



Seniors Social Isolation Peak Services Program

Executive Summary – Age Well, Stay Connected Event (31/3/25)

On 31 March 2025, the Seniors Social Isolation Peak Services Program successfully delivered its inaugural event, "*Age Well, Stay Connected*" in collaboration with ADA Australia and the Public Advocate. The event was held at the Queensland Multicultural Centre in Brisbane, a well-established community hub for diversity, inclusion and community engagement. A total of 107 participants attended from diverse backgrounds and organisations, including those representing First Nations communities and the multicultural sector. Participants travelled from Brisbane, Moreton Bay, Logan, Ipswich, Redlands, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast, Toowoomba and the Western Downs.

The aim of the event was to bring together community members and sector stakeholders from Brisbane and the surrounding areas to gain a deeper understanding of social isolation among seniors and generate ideas that leverage local strengths and resources, with the potential for future collaborative projects. The event focused on three key objectives to help community address social isolation among seniors:

- Raising awareness of the impact of social isolation on seniors
- Encouraging knowledge sharing and collaboration
- Strengthening networks and partnerships

The program was shaped by input from a variety of sources and the event was promoted through multiple communication channels, including direct emails to Seniors Social Isolation (SSI) funded organisations and key sector stakeholders, as well as social media, resulting in strong interest and high engagement. Although 30 community members registered, only 15 attended, likely due to unforeseen personal commitments, missed confirmation notices or unexpected circumstances, resulting in sector stakeholders comprising a larger proportion of the final audience (see Appendix A).

Facilitated by Tina Bramley, holistic counsellor and psychotherapist, the event opened with a performance and Acknowledgement of Country by celebrated First Nations singer-songwriter and businesswoman, Toni Janke. This offered a meaningful start and established a respectful and inclusive tone for the day. Sandra Nugent, Non-Executive Board Director, highlighted the central role played by Council on the Ageing Queensland as a peak organisation in supporting community organisations to help seniors stay connected. Dr John Chesterman, Public Advocate for Queensland emphasised the importance of knowing your neighbours to help reduce the risk of social isolation.

Guest speaker Sarah Walker, Sector Development Manager at Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS), shared key insights from the [Social Isolation Best Practice Guide](#) to enhance our understanding of social isolation among seniors. She also emphasised how the guide can help support service providers improve outcomes and keep older Queenslanders socially connected.

Keynote speaker, Dr Catherine Barrett, Director and Founder of Celebrate Ageing was a highlight for many, sharing her perspectives on the growing health and policy implications of social isolation and loneliness, emphasising that ageism, loneliness and the wellbeing of older people is everyone's business. She also offered valuable insights on ageism, intersectionality, and internalised ageism, points that strongly resonated with the audience.

A diverse panel of six people, including an older male with lived experience of mental health and cognitive challenges, alongside sector leaders, discussed community-led solutions to social isolation, covering topics including men's mental health, digital inclusion, caregiving, disability, intergenerational connections, aged care navigation, council programs, green spaces, social prescribing and collaboration with GPs.

The afternoon offered a range of activities—world café sessions, workshops, and connection activities—covering topics such as diversity and inclusion, empowering older women, supporting carers, enhancing older men's wellbeing, fostering online connections, and the role of libraries as hubs for connection.

Throughout the day, participants reflected on what social connection means to them, emphasising that addressing social isolation is key to overcoming community challenges. They also noted that finding a sense of purpose encourages meaningful engagement and helps reduce isolation. A strong sense of belonging, supported by both formal and informal social connections, was seen as essential to promoting an inclusive, vibrant community, and enhancing mental health and wellbeing through active participation, including volunteering and relationship-building.

Thematic analysis of the data collected from the panel discussions, World Café sessions, workshops and engagement activities revealed nine emerging themes:

- Theme 1: Barriers to Connection
- Theme 2: Building Connection, Trust and Resilience through Everyday Actions
- Theme 3: Empowering Communities through Education, Support and Advocacy
- Theme 4: Flexible Communication and Outreach Strategies
- Theme 5: Inclusive and Nurturing Spaces for Connection and Belonging
- Theme 6: Intergenerational Connections
- Theme 7: Local Activities, Resources and Volunteering
- Theme 8: Shifting Mindsets and Empowering Local Action
- Theme 9: Strengthening Community Wellbeing through Connection

Participants shared ideas for future collaborations to strengthen community connections and promote wellbeing and inclusion, including:

- **Carer Support:** Collaborate with schools, workplaces, and local groups to raise awareness of carers' needs, support young carers, and promote intergenerational connection.
- **Challenge Ageism and Stereotypes:** Promote positive images of ageing by featuring diverse, strengths-based stories and images in newsletters, media, and community communications to shift perceptions and promote inclusion.

