

Early Intervention and Social Determinants

At QAMH, we believe that the best mental health outcomes occur when responses are offered early in distress through a preventative lens. We also believe in the importance of addressing the broader social determinants of mental ill health such as housing instability, unemployment, domestic violence and poverty.

Here we have curated a list of resources which look beyond the medical model and confirm the significant benefits of early intervention and addressing the social determinants of mental ill health.

Resource Links

- **Mapping Mental Health Care**

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/27450e995475415ea9263333f48b9545>

This research commissioned by Mental Health Australia uses data on Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services as an indicator of access to mental health care, and shows a pattern of lower use of Medicare-subsidised mental health services in regional and remote areas, despite the higher rates of psychological distress and mental health conditions experienced compared to major cities. While this data does not specifically include our sector's services, it does suggest a greater role for Primary Health Network (PHN) commissioned mental health services which address regional health service needs and gaps in these areas.

- **A Call to Incorporate Social Justice into Mental Health Therapy**

<https://www.croakey.org/a-call-to-incorporate-social-justice-into-mental-health-therapy/>

In this article, Max Loomes, researcher at UNSW and mental health advocate, argues that more attention needs to be paid to addressing the social determinants of mental health, and calls for mental health workers and other professionals to utilise a social justice approach – once a consumer's personal resources are replenished – to encourage consumers to advocate for changes to societal circumstances instead of changing themselves.

- **The Nexus Between Trauma and Mental Health - MHPN Podcast**

<https://mhpn.org.au/podcasts/trauma-resilience-the-nexus-between-trauma-and-mental-health/>

In this podcast episode from the Trauma and Resilience series by the Mental Health Practitioner's Network, our host continues to lead the trauma focused conversation identifying what drives different responses from people to traumatic events. Humans are resilient, and most people who experience trauma can and do recover without professional help. In this episode, the hosts discuss the complexities of trauma responses and what, other

than the traumatic event, can contribute to the range of mental health problems that may develop after the trauma experience.

- **Physically Active Video Gaming**

[Exergaming \(physically active video gaming\) for Mental Health Service Users in a Community Mental Health Care Setting - Study](#)

Exergaming (gaming involving physical movement) is increasingly used to improve physical activity across the lifespan. This study explored engagement of mental health service users with exergaming to increase physical activity in a community mental health care setting. Although the sample size is small, it does provide some evidence that facilitating exergaming has the potential to engage people living with severe mental illness in physical activity leading to possible additional health benefits.

- **Successive Australian Generations Suffering Worse Mental Health than the One Before**

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/nov/28/successive-australian-generations-suffering-worse-mental-health-than-the-one-before-study-shows>

New research has shown that each successive generation of Australians since the 1950s is suffering worse mental health than the generation who came before them. A study led by the University of Sydney using the nationally representative Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey has found that people born in the 1990s have poorer mental health for their age than any previous generation. They are also not experiencing better mental health as they age, as earlier generations have. Although previous research comparing generations might find someone in their 50s to be happier than someone in their 30s, this is the first time it has been shown that this is a birth cohort difference, rather than a difference in age.

- **The Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia**

[The worsening rental crisis in Australia \(apo.org.au\)](#)

This interim report from the Community Affairs References Committee on the Senate Inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia provides:

- an overview of current housing landscape and policy context;
- a summary of the experiences of renters and describes the many difficulties and challenges renters face;
- evidence regarding specific cohorts facing additional barriers to renting and the mental health impacts; and
- an overview of the key factors underlying the current rental crisis.

Overall, the report shows that there is a strong link between the power imbalance experienced by renters and their mental health.

- **A Call to Incorporate Social Justice into Mental Health Therapy**

[A call to incorporate social justice into mental health therapy – Croakey Health Media](#)

In this article, Max Loomes, researcher at UNSW and mental health advocate, argues that more attention needs to be paid to addressing the social determinants of mental health, and calls for mental health workers and other professionals to utilise a social justice approach – once a consumer’s personal resources are replenished – to encourage consumers to advocate for changes to societal circumstances instead of changing themselves.

