



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

QTON No. 09

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

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE (QTON)
Public Hearing - Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT
Tuesday, 28 May 2024

Asked by Ms Nicole Lawder MLA on 28 May 2024: Ms Emma Davidson MLA, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Population Health took on notice the following question:

Ref: *Hansard - Uncorrected Proof Transcript (UPT)*, 28 May 2024, pages 28–29.

In relation to: Loneliness data by time period

MS LAWDER: Of the data, at the beginning of the government's submission there is the table with the different groups from 2023, I think.

Ms Davidson: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Do you have any comparable data, for example, from 2019, pre-COVID, to see whether there have been changes in some cohorts?

Ms Davidson: Yes. This is data that has been measured since 2019. The University of Canberra run that survey, and actually what they found is that when they ran this survey in 2023—we had the lowest levels of loneliness recorded in the ACT since they started doing it in 2019. So yes, there will be comparative data that would be there, and I can take on notice to—are there particular areas that—

MS LAWDER: Yes, I am just interested to know if each group has bounced back after COVID, for example, because anecdotally, during COVID some groups felt very isolated and lonely. I am just wondering whether it is better now or not quite as good as it once was.

Ms Davidson: Yes, absolutely. I ran through some of the groups there that currently are finding that they are not experiencing the same levels of social connection and they are experiencing higher levels of loneliness than the broader community are. I would expect that that absolutely would be impacted by some of the regulations that were needed during COVID—regulations in the ACT—in order to reduce transmission and protect people's health, and certainly people with disability and their carers talk to me frequently about the ongoing impact that that has.

Even though the rest of the community is now back to doing a lot of things that they used to, there are a lot of people with disability that—I feel it when I go to events, and familiar faces—people that I have been friends with for years—are physically not there in the room, because it is not yet safe for them to go back out into large group situations. They would be particularly at risk—and also for carers.

To be able to provide you with that detail of how it compares to 2019 I think would help us to see in a quantitative way the difference that that makes, and the responsibility that we all have as a community to enable flexibility around things like can you still participate in things online if you cannot be there in person? Can we still do as many of our meetings as possible outdoors where there is more circulation? Those kinds of things can make a real difference to people’s ability to stay connected.

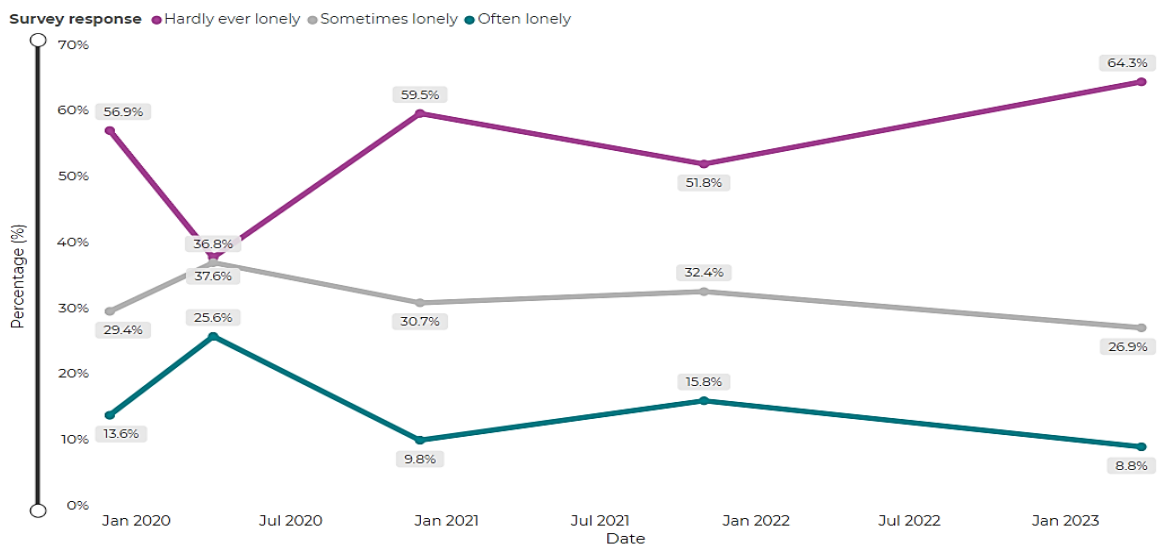
MS LAWDER: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Emma Davidson MLA: The answer to the Member’s question is as follows: –

The following table shows the levels of loneliness in the overall ACT population from 2019 to 2023.

