



beyondblue
Depression. Anxiety.



Connections matter

Helping older people stay socially active

Cover image: Sue (left) helps Betty stay connected through the Community Visitors Scheme. Find out more on page 34.
Photo courtesy of the Australian Red Cross.

Contents

Introduction	2
Why connections matter	4
Connections and ageing	6
Reflecting on your connections	8
Make a change – helping yourself	11
Make a change – helping others	15
What is available?	18
Group activities	20
Support your community	28
Have a conversation – over the phone	31
Have a conversation – in person	33
Stay connected online	36
Where to find out more	41

Introduction



Connections matter. Strong ties with family, friends and the community provide people with happiness, security, support and a sense of purpose. Research shows that being connected to others is important for mental wellbeing and can be a protective factor against anxiety and depression.

However, not everyone is as connected as they would like to be. Nearly a decade of annual survey data shows

that the number of Australians feeling lonely is increasing over time. In any given year, one in 10 people will experience a period of loneliness.¹ Building and maintaining good social connections at any age is important, but as people get older, the risk factors for experiencing loneliness increase. Having meaningful contact with other people and being part of a community can help you feel more positive and avoid loneliness.



Getting started

Loneliness is not an inevitable part of getting older, and there are lots of things you can do if you are feeling lonely or disconnected. This booklet provides some practical and evidence-based suggestions to help you strengthen your social network.

It is designed to help you:

- understand why social connections are important for wellbeing
- recognise when and why loneliness might occur
- understand how well connected you are
- find ideas and inspiration for connecting with others
- take the next step and actively expand or improve your social network.

Who is this booklet for?

This booklet is for older Australians and their families and friends. It is also useful for carers and people working in residential and community aged care.

Why connections matter



How connected do you feel with others? Did you know that social connections can improve your physical and mental health and wellbeing?

external circumstances, such as the loss of a loved one. However, feeling lonely for extended periods of time can affect your physical and mental wellbeing.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a feeling of a lack of companionship or quality relationships with other people. Many people feel lonely at different times in their lives. Feeling lonely is a normal human emotion and is simply a sign of wanting contact with people. It is often the result of

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that people can recover from loneliness and many activities, such as volunteering, can stop people feeling lonely in the first place.²

How loneliness can affect our health

There is a well-established link between loneliness and both mental and physical health.³ Research has found that lonely people, in comparison to their non-lonely counterparts:

- are more likely to report symptoms of depression
- are admitted to hospital more frequently
- have double the risk of obesity
- have higher blood pressure and a greater risk of heart attack.



Social connections and wellbeing

Social connections are closely tied to our physical and mental wellbeing. Having someone to talk to and support you is important. We know that older people who remain connected with others and have strong relationships are likely to:

- report better quality of life and satisfaction with their life
- have delayed progression of dementia and mental decline
- need less domestic support and enjoy greater independence.⁴

Simply put, social connections, interactions and networks matter. Overall, social connections can improve your physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Connections and ageing



Do you feel lonelier than you used to? Loneliness can be felt by people of all ages, but as we get older, risk factors that might lead to loneliness begin to increase. These include:

Lifestyle changes and loss

Major lifestyle changes and personal losses associated with later life can have a significant effect on social connections and result in feelings of loneliness.

Examples of these types of transitions and losses include:

- retirement
- redundancy or unplanned retirement
- loss of driving licence
- moving house
- death of a partner, relative or close friend.⁵

Personal circumstances

For some people, older age is associated with decreased mobility and/or an increased need for assistance due to:

- illness or disability, including health conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis and dementia
- becoming a carer for a partner or other family member
- perceptions about a lack of safety and security
- lack of facilities, such as adequate footpaths or health care options
- limited transport options.



“It was losing my husband first, and he was a perfect man, and you know, I did go down.”

– *Betty, Queensland*

Reflecting on your connections



If you feel lonely or disconnected at times and would like to make a change, a good starting point is to think about all the ways you are currently connected to other people.

Asking yourself the following questions can help you to understand your existing social network and identify areas where you could develop new connections.⁶

1. Friends and family

How often do you get together with friends or family for outings, meals or special events?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every few months
- Once a year or less

2. Chatting and catching up

How often do you stop for a chat, talk on the phone or chat online with other people?

- Daily
- Two to five times a week
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every few months
- Once a year or less

3. Activities and interests

Do you belong to any formal or informal interest groups? These can include fitness, theatre, cards, cooking, hobby and cultural groups or sports, car, social and book clubs.

