



# Telstra Talking Loneliness Report

Research into the state of  
loneliness in Australia in 2021







## Foreword

“With so many feeling reluctant to speak up, we need to start talking more about loneliness.”

Telstra has been connecting people for more than 100 years and in today’s world everyone and everything is connected. Despite this there are so many people in the community who feel disconnected. As a company with connectivity at the heart of our purpose, we are shining a light on this important issue and encouraging people to start a conversation about loneliness.

With so many feeling reluctant to speak up, being open about loneliness will help those who cannot raise the issue. It could be affecting your brother, neighbour or workmate and you may never know. That’s why we want to challenge the preconceptions about who might be lonely and to encourage Australians to find a sense of connection through sharing experiences.

While it was a significant societal issue beforehand, more than a quarter of Australians experienced loneliness for the first time during COVID. We know the pandemic has had a huge impact on mental health but now we also know how it has accelerated the widespread issue of loneliness.

In this report, conducted in association with YouGov, we have captured a snapshot of loneliness in Australia right now. We have also looked at who suffers it, how it presents, as well as some of the ways we can start to address it, for ourselves and others.

The report is one way we can bring focus to this growing issue. We hope its findings alongside the other resources we are bringing together help spark a conversation about loneliness, with your family, friends, or maybe someone you have not spoken to before or in a long time – reaching out might just make someone’s day.

Andrew Penn  
CEO  
Telstra

# Loneliness in Australia



## How loneliness can feel

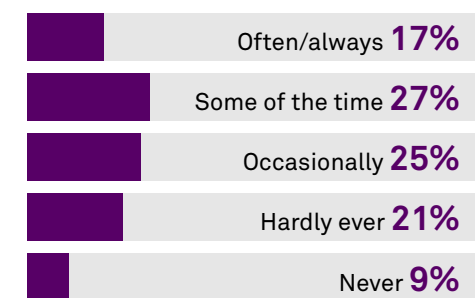


Four in ten (44%) Australians regularly feel lonely



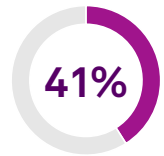
Nine in ten (91%) Australians have experienced feelings of loneliness

## How often do Australians feel lonely?

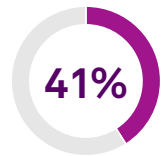




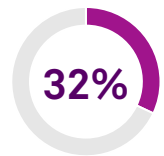
## The stigma of loneliness



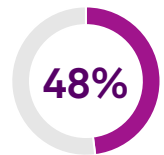
Two in five Australians agree that they worry others will judge them if they say they are lonely



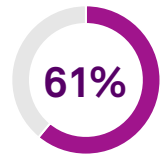
Two in five Australians say they are worried others will think there is something wrong with them if they say they are lonely



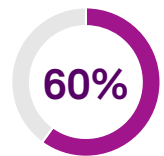
One third of Australians say that when they feel lonely they feel ashamed about it



1 in 2 Australians say that when they feel lonely they are too embarrassed to admit that to others



Six in ten Australians say that when they feel lonely they do not talk to others about it



Six in ten Australians say they can recognise if friends or loved ones are lonely, with women more likely to agree with this sentiment compared to men (65% compared to 56%)



Australians in rural regions who feel lonely are almost twice as likely as Australians in inner metro areas to say they do not do anything to combat feelings of loneliness

## Misconceptions of loneliness

Looking at the age groups most likely to be perceived as lonely, the research found that six in ten (60%) Australians assumed people aged 65+ are the loneliest group in their community.

However, when asked directly, those aged 65+ are the most likely generation to say they 'never' or 'hardly ever' feel lonely (46%).



