



NSW GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in New South Wales

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The NSW Government acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who contributed to the development of this response.

INTRODUCTION

The NSW Government acknowledges the work of the Standing Committee on Social Issues' Parliamentary inquiry into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in New South Wales and its final report (the report), and thanks members of the public who contributed to this Inquiry.

In considering the prevalence, causes and impact of loneliness and social isolation, the NSW Government recognises the importance of distinguishing the two concepts to avoid conflating the risk factors in experiencing loneliness. These concepts are also separate to experiences of social exclusion and lack of social cohesion, and mental health conditions.

The NSW Government recognises the report's findings regarding the value of meaningful social connections to people's wellbeing, and the importance of considering social determinants of health to foster greater social connectedness. At the same time, it acknowledges that loneliness is a personal experience unique to each individual. Approaches to address loneliness must be sensitive to individual circumstances, while also providing strategies for the wider community.

The NSW Government supports considering the social determinants of health in fostering greater social connection and supporting individual wellbeing, and recognises the importance of connection to kin, country, culture and spirituality as being foundational to the wellbeing and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The NSW Government's submission to the Inquiry details existing strategies and initiatives across all of Government seeking to bolster protective factors both State-wide and cohort specific, to achieve this. This response builds on this work, providing further information regarding initiatives that focus on increasing protective factors to mitigate the impact of loneliness on individuals.

Through ongoing collaboration with all levels of government, key stakeholders, and local communities, the NSW Government acknowledges that a whole of community response is essential to building social connection and cohesion.

The NSW Government supports 7 recommendations, supports in-principle 7 recommendations, notes 5 recommendations and does not support 1 of the 20 recommendations.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the NSW Government embrace a comprehensive, whole of society framework in which loneliness is addressed on an individual, community and population level, with the full range of actors all playing their part in addressing loneliness, including state and local government, health and community professionals, the community and private sectors, local communities, researchers and individuals. The framework should target the population as a whole as well as groups and individuals that are most at risk.

Position

Supported in principle

Response

The NSW Government already works in partnership across all levels of government to address complex social issues, including social isolation and fostering meaningful social connection.

The NSW Government has previously engaged with the concept of loneliness in the NSW Strategic Framework for Suicide Prevention in NSW 2022-2027, identifying chronic loneliness and social isolation as a risk factor of suicidality.

The Future Health: Strategic Framework (**The Strategic Framework**) supports delivery of a coordinated approach across all sectors in addressing the social determinants of health and managing future change in the health system. The Strategic Framework highlights ways NSW agencies work together with their stakeholders, including clinicians, people with lived experience and communities to ensure diverse perspectives are heard and considered.

The NSW Mental Health Commission is developing a new NSW Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy which will set a comprehensive vision and roadmap for the mental health service system in NSW, and explore the broader social, cultural and economic drivers of wellbeing. The development of the Strategy engages all government agencies, the non-government sector, individuals and the community to ensure an approach that promotes social connection and community engagement as essential components of mental health and wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the NSW Government support further research to better understand the underlying cognitive mechanisms that cause and maintain loneliness in order to inform the development of evidence based individual level interventions

Position	Supported in principle
Response	<p>The NSW Government recognises the importance of research in developing targeted interventions that are evidence-based and contribute to overall system design.</p> <p>The Government released its new NSW Health Research and Innovation Strategy (2025-2030) in May 2025. The Strategy aims to foster a vibrant research and innovation ecosystem that improves the experience of delivering and receiving care, system efficiency and sustainability, and equity in access and health outcomes.</p> <p>The Government supports such research through a range of merit-based grant funding programs that aim to improve health outcomes and support the growth of a sustainable and highly productive medical research sector in NSW.</p> <p>NSW Health has provided one-off funding to the University of NSW to undertake the Youth Mental Health Social Connectedness Project. This project aims to identify best practice models that improve social connectedness among young people aged 12 to 25 with, or at risk of, mental health concerns. The work will inform the development of a more responsive, integrated youth mental health system that proactively addresses social disconnection and strengthens early intervention.</p>

RECOMMENDATION 3

That the NSW Government, in consultation with the healthcare sector and community organisations, further investigate social prescribing as a possible strategy for assisting those experiencing loneliness with pathways to social connection.

Position	Supported in principle
Response	The NSW Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy will consider innovative approaches, including non-clinical supports and referral pathways, to strengthen protective factors and reduce isolation.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the NSW Government extend The Welcome Experience program to other local government areas to support essential workers settle into regional, rural and remote communities.

