

Victorian Government response

Ageing is everyone's business:

A report on isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians

In early 2015 I requested the Commissioner for Senior Victorians investigate the issue of social isolation and loneliness among Victorian seniors. In his report of that investigation, *Ageing is everyone's business: a report on isolation and loneliness among senior Victorians*, the Commissioner has identified a significant issue for our ageing population.

The Commissioner found that at least ten percent of Victoria's older population experiences loneliness at any one time.

The causes can be related to 'trigger' events in later life, such as leaving the workforce, death of a partner, living alone or moving to a new location.

The Commissioner's report makes the point that providing assistance to older people experiencing social isolation and loneliness is something that we all should be concerned about, due to the effect on health and wellbeing and, with the ageing population, the prevalence of loneliness among older people.

The Commissioner concluded that addressing loneliness among older people is 'everyone's business' – we all have a role to play as neighbours, business owners, members of community groups or service providers in reaching out to and creating a welcoming and supporting environment for older people.

Age-friendly communities encourage active ageing and optimise opportunities for good health, social and economic participation and personal security. They recognise the great diversity of our older population, promote inclusion of older people and respect their decisions and lifestyle choices. They involve service providers, businesses, community leaders and older people in planning to meet ageing-related needs.

On behalf of the Victorian Government, I am pleased today to announce a number of initiatives to support older people in the community; including the Age-Friendly Victoria initiative with:

- \$2.2 million over four years for **Age-Friendly Community grants** targeting rural councils and innovative age-friendly projects to improve quality of life for older people
- the **Age-Friendly Victoria Declaration** signed with Municipal Association of Victoria, and the Statement of Support and Partner Endorsement signed by peak bodies and business supporters to build more age-friendly communities, services and local environments
- an **Age-Friendly Victoria Award** to recognise excellence and innovation in creating age-friendly communities, promoting active ageing and improving quality of life and inclusion for older people
- the **Seniors Card Age-Friendly Partners Program** that is developing innovative partnerships with businesses to create age-friendly products and services.

A new information and communication initiative in my department – Life planning for seniors – will encourage older people to actively plan for healthy and active ageing. Working with a range of government, community and business content partners, **Life planning for seniors** will utilise Seniors Online, the Victorian Government's website for older people, and Seniors Card communication channels to provide relevant and easy to understand information to Victorian seniors on a range of issues related to 'trigger' events, later life transitions and community participation opportunities.

Health services will be encouraged to work with isolated and lonely older people through advice and information to be included in the *Older People in hospitals* toolkit.

To help build participation opportunities, the Department of Health and Human Services will provide tools and resources for place based initiatives to address social isolation and loneliness among seniors, and work in partnerships with local service and community organisations to strengthen service delivery and local participation opportunities.

I have asked the Commissioner for Senior Victorians to lead this work in the community sector to encourage local community based organisations to become more age-friendly and to reach out to older people.

He will establish a stakeholder reference group and conduct locally based forums to support and inform actions and activity. I have also asked the Commissioner to advocate on behalf of older Victorians to encourage the corporate and business sectors to better understand their needs as customers and service recipients.

My department will work with other Victorian Government departments to encourage a cross-government approach to creating opportunities for older people to better participate in their local communities.

For example, to help seniors bridge the digital divide, **the Adult Community and Further Education Board will support the provision of in-depth information technology courses for older people** for delivery within the Learn Local service network.

The government's vision for making Victoria the Education State means building a lifelong love of learning in our community, and providing opportunities for an excellent education for all. In addition to making improvements to our formal education system, it means tapping into our existing community resources and capabilities, including the valuable contribution of older Victorians and seniors community organisations in the learning and development of children, young people and adults.

The new Active Transport Victoria initiative will focus on increased participation and safety among cyclists and pedestrians, including senior pedestrians, who currently account for almost half of all pedestrian fatalities in Victoria.

To help protect older people from abuse within their family and friendship networks, the government will implement recommendations from the Family Violence Royal Commission to improve responses to older people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse.

The Ministerial Council for Volunteers provides expert advice to the Victorian Government on ensuring that the volunteer sector increases social inclusion, strengthens the community, and provides Victorians with every opportunity to benefit from participation in volunteering. **I have referred the matter of seniors isolation and loneliness to the Ministerial Council for Volunteers to consider the enormous potential of older Victorians** who have a diversity of life experiences, skills and capabilities to share; and for whom volunteering and participation in community life can strengthen meaning and purpose as they age, and help reduce social isolation and decline. I have asked the Commissioner to brief the Council on the findings of his report.

The Commissioner has provided important social policy research on social isolation and loneliness, identifying the types of events that can trigger loneliness and the harmful impact of loneliness on older people.

There is enormous opportunity for all sectors – government, business and community – to play a part in better understanding the needs of older people and strengthening the way in which services and communities respond.

It's time to make ageing everyone's business.



Martin Foley MP

Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing

Available at www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au

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