- Yes
- No

If **yes**, how often do you attend?

- Twice a week or more
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every few months
- Once a year or less

4. Helping out and volunteering

How often do you do something to help someone? For example, help a neighbour, cook a meal or clean for a sick friend, or volunteer.

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every few months
- Once a year or less

5. Community and local events

How often do you attend community events? These can include events such as local markets, school fetes, music festivals, theatre, sporting events and local government activities.

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Every few months
- Once a year or less

Reflect on your responses and ask yourself: **“Am I as connected as I would like to be?”** If the answer is “No” then think about what types of connections you would like to develop. For example, some people may want more time with friends or family, while others would like to meet new people in their community.

The next few pages provide some practical advice on how to improve your connections and highlight some of the great programs available to older Australians.



Make a change – helping yourself



Once you have identified the types of connections you would like to make, there are lots of practical things you can do to achieve them. Here are some suggestions based on what has worked for other people who have experienced periods of loneliness.

TIP: START SMALL

If you want to make a change, try starting small and doing something within your comfort zone.

Make a plan

Creating an action plan can help you think about the steps you'll need to take to achieve your goals. The following pages have some examples of how you could approach the situation, as well as a blank template you can use for your own personal action plan.

My plan

Current situation	Goal	Actions	Outcomes
Example 1 I don't see or speak to my grandchildren as often as I would like.	Speak to or see my grandchildren at least once a fortnight.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell my daughter I would like to be in contact more often and why. 2. Discuss options/ideas for how and when we could do this. 	We have scheduled a regular Skype call every fortnight and they will visit at least once a month.
Example 2 I have just moved to a new area where I don't know anyone.	I would like to meet some like-minded people in my local community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Call the local council and find out what activities are on. 2. Trial some activities that I am interested in. 	I tried a tai chi class, book club and walking group. I really like the people in the book club and will go once a week.

Current situation	Goal	Actions	Outcomes

Research your options

Depending on where you live, there are many community resources that can help you find what you're looking for.

Three quick steps to find out what is available in your local area are:

1. Visit or call your **local council** to find out about local groups or programs.
2. Read your **local newspaper** or pamphlets for upcoming activities, events and other opportunities.
3. Visit your **local centres**, such as senior centres, libraries or community spaces, to find out what they offer.

If you receive or are eligible for Home and Community Care (HACC) services, you can also access social support services as part of your personal care package. Talk to your current service provider about options or call the national HACC information line on **1800 200 422** to find out about services in your area.

Talk to your family and friends

Sometimes we keep our feelings of loneliness to ourselves for fear of being a burden to others or being seen to be negative. However, if your family and friends don't know there's an issue, they can't help you find a solution.

The *beyondblue* website has tips and videos that can help you plan what you might say. Visit **www.beyondblue.org.au/conversations**

TIP: KEEP TRYING

It's important to remember that if at first you don't find something you enjoy, there are always other opportunities. Many of the older adults who shared their experiences for this booklet have trialled various activities and social groups until they found what suited them.

Talk to a health professional

Sometimes the prospect of meeting new people or talking about your feelings of loneliness with someone you know can seem overwhelming. This is especially the case if you are feeling extremely lonely, or are experiencing anxiety and depression. Social anxiety can also be a major barrier to forming connections.

However, social skills training and cognitive behaviour therapy have been proven to help people overcome these challenges.⁷ Talking to your GP in the first instance can help you find the right program and qualified people to support you.

TIP: FIND BRIDGE BUILDERS

Identify people in the community who have good connections, such as activity program coordinators or well-connected friends, and ask them to introduce you to others.

“Since retiring my husband and I have become involved in activities which increase our social connectedness. We joined a lawn bowls club where we play competitively and where we organise weekly social bowls days with lunch provided. We both volunteer with the Smith Family one day a week and participate in online mentoring. I make greeting cards and maintain regular online correspondence with a like-minded crafter in the USA. Of course we have made new friends which leads to meeting for coffee or meals and other social activities. These social connections have been invaluable to us, particularly when my husband faced some very significant health issues. Knowing that others cared and offered support was very comforting and affirming.”

– Zoë, Victoria

Make a change – helping others



If you are worried that someone you know is feeling lonely or isolated but aren't sure how to help, here are some simple and practical suggestions.

