



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Miss Laura Nuttall MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Member)

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT

**Submission Number: 22**

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## **Friends for Good Inc. Submission to Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT**

Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
By email: LAcommitteeECI@parliament.act.gov.au

Friends for Good welcomes the ACT Parliament's interest and inquiry into loneliness and social isolation.

Friends for Good is a national not-for-profit and Australian loneliness pioneer. Our mission is to raise awareness of loneliness as a significant issue in the community and address gaps in services that foster a greater sense of connection and wellbeing for individuals and communities.

Friends for Good is pleased to make the following submission for the Committee's consideration:

### **The prevalence of loneliness and isolation in the ACT community.**

Recent research conducted by Friends for Good, *Unveiling a Silent Struggle: Australian First Research into the Stigma of Loneliness* (Casanas, E. [www.friendsforgood.org.au](http://www.friendsforgood.org.au)) confirms that loneliness is widespread in the Australian community. In addition, there continues to be a great deal of stigma surrounding loneliness, with many people reluctant to speak openly about it:

Some key findings from our research include:

1. 9 in 10 Australians have experienced loneliness at some point in their lives.
2. Approximately 1.7 million Australian adults often or always experience loneliness.
3. 84% of people think that others would feel ashamed or embarrassed to admit to feeling lonely.
4. 53% say that they themselves would be embarrassed to tell others that they felt lonely and only 29% of people have actually opened up to others if they felt lonely.
5. Men are more likely than women to view loneliness as a weakness.
6. People are more likely to disclose a mental illness diagnosis than an experience of loneliness.

**Experiences of loneliness and social isolation among residents of the ACT, including but not limited to seniors, young people, people with a disability, parents, carers, LGBTIQA+ people, and recently arrived migrants and refugees.**

Friends for Good provides FriendLine, a free anonymous chat with a friendly, trained volunteer. This service is successful in assisting regular callers to feel less lonely. We receive calls from people in the ACT and know of the particular challenges faced by many people, particularly those who are geographically isolated. Although FriendLine is anonymous anecdotally we know that many members of the groups listed here are at the intersection with loneliness and need tailored help and assistance to overcome barriers to wellness.

**The personal and social costs associated with loneliness and social isolation in the ACT, including the impact of loneliness and social isolation on mental and physical health.**

Friends for Good reported in *Loneliness in Australia, Research, Context and New Findings* that “loneliness and the related negative emotions and cognitions have been found to influence countless aspects of health and wellbeing” (Lauria, E. [www.friendsforgood.org.au](http://www.friendsforgood.org.au)). Please refer to this easy-to-read report for comprehensive details about the impact of loneliness and social isolation on mental and physical health (pg.6).

This report also outlines that:

1. Loneliness does not discriminate. Similar scores in loneliness were found for both men and women, people of all ages, those in cities, regional and rural areas. It impacts people from all walks of life.
2. The way people say they are doing economically impacts how lonely or connected they are. Those who report being able to get by easily with the money they have are the least lonely and have the lowest risk for social isolation.

Friends for Good calls loneliness the hidden suffering of the modern age. Some people experience suicidal ideation, others experience depression and stand in what we call a dark space. It is personally painful for thousands of people, particularly those who have come to believe that they are not worthy of friendship or that they will never experience a true friendship, even in the future.

**Opportunities for the ACT Government to support organisations and individuals to address loneliness and social isolation and improve social connectedness in the ACT community.**

There are many and varied opportunities to support organisations and individuals to address these pressing health concerns. Friends for Good is a service provider adept at assisting in developing state-based strategies that improve social connectedness. Friends for Good is also a member of the Friendship Alliance, a national network of individuals and organisations working together to help communities become more

aware of the detrimental health impacts related to loneliness and providing a broad range of services.

Friends for Good would welcome the opportunity to discuss the Committee's priorities and provide feedback or facilitate introductions to relevant organisations.

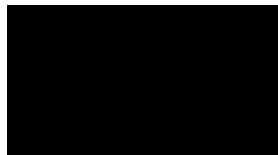
**Opportunities for the ACT Government to integrate improving social connectedness into other areas of policy making.**

From our research the UK have been leaders in integrating the improvement in social connectedness into other areas of policy making. It would be a great achievement for an Australian Government to learn from, commit to, and begin such a process. This report outlines the approach taken:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness>

**Any other related matters.**

Friends for Good would encourage the Committee not to undertake research into the prevalence and impacts of loneliness in Australia. That work has been done. Ideally organisations with expertise in helping people to overcome the barriers of social isolation and loneliness can be consulted and either provide initiatives or mentor local groups to do so.



Patricia Lauria  
Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer  
Friends for Good

