short term or inconsistent in their programming, vulnerable community members can be left at risk of further isolation and with feelings of abandonment.

Carina's story

Carina* is a woman experiencing mental ill-health who began living in a property within a Salvation Army corps. Due to issues of self-worth, Carina felt she was 'not worthy' of help and isolated herself rather than ask for medical help. Isolation further fed into Carina's ill-health, which made her isolate more.

After eight years of outreach and active engagement with the corps, Carina began to open up and realised her value. Carina has now sought help and is progressing toward mental wellbeing, through the help of her community and her medical professional.

**Name has been changed*

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government work to develop a social isolation and loneliness strategy with a vision to long-term delivery of social isolation and loneliness resources.
- The Queensland Government work with the Commonwealth Government to establish a national social isolation and loneliness strategy, ensuring that resources are available to all Australians.

Belonging

Belonging to a community and the incidental social connection that comes from being part of that community has helped many of the people we work with to overcome feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

Employment and volunteering are significant ways The Salvation Army has seen people experiencing social isolation and loneliness develop this sense of belonging to community, and a feeling of contributing to something bigger. The Salvation Army is always eager for volunteers to bring fresh energy and ideas to a range of volunteer roles in our local communities. Volunteer opportunities within the community are diverse and can include working for an organisation's management committee, community sport team coaching, fundraising, food preparation and delivery, and even gardening work. Volunteering provides practical experience that can be transferred into employment opportunities and can help to build confidence.

Volunteers in our Salvos Stores, and in any number of outreach activities, describe their work as like being part of a 'micro-community', where people work together and contribute to their broader community. These 'micro-communities' provide people with the kind of incidental social interaction that helps to prevent loneliness. Comradery and common purpose bring volunteers together and fosters belonging to community. Studies have found that volunteering can provide participants with a sense of happiness, empathy and mental and physical wellbeing that have been called a 'helper's high'.¹⁰

From the experience of The Salvation Army, volunteers also enrich our work. Community members have expressed that they experience a deeper connection and develop a relationship as they know the volunteer is there purely to help them, rather than viewing their problem as 'work'. This further enriches the belonging experienced by the community member seeking help, as they and the volunteer are allied and united against their problem.

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government continue to work with Volunteering Queensland and community organisations to establish and expand accessible, face-to-face loneliness reduction and intervention services to provide outreach and companionship to those at risk of social isolation and loneliness.
- The Queensland Government work with the Commonwealth Government and community service organisations to develop a national volunteering strategy to facilitate volunteer opportunities.
- The Queensland Government work with the Commonwealth Government to incentivise volunteer participation for those who are experiencing unemployment.

¹⁰ Dossey, L. (2018). The Helper's High. *Explore*, 14(6), 393-399. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.explore.2018.10.003>.

Accessibility of services

Barriers to access to community connection are diverse, and some barriers more significantly affect different cohorts.

We expect the Committee will receive submissions from experts who will provide insight into the importance of accessibility for people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Accessibility for these cohorts is fundamental. As discussed above, it is also critical that there is financial accessibility of services and supports for people experiencing loneliness and social isolation, given the relationship between loneliness and poverty.

Two other forms of accessibility that need to be considered are digital and geographic accessibility.

Digital accessibility

Throughout the past 18 months there has been an acceleration of community supports and social inclusion resources shifting online. This shift has been ongoing for many years, as this is a cost-effective way of delivering services. Although internet access is a given for many, there is a sizable portion of our client base who are unable to access these resources, including those in rural areas where infrastructure is lacking, and those who cannot afford data or devices. Older Australians too are a large category at risk of social isolation and loneliness, who often are less comfortable using internet resources.

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“Of all the services we provided, people needed things like financial support, but people also needed to talk.

We could give them a welfare card, and a blanket, but the companionship, it was about what was really in their heart or on their mind.”

- A Salvation Army officer

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Our experience is also that face-to-face interactions, where people can experience in-person communication, offer greater connection between individuals than phone or online contact. This has led The Salvation Army to design our loneliness reduction and intervention services with a focus on face-to-face personal interaction.

It is important that both digital and in-person community connections and loneliness reduction and intervention services remain a focus post-pandemic. Although this may seem like duplication, these services in tandem serve different cohorts and provide complementary experiences to those who access them. Maximising accessibility and availability of services is the best way to ensure that loneliness reduction and intervention services are utilised.

