



## Fact Sheet

# Community collectives

The  
**places and  
communities**



where we spend  
significant amounts of  
time have a profound  
impact on our mental  
health and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

Our wellbeing is also influenced by  
our daily interactions with others, our  
capacity to socialise and connect,  
the communities we identify with and  
the people with whom we share a  
sense of belonging.<sup>2</sup>

- Jim Williamson

During the initial coronavirus  
restrictions, VicHealth surveyed  
2,000 Victorians to examine how  
the restrictions were affecting  
health and wellbeing.



**3 in 10**

respondents reported they found it  
hard or very hard to stay connected

to friends and family during this period, and almost  
one in four did not feel connected with others.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2018  
Australian Loneliness Report,



**one in four**

Australian adults is lonely,  
and

**one in two**

Australians feel lonely for at  
least one day in a week.<sup>4</sup>

Social connections comprise the people we know, the friends  
we confide in, the family we belong to and the community we  
live in. These connections provide a level of social support  
that is critical for mental health and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

- VicHealth

A systematic review of the public health consequences of social isolation and loneliness suggested a **positive relationship between high-quality social relationships and subjective wellbeing** across all ages.<sup>6</sup>

Communities are also crucial for people with lived experience of mental illness. Witnesses and consumer-led organisations advocated to the Commission for **a greater focus on communities** to promote good mental health and wellbeing.<sup>7</sup>



I think there is a lot happening in this space where community groups and initiatives do seek to work closely with local residents experiencing mild, or not yet recognised experiences of poor mental health. It is important to recognise that all these community groups have been contributing to the glue that has held the mental health system together, and they could have an expanded role in a reformed and more responsive system.<sup>8</sup>

- Jim Williamson



The cricket club has taken their learning out of my experience which has helped raise awareness. It has been really powerful. Now people are able to talk about issues they are facing without feeling as though they are going through things alone and keep things hidden like I did.<sup>9</sup>

- Rick Corney



Local government's role in supporting community-level mental health and wellbeing efforts is well established. Prevention United's submission highlighted the potential for local council initiatives to tackle 'local-level risk and protective factors such as social cohesion, social connectedness and loneliness.'<sup>10</sup>

- Prevention United

Action to support mental health at the community level provides a platform to develop and improve social norms, values and practices, while encouraging community empowerment and participation.<sup>11</sup>

- World Health Organisation



Governments can help by facilitating the facilitators. Perhaps set aside some money that you're willing to risk on a new initiative, on a new experiment. Having an experimental fund would be useful, and it would be better than declaring from the top what the desired outcome is and how to achieve it.<sup>12</sup>

- David Pearl





## Recommendations

### Recommendation 15: Supporting good mental health and wellbeing in local communities

- ✓ Community collectives will be established in each of the state's 79 local government areas, bringing community members and community leaders together to drive social connection and inclusion efforts.
- ✓ The collectives will consult with local communities to identify challenges and opportunities, supporting them to determine issues and take action to support the mental health and wellbeing of their communities.
- ✓ Each community collective will be supported by local government.
- ✓ The Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Office in the Department of Health will support the community collectives by distributing annual, ongoing funding. It will also support evaluation of local community-led initiatives.
- ✓ Promising initiatives will be scaled up or replicated across the state.
- ✓ Given the variation in population and geographic sizes of local government areas, some local councils may wish to create networks and partnerships to deliver community collectives, and to enable connections between communities.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, *Social Determinants of Mental Health*, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Witness statement of Jim Williamson*, 11 May 2020, para. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *VicHealth Coronavirus Victorian Wellbeing Impact Study, Report for Survey #1*, 2020, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University and Swinburne University, *Australian Loneliness Report: A Survey Exploring the Loneliness Levels of Australians and the Impact on Their Health and Wellbeing*, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> VicHealth, *Opportunities for Social Connection: A Determinant of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Learnings and Implications*, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> N. Leigh-Hunt and others, 'An Overview of Systematic Reviews on the Public Health Consequences of Social Isolation and Loneliness', *Public Health*, 152 (2017), 157–171.

<sup>7</sup> *Witness statement of Mary O'Hagan*, 16 June 2020, para. 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Witness statement of Jim Williamson*, 11 May 2020

<sup>9</sup> *Witness statement of Richard Corney*, 3 May 2020

<sup>10</sup> Prevention United, *Submission to the RCMHS: SUB.0002.0028.0412*, 2019, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> World Health Organization, *Social Determinants of Mental Health*, 2014, p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> *Witness statement of David Pearl*, 11 May 2020.

To read the final report go to [rcvmhs.vic.gov.au](https://rcvmhs.vic.gov.au).