Position	Noted
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Response	<p>Supporting essential workers to live and work in regional, rural and remote communities is a priority of the NSW Government.</p> <p>The Welcome Experience program (the Program) is delivered by the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, supporting essential workers and their families to form lasting connections in regional communities when they relocate.</p> <p>The Program will remain operational in 55 regional locations until mid-2026, after which an evaluation will guide its future direction and any potential expansion or changes to its scope.</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 5

That the NSW Government recognise peer support, including mentoring, as a key strategy for addressing loneliness at the individual level and identify opportunities to expand availability in local communities and online platforms, prioritising programs that support at risk groups.

Position	Supported
Response	<p>The NSW Government recognises the importance of the expertise of people with lived and living experience, and peer support. NSW Health released the NSW Peer Workforce Framework (the Framework) on 16 October 2025.</p> <p>The Framework provides comprehensive guidance to all LHDs and SHNs in supporting, developing, and expanding the mental health and suicide prevention Peer Workforce. It defines the scope of practice for peer workers and detail best-practice approaches to workforce development.</p> <p>To support professional growth within the Peer Workforce, NSW Health allocated \$475,000 over two years to fund scholarships aimed at increasing access to nationally accredited training programs. These scholarships are available for the Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work and the Peer Navigator Unit of Competency, aiming to strengthen the pipeline of qualified peer workers across NSW.</p> <p>In August 2024, the Hon. Rose Jackson MLC, Minister for Mental Health, hosted a Men's Mental Health Forum: Suicide Prevention which identified loneliness as a significant driver of distress, and discussed effective programs and interventions, and future strategies for male suicide prevention. Following the forum, the NSW Government committed an additional investment of \$1.4 million to enhance men's mental health services and prevent suicides. This funding has been distributed among 34 grassroots organisations to deliver community-led programs specifically tailored for men across NSW.</p>

These one-off grants, ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000, are designed to enable community and grassroots organisations to co-design and implement targeted mental health and suicide prevention initiatives for men and boys. Supported activities include mentoring and peer support groups.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That the NSW Government fund new and existing neighbourhood and community centres to build their capacity to address loneliness locally through separate core funding, in addition to program funding.

Position	Noted
Response	<p>The NSW Government recognises that Neighbourhood and Community Centres (NCCs) are important social infrastructure and form part of a diverse, capable and responsive community services system, providing essential support, social connection and pathways to assistance for their local communities. In recognising this role, the NSW Government has signed the Shared Commitment to Collaboration for NCCs in NSW to strengthen grassroots community services.</p> <p>The Shared Commitment agreement (the Agreement) between Local Community Services Association (LCSA), NCCs and the NSW Government sets out a collaborative approach to strengthen communities across NSW. Co-designed by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and LCSA, the Agreement outlines 15 commitments and sets clear priorities to improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities. The Agreement complements broader reforms being undertaken by the Government to strengthen community and social services across NSW.</p>

RECOMMENDATION 7

That the NSW Government review and enhance funding arrangements for small community and grassroots organisations including by simplifying grant processes and improving eligibility requirements for small grants.

Position	Noted
Response	<p>The NSW Government is committed to delivering grants programs that are transparent and in the public interest.</p> <p>The Grants Administration Guide 2024 (the Guide) outlines the administration process, overarching principles that apply to all NSW Government grants, and specific requirement that must be complied with when administering grants. The design of processes is intended to be as simple as possible for</p>

stakeholders, while also ensuring delivery of obligations under the Guide, the Premier's Memorandum M2024-03 Grants Administration Guide and aligned the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018*.

As per the Guide, co-design of grants with stakeholders may be appropriate in some cases, enabling stakeholders to have input on the design of the grant to meet community needs more effectively.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the NSW Government explore opportunities to reduce financial barriers and support greater participation in local sporting and social organisations.

Position	Supported
Response	<p>The NSW Government recognises that participation in sport and active recreation plays an integral role in improving the health and wellbeing of individuals, as well as fostering social connections within communities. The Office of Sport provides leadership, policies, programs, funding and infrastructure to ensure everyone can participate.</p> <p>The NSW Office of Sport Strategic Plan 2024-2028 demonstrates the NSW Government's commitment to supporting all people, communities and organisations across NSW to enjoy the benefits of participating in sport and active recreation. The Strategic Plan is supported by five focus areas including supporting sector growth, enabling an accessible network of facilities and places, facilitating inclusion, pursuing investment opportunities and ensuring the Office of Sport is sustainable, responsive and contemporary.</p> <p>To prevent financial constraints from limiting participation, the Office of Sport provides support through a range of grant programs. Some of these initiatives include the Local Sport Grant Program, Organisation Support Program, Level the Playing Field Program, Her Sport Her Way Grant Program, and the Centre of Excellence Fund.</p>

RECOMMENDATION 9

That the NSW Government, in partnership with local government, prioritise the development of and equitable access to third spaces and green spaces that are well connected to public and active transport across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities.