Make that call

If you think someone you care about is lonely but are unable to visit very often, try making a five or 10 minute call every day. Calling regularly will mean shorter conversations, but research shows that just making regular contact,

however short, can significantly reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing.

Find opportunities and offer support

Finding information on activities and services available for older adults can be time-consuming. It can also be very daunting to talk to new people or turn up alone to an activity or event, especially if you are joining an established group. Friends and family can help by

offering to help find activities or interest groups, organising and scheduling the activities, and coming along to the first few meetings for support.

Help them connect online

Technology makes it easier than ever to connect remotely with friends and family. Older Australians who are unfamiliar with modern technology may be missing out on great opportunities to connect online with loved ones separated by distance. You can help a friend or family member by introducing them to simple programs like Skype, email or Facebook and supporting them as they learn the basics.

Rally the troops

Keep your extended network – friends, family and community – aware of what’s happening, so they can proactively maintain their connections with the person you are worried about.

Share the love

Social connections aren’t just about the quantity of relationships and contacts. Quality is often the most important factor for mental wellbeing. Reminding someone that you care about them and appreciate having them in your life can make them feel like they are a valued member of your family or social network.



“Since moving to a small country town from the city, I have volunteered with many of the local organisations. One of the best things I participated in was the council-run Community Leadership Program, open to people of any age. Through this experience, I was required to pick a project to enhance community awareness. I chose to reach out to those people feeling socially disconnected or isolated either by distance

or hardship, by making them aware of the local emergency services available to them. I was so humbled and inspired by this experience; it gave me a new sense of self-worth and purpose, which I feel I only gained through helping others. I have gained many friends through volunteering and since gone on to gain a degree, with a specialisation in counselling. It has turned my life around.”

– *Kaye, Victoria*

What is available?



The following section outlines some of the types of activities you can participate in and highlights some great social programs running in different parts of Australia. The activities have been grouped as follows:

Group activities

Research has found that joining group activities can be particularly effective at reducing and protecting against loneliness. Some group activities highlighted in this booklet include:

- enjoy a meal (page 20)
- spark an interest (page 22)
- join a club (page 23)
- physical fitness (page 24).

Support your community

Volunteering offers the dual benefits of meeting new people while at the same time contributing to your local community and/or a meaningful cause. There are all sorts of volunteering roles available to suit you and keep you interacting with others.

Have a conversation

Having regular conversations with other people is an important way of staying connected. There are programs that can help you find opportunities to talk to interesting people both in person and over the phone.

TIP: TALK ABOUT IT

Don't be afraid to share your feelings with loved ones. If they don't know, they can't help you.

Stay connected online

The internet can help you to connect with family and friends, wherever they live. There are also opportunities for older adults to learn about getting online, as well as protecting your privacy.



Group activities



Enjoy a meal

Sharing a meal is a great way to meet new people and enjoy a conversation. Meals can be at a local club or café, held in a community centre or hosted at someone's home. One example is the **Eating With Friends** program.

Eating With Friends (Tasmania) works with communities and volunteer groups to establish regular group meal programs

that help to strengthen communities, reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing.

Eating With Friends operates on the simple premise of bringing people together for a nutritious meal with friends. Each group is different and tailored to what works for the local community – some involve eating out at cafés and restaurants, others are held at local halls where volunteers organise and cook meals.

Some programs are run with local high schools where students organise, cook and host a meal, helping them to gain practical hospitality skills.

Benefits of the Eating With Friends program include:

- increased enjoyment of eating with others
- improved social interaction
- nutritional benefits of eating a broader variety of food than when eating alone.⁸

INTERESTED?

If you live in Tasmania visit www.tach.asn.au/projects/eating-with-friends to find a group near you.

In other states, meal programs are often run by local councils, community centres and local service providers.

Contact your local council or one of the information services listed in the back of this booklet to find a program near you.



Spark an interest

Developing a new interest or building on an existing one is another way to increase your social circle.

By joining a group, you can meet new people and enjoy the company of others who share your interest.

There are many different opportunities, such as arts and craft groups, Men's Shed activities, cultural pursuits, or adult learning courses.

Activities that involve some form of education or learning can improve wellbeing and provide social benefits. The type of learning does not have to be formal. Informal learning opportunities can be just as effective.⁹

What matters is getting involved.

INTERESTED?