- **The Nexus Between Trauma and Mental Health - MHPN Podcast**

[MHPN - Podcasts](#)

This podcast episode from the Trauma and Resilience series by the Mental Health Practitioner’s Network continues the trauma focused conversation identifying what drives different responses from people to traumatic events. Humans are resilient, and most people who experience trauma can and do recover without professional help. In this episode, the hosts discuss the complexities of trauma responses and what, other than the traumatic event, can contribute to the range of mental health problems that may develop after the trauma experience.

- **Exergaming (physically active video gaming) for Mental Health Service Users in a Community Mental Health Care Setting**

[Exergaming \(physically active video gaming\) for mental health service users in a community mental health care setting: an ethnographic observational feasibility study | BMC Psychiatry | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

Exergaming (gaming involving physical movement) is increasingly used to improve physical activity across the lifespan. This study explored engagement of mental health service users with exergaming to increase physical activity in a community mental health care setting. Although the sample size is small, it does provide some evidence that facilitating exergaming has the potential to engage people living with severe mental illness in physical activity leading to possible additional health benefits.

- **Poverty & Mental Health: System Solutions to Improve Wellbeing**

[Joint Media Release - Poverty & Mental Health: System Solutions to Improve Wellbeing | WAAMH](#)

The Western Australian Alliance for Mental Health (WAAMH) has partnered with Anglicare WA to release this report analysing the links between poverty and mental health, outlining key government policies that unintentionally exacerbate problems and recommending

alternative approaches. The report's authors point to decades of research affirming the causal link between financial difficulties and mental health challenges. Further, they found the relationship is bi-directional: people experiencing mental health challenges are twice as likely to experience financial troubles, and vice versa. The report outlines four key recommendations that can lead to better societal outcomes.

- **Social isolation at home linked with higher risk of early death**

[Social isolation at home linked with higher risk of early death \(themandarin.com.au\)](https://www.themandarin.com.au/social-isolation-at-home-linked-with-higher-risk-of-early-death)

International researchers have found a link between loneliness and the risk of premature death even among those who seek extracurricular activities outside of the home. The finding was made after analysing the data in a decade long observational study of 450,000 UK adults that asked questions about participant's level of social interaction. Overall, having someone visit at home was found to be key, with the researchers identifying that this is more important to reducing the risks of social isolation than attending social or group activities outside the home. The study found that not having visitors at home found to be equivalent to 39% associated increased risk of early death and that more research is needed to understand the effects of other types of social interaction on mortality risk to develop targeted interventions for social isolation.

- **Creating Wellbeing: Attitudes and engagement with arts, culture and health**

[Creating Wellbeing: Attitudes and engagement with arts, culture and health - Creative Australia](https://www.creativeaustralia.org.au/creating-wellbeing-attitudes-and-engagement-with-arts-culture-and-health)

This report provides powerful evidence of public support for the idea of arts and creativity benefitting health and wellbeing, including that:

- Most people agree that engaging in the arts can have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing, including mental health (89%), social health (84%), physical health (70%), family life (72%), community life (75%), and knowledge and skills (82%).
- Most respondents are open to arts on prescription. Almost nine in ten respondents are either 'very open' (42%) or 'somewhat open' (43%) to arts on prescription for mental health conditions.

- **Creative Solutions: Training and sustaining the arts for mental health workforce**

[Creative Solutions: Training and sustaining the arts for mental health workforce - Creative Australia](https://www.creativeaustralia.org.au/creative-solutions-training-and-sustaining-the-arts-for-mental-health-workforce)

This report identifies the professional development needs and support structures required to ensure that this work is safe and sustainable for all involved, including that:

- There is an urgent need for models of professional supervision and/or a community of care. At present, independent practitioners are often working in isolation, without organisational support or sufficient pastoral care, and in environments that are highly challenging and complex.
- Mentoring is a highly valued source of training in arts for wellbeing practice, providing a structured means of sharing knowledge with attention to the specifics of program context. Mentoring is currently a common source of training for many arts and wellbeing practitioners and could be scaled up and formalised with additional support.

- **“It’s Not Enough: Why More is Needed to Lift People out of Poverty**

[ACOSS COL Report Sep 2023 Web.pdf](#)

This ACOSS research – which surveyed 270 people living on JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment in July and August 2023 – finds that almost three quarters of people receiving income support are eating less or skipping meals due to the low rate of payments and rising cost of living. It also suggests that the upcoming increase to interest rates will not be enough to prevent “widespread distress”.

