




Speech By
Cynthia Lui

MEMBER FOR COOK

Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms LUI** (Cook—ALP) (3.29 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the social isolation and loneliness report No. 14 of the Community Support and Services Committee. This report presents a summary of the committee's inquiry into social isolation and loneliness in Queensland, outlines the nature and extent of the impact of social isolation and loneliness experienced in Queensland and identifies the causes and drivers and the protective factors available in society that might mitigate the problem. On 27 May 2021 the Legislative Assembly agreed to a motion that the committee inquire into and report on social isolation and loneliness in the state. The committee was required to report to the Legislative Assembly by Monday, 6 December 2021.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts, Leeanne Enoch, committee chair Corrine McMillan, fellow committee members, the committee secretariat and Hansard for their hard work during the course of the inquiry. I am humbled to be part of the Community Support and Services Committee that led the inquiry across the state. The committee invited stakeholders and subscribers to make written submissions to the inquiry and received a total of 196 submissions, including one video submission. The overwhelming response from Queenslanders was not surprising, as social isolation and loneliness is a serious problem that affects everyone, but is probably the least talked about. The inquiry gave Queenslanders an opportunity to have a conversation about this important topic to improve outcomes into the future.

The committee heard from a diverse range of submitters from around the state, nationally and internationally. The committee held public hearings in Brisbane, Mount Gravatt, Toowoomba, Nambour, Mount Isa, Townsville, Cairns and Thursday Island. I acknowledge and thank the following organisations from my electorate that made the extra effort to travel to our Cairns public hearing: the Port Douglas Neighbourhood Centre, Mossman Community Care, Mareeba Community Care and Pormpur Paanthu Aboriginal Corporation from Pormpuraaw in Cape York for dialling in to give their contribution via teleconference. I acknowledge the difficulty my communities often face when it comes to attending public hearings and I give a special shout-out to the wonderful hardworking and passionate CEOs of these organisations for making the extra effort to contribute to the inquiry and give FNQ and regional and remote communities a voice and a chance at influencing change.

What is social isolation and loneliness? Social isolation and loneliness, while related, are not the same. Loneliness has been defined as an aversive and subjective feeling of social isolation which occurs when a person perceives that the quality or quantity of social relationship that they have is less than they desire. The Australian Loneliness Report stated that compared to non-lonely people, lonely people are more anxious about social interactions, express more symptoms of depression, have less social interaction with families, friends and neighbours, have poorer physical health, have more negative emotions, have fewer positive emotions, have poorer overall quality of life, are more likely to suppress

their emotions and are less likely to be able to change the way they think about a difficult situation. As social beings we rely on interactions with others and the relationships we form and maintain to help navigate our way in this crazy world. No doubt the global pandemic over the past two years has put a lot of pressure on our daily norms by restricting the social interactions that we all thrive on.

I acknowledge that restrictions on face-to-face interactions were particularly hard. Not being able to travel and not being able to interact with friends and loved ones was devastating. When the strict lockdowns had us restricted to our homes, hugs and handshakes were put in the no-go zone, when our recreational activities suffered because suddenly it was too high risk to be around people—although it was in the best interests of keeping ourselves, our family and our communities safe—it came at a cost to our emotional, physical and mental health. While we are talking about social isolation now in the context of COVID, the issue has been longstanding. During the committee inquiry we got to meet many people who came forward to share their experience of social isolation. There are many causes underlying an individual's lived experience and I want to mention some of the barriers that affect individual experience such as people with disability, ethnic backgrounds, the language they speak and their educational level. It all plays a part in how a person integrates into society thus influencing their ability to conform on a daily basis.

I want to acknowledge the many community organisations, sporting groups, clubs and volunteers who do incredible work in our community to engage our most vulnerable. They provide support and create opportunities for vulnerable people to engage in meaningful activities that facilitate positive interactions to help them function effectively in society.