Whatever your passion or interest, there's likely to be a group for you to join. This might include:

Singing

Sing Australia (national) has 150 groups around Australia. Groups meet regularly to sing and hold other social activities. Anyone can join and there are no auditions. For more information visit www.singaustralia.com.au/home

Gardening

The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. (national) is an umbrella organisation for 670 clubs throughout Australia. To find gardening clubs in your area or for more information visit www.gardenclubs.org.au

Join a club

National Seniors Australia

is Australia's largest not-for-profit organisation for adults aged 50 years and older, with more than 200,000 members and a network of branches across the country.

Branches offer a place for older adults to discuss community issues, participate in social events, hear informative guest speakers and meet like-minded friends.

Some branches run activities such as movies, games evenings, walks, coffee mornings, lunches, dinners or exercising. Others go on outings to theatres, zoos, tenpin bowling, wine tastings or visit local monuments or gardens, while some organise domestic or overseas holidays together.

For many members, being part of the group is simply a chance to get out and meet others at the local RSL, restaurant or a community meeting place, and there is often little or no cost involved.

More information

1300 76 50 50

www.nationalseniors.com.au

"It is comforting to be in such a caring environment especially when families are far removed. Knowing people who are easy to approach when support is needed is very reassuring.

Some of the friendships we have made in the last few years, through this activity, seem as though they have been forever."

- Hazel, National Seniors Member, Queensland

"I was lonely after my husband passed away so I joined a National Seniors Australia branch as a social outlet.

Being a member of a branch has made me much happier because it has given me the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends to arrange social meetings or go on trips with."

- Caroline, National Seniors Member, Queensland

Physical activity

Taking part in a group physical activity can be a good way to stay connected without feeling pressured to make conversation. It also has all-round physical and mental wellbeing benefits.

Physical activity in later life can reduce the risk of developing long-term physical health conditions, depression, and dementia, as well as increasing the chances of healthy ageing.¹⁰

Local councils and community centres usually run a variety of physical activity programs. For example, the **Southern Gold Coast 60 & Better Program** involves physical activities, such as walking groups, exercise classes and social activities, combined to improve health and wellbeing.

National programs include **Living Longer Living Stronger™** and **Strength for Life**, which are run by Council on the Ageing (COTA) groups. See page 43 for contact details.

“The Living Longer Living Stronger™ program was just what I needed. I lost 25kg, my body’s stronger, I’m fitter, leaner and happier than I’ve been for a long, long time. I’m now 73, playing pennant squash and I volunteer for COTA to talk to groups of older people about the benefits of getting some exercise and looking after your health.”

– Bernard, *Living Longer Living Stronger™ program participant, Victoria*

INTERESTED?

A good place to start is your **local council**. Many local councils run a range of healthy lifestyle programs.

Another option to explore is **Bowls Australia**. Bowls clubs are all around Australia, and bowls is a great activity for people at any life stage.

www.bowlsaustralia.com.au

Heart Foundation Walking (national)

Since launching in 2007, the national Heart Foundation Walking Program has grown to over 1,100 groups throughout Australia. This program is a network of free community-based walking groups with volunteer walk organisers

who lead groups in your local area. Everyone is welcome. The program aims to support Australians to lead active, healthy lives by encouraging them to join or start Heart Foundation Walking groups. As well as being fun and a great way to meet new people, the groups cater for different fitness levels and abilities.

LIVING LONGER LIVING STRONGER™

Living Longer Living Stronger™ is a progressive strength/resistance training program for older people. Designed to increase strength, balance, flexibility and coordination, it helps to improve confidence and reduce the risk of falls.

Research demonstrates strength training can also help to prevent or manage conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, osteoporosis and depression.

The program is:

- delivered in a safe and welcoming environment with other older people
- tailored to your individual needs and goals
- low cost (about \$5 per session) and requires no long-term financial commitment
- offered at regular time slots at least twice a week
- supervised by skilled, qualified instructors.

After your session, you can socialise with others over a cup of tea or coffee.

There are also tailored groups for older adults, women, cultural groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and dog walkers.

Additional benefits

Walking for at least 30 minutes a day provides a range of heart-health benefits including maintaining healthy weight, increasing fitness and strength, and improving self-esteem and mental health.

Contact the Heart Foundation to find your nearest group, or for tips on how you can start your own group.

More information

1300 36 27 87

www.heartfoundation.org.au/walking



Image courtesy of the Heart Foundation.



Image courtesy of the Heart Foundation.

Heart Foundation Cairnlea walking group

Established in 2008, the Cairnlea walking group has around 15 regular walkers from various cultural backgrounds and age ranges. For many of the walkers, it was the first time in a long period that they had joined this type of group and participated in physical activity.

