

Building stronger communities

Understanding loneliness and connection



Strengthening connection

At Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria, our Policy & Advocacy team has been actively exploring how older Victorians experience social connectedness and how we can better support those who feel isolated or disconnected. We engaged our members through two key avenues:

- A state-wide social connectedness survey asking what helps you stay socially connected, what gets in the way, and what support is needed.
- An in-person member workshop where participants shared personal stories, insights, and ideas in small group discussions.

What we asked

Our survey, which received over 160 responses, aimed to build a clear picture of the factors contributing to, and challenging, social connectedness in later life. Key questions included:

- How often do you have meaningful conversations or social interactions with friends, family, or community?
- What kinds of activities help you stay socially connected? What are the main barriers to

taking part?

- What supports or strategies help you feel more connected?
- What kind of initiatives would help older people connect more easily?

What we heard: Understanding loneliness

Our community survey reveals important insights about how community members experience loneliness and social connection. While the majority of respondents maintain good social connections, a significant portion experiences varying degrees of loneliness that impacts their daily lives.

I am not lonely but at times, I feel very alone.

Community survey respondent

40%

Never or seldom
feel lonely

36%

Occasionally feel
lonely

15%

Feel lonely
some of the time

6%

Feel lonely often
or always

Top barriers to community participation

Understanding what prevents people from participating in community activities is crucial for creating more inclusive opportunities. Our survey identified five primary barriers that consistently prevent community members from engaging with their community.

1. **Personal challenges**
Emotional or transport-related barriers (25 responses)
2. **Social confidence**
Fear of not fitting in or social anxiety (23 responses)
3. **Health and disability**
Physical or health-related limitations (21 responses)
4. **Information gap**
Lack of information about available activities (18 responses)
5. **Financial concerns**
Cost of participation as a barrier (18 responses)

I often want to go, but I get anxious about being the odd one out.

Community survey respondent

What helps people feel connected

Community members shared valuable insights about what makes them feel most connected to their community and others. These findings provide clear direction for developing effective community connection strategies.

Key connection factors include:

- Spending quality time with loved ones
- Participating in low-pressure or familiar activities.
- Accessing inclusive community spaces.

- Engaging in meaningful conversations and shared interests.
- Having opportunities for both structured and informal interactions.

Coffee or discussion dates. Sport like pickleball.

Community survey respondent

Community-suggested solutions

Our community members have provided clear direction on what initiatives would most help build stronger community connections. These suggestions come directly from those experiencing barriers to participation and offer practical, actionable solutions.

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More accessible community events

Creating events that welcome people of all abilities, ages, and comfort levels with various participation options.

33

Transport solutions

Providing transport options, ride-sharing, or shuttle services to help people reach social activities.

29

Buddy programs

Connecting people with companions or mentors for trying new activities together safely

21

Intergenerational programs

Bringing different age groups together for mutual support, learning, and connection.

It's easier to try something new with someone beside you.

Community survey respondent

Digital vs. in-person connection preferences

While online platforms serve a purpose in modern communication, our survey reveals a strong preference for face-to-face interaction among community members. Most residents prefer in-person engagement over digital alternatives, with few citing online groups as particularly meaningful for building lasting, supportive relationships.

This finding suggests that community initiatives should prioritize creating safe, accessible physical spaces and in-person opportunities while using digital tools primarily as supplements to support and organize face-to-face connections.

Moving forward together: Recommended actions

Based on your feedback, we've identified several practical ways to improve social connectedness for older Victorians:

- **Empowering peer-led communities:** Many of you called for streamlined systems and support so older people can form their own groups or networks, tailored to their interests, needs, and local area.
- **Improved transport and event access:** You told us that making community events more accessible, especially via public transport, would make a big difference. Suggestions included clearer transport information, venues near transit routes, and local government support to reduce barriers.
- **Community education and awareness:** There's a need for greater awareness, both among older people and the broader community, about how to stay socially connected and where to find support.

Our ongoing work

Your feedback and suggestions will continue to inform our ongoing advocacy when it comes to reducing the prevalence of loneliness and social isolation amongst older Victorians.

We are committed to continuing this work by listening to our members, deepening our research, and using your input to guide our advocacy.

We're grateful to everyone who took the time to complete the survey or attend our workshop. Your experiences are shaping how we speak up for older Victorians and how we build more connected, inclusive communities for Victorians of all ages.

Resources for now

While we continue our advocacy for better supports, there are some great tools and community services available right now to help you stay connected.

[We encourage you to visit our website](#) to access a range of these services and directories, which include the likes of LiveUp, local councils and libraries, Neighbourhood Houses, and many more.

Our directory includes phone numbers to directly speak with support services wherever possible.