

Media Release

The Hon Luke Donnellan MP
Minister for Child Protection
Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers



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KEEPING LOCAL COMMUNITIES CONNECTED DURING CORONAVIRUS

Victorians experiencing loneliness or social disconnection due to coronavirus will receive support from the Australian Red Cross and local community organisations with one call to the coronavirus hotline, thanks to a new Victorian Government initiative.

Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan has launched the Community Activation and Social Isolation initiative with more than \$6 million over six months to support people experiencing loneliness or social disconnection as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The initiative is part of the Victorian Government's \$59.4 million mental health and wellbeing package, helping Victorians with additional supports to deal with significant changes to our lives as a result of the pandemic.

For many Victorians, physical distancing and social or work-related restrictions have led to feelings of loneliness and disconnection. For those already lonely or isolated before the pandemic, it's been even harder to get help to feel happy and well.

The Community Activation and Social Isolation initiative will expand the Victorian coronavirus hotline (1800 675 398) by partnering with the Australian Red Cross whose volunteers have been trained in psychological first aid to provide emotional support and help to callers who may be distressed or anxious.

The hotline will also link people in need to community connectors for local practical supports and social activities, such as video chats, online book clubs or fitness groups.

To help older Victorians stay connected and participate in social activities during the pandemic, a Social Support Hub has also been set up at the Victorian Government's Seniors Online website at seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/services-information/social-support-hub.

Seniors can find out what services and activities are available in their local area via the Hub. The Hub will be regularly updated with information and links to other community based organisations offering support and activities to older Victorians, including information about phone line support and local community connectors.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Luke Donnellan

"The coronavirus pandemic has brought into even sharper focus the importance of community and social connections to improve health and wellbeing. This initiative is about people getting the help they need safely and locally."

"If you're feeling lonely, give the coronavirus hotline a call on 1800 675 398 and press three to speak to an Australian Red Cross volunteer who will provide a friendly ear and can connect you to supports in your local community."

Quote attributable to Sue Cunningham, Red Cross Victorian Director

"We are understandably hearing stories of people feeling isolated and lonely. Some have concerns about job loss and finances. Many people are distressed and are needing someone to turn to. We are helping by providing that friendly listening ear and caring voice, linking them into local supports, and giving vital information."

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