- **Inequality in Australia 2023: Overview**

[Inequality-in-Australia-2023 Overview print2.pdf \(acoss.org.au\)](#)

Wealth inequality has a significant impact on wellbeing, and over the past two decades the gap between those with the most and those with the least has increased strongly. This research by Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and University of New South Wales Sydney shows the average wealth of the highest 20% growing at four times the rate of the lowest.

- **Social Isolation Loneliness and Wellbeing**

[Australia's welfare 2023 data insights \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

This report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identifies some of the key changes in experiences of loneliness reported by Australians before and during the pandemic. It shows that while loneliness and social isolation have been trending upwards – particularly for young females aged 15-24 - since before the pandemic, people across all age groups appear to be having less social contact from 2001 to 2021.

- **Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Social Isolation 2023**

[Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation \(hhs.gov\)](#)

There's growing evidence that loneliness is as bad for your health as smoking or obesity. The Surgeon General of the United States has described as an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation".

- **Climate Trauma: The Growing Toll of Climate Change on the Mental Health of Australians**

<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-02/apo-nid321652.pdf>

In December 2022, the Climate Council with support from Beyond Blue sought to build a clear picture of the impact of climate change on the mental health of Australians. The overall message of this report is simple: stronger action on climate change is fundamental to promoting the mental health and wellbeing of not only Australians, but of communities all over the world.

- **Effectiveness of Physical Activity Interventions for Improving Depression, Anxiety and Distress: An overview of Systematic Reviews**

<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2023/03/02/bjsports-2022-106195?rss=1>

This study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine reviewed more than 1,000 research trials and found that exercise – at least 150 minutes per week – is an effective way to combat depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. The findings of the study are yet another nod to a wellbeing approach to mental health, with exercise shown to be around 1.5 times more effective than either medication or cognitive behaviour therapy.

- **“It’s Hell”: How Inadequate Income Support is Causing Harm**

https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ACOSS-cost-of-living-report2-March-2023_web_FINAL.pdf

This report released by ACOSS shows that the surging cost of living is having a devastating impact for people on income support, with 68% eating less or skipping meals, missing out on medication, cutting back on car use and more. 99% of people who took part in the survey said that the inability to cover the cost of living has harmed their mental health.

- **How Community Hubs could Contribute to Better Health for Rural and Remote Australians**

<https://www.croakey.org/how-community-hubs-could-contribute-to-better-health-for-rural-and-remote-australians/>

In this article Mark Burdack, CEO of the Healthy Communities Foundation Australia outlines the Foundation’s proposed policy for Community Hubs in rural areas, which he describes as “a one-stop-shop for services that are engaged in addressing the social determinants of health”. At QAMH, we believe this is exactly what’s needed to move from a focus on acute

care to wellbeing and put the power to design and deliver healthcare back in the hands of communities.

- **Door-to-Door for Mental Health**

<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-02/apo-nid321474.pdf>

The idea of knocking on a door to check in on household wellbeing is a simple but effective one. This large-scale project coordinated by Community Mental Health Australia covered over 37,000 households in a variety of community settings and included support to connect people with services when needs were identified. The study shows that a “grass roots” approach such as this holds promise for community mental health and wellbeing research in the future as an effective way to engage people who were hardly reached or living in disadvantaged communities.

- **Australia’s Mental Health Emergency**

[McKellMentalHealthEmergency.pdf \(mckellinstitute.org.au\)](#)

This report from the McKell Institute makes a strong case for Australia’s post-pandemic “mental health emergency”, with the mental health of Australians decreasing as the demand for support increases. Using figures for psychological distress, workers’ compensation claims for mental health-related issues, and rising suicidality and self-harm trends as indicators of the worsening mental health of Australians, the paper also looks at the external drivers of ill-health as well as the barriers to mental health care, mainly through a workforce development lens limited to increasing the number of available psychologists in Australia.