- **Community-Based Initiatives:** partner with libraries, community centres, and local groups to deliver community-driven programs, like Chatty Café, that foster connection, encourage sharing and storytelling, provide access to valuable resources, and help reduce isolation while building a strong sense of belonging.
- **Community Champions:** Local volunteers who inspire and connect others, strengthening community ties through peer support. Their contributions are actively recognised and celebrated, highlighting the vital role of volunteering in building resilient communities.
- **Digital Inclusion and Literacy:** Collaborate with trusted partners to deliver one-to-one digital mentoring and flexible learning programs, improving digital access, skills and confidence—particularly for older adults in underserved communities, to reduce isolation and enhance connectivity.
- **Flexible Engagement Structures:** Codesign adaptable frameworks that enable communities to develop and sustain inclusive local initiatives.
- **Resource Awareness:** Partner on education campaigns that improve awareness of available support services and how to access them.
- **Intergenerational Programs:** Collaborate on housing and activity-based initiatives that build connections across age groups and reduce social isolation.
- **Nature-Based Wellbeing:** Work with gardening clubs and nature organisations to offer outdoor programs that support physical and mental health.

Participants were invited to provide feedback after the event. Of the 11 responses received, many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to connect, share ideas, and contribute to future initiatives. They enjoyed the welcoming 'vibe', live music, and opportunities for informal interactions. They also valued hearing lived experiences, networking with peers and professionals, and engaging in open sharing of information.

Participants recommended several areas for improvement, including adding presentations from smaller community groups, increasing representation of older people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, and incorporating more interactive workshops featuring case studies. To build on the momentum generated through the event, we propose the following recommendations to extend engagement, broaden participation, and support community-led action.

- **Recommendation 1:** Share the findings from the event with participants and invite ongoing collaborative action.
- **Recommendation 2:** Expand engagement efforts across regional and rural Queensland, including areas such as Townsville and Longreach.
- **Recommendation 3:** Collaborate with seniors social isolation (SSI) funded organisations and provide targeted funding and resources to enable them to lead culturally appropriate and community-driven engagement activities.

These recommendations aim to inform and strengthen future engagement strategies for the Seniors Social Isolation Peak Service Program, aligning with Queensland's broader efforts to combat social isolation and build age-friendly, inclusive communities.

Appendix A: Organisations represented

Government

Federal

- Department of Health and Aged Care
- Services Australia (Aged Care Specialist Officer)

State

- Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety
- Metro South Health
- Office of the Public Advocate
- QAGOMA
- Queensland Health
- Queensland Public Trustee (QPT)

Local

- Brisbane City Council (50 Plus Centre and Community Development – Seniors)
- City of Gold Coast
- City of Moreton Bay (Libraries)
- Logan City Council
- Noosa Shire Council
- Redland City Council

Non-Government Organisations

- ADA Australia
- Aspire4Life
- Australian Association of Gerontology
- Brisbane South PHN
- Carers Queensland
- Caxton Community Legal Centre
- Celebrate Ageing
- CommuniQ Queensland
- Council on the Ageing Queensland
- Cuppa PLUS Inc.
- Ethnic Community Council of Queensland (ECCQ)
- Footprints Community
- Health Consumers Queensland
- Inclusive
- iLA - LiveUp
- Leora Healthcare (disability, aged care and mental health)
- Metropolitan Senior Citizens Centre
- Micah Projects

- Minjerriba Day Respite
- Mount Gravatt Community Centre
- NDS Community Services Gateway to Industry School's Project
- NSI Housing
- Oxley Senior Citizens Club Inc.
- Palliative Care Queensland
- QCOSS
- St John Ambulance Queensland
- Support Groups Queensland
- The Salvation Army
- The Seniors Channel
- UnitingCare's Older Persons Programs
- Wellways (Carer Gateway)
- World Wellness Group
- Your Lifestyle Centre Beenleigh

Seniors Social Isolation (SSI) funded organisations

- Caloundra Community Centre
- Noosa Seniors Connect Program
- Older Women's Network (Qld) Inc.
- Goondir Health services
- Queensland Positive People
- Relationships Australia Qld- Senior Social Connections Program
- Wynnum 60 and Better Programme Inc.
- The Older Mens Network (TOMNET)
- Thriving Multicultural Communities Gold Coast

University, Learning or Research Institution

- University of Queensland

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