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New research reveals depth of Australian loneliness epidemic

New research launched today reveals the breadth and depth of Australia's loneliness epidemic.

Based on the findings from 16 waves of Household Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia survey data from 2001-2016, the research conducted by Relationships Australia and entitled *Is Australian experiencing an epidemic of loneliness?* identifies which Australians are most likely to feel lonely and socially isolated, and when.

The research, launched by the Assistant Minister for Children and Families the Hon Michelle Landry MP, reveals that one in 10 Australians lack social support and one in six is experiencing emotional loneliness - that is, they don't have a sufficient number of meaningful relationships in their lives to sustain and nurture them, particularly through difficult times.

"Our research reveals that poverty, unemployment and poor relationships are significantly associated with loneliness and lonely people make greater use of the health system," said the National Executive Officer with Relationships Australia, Alison Brook.

"Lack of employment and/or receipt of income support is associated with higher risk of loneliness for both men and women, with the highest rates for younger men in receipt of income support," Ms Brook said.

"Single parents, particularly single fathers, are most likely to experience a lack of social support with almost 40% of younger fathers reporting a lack of social support and more than 40% reporting emotional loneliness.

"Widowed men and women under 65 years of age also report high rates of loneliness.

"Data shows that people in de facto relationships are lonelier than people in other relationship types.

“People with poorer health were also more likely to report higher rates of emotional loneliness and a lack of social support.

“The research reveals that overall levels of loneliness for men are higher than women for all 16 waves of available data, although the reverse is true when examining the proportion of people reporting emotional loneliness.

“The number of people moving in and out of loneliness is also consistently high over the past decade.

“A substantial minority of people experience a lack of social support while a substantial majority report emotional loneliness at some time in their life.

“There is no doubt that a significant number of people in our community are experiencing loneliness.

“Relationships Australia believes there is a compelling case for a national discussion about the health and social risks posed by loneliness.

“Loneliness needs to be treated as a significant public health and social policy issue.

“At Relationships Australia, we believe we can each take steps to prevent our own loneliness and that of our loved ones, and that at a community level we each have a responsibility to look out for our neighbours who may be socially isolated.

“Additionally, in our rural communities, it is vitally important that neighbours look out for those doing it tough in the drought.

“Through our Neighbour Day campaign each year Relationships Australia encourages all Australians to reach out to the people in their community who are socially isolated, living alone or who, through age or disability, struggle to get out and engage in their local community,” Ms Brook said.

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