



Media Release

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Loneliness and social isolation a growing health risk for young Australians

A new research report from health promotion foundation VicHealth and Swinburne University of Technology has found young Australians are experiencing alarming levels of loneliness and social isolation putting them at risk of social anxiety and depression.

The [ground-breaking study](#) of 1500 young Victorians aged between 12-25 found more than half of young people felt lonely sometimes or always and over a quarter of young Victorians were lonely three or more times a week.

The research found almost a third of young Victorians were also at risk of social isolation. Around 47 per cent of young people stated they sometimes or always feel they have no one to turn to.

Loneliness is having a significant impact on young people's mental health, with lonelier young people reporting higher risk for depression and social anxiety (18% and 12% respectively).

The Young Australian Loneliness Survey also found:

- 57% of young people said they lack companionship sometimes or always
- 55% of young people said they sometimes or always feel left out
- 17% of young people reported they feel there are rarely people they can talk to
- Young adults (aged 18–25) reported more loneliness than adolescents (aged 12–17)
- Young women reported more loneliness, social anxiety, and depressive symptoms than young men

VicHealth CEO Dr Sandro Demaio said while loneliness could affect anyone, young adults were particularly vulnerable.

“Young adults go through significant changes after finishing high school, with many starting a new job or pursuing further studies which can be stressful and challenging,” Dr Demaio said.

“Additionally, young people may move away from the support networks they had in their teenage years, with many having to make new friends at work or at university and many moving out of their family home.

“It's concerning that a significant number of young people feel like they have no one to turn to. Having a supportive network of friends and family around us can help improve mental wellbeing.

“This research shows we need to be doing more to support young people to make friends and develop social connections to get them through tough times.”

Director of Swinburne's Social Health and Wellbeing Laboratory and Scientific Chair of the Australian Coalition to End Loneliness, Dr Michelle Lim, said while it is normal for people to feel lonely but the level of young people's loneliness indicated in the report was concerning.

Media Contact:

VicHealth: Rachel Murphy, Principal Media Advisor on 03 9667 1319 or 0435 761 732
rmurphy@vichealth.vic.gov.au

“We found that a quarter of young people felt lonely three or more days a week and for those aged 18-25 years it’s even higher – over a third,” Dr Lim said.

“Chronic loneliness is well-known to negatively affect our health and mental wellbeing. We found that lonely young people are at higher risk of anxiety and depression.

“These results highlighted a crucial need to find effective ways in which young people can meaningfully connect with their peers, friends, and their community.

“Being more socially connected doesn’t mean you have to make more friends. You could start by deepening the relationships with people you already know.”

Dr Demaio had this advice for young people who feel they don’t have anyone to turn to.

“It can be really tough to make friends as an adult. One way of making friends is to find people with similar interests to you, whether that’s joining a sports team, a music group or taking a language class,” he said.

“Another way to make social connections is to volunteer for a cause you’re passionate about – that way you’ll be helping others while meeting like-minded people.”

Top tips for loneliness

- **Act not react.** Understand that feeling lonely is normal and it is a signal for you to do something different in your current social relationships.
- **Signal.** Signal to others your willingness to connect. Simple acts such as smiling and open body language helps others know you are willing to interact.
- **Speak.** A confidant can help alleviate loneliness, this could be a professional such as a school counsellor or a teacher.
- **Focus.** Getting more friends may help some but for others it could be easier to focus on improving the quality of a few relationships.
- **Find ‘your people’.** Join a sports team, choir, art class or volunteer – spending time with like-minded people with common interests is one way to make friends.
- **Take the time.** Repeated social interactions with others builds trust.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Friendships and relationships are dynamic. Your connection with a person wavers over time so don’t get down on yourself if you’re not seeing certain friends all the time.
- **Manage social fears.** Your fear of being judged by others may stop you from interacting with people. Seek help to gain more confidence around social interactions to make this easier.
- **Manage feeling down.** If you think you feel more sad and depressed about your social situation than you should be, speak to someone you trust or a health professional.

The Young Australian Loneliness Survey is available at <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/loneliness-survey>

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