Each week the leaders take the group on a walk through the beautiful parks or walking trails in the area. After the walk they often go to a local café,

where they are now well known as the 'Cairnlea walkers'.

The walkers' fitness levels are increasing each week with many mentioning that they feel much better about themselves.

The group has now become much more than just a walking group, meeting regularly for extra social outings. Long-lasting friendships are formed, as well as a strong sense of social connection. They have also started to take part in other regular physical activity programs. This is a great achievement for many as their increased confidence has helped them to try new activities.

Support your community



Research consistently demonstrates the benefits of volunteering for physical and mental wellbeing.¹¹

There are a host of volunteering organisations and causes to give your time to and meet other people motivated to contribute.

Volunteer roles can be with large and established organisations, such as Rotary

or Lions, or smaller local groups and causes.

Timehelp (see page 29) is an example of an organisation that specifically recruits older adult volunteers.

You can also support others in your community, or further afield, by joining a club. Many clubs and associations blend social events with opportunities to help and learn.

Men in particular have been found to benefit from involvement in formal associations and community-based groups.

INTERESTED?

A good place to start is **Volunteering Australia**, the national peak body for volunteering.

Volunteering Australia can put you in contact with an organisation in your local area to discuss a role that suits your interests, skills and circumstances.

More information

(02) 6251 4060

www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Some clubs you might already know

Rotary clubs aim to bring people together to share ideas, build relationships, and take action. Membership is open to both women and men.

www.rotary.org.au

The **Country Women's Association** aims to improve conditions for women and children and make life better for families, especially those living in rural and remote Australia.

www.cwaa.org.au

Lions aims to meet the needs of communities on a local and global scale under the motto 'We Serve'. Membership is open to both women and men.

www.lionsclubs.org.au

TimeHelp (Victoria and New South Wales)

A school-based volunteer program operating in Victoria and New South Wales, Timehelp connects older adults and school students for education and wellbeing benefits.

The organisation provides structure and support by recruiting, screening, training and matching volunteers to school needs. Older adults volunteer two to three hours a week to help children in

local schools with activities, such as reading, literacy and numeracy support, gardening and assisting in the library.

More information

(03) 5277 3411

www.timehelp.com.au

“Many of the young people we support do not have a grandparent or positive older role model in their lives. Our volunteers say the experience is helping them physically and mentally and connecting them to young people in their community.”

– Timehelp coordinator

“For me, the best part is having the opportunity to make a difference to a child’s life. To see them become engaged with activities is just a wonderful experience.

Seeing their face light up when you offer words of encouragement and praise for their work is just priceless!

It also keeps me active, engaged and mentally stimulated.”

– Jill, Timehelp volunteer

Image courtesy of Timehelp.



Have a conversation – over the phone



Having a conversation can be a simple but important way to stay connected.

Many programs arrange regular telephone conversations between individuals and groups, matching people based on their common interests and preferences.

Two different examples of telephone conversations available include **TeleCHAT** and **Good Conversations**.

Red Cross TeleCHAT and TeleYARN (national)

Sometimes it can be difficult for people to get out to social activities and living alone means they might not always have someone to talk to. TeleCHAT provides a regular telephone call to people who would benefit from a social chat.

TeleCHAT may benefit people who:

- live alone
- find it difficult to get out of the house
- live in a remote location
- are living with a disability.

Through a regular telephone call, **TeleYARN** provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with social and cultural connections through relationships developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers.

More information

1300 885 698

www.redcross.org.au/misc/vulnerable-older-people.aspx

“I’ve really dug myself up and I’m now a much better person – and a lot of that is praise from Red Cross. It’s just nice to have someone build your self-esteem up again. It puts me in a good mood and helps keep me on an even keel.”

– Rebecca, TeleCHAT program participant

Brotherhood of St Laurence Good Conversations (Victoria)

Telephone conversations don’t just have to be one-to-one.

Good Conversations is a service provided by Brotherhood of St Laurence in Victoria. The service is for individuals in rural or remote Victoria, or those who are housebound, have limited mobility due to illness or disability, and/or adults aged 55 and above.

A one hour group-based conversation is facilitated by a trained volunteer. Conversations cover a range of topics, including current affairs, books, interests and hobbies.

