

# LONELINESS



Jesus told us that he came to bring us life in abundance (John 10:10). The Uniting Church in Australia believes that “the fullness of our humanity is not found in wealth but in relationship with each other and the world around us.” (*An Economy of Life*) We want to see a Western Australian community where all people are connected, supported and feel a sense of belonging.

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## OUR CONCERNS

Loneliness and social isolation are separate but connected issues that affect many Western Australians. Whereas loneliness is a feeling of distress at being disconnected from the people around you, social isolation is a physical state where you have less interaction with other people.

People can feel lonely even when there are other people around them; in fact, 1 in 3, or 32% of Western Australians experience feelings of loneliness some or all of the time, according to the 2023 State of the Nation Report: Social Connection in Australia.

Perhaps surprisingly, young people at 18-24 are mostly likely to often or always feel lonely (22%) compared to only 5% of those over 75. This is linked to poor mental health, since lonely people are 4 times more likely to have either depression or social anxiety. People who feel lonely are stigmatised in our community, making it hard to people to speak up and ask for help. Nearly 1 in 3 Australians say they are ashamed of feelings of loneliness; and more than 1 in 4 Australians think those who are lonely are somehow less worthy.

100 Families WA, a collaborative research project involving Uniting WA, talked to families experiencing disadvantage, and found that hardship is both caused by and results in social isolation. Family relationships and social connections were really important, but these required “acceptance, empathy, and encouragement” that wasn’t always available.

Social isolation is also linked to family and domestic violence, with social isolation used as a tactic of coercive control.

All Australians can work to address loneliness and encourage social connections, but Government has a role to play, in funding organisations that offer social connections and mental health support. In particular, support for young people aged 18-24 to help them build meaningful connections at this vital transitional phase of their lives.

## ASK YOUR CANDIDATES

- What plans do you have to enhance community support networks and services?
- What plans do you have to support voluntary and community organisations that provide places of social connection?
- What initiatives will you introduce to reduce stigma around loneliness?
- What measures will you take to support WA families who are experiencing hardship, and who don’t have strong family networks to support them?
- What plans do you have to increase awareness and support for victim-survivors or domestic violence including coercive control?
- What measures will you take to improve mental health support?



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Western Australia