Position	Supported
Response	<p>The NSW Government recognises that creating social connection in the community through social and built environments has the potential to positively influence loneliness outcomes. These community level interventions</p>

require collaboration across various levels of government and sectors, including planning and environment, transport and social infrastructure.

Green and public spaces play an important role in enhancing quality of life and community wellbeing. The Green Places Framework is a design framework produced by the Government Architect NSW to guide the planning, design, and delivery of green infrastructure in urban areas across NSW. It aims to create healthier, more liveable, and sustainable urban environments by connecting open spaces with town centres, public transport hubs, rivers, and employment and residential areas. The Government's commitment to the development of and equitable access to green spaces is demonstrated in the Biodiversity in Place Framework, Framework for Valuing Green Infrastructure and Public Spaces, and Everyone Can Play guide.

The NSW Government is prioritising the development of green spaces in metropolitan and central coast communities through the Metropolitan Greenspace Program which helps councils create vibrant neighbourhoods and sustainable communities. The Metropolitan Greenspace Program provides funding for projects that create high-quality green spaces and connect town centres, transport hubs, and homes.

The NSW Government has invested \$4 million in FY25-26 as part of this program to improve and expand green open spaces across 14 council areas. This will deliver more outdoor places where people can gather, play, relax and exercise in their community.

The NSW Government and Commonwealth Government has also committed \$300 million to invest in new public open space to enhance the liveability in growing communities as part of the Parks for People – Transport Orientated Development Program. The investment will deliver high quality parks and playground, and innovative precincts located near public transport and infrastructure.

The Intergovernmental Agreement: To Guide NSW State-Local Government Relations on Strategic Partnerships 2024-2027, reaffirms the Government's commitment to working in partnership with local government to achieve strong communities.

RECOMMENDATION 10

That the NSW Government enhance its support for youth hubs by establishing new youth hubs in New South Wales and provide further investment to existing youth hubs, in recognition of key challenges experienced by young people and the lifelong benefits that will follow.

Position	Supported in principle
Response	<p>The NSW Government is committed to supporting young people to build greater social connection and strengthen social cohesion in our communities.</p> <p>The Government recently established the NSW Office for Youth to ensure that young people are directly involved in the development of policies, embedding youth perspectives from the outset. The Office for Youth will engage young people across NSW in the design of policies that impact their lives and support deeper community participation.</p> <p>The Office for Youth's Holiday Break Program provides funding to councils and youth service providers to deliver recreational activities for young people during school holidays. One of the outcomes of this program is supporting young people to develop and sustain positive relationships with peers, increasing their sense of belonging and strengthening links to their community.</p> <p>The Government recognises that life transitions such as leaving school may be accompanied by a loss of peer connection. The Young People Hub is a NSW Government initiative led by the Department of Customer Service (DCS) which helps young people easily access services, resources and support during key life transitions as well as providing details for youth hubs across NSW.</p>

RECOMMENDATION 11

That the NSW Government acknowledge the importance of transport infrastructure in regional, rural and remote communities, as a means of enabling practical and meaningful connections.

Position	Supported
Response	<p>The NSW Government acknowledges the unique challenges faced by regional, rural and remote communities across NSW, and the importance of effective transport networks for facilitating access to employment, education, healthcare, and social engagement.</p> <p>Transport for NSW's (Transport) Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plans (SRITPs) respond to the NSW Government's election commitment to deliver integrated strategic plans for roads and transport in regional NSW.</p> <p>Through a co-design process, the nine SRITPs across NSW will reflect the needs of regional communities and include detailed evaluations of a communities' current and future transport needs. They are outcome focused and include</p>

actions and initiatives to enable funding decisions based on priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 12

That the NSW Government consider alternative transport options where public transport is not available or accessible, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas of New South Wales.