More information

www.bsl.org.au/Services/Older-people/Care-in-the-community/Good-Conversations

Have a conversation – in person



If you would like to have conversations with people face to face, there is a range of programs that can help you.

Many programs use trained volunteers who can meet you for a regular chat or help you build your confidence to re-engage with society. Others simply give you an opportunity to chat informally with like-minded people on a regular basis.

Community Visitors Scheme (national)

Operating across Australia, the Community Visitors Scheme aims to improve the quality of life of socially isolated people by matching them with volunteers for a regular visit.

Volunteers are matched with an older adult or a small group of older adults who experience social isolation and whose

quality of life would be improved by friendship and companionship.

Meetings take place in people's homes where volunteers visit one-on-one with a person who receives a Home Care Package or who is in an aged-care facility.

Community Visitors Scheme volunteers visit at least once per fortnight. The visits are relaxed and social in nature, where the older person and the visitor might chat together, reminisce, listen to music, read the newspaper or play card games.

The benefits of receiving regular social contact for people who are socially isolated include improved wellbeing and mental health, and reduced feelings of anxiety or depression.

The scheme is a government-funded initiative of the Department of Health and Ageing and is administered by a number of community agencies, including Australian Red Cross.

More information

[www.redcross.org.au/
community-visitors-scheme.aspx](http://www.redcross.org.au/community-visitors-scheme.aspx)

Phone **My Aged Care** on
1800 200 422.

BETTY'S STORY

Through the **Community Visitors Scheme**, Betty was matched with Sue, a Red Cross volunteer. The pair hit it off immediately and Sue visits at least once a fortnight, sometimes more, to share conversation and to help Betty stay connected to the community outside the aged-care home.

Sue says that she and Betty have connections with many of the same people in the community.

"We just clicked," says Betty. For Betty, her visits from Sue mean that she enjoys her life living in an aged-care home. "I'm quite happy here, but I wouldn't be without Sue," she says. "She makes my day!"



MATES

MATES is an activity-based approach, which works to reconnect isolated people with their community. A trained volunteer works with an individual for 12 months to build their self-esteem and help them reconnect.

MATES is run by the Australian Red Cross.

www.redcross.org.au/mental-health-case-study-3.aspx

Probus

Probus is an association for older adults, providing members with opportunities to pursue interests and activities in the company of others. Single and mixed gender clubs are available.

www.probussouthpacific.org

Want to talk with other men?

There are increasing numbers of men's discussion groups around Australia that meet on a regular basis.

OM:NI stands for Older Men: New Ideas and involves regular

face-to-face men's discussion groups. The groups provide opportunities for men to build their self-esteem, make friends, and share knowledge, experience and concerns.

OM:NI is available in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania.

www.omni.org.au

TOMNET (The Older Men's Network) involves a mixture of activities, including a weekly men's meeting with guest speakers, discussions, and afternoon tea.

Member support and community connections programs provide peer support and help to expand social networks.

TOMNET is available in South West Queensland.

www.tomnet.org.au

The Australian Men's Shed Association is a national network of local sheds where men get together to socialise, make and fix things, and learn new skills.

www.mensshed.org

Stay connected online



Getting online to chat with family and friends can also help people stay connected.

Benefits of using online technology include:

1. Connecting or reconnecting with friends and family members.
2. Connecting with carers and services.
3. Using social networks to help bridge generation gaps.
4. Using the internet to find activities and events.
5. Attending face-to-face computer and internet training to learn skills and meet new people.¹²

There are other benefits to getting online in later life. As well as learning new skills and keeping your mind active, you can access online services, such as therapy and counselling, if you need them.

Social networking sites and other online tools are a great way to stay in touch, meet new people and find interesting information.

Getting started

Social networking sites

If everyone seems to be using Facebook, that's because the number of Facebook users is now over 1 billion. Facebook is just one example of the many online social networking sites connecting people. Social networking sites enable you to create a profile page and send messages to friends, share pictures or comment on other people's pictures, and share links to interesting articles.

If you are a newcomer to the online world and interested in social networking sites, **Broadband for Seniors** (page 38) can help you develop your computer skills. It is also a good idea to get someone you know who already uses Facebook or another networking site to help you set up your profile and introduce you to the different functions.



STAYING CONNECTED ONLINE – CHARLOTTE'S STORY

“Two years ago, I moved to a retirement village and away from friends. The move was far more severe on the emotions than I anticipated. I met some good people, but many were as hard of hearing as I was and so my main way of staying in touch was with people outside the village and through email.