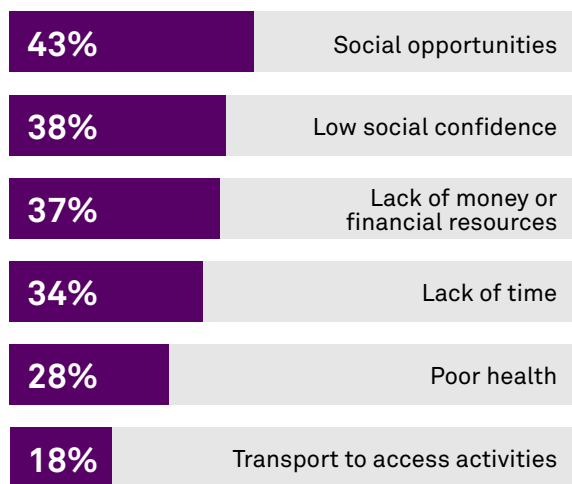
# Making connections



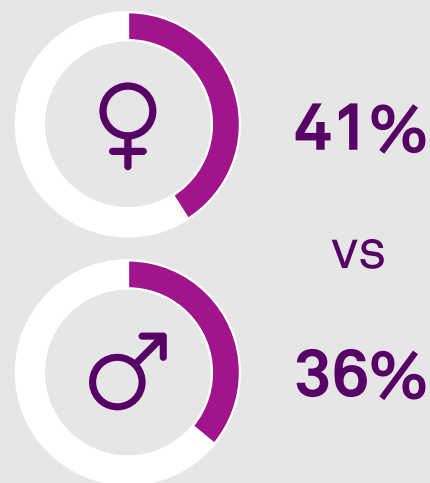
## What would make it easier to get involved in new activities?



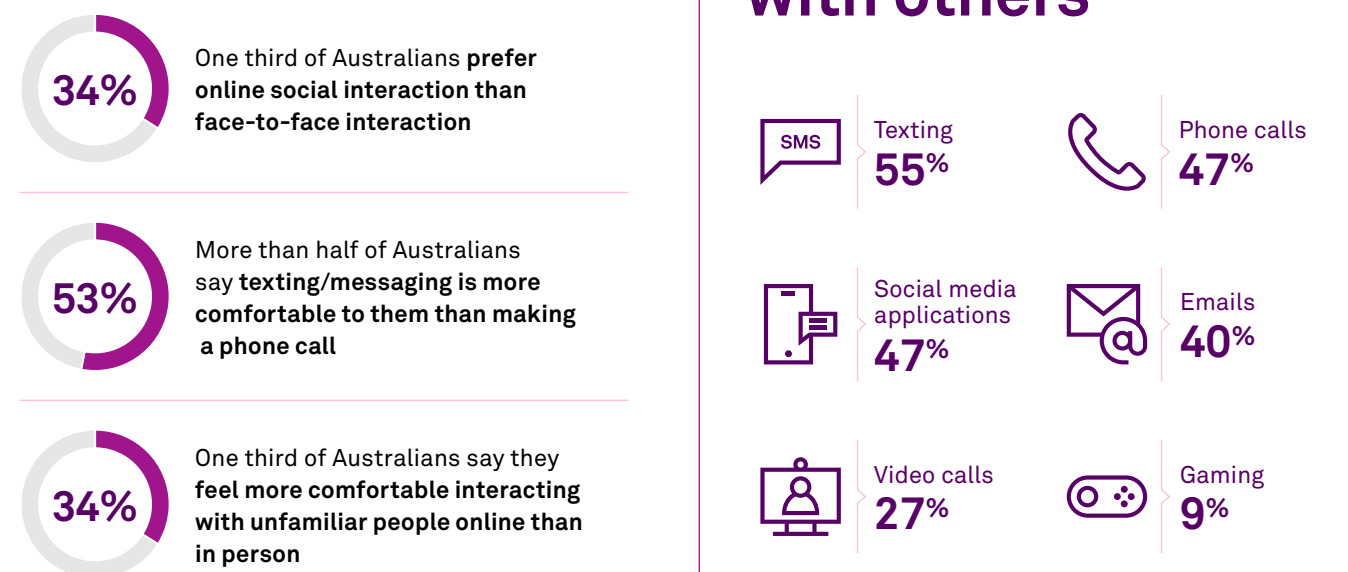
## Barriers for new meaningful connections



Women are more likely than men to say low social confidence is limiting them from building new meaningful social connections