Position	Supported
Response	<p>Accessibility is a key consideration of the NSW Government when planning and designing public transport. Transport provides funding to community transport organisations to provide services under the Community Transport Program which aims to address transport disadvantage at the local level. The program provides alternative transport options to individuals with limited or no access to public or private transport options due to physical, social, cultural and/or geographic factors.</p> <p>The NSW Government also acknowledges data indicating that people living with disability may experience higher levels of loneliness compared to those living without disability and the need to consider this factor in public transport planning and design. The Safe Accessible Transport program is designed to enhance safety, inclusivity, and usability of public transport for everyone, with a particular focus on people living with disability, and older adults. Implementing Transport's Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (DSAPT) works to improve amenity, access, and safety, and recognises the function of public transport locations within their communities.</p> <p>The NSW Government has committed \$15 million in 2025 to address the shortage of wheelchair accessible taxis across NSW, which provide alternative transport options to people living with a disability who are unable to use or have access to public transport.</p> <p>In the FY25-26 NSW Budget, the NSW Government allocated an additional \$452 million to continue work to build better connection communities by creating new bus routes, expanding existing routes and reinstate routes across regional NSW.</p>

RECOMMENDATION 13

That the NSW Government consider changes to the *Local Government Act 1993* to require local governments to explicitly plan for and report on actions to combat loneliness and encourage meaningful connections.

Position	Not supported
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Response	<p>The NSW Government does not support changes to the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i>.</p> <p>The NSW Government recognises the critical role that Local Government plays, as a significant provider and enabler of facilities, programs and community partnerships, that build meaningful social connection and enhance social cohesion across Local Government Areas (LGAs).</p> <p>Existing legislative and policy frameworks, including the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework, already empower and require councils to support social connection and cohesion, and to report on the work undertaken.</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 14

That the NSW Government ensure that, as part of its response to the housing crisis, social connections are a key consideration, through the provision and equitable distribution of third spaces, green spaces, public and active transport and other social infrastructure. In doing so, it should consider ways to leverage private sector investment in fostering community connections as well as how to maximise the community use of existing assets.

Position	Supported
Response	<p>The NSW Government is taking significant steps to address the housing crisis, while also ensuring the provision and equitable distribution of infrastructure and services that communities need.</p> <p>Homes NSW has several major initiatives and reforms that support priorities for housing in NSW. Recognising the Inquiry's findings on the diverse population groups vulnerable to significant loneliness and the intricate set of contributing risk factors, the Government remains committed to delivering safe and equitable housing solutions for these cohorts. Building Homes for NSW will deliver new housing to assist women and children escaping domestic violence, Aboriginal people, older Australians, people with disability and young people without family support.</p> <p>Public spaces and transport hub precincts enable people to better connect with each other and participate in public life. Shaping places with the communities who use them can add social value by creating or strengthening relationship between people and place. The Share our Space program allows community members to enjoy quality outdoor facilities like playground, multipurpose courts and ovals during school holidays. The NSW Government recognises that by sharing spaces, we help to create opportunities for informal sport and recreation, a sense of stewardship and responsibility for schools and their role in building relationships, connections and resilience in the community.</p>

The NSW Government recognises the role social infrastructure and community spaces can play in fostering stronger social cohesion and connection in local communities. Transport is committed to integrating transport networks within neighbourhoods to ensure they are functional, inclusive, resilient, and inviting for all. Placemaking is a key aspect of this approach, focusing on creating public spaces where people feel welcome, safe and connected.

Streets account for approximately 80 per cent of public space in urban centres across NSW. The Draft NSW Handbook for Activating Local Streets canvasses the potential to use suitable roads as existing assets for community activities and events that help foster social connections and bring individuals together. The final Handbook is anticipated to be released in late 2025.

The Open Spaces Program will create quality public open spaces that enhance community wellbeing, make places more liveable across NSW and improve neighbourhood spaces where people can connect.

The NSW Government is committed to delivering more high-quality, well-located homes near transport, community services and open spaces. The Transport Oriented Development (TOD) Program will deliver much needed housing around 39 transport hubs and improve access to transport options, walkable neighbourhoods, public open space, and other amenities and services.

RECOMMENDATION 15

That the NSW Government, through the Department of Local Government and other means, ensure that place-based strategies to address loneliness actively target disadvantaged communities.

Position	Noted
Response	<p>Ensuring that communities experiencing disadvantage are at the heart of government strategy design is a longstanding practice, reflected in the NSW Government's commitment to creating equitable outcomes for people across NSW.</p> <p>Councils are committed to delivering for their local communities and implementing place-based initiatives. Supported by the IP&R framework, councils discuss local needs and priorities directly with their communities. IP&R does not mandate consultation with specific groups, instead councils engage with those relevant locally to ensure a place-based approach to strategies, frameworks LGA priorities and plans. For example, Community Strategic Plans detail a local community's vision and give key consideration to social</p>

justice principles including equity, access, participation and rights.

