

Some people enjoy their own company and as a result may not experience any discomfort from being alone or socially isolated. While others, despite being surrounded by people, may feel lonely and as though they can't connect or engage with those around them. Feeling lonely can present a range of challenges relating to an individual's physical and emotional wellbeing. Social isolation is distinct from loneliness and is usually used as a measure of how frequently someone has access to social networks. Social isolation does not necessarily mean someone is lonely but it can be related. Loneliness is typically defined by a subjective negative emotional experience of being alone.

## Socially Isolating Factors

- The loss of a loved one, friend or family member
- Declining health, decreased mobility and reduced income
- Moving to a new location
- Societal attitudes including ageism, sexism, racism, homophobia etc
- Living in a remote location and/or lacking transport options and missing out on regular social interaction as a result

The ageing process can present challenges for all people. For people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI), moving into retirement can present unique challenges. Research suggests that LGBTI people are more likely to live alone and have typically experienced discrimination at some point in their lives. This can damage someone's sense of self and affect their ability to feel connected to mainstream society. For others they may experience isolation even within the LGBTI community.



## Things you can do

There are a number of groups you can join such as walking groups, classes, workshops, clubs, support groups and volunteering opportunities. There a variety of online resources, social applications and social groups to connect in with. If you feel like emotions are getting in the way or you are experiencing depression, anxiety or just low mood and confidence issues, you can reach out for support to talk about your feelings with a counsellor or psychologist (see resources).

The LOVE Project puts on events that aim to reduce social isolation and create spaces to connect community members to each other. If you have an idea for an event, social or sporting group you'd like to promote or just want to see what's going on, join the mailing list by visiting our website [loveproject.org.au](http://loveproject.org.au) or emailing [loveproject@acon.org.au](mailto:loveproject@acon.org.au).

## Improving Connectivity

Feeling connected and making physical contact has been shown to have a profoundly positive effect on physical and mental wellbeing by reducing stress hormones such as cortisol and increasing the neurotransmitter oxytocin. Reduced loneliness has been linked to:

- Improved quality of sleep, motivation and outlook on life
- Reduced pain, blood pressure and inflammation
- Improved life expectancy
- Reduced risk of dementia, depression, anxiety and other mental health concerns
- Reduced risk of cerebrovascular complications such as heart conditions and strokes

## Planning for Retirement

For some of people, the thought of finishing work for good can sometimes feel exhilarating. For others, work life may have contributed to a sense of self or identity and the kind of life work has created. This may be a good time to plan for your retirement if you haven't already. Sometimes people don't wish to retire in a big rush and choose to stagger things by cutting work back to three days a week while they get used to changes.

Now might be a good time to dedicate to personal interests or improve on your social networks. Consider writing a list of goals that you would like to achieve as you transition. Goals may be big or small and may include moving to a new location, improving health, personal relationships, sports, fitness and intellectual pursuits. You may want to volunteer to a cause you've always believed in. See the resources for groups to get involved in.

## Seeking Care for Disability

Disability can present itself at any time, sometimes unexpectedly without warning. This can produce a variety of problems such as decreased mobility, difficulty performing daily routines, and difficulty accessing support networks, friends and family. It may be difficult working out what type of care plan suits you. It's important to consider whether you want residential or in-home care, where you might like to live and who you want to care for you. Seek out the kind of supports specific to your needs that can be provided and find one that is LGBTI friendly.

## Resources

ACON offers face to face counselling. Contact Intake and Assessment Officer (02) 9206 2000  
Free Call: 1800 063 060  
Email: [acon@acon.org.au](mailto:acon@acon.org.au)  
Hearing Impaired: (02) 9283 2088

Groups in NSW  
[loveproject.org.au/groups](http://loveproject.org.au/groups)

beyondblue  
1300 22 4636  
[beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

Lifeline  
13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service  
1300 659 467

Carers Australia  
1800 242 636

MensLine Australia  
1300 78 99 78

Relationships Australia  
1300 364 277

Q-Life  
1800 184 527

Alcohol and Drug Information  
Service NSW (02) 9361 8000 or  
1800 422 599 (rural)

55 Uppity  
[55uppity.com/about](http://55uppity.com/about)

Mature Age Gays  
[magnsw.org](http://magnsw.org)

NSW Seniors Week  
[nswseniorsweek.com.au](http://nswseniorsweek.com.au)

Volunteering Australia  
[volunteeringaustralia.org](http://volunteeringaustralia.org)

Sydney Guys Group  
[sydneyguysgroup.com](http://sydneyguysgroup.com)

meetup  
[meetup.com](http://meetup.com)

Gay and Lesbian Sports  
[teamsydney.org.au](http://teamsydney.org.au)

Suicide Prevention Australia  
[suicidepreventionaust.org](http://suicidepreventionaust.org)

National LGBTI Health Alliance  
[lgbtihealth.org.au](http://lgbtihealth.org.au)

Organisation Intersex Australia  
[oiaustralia.com](http://oiaustralia.com)

The Gender Centre  
[gendercentre.org.au](http://gendercentre.org.au)

q-life  
[qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au)

Mental Health Australia  
[mentalhealth.asn.au](http://mentalhealth.asn.au)

The LOVE Project is an ACON initiative aimed at creating better conversations and improved social engagement with older LGBTI community members. By understanding people's needs and preferences the LOVE project aims to facilitate greater social connectivity, improve social inclusion and provide appropriate health information for LGBTI elders.

[facebook.com/LivingOlderVisiblyEngaged](https://facebook.com/LivingOlderVisiblyEngaged) | [twitter.com/LOVEproject](https://twitter.com/LOVEproject) | [Loveproject.org.au](http://Loveproject.org.au)

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