



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 participate and contribute to the social, economic and cultural life of their community are likely to be healthier than those where people face insecurity, exclusion and deprivation.

What is social inclusion?

Social inclusion refers to when efforts are made to ensure that all people, irrespective of their background, have equal access to opportunities to reach their full potential in life. This may be done through policies and actions that promote equal access to services, as well as enabling people to participate in the community and decision-making processes that affect their lives (United Nations, 2023).

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 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. According to estimates from the 2020 Victorian Population Health Survey:

- 35.8 per cent of Port Phillip residents definitely agreed that most people could definitely be trusted, with 53.8 per cent saying sometimes and 9.6 per cent saying never or not often. This is compared to 36.1 per cent of the Victorian population saying they agree, 47.7 per cent saying sometimes and 14.2 per cent saying never or not often.
- 76.3 per cent of Port Phillip residents definitely agreed that multiculturalism makes life in the area better, with 16.6 per cent saying sometimes and 4.8 per cent saying never or not often. This is compared with the percentage of 63.5 per cent of the Victorian, 23.5 per cent and 6.7 per cent for each category respectively.
- 50.9 per cent definitely had feelings of being valued by society, with 38.8 per cent stating sometimes they did, and 7.6 per cent stating they never or did not often. This is compared to 51.6 per cent, 34.2 per cent and 11 per cent for the Victorian population respectively.



- 97.3 per cent of residents said they have close friends or family whom they talk to regularly, while 2.7 per cent said they did not. This is compared to 95.2 per cent of the Victorian population saying yes, and 4.7 per cent saying no (Department of Health, 2022).

Please note that these are estimates and usually a larger sample size would be collected from to have more accurate statistics. However, a larger sample was not used in this instance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that results should be interpreted with caution.

Additionally, in the 2022 Community Satisfaction Survey, 90 percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “you feel proud of, connected to and enjoy living in your neighbourhood”. 84 per cent of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that “the City of Port Phillip is a welcoming and support place for everyone including people from varied cultural and religious backgrounds, ages, gender and sexualities” (City of Port Phillip, 2022).

How connected and included are people in our community?

- **Living alone**, while enjoyed by some, can be an indicator for loneliness. According to 2021 Census data, 41 per cent of Port Phillip residents were living in lone person households, higher than Greater Melbourne at 23.7 per cent. This is an increase from 35.2 per cent of Port Phillip residents living in lone person households in 2016 (.id, 2023).
- People from **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (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).
- **Young adults** are one of the most likely groups to experience loneliness. For example, young adults (aged 18-24 years) were more likely than other age cohorts to feel higher levels of social isolation during COVID-19 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021).
- **People with disability** have historically been excluded from various facets of society such as employment, education, community access and cultural activities. Whilst this is improving with the increased recognition of the rights of people with disability, there is still more work to be done in promoting social inclusion for people with disability, with some basic data below to illustrate:
 - For example, according to the Australians Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, “more than one quarter (27 per cent or 1.1 million) of people with disability aged 5 and over living in households, do not leave home as often as they would like. A further 0.9 per cent (or 38000) do not leave home at all (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).
 - Additionally, data from the 2017 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey indicated that almost “4 in 10 (39 per cent) of people with disability aged 15-64 are not satisfied with their local community, compared with 27 per cent of those without disability” (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022).



- **The LGBTIQ+ community** have also historically been excluded from society, but this is improving with increased social acceptance and inclusion, as well as recognition of rights. In the context of the City of Port Phillip, increased inclusion has been seen in hosting events as part of the Midsumma Festival, including the Flag Raising Ceremony and the Pride March. However, it should be noted that this community still experiences discrimination, and homophobia and transphobia are ongoing issues that impact social inclusion.
- **Single parents**, particularly **single mothers**, may be disconnected from the community and their own friends and family, in trying to meet work demands as well as care for their children. This may be exacerbated by the fact that having one source of income for themselves and their children may create financial strain and place them in a lower socio-economic status.
- People with **lower incomes** or of a **lower socioeconomic status** are more likely to experience social exclusion due to potentially not being able to afford to partake in activities or services that cost money. This can also be exacerbated by limited involvement in education and leaving school early, making it potentially difficult to gain employment.

Current impacts on social inclusion

The impact of COVID-19 on social inclusion has been progressively lessening in the post-lockdown context, as Australia has entered a 'COVID-normal' era. However, it should be noted that this may not apply to people with disability, people who are immunocompromised or older people, as these groups may still be more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19. As such, people from these groups may not be regularly integrating into society, and they may minimise physical social interaction due to the threat of COVID-19 transmission. This may be compensated for by using phones and technology to keep socially connected with friends and family. However, the 'digital divide', i.e. the unequal access to technology and the internet, means that some people may experience more severe social isolation or loneliness. Additionally, as some people, particularly older people, may have less digital literacy than others, this creates a further barrier to social integration via phones and online means.

Why is social inclusion 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.



- 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. 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,
- Culturally and linguistically specific organisations and services for older adults.

What may change over the next five years?

- With working from home becoming more commonplace and widespread in workplaces, there is a risk that people may experience more social isolation and loneliness from not having as much regular social interaction with colleagues. While this may not be an issue for some, these interactions may be more important for people with smaller social networks.
- Backlash and discrimination may occur that disrupts social inclusion and cohesion. For example, the anti-LGBTIQA+ protest that occurred outside the Victorian Pride Centre in December 2022 caused the postponement of a community event. Issues with events like these may have implications in the future for people wanting to attend and increase their participation in the community.
- In a post-lockdown and 'COVID-normal' society, it is likely that the use of digital platforms to supplement traditional programs and services will continue. This may expose ongoing issues concerning the digital divide and digital literacy within the community. Efforts are ongoing to address these issues, which are hoped to lessen in this time period.



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