The IP&R framework involves a reporting structure to communicate progress to council and the community as well as a structured timeline for review to ensure the goals and actions are still relevant to the community's needs.

The Office of Local Government supports councils to deliver for their local communities and is responsible for providing councils with guidance and support to implement the IP&R process with and for their communities.

In addition, the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government Program, administered by the Premier's Department, also provides support to councils to implement initiatives to enhance social cohesion and connection in their LGA.

RECOMMENDATION 16

That the NSW Government develop a community awareness campaign to destigmatise loneliness, normalise conversations about loneliness, enhance community participation, and support and encourage individuals to seek out meaningful connections, not only by reaching out, but also by reaching in.

Position

Supported

Response

The NSW Government acknowledges the importance of raising awareness and reducing the stigma around loneliness. As canvassed in the response to other recommendations, there are a range of established campaigns, programs, and initiatives across government that are dedicated to fostering community connection and ensuring individuals know where and how to seek support.

These efforts include public awareness campaigns, community events, and targeted outreach delivered through multiple government agencies. Through these ongoing initiatives, the NSW Government continues to support individuals in building meaningful connections and accessing the services they need, ensuring that all members of the community are aware of available resources and feel empowered to reach out or engage with others.

The Office for Youth will explore opportunities to build awareness and provide avenues for better social connection for young people. This could include collaboration with Government and non-government stakeholders to raise greater community awareness of loneliness, while also promoting opportunities for young people to increase social connectedness and deeper community participation through activities such as volunteering.

RECOMMENDATION 17

That the NSW Government develop a workforce development strategy to build the capacity of health and community professionals, to identify people at risk of loneliness and connect them with appropriate supports in consultation with the sector.

Position	Noted
Response	The NSW Health Workforce Plan 2022-2032 outlines priorities, outcomes and activities that will support the health workforce to deliver safe, reliable and person-centred care. The Plan guides collaboration across NSW Health to develop state-wide initiatives for the system, and for local workforce plans in LHDs and SHNs to translate priorities into local actions.

RECOMMENDATION 18

That the NSW Government consider opportunities to consolidate an online directory identifying all existing services that address loneliness and social isolation.

Position	Supported in principle
Response	All NSW Government agencies and departments have existing and accessible online resources and guidance to help people find services and programs. The Government's OneCX Program will help to centralise this content in one place, nsw.gov.au .

RECOMMENDATION 19

That the NSW Government implement a five-year whole of government strategy to address loneliness and build meaningful connections, led by the Premier's Department, that seeks to:

- elevate loneliness and meaningful social connections as a policy priority across all departments and agencies
- secure commitment to action across the public, not for profit and private sectors
- strengthen the evidence base
- deepen the community's awareness to destigmatise loneliness, strengthen interpersonal microskills, and encourage people to give and seek support
- enhance workforce capacity to identify and respond to loneliness
- empower community-led initiatives
- build connected communities
- improve critical infrastructure, including transport and digital infrastructure
- establish state-level targets alongside a governance and accountability framework.

Position	Supported in principle
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Response	<p>The NSW Government recognises the importance of building and supporting strong social connection as a key protective factor against loneliness, and empowering community-led initiatives.</p> <p>This focus is embedded as a key factor across multiple portfolios, policy areas and existing Government Frameworks and Strategies; from supporting social cohesion and an individual's overall sense of wellbeing, to building connected places through the Government's planning system. The Government will continue to work with the non-government sector, local government and grassroot organisations to support the best outcomes for the people of NSW.</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 20

That as a key component of its five-year whole of government strategy to address loneliness in New South Wales, the NSW Government, in collaboration with key organisations and researchers, commit to improving the evidence base by:

- establishing a robust data framework with standardised data measures
- supporting robust research to better understand the causes and impacts of loneliness, paying particular attention to at risk cohorts
- implementing rigorous evaluation of interventions to ensure effectiveness.

Position	Supported in principle
Response	<p>The NSW Government acknowledges that enhancing data collection is an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the prevalence and impacts of loneliness and social isolation within NSW.</p> <p>The NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework reports on a targeted set of performance and wellbeing measures to better understand the full impact of NSW policies on societal health and wellbeing.</p> <p>The Government will explore improving data collection through existing mechanisms, such as the NSW Life Satisfaction Survey. Collecting relevant data may assist existing government frameworks and strategies by incorporating indicators related to loneliness and social connection and inform the delivery of key services.</p>