My emails go to family, friends and commentators of interest to me here and overseas.”

Skype

Skype is an easy way to send and receive video calls and instant messages, as well as sharing documents.

To get started with Skype you need to download the application for your computer, laptop or mobile phone, set up an account, then start calling others on Skype.

FaceTime

FaceTime is a mobile application that allows you to call any of your friends or family, as long as both you and the person you are calling have FaceTime set up on your iPhone or iPad.



FaceTime means you can see your friends or family in a video chat, no matter how far away you are from them. All it takes is the push of a button and an internet connection.

Find out more about getting online

Broadband for Seniors is a great place to start learning about using technology to stay connected. Funded by the Australian Government, this national service provides older adults (aged 50 years and over) with free access to computers, internet and basic training.

Training in word processing, web browsing and sending emails is offered in-person at internet kiosks around Australia.

More information

1300 795 897

www.necseniors.net.au

Online communities

There is also a growing number of online communities, especially for older adults, where you can connect with other people and have conversations via discussion forums and live chat rooms.

Greypath

Greypath is a website aimed at people aged 50 and above. Launched over a decade ago, it is now the world's leading older adult website. Free to join, the website includes forums, chat, competitions, jokes and IT support.

www.greypath.com

University of the Third Age

University of the Third Age (U3A) Online is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. U3A is especially suited to older adults who are isolated either geographically, or through physical or social circumstances.

For a small annual membership fee, you can access over 45 self-paced short courses, as well as the members' lounge where you can take part in online social forums and wikis (knowledge exchange), live chat, and links to games.

www.u3aonline.org.au

Staying safe online

It's important to protect yourself online. Some steps to keep yourself and others safe include:

1. Check the privacy policy before joining a social network.
2. Review your privacy settings regularly.
3. Limit the amount of personal information that you post or give out online.
4. Be cautious about connecting with people you don't know online.

To learn more visit the following Australian Government websites:

www.staysmartonline.gov.au
for online safety and security.

www.scamwatch.gov.au
for information on the latest scams.

DID YOU KNOW?

Older adults involved in self-paced learning activities online, via University of the Third Age (U3A) Online, reported high levels of satisfaction, as well as personal, mental and social improvements.¹³

Where to find out more

Government organisations and programs

National

My Aged Care

www.myagedcare.gov.au

1800 200 422 (Available from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday, and 10am to 2pm on Saturdays).

My Aged Care is an Australian Government website and phone line with information on local aged care services, and advice on how to be active and healthy. My Aged Care can provide access to interpreters and translated materials.

State and Territory agencies

ACT

Seniors Information Online

www.communityservices.act.gov.au/wac/ageing/ACT_Seniors_Directory

NSW

Seniors Information Service

www.ageing.nsw.gov.au/ages_65/seniors_information_service

13 77 88 (general number)

13 14 50 (interpretation service)

Queensland

Seniors Enquiry Line

www.seniorenquiryline.com.au

1300 135 500

(interstate callers 07 3867 2500)

South Australia

Seniors

www.sa.gov.au/topics/seniors

Victoria

Seniors Information

1300 135 090

www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au

Western Australia

Seniors Information Service

6551 8800 (metro) and

1800 671 233 (country)

www.communities.wa.gov.au/communities-in-focus/seniors

There are no dedicated services for older adults in Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Please refer to the Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre on 1800 052 222.



Non-government organisations

COTA Australia (national)

(08) 8232 0422
www.cota.org.au

COTA (Council on the Ageing) is the peak body representing the interests and views of older adults, aged 50 years and over. COTA seeks to advocate, inform and influence all levels of Government, the business sector and the community on behalf of older adults.

To find out more, contact your COTA State or Territory representative.

COTA ACT

(02) 6282 3777
www.cotaact.org.au

COTA New South Wales

(02) 9286 3860
www.cotansw.com.au

COTA Northern Territory

(08) 8941 1004
www.cotant.org

COTA Queensland

(07) 3316 2999
www.cotaqld.org.au

COTA South Australia

(08) 8232 0422
www.cotasa.org.au

COTA Tasmania

(03) 6231 3265
www.cotatas.org.au

COTA Victoria

(03) 9654 4443
www.cotavic.org.au

COTA Western Australia

(08) 9321 2133
www.cotawa.org.au

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beyondblue


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Where to find more information

beyondblue

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 1300 22 4636

 Email or  chat to us online at www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

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headtohealth.gov.au

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