



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (3.19 pm): I move—

That the House take note of the Community Support and Services Committee Report No. 14, 57th Parliament, *Inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland*, tabled on 6 December 2021.

It was late 2017 when I was delivering meals to those in need in my community on behalf of my local Meals on Wheels organisation when towards the end of my delivery run I knocked on the door of a woman who I found to be distressed and very sad. She shared with me that her only sister had just passed away earlier that morning. Until she shared this information with me, she had not had the opportunity to share her sad news with anyone else and, further, she told me that I was likely to be the only person she would share this news with on that day and that I would be the only person she would talk to during that day. I offered a hug in comfort and put the kettle on to share a cup of tea with her and spend time listening.

This story stayed with me for many days later and I am sure that many members of this House have had very similar conversations with members of their communities. I was left feeling hollow and helpless and for the very first time questioned whether I truly knew my community—a community that many perceived to be an inner-city community of relative privilege and tremendous opportunity. As the days passed, I wondered about the extent of this issue in my community and considered the role of a good government, asking myself, 'What would a good, strong, caring and considered government do to address this issue?'

In the following months I encountered many others with similar stories of a solo existence in need of love, warmth, friendship and connection. It was this experience that was the catalyst that began my conversations in 2018 with my colleagues at the University of Queensland, the Queensland Community Alliance and the Mount Gravatt Community Centre to investigate social isolation and loneliness in our local community. Our research and pilot project, the Ways to Wellness program, sparked government curiosity, and I thank Minister Enoch for her tremendous support. It attracted a resource allocation from our government and of course interstate and global interest.

The committee's task was to inquire into and report on the nature and extent of the impact of social isolation and loneliness experienced in Queensland and to identify the causes and drivers and the protective factors available in society that might mitigate the problem. The terms of reference also required the committee to inquire into and report on the potential benefits of addressing social isolation and loneliness, which I note are significant both to the individual and to the Queensland community. The committee learned that social isolation and loneliness is not clearly or universally defined and nor is it easily identified. The committee also learned that there is no singular action or treatment to end social isolation and loneliness. Rather, the committee heard compelling evidence for systemic change to the delivery and interaction of social and community services and infrastructure to best deliver a more place based and person centred approach to address this problem.

During the course of the inquiry the committee received evidence from world experts in this field, and I am deeply appreciative of the information and research generously shared with the committee by academics here in Queensland as well as from across the world. Their work forms the foundations of this report upon which the committee has built its 14 recommendations. On behalf of the committee, I thank those individuals and organisations who provided submissions to the inquiry, both in written and video format. I am especially thankful for the people throughout Queensland who took time out of their very busy days to attend the committee's public hearings, often setting aside their essential work within their own communities to share their stories.

It is the contributions of these Queenslanders that has guided the committee towards a set of recommendations that shape a vision for a statewide strategy to address social isolation and loneliness in Queensland. I thank the deputy chair, Mr Stephen Bennett MP, the member for Burnett, and all of my fellow committee members for recognising the difference that they will make through their genuine care for and commitment to this important issue. I thank the Parliamentary Service staff for their patience, time and endurance compiling the extensive state, national and global research evidence and the personal stories and experiences of organisations across Queensland that supported the clarity with which our committee detailed the recommendations of this report. Finally, I thank the 16 Queensland government departments which work tirelessly every day to support Queenslanders to better their lives.