

07 August 2026

MEDIA RELEASE

Community network to lead \$6m project to address loneliness and strengthen belonging among older Australians

A national project to address loneliness and social isolation among older Australians has been launched. The initiative brings together organisations from the social welfare, community and philanthropic sectors to help older people experience greater connection, participation and belonging – and build more intergenerational links.

Launched in July 2026 and funded by the JO and JR Wicking Trust managed by Equity Trustees, Weaving Connections is a three-year, \$6 million investment in community-led action that recognises some of the most effective responses to loneliness and social isolation already exist within communities, but are often under-resourced, not connected to one another or overlooked in broader policy and funding approaches.

Loneliness and social isolation can have significant impacts on older people's health and wellbeing, including increased risks of depression, heart disease and early death. Lonely older adults have a 58% higher risk of developing dementia compared to less lonely peers.

Rather than funding many separate programs, the Wicking Trust specifically wanted to play a field catalysing role by convening a group of trusted organisations working in communities to collaborate, share learnings and create greater impact.

The Wicking Trust is partnering with the Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association (ANHCA), Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR), Ending Loneliness Together, Relationships Australia and Council of the Ageing (COTA) Australia, along with Community Foundations Australia (CFAus), which is convening the ecosystem.

Announcing the project in Loneliness Awareness Week, Susie Meagher, Grant Program and Social Impact Manager at Equity Trustees, said: "The idea is to get the funding out to organisations that have deep community roots – to those people who know where it needs to go.

"So it's weaving connections between the grant partners but also ensuring that they then weave those connections to the older Australians to get them closer to the activities, initiatives and people that matter to them at this stage of their lives."

Susie said that she hopes that older Australians themselves and their communities are involved in funding decisions and that the learnings are not just looped back to the national partners but also to the funding community.

Currently only 1% of philanthropic funding is directed to programs for age-related issues, said Susie, so she hopes other funders see the benefits of the initiative. Loneliness affects all age groups, so the intersectionality of the work will also be of interest to funders across those areas, she said.

"We're hoping that philanthropic funding can help with joining the dots and bringing the sector together so that it starts to become less a bunch of organisations operating separately, albeit well, and becomes more of a movement," she said.

Social isolation (the objective lack of social contact) and loneliness (the subjective feeling of disconnection), both require responses that are relationship-based, trusted and grounded in communities. Through the program, older Australians will be supported to age with dignity, inclusion, choice and meaningful social connection.

As the national field catalyst for community philanthropy, CFAus convenes an Ageing Well Impact Community, a networked group of 11 community foundations that have received funding from the Wicking Trust to explore and launch initiatives in their communities. The group includes community foundations working in place across the continent, as well as Indigenous- and community-led funds and Australia's first national LGBTQIA+ community foundation. The group has begun to build its shared knowledge about ageing well as a base from which to act.

Georgia Mathews, Co-CEO of CFAus, said: "This is the first time that the network of community foundations has entered into a highly trusting, multi-year learning partnership with national expert organisations to promote ageing well in their communities.

"We're excited to work with others to explore what it takes to shift conditions at a national level, and experiences at a community level, to ensure all Australians feel well-connected and have a sense of belonging as they age."

There will also be a particular focus on valuing and applying First Nations cultural knowledge and ways of thinking and doing to the group's work, along with considering the health and wellbeing disparities that persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Government and health agencies define 'older' Indigenous Australians as starting at age 50, compared to age 65 for non-Indigenous Australians. This difference reflects a lower overall life expectancy and a higher rate of chronic illness occurring at a much earlier age in Indigenous communities.

Priority areas identified through early community conversations include increasing consistent in-person support for older people, creating accessible opportunities to participate in volunteering and intergenerational engagement, strengthening neighbourhood hubs and gathering places, and supporting people to remain connected in their communities via vital infrastructure such as housing and transport.

By investing in relationships, community leadership and expertise, Weaving Connections aims to build a stronger ecosystem that enables all older Australians to experience meaningful connection, purpose and belonging in everyday life. "There's so much we can learn so that older Australians can continue to contribute and feel that they belong if we can remove some of the barriers to inclusion," said Susie.

"A great outcome would be that we start to see a shift in how we view older Australians - that they are assets in their communities."

Learn more about Impact Communities on our website. Contact dee@cfaustralia.org.au for more.

About Community Foundations Australia

Community Foundations Australia is the national support organisation for Australia's community foundation network. It works with community groups, community foundations and other forms of community-led philanthropy, partners and government to advocate for community governance models, and to empower local communities to create lasting social change.