Geographic accessibility

Transport infrastructure is a critical element supporting accessibility. One of the inescapable issues of providing face-to-face loneliness reduction and intervention services is the issue of physical access to those services. Numerous Salvation Army staff in rural and regional areas have reflected upon the barriers to access presented by the lack of transport.

One of the major shortcomings we have observed in our service delivery is the physical difficulty of accessing community spaces, events, services, work, and education. Although we strive to maintain and foster face-to-face contact within rural and regional communities, difficulties accessing transport, including public transport, locks people into isolation. People with transport disadvantage often have the least flexibility about how they interact with their community.

Although transport infrastructure is always a priority for governments, particularly in low density rural communities, it is important that the role of public transport in fighting social, as well as physical, isolation is not forgotten. This could include consideration of partial or free fares to community or sector events and increasing the promotion of existing community transport services.

Recommendations

- The Queensland Government work with community organisations to establish and expand accessible and inclusive loneliness reduction and intervention services, including grants and guidance, to provide outreach and companionship to those at risk of social isolation and loneliness.
- The Queensland Government work with local councils to enhance accessible and inclusive public transport to community facilities, including churches and other charity outreach centres.
- The Queensland Government grow the capacity of the Community Transport Program to further provide coverage of rural and regional communities.

“

“Just this morning I spent two hours in the house of a community member. She had been feeling really overwhelmed and lonely and I spent the morning at her house and just sat with her and helped her clean out her linen cupboard. She just needed someone to be with her to make that small job feel manageable.”

”

- A Salvation Army Officer

Stigma and awareness

One of the key issues The Salvation Army sees in our social services and ministry work is how the stigma of loneliness leads people already in the margins to withdraw further from community. One of the things community members value about our Corps is that they can be places where community members can find social connection without judgement – where people 'know their names'.

One of the reasons this Inquiry is so important is that it starts the process of normalising the discussion of loneliness and social isolation.

An effective next step could be to engage in an awareness campaign that highlights both the prevalence of loneliness in the community and the availability of supports for those who are experiencing loneliness. This awareness campaign needs to be accessible to the wide range of people who experience loneliness noting the significant barriers to accessing information experienced by many within the community.

Recommendation

- The Queensland Government work with community groups and service providers to develop a public awareness campaign highlighting the prevalence of social isolation and loneliness within Queensland, and to publicise the existence and accessibility of loneliness reduction and intervention services.

COVID-19

It is not possible to discuss the issue of loneliness and social isolation without acknowledging the immense difficulties that arose throughout 2020 and are continuing in 2021. Loneliness and social isolation were serious issues before the COVID-19 pandemic but there can be no doubt that the pandemic has exacerbated the impact.

Necessary precautions and restrictions implemented to keep us safe have isolated many within our community. It has introduced a new group of people, who once felt well connected, to social isolation. The impact of the pandemic was, predictably, most acute for those who were already experiencing disadvantage and therefore had fewer resources to adapt. The Salvation Army applauds the Queensland Government for recognising this early and establishing a Care Army, which has worked with Volunteering Queensland to coordinate support for those in vulnerable groups who are subject to health directives.¹¹

The way forward has not fundamentally changed as a result of COVID-19. Rather, the pandemic has exposed how critical our relationships and social connection is in our community and how various forms of disadvantage interrelate with loneliness. Some key lessons we have observed from the pandemic and the response to the pandemic are:

- **Government can play a very effective role in supporting social connection** – Government provides funding for most of the initiatives mentioned in this submission and has always supported social inclusion through community organisations. Queensland's Care Army and similar initiatives in other jurisdictions demonstrate the meaningful direct-action governments can continue to take in this space.
- **Addressing disadvantage can have a powerful impact in alleviating loneliness** – the most radical demonstration of how addressing disadvantage also addresses social isolation was seen when the Commonwealth Government implemented the Coronavirus Supplement for people receiving income support payments. While income support is not a state and territory government responsibility, the increased social connection that resulted from alleviating poverty is instructive for a range of initiatives focussed on addressing hardship.
- **Supports and services must be truly inclusive and holistic** – the movement to many services being delivered online was necessary and unavoidable. At the same time, the movement online reinforced existing digital, cultural and linguistic divides in our community. Digital service delivery must be carefully designed to ensure that the benefit of incidental connection and the ability to connect with the whole person is not lost. Similarly, there are cohorts that will require greater support to engage effectively with online services and that support must be built into the service design.

¹¹ Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts, The Honourable Leeanne Enoch (2021, August 6). *Create your own Care Army for loved ones, neighbours and friends this lockdown* [Press Release]. <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/92881>.