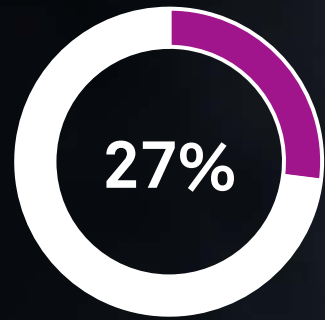


## How Australians like to connect with others

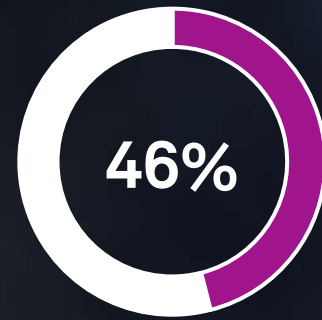




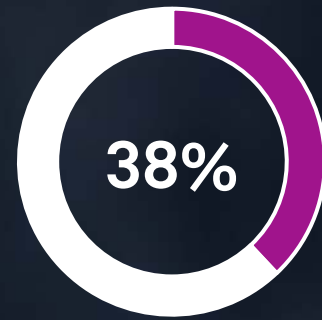
## Loneliness in the pandemic



More than one in four  
Australians say that **COVID-19**  
has caused them to experience  
loneliness for the first time



Almost half of  
Australians say they have  
felt lonelier as a result of  
the lockdown



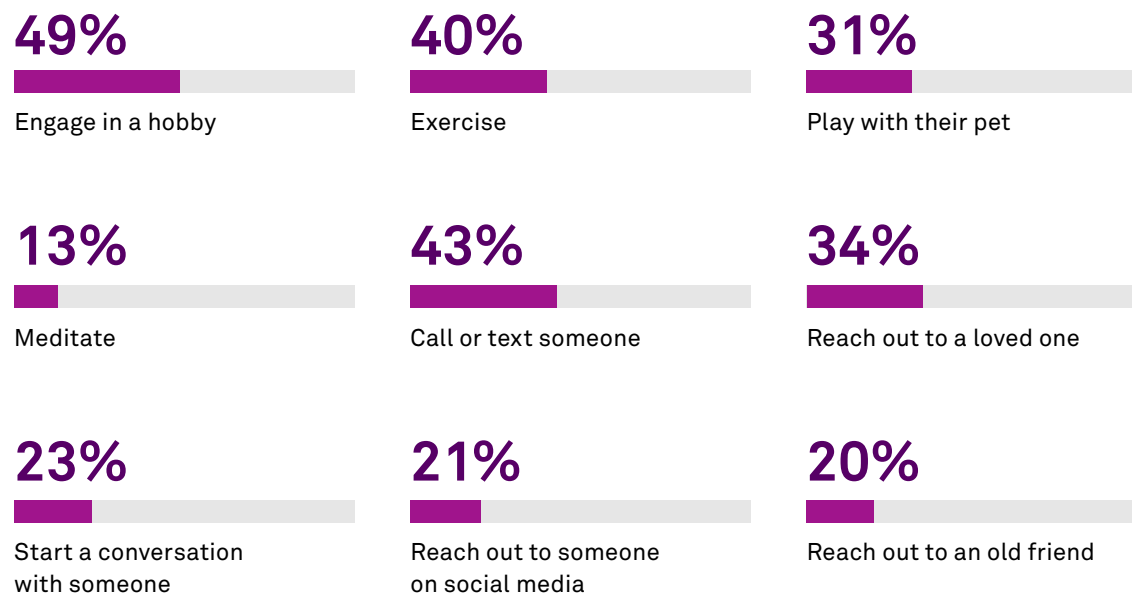
Almost two in five Australians  
say they have **never felt**  
more lonely than they have  
felt in lockdown



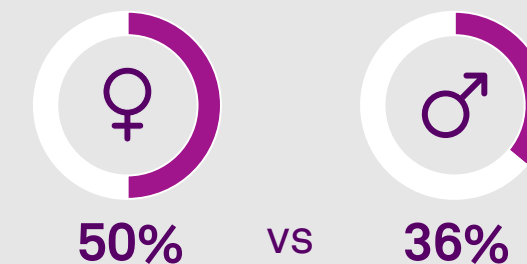


## Managing loneliness

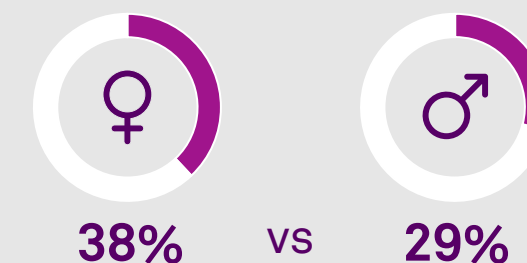
To help when they feel lonely, Australians:



Women who feel lonely are more likely than men to **call or text someone**



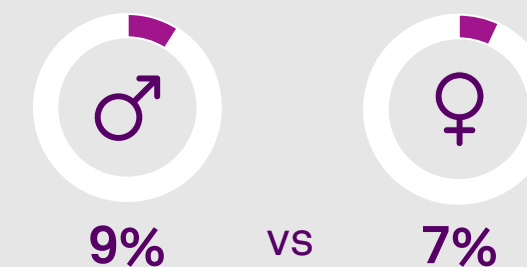
and reach out to a loved one to manage feelings of loneliness



You can help others manage feelings of loneliness by:



Men who feel lonely are more likely than women to say they do not do anything to manage feelings of loneliness





Spotlight on

## Millennials and Gen Z

Millennials and Gen Z are the loneliest age groups in society but also the most likely to be too embarrassed to admit it

**54%** of Gen Z and **51%** of Millennials say they **feel lonely either often, always or some of the time**, which is higher than all other generations

**51%** of Australians aged 18–24 label themselves as **the most lonely group in their community**

Lonely Gen Z Australians are **the generation most embarrassed to admit their feelings to others**

**52%** of Gen Z and **50%** of Millennials say they are **worried others will judge them if they say they are lonely** – more than all other generations

Younger Australians are more likely than their older counterparts to say that **when they feel lonely they do not talk to others about it** – Gen Z **68%**, Millennials **62%** and Gen X **65%**, compared to Baby Boomers **56%** and Silent **52%**

Gen Z is the most likely generation to **prefer to use social media (71%) and gaming (30%)** as technology platforms to **connect with others**

Spotlight on

## LGBTQI+ Community

LGBTQI+ Australians are **more than twice as likely to say they often or always feel lonely**

LGBTQI+ Australians who feel lonely are **almost twice as likely to say they feel lonely on the weekend**

LGBTQI+ Australians are **more likely to be worried others will judge them if they say they are lonely**

**63%** of Australians who identify as LGBTQI+ say it would be **easier to attend or get involved in events if it felt like a person like themselves would be welcome there**

Spotlight on

## Parenting

Throughout the pandemic we've never spent more time at home and with family, though COVID-19 has caused many Australian parents\* to experience loneliness for the first time

**48%** of Australian parents\* say they **feel lonely either often, always or some of the time**

COVID-19 has caused **2 in 5** Australian parents\* to **experience loneliness for the first time**

**1 in 2** Australian parents\* are **worried others will judge them if they say they are lonely**

**55%** of lonely Australian parents\* are **too embarrassed to admit it to others**

\*Parents with children under 18 at home





## About the research

This study was conducted online between 6-12 September 2021. The sample comprised of a nationally representative sample of 3,047 Australians aged 18 years and older. Following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates. The questionnaire was created by YouGov in consultation with Telstra and Dr Michelle H Lim, Scientific Chair & Chairperson, Ending Loneliness Together, Co-Director, Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection, Research Fellow & Clinical Psychologist, Iverson Health Innovation Research Institute, Swinburne University of Technology.

### Research methodology references

#### University of California Loneliness Scale 9 items (UCLA-LS-9)

Hawkley, L. C., Browne, M. W., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2005). How can I connect with thee? Let me count the ways. *Psychological Science*, 16(10), 798-804. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01617.x

#### ONS Loneliness Item

Office for National Statistics. *Measuring loneliness: guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys*. United Kingdom 2018

#### Acknowledgement

BBC Loneliness Survey & University of Manchester, Prof Pamela Qualter on the use of loneliness stigma questions

## Support services

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

Lifeline 13 11 14

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800

🔗 Find out more at [telstra.com/loneliness](https://telstra.com/loneliness)