ACT population, by level of loneliness			
Period	Hardly ever lonely	Sometimes lonely	Often lonely
December 2019	56.9%	29.4%	13.6%
April 2020	37.6%	36.8%	25.6%
December 2020	59.5%	30.7%	9.8%
November 2021	51.8%	32.4%	15.8%
April 2023	64.3%	26.9%	8.8%

The levels of loneliness in the ACT peaked in early 2020 and have mostly improved since. There was another increase in levels of loneliness in late 2021, but not as sharp as the increase seen in early 2020. The longer-term view shows an overall decrease in the percentage of people feeling sometimes or often lonely, and an increase in the percentage of people hardly ever feeling lonely. The 2023 results show lower levels of loneliness than the pre-COVID (2019) results. The graph below shows how the levels of loneliness have changed for overall population in the ACT since 2019¹.



¹ ACT Government (2023), [Levels of Loneliness – ACT Wellbeing Framework](#), accessed 03 June 2024.

The tables below show change in levels of loneliness for specific groups of people in the ACT since 2019. The data shows certain cohorts, for example, men, 30-49 and 65+ age groups, people born overseas in English speaking countries, non-LGBTQIA+ people, and non-carers reported higher increase in levels of loneliness during the peak in early 2020. The data also shows that for some groups, the levels of loneliness peaked later, for example, carers and people aged 50-64 reported highest levels on loneliness in late 2021. While most groups have shown significantly lower levels of loneliness in the 2023 survey results, certain groups have not bounced back as well as others after the peak. These include people aged 50-64 years, people born overseas in non-English-speaking countries, LGBTQIA+ people, and carers.

ACT population feeling "Often lonely", by gender		
Period	Male	Female
December 2019	11.9%	15.2%
April 2020	24.3%	26.8%
December 2020	10.2%	9.3%
November 2021	15.4%	18.2%
April 2023	7.4%	9%

ACT population feeling "Often lonely", by cultural and linguistic diversity status.			
Period	Born overseas - non-English speaking country	Born overseas - English speaking country	Born in Australia
December 2019	9.6%	12.6%	15.5%
April 2020	23.1%	28.3%	26.4%
December 2020	8.6%	7.4%	10.5%
November 2021	10.4%	14.2%	18.6%
April 2023	11.3%	9.7%	8.1%

ACT population feeling "Often lonely", by age group.				
Period	65+	50-64	18-29	30-49
December 2019	6.6%	11.5%	21.8%	13.9%
April 2020	19%	17.4%	31.8%	29.1%
December 2020	5.2%	8.8%	14.7%	10.1%
November 2021	8.8%	20.6%	23.8%	15.1%
April 2023	5.6%	8.6%	13.6%	11.2%

ACT population feeling "Often lonely", by carer status.				
Period	Not a carer	Carer	Carer, less than 15 hours per week caring obligations	Carer, 15 or more hours per week caring obligations, or varied
December 2019	13.5%	14.3%	7.3%	19%
April 2020	25.7%	25.2%	28.4%	23.4%
December 2020	9.5%	9.5%	3.9%	3.5%
November 2021	16.2%	27.4%	14.4%	33%

April 2023	8.1%	12.5%	9.8%	18.9%
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Act population feeling "Often lonely", by LBGTIQ+ status.		
Period	Not LBGTIQ+	LBGTIQ+
December 2019	12.3%	28.8%
April 2020	24.2%	33.9%
December 2020	9.4%	9.2%
November 2021	15.5%	19%
April 2023	7.3%	18.7%

ACT population feeling "Often lonely", by disability status.	
Note: Data for people with disability are only available for 2023 due to a change in the way disability was defined and measured in the survey, to better reflect international best practice.	
Category option	Percentage
Person with long-term restriction in cognition, cognitive processing, or mental health functioning	26%
Person with long-term restriction other than physical mobility, mental health, sight, hearing, or speech (includes pain, shortness of breath, fits/blackouts, asthma)	15.9%
Person with any type of long-term restriction in functioning	15.1%
Person with long-term restriction in daily physical mobility	15.5%

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion

Signature: *Emma Davidson* Date: 11 June 2024

By Emma Davidson MLA
Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans