



Social Inclusion

City of Port Phillip Health Profiles

Feeling connected to people and places are important determinants of health. Communities that enable all citizens to play a full and useful role in the social, economic and cultural life of their community are likely to be healthier than those where people face insecurity, exclusion and deprivation. (World Health Organisation, 2003).

What is social inclusion

A socially inclusive society is one 'where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so that they can live in dignity. Social exclusion is 'the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of the person into the community' and can lead to people experiencing social isolation (Cappo, 2002).

There is a strong association between social isolation and early death driven by depressive symptoms and socioeconomic factors, including education, neighbourhood disadvantage and household income. (Elovainio, et al., 2017).

How connected and included are the residents of Port Phillip?

Many residents also feel that they have opportunities to participate in local community events and activities, feel pride, connection and enjoyment in living in their neighbourhood and have a good sense of safety and security. Prior to COVID-19 there was good evidence of community connectedness across Port Phillip:

- Port Phillip has a high proportion of residents who feel they live in a close-knit neighbourhood and that neighbours can be trusted (71.8 per cent which is in line with the Victorian average) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).
- Many residents feel that people in their neighbourhood are willing to help each other and they can get help in an emergency (72 percent which is lower than the Victorian average of 74 per cent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).
- 61 per cent of residents feel that they live in a close-knit neighbourhood (again in line with the Victorian average) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).
- Volunteering can bring meaning and purpose to life, increase social connections, self-esteem and wellbeing, relieve stress and alleviate symptoms of depression. Almost a fifth



of our population reported doing some form of voluntary work in 2016 (19.9 per cent vs 17.6 per cent of Greater Melbourne residents) (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

How connected and included are some groups in our community?

- Living alone can be an indicator for loneliness. In 2016, 35.2 per cent of Port Phillip households were **lone person households**, compared to 23.3 per cent in Victoria (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).
- **People from CALD backgrounds** consistently have higher levels, and greater numbers, of socially determined risk factors for mental health problems such as social isolation (Mental Health in Multicultural Australia, 2014).
- 26 per cent of **young** Australians experience a mental illness every year. One in eight young Victorians report feeling lonely and one in four are unable to find social support when they need it (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).
- **People living with greater socioeconomic disadvantage** are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological stress (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Social isolation and loneliness are linked to depression and poorer cardiovascular health (Heart Foundation, 2009). These effects are particularly pronounced amongst **homeless people** and **older Australians**.

COVID-19 Impact

Victorians in the first coronavirus lockdown of 2020 showed that people felt less socially connected. Data showed:

- 23 per cent of Victorians did not feel connected with others, up from 1 in 10 (10 per cent) in February 2020.
- 1 in 5 Victorians said the first lockdown put a strain on their relationships with the people they live with.
- 3 in 10 Victorians found it hard or very hard to stay connected to friends or family during lockdown.
- Staying connected to others during the first lockdown was most difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, young people, people who speak a language other than English at home and Victorians eligible for JobKeeper or Job Seeker.
- Those who continued to volunteer during the COVID-19 crisis had a significantly and substantially smaller decline in life satisfaction and psychological distress than those who stopped or who never volunteered in the first place. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).



Why this is important

- Those who are shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of people into the community can experience extreme forms of social isolation.
- Social isolation is proven to have negative effects on mental and physical health (Heart Foundation, 2009).
- Increasing social inclusion can lead to greater social cohesiveness and better standards of health and reduce premature mortality (World Health Organisation (WHO) Europe, 2003).
- As indicated in a number of Port Phillip Health profiles, there are some groups in our community who are at greater risk of social exclusion and isolation and consequent health impacts.

What is Council's role?

How are the State and Federal Governments increasing social inclusion?

Over recent years, the Federal Government has developed a number of social inclusion policies which aim to 1) reduce disadvantage and 2) increase social, civic and economic participation, and a greater voice combined with greater responsibility. The Government has also developed principles to approach social inclusion including:

- Building upon individual and community strengths
- Using evidence to inform policy
- Building partnerships with key stakeholders
- Developing tailored services
- Giving a high priority to early intervention and prevention, and planning for community sustainability (Heart Foundation, 2009).

As indicated in a number of Port Phillip Health Profiles, both the Federal and State government focus on addressing the economic, social and cultural drivers of social exclusion through development of a range of policies and programs relevant to 1) employment, 2) education, 3) housing and 4) discrimination, in all of its forms and 5) enhancing the built environment. These governments also strive to address the consequences of social exclusion and isolation such as 1) poor mental health, 2) substance misuse and 3) crime.

At the state level there are also specific programs, designed to reduce the social elements of isolation and loneliness. These programs are offered by Sport and Recreation Victoria, the Department of Education and Training, Creative Victoria and the Diversity and the Social inclusion located within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. These programs focus on increasing opportunities for engagement in community activities and connecting people to community life.



What is the City of Port Phillip's role in managing mental health?

Over the next four years Port Phillip will work with key stakeholders to address the economic, social and cultural drivers of social exclusion, as identified in the suite of Port Phillip Health profiles developed in 2021. In addition to this Port Phillip can:

- Ensure community infrastructure and facilities are welcoming, accessible and relevant to the needs of all community members now and into the future.
- Ensure that our built and natural environments are designed to maximise opportunities for social connection.
- Promote and strengthen social inclusion and community participation through a wide variety of community programs that build on community initiatives and include people of all ages and abilities. This includes programs designed to provide opportunities for participation in creative and physical activity.
- Provide targeted support to people at risk of experiencing social exclusion and isolation, by building community participation opportunities.
- Provide a diverse range of connection opportunities, utilising both technological (online and social media) and traditional (letter drop/ written/ verbal) methods.
- Promote volunteering by supporting and training volunteers to help provide a wider range of community services.

Who are our partners?

Maximising opportunity for social connection requires the input and support of community organisations. Some of our key partners in this endeavour will be those working in:

- Sport and Recreation and the arts,
- Community organisations such as the Port Phillip Community Group, Neighbourhood Houses, Sacred Heart Mission, South Port Day Links,
- Housing and welfare agencies,
- Ethno specific organisations and services for older adults.

What may change over the next five years?

- There is likely to be a long-term shift in more people working from home post COVID-19, which may increase levels of social isolation and change the way we interact with our built, natural and social environments.
- There will be continued use of digital platforms to supplement traditional programs and services.



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