- **Loneliness and Mental Health**

[Loneliness and Mental Health | Lived Experience Australia](#)

This research from Lived Experience Australia, in collaboration with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, is based on a survey of 322 people across Australia and New Zealand in 2022. It aims to better understand loneliness and its effects, particularly in relation to mental health, physical health, families, and wellbeing. It also explores what supports people felt may help overcome their loneliness.

- **Social Cohesion in Australia**

[Pandemic spike in social cohesion starting to decline - ANU](#)

This study from the Australian National University, in partnership with the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, has found that social cohesion in Australia is declining due to a weaker sense of pride, belonging and social justice. This has major implications for individual and community wellbeing.

- **School Connectedness**

[The role of school connectedness in the prevention of youth depression and anxiety: a systematic review with youth consultation | BMC Public Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

This article from BMC Public Health suggests that ensuring students feel a strong sense of belonging and connection to their high school can protect against the development of depression and anxiety.

- **Snapshot Report – Social Isolation and Loneliness**

[Social isolation and loneliness - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

This snapshot report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has some useful facts and figures on the incidence, demographic distribution, risk factors and impact of social isolation and loneliness in Australia.

- **Ending Loneliness Network**

[Ending loneliness together](#)

Ending Loneliness Together is a national network of organisations committed to reducing social isolation and loneliness in Australia. Their website is a treasure trove of reports, research articles, webinars, podcasts and more – all focussed on addressing this critical issue.

- **Report – Patterns of Social Connectedness**

[139532_BCEC-Stronger-Together-report_WEB.pdf](#)

This report from the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre examines the patterns of social connectedness in Australia and provides an assessment of connectedness among different segments of the society. The report also sheds light on the patterns of loneliness and identifies the groups at greatest risk of loneliness and social isolation. The breadth of people's social experiences through the COVID-19 pandemic is a special focus of the report, which tracks changes in social connectedness, participation and trust before and after the pandemic.

- **Psychiatric Crisis Care**

Drake, R.E., & Bond, G.R. (2021). Psychiatric crisis care and the more is less paradox. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 57(7), 1230–1236.

[Psychiatric Crisis Care and the More is Less Paradox - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

This article argues that mental health care in the United States exemplifies the “more is less paradox”. More is spent on health care than any other high-income country, yet their outcomes are typically poorer. They do this, in part, by emphasising medical treatments for problems that are inherently social, rather than addressing social determinants of health. Medical interventions for socio-economic problems are usually expensive and ineffective. Instead, the United States should address social determinants, emphasise research-based interventions and prevention – proven strategies that decrease costs and improve outcomes.

- **Wellbeing and Social Determinants of Health Among Australian Adults**

[Green, H., Fernandez, R., & MacPhail, C. \(2022\). Wellbeing and social determinants of health among Australian adults: A national cross-sectional study. *Wiley Online Library*.](#)

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between wellbeing and the social determinants of health among Australian adults during the pandemic. It demonstrated that those with poor social support, difficulty accessing healthcare, insecure housing and food insecurity had significantly poorer wellbeing during the pandemic. It highlighted the need for action to address the social determinants of health and inequalities.

- **Behavioural Therapy for Depression and Loneliness in Young People**

Cruwys, T., Haslam, C., Rathbone, J., Williams, E., Haslam, S., & Walter, Z. (2022). Groups 4 Health versus cognitive–behavioural therapy for depression and loneliness in young people: Randomised phase 3 non-inferiority trial with 12-month follow-up. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 220(3), 140-147. doi:10.1192/bjp.2021.128

[Groups 4 Health versus cognitive–behavioural therapy for depression and loneliness in young people: randomised phase 3 non-inferiority trial with 12-month follow-up | The British Journal of Psychiatry | Cambridge Core](#)

Loneliness is a key risk factor in the onset, maintenance and development of depression. This study evaluated the efficacy of a novel loneliness intervention, Groups 4 Health (G4H), relative to the best-practice treatment of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), in reducing loneliness and depression over a 12-month period. 174 participants aged 15-25 years experiencing loneliness and depression were recruited and followed over 12 months. Results indicate that G4H was non-inferior to CBT for depression and showed a slight advantage over CBT for loneliness.

- **Social Group Membership to Support Health**

Haslam, C., Cruwys, T., Chang, M.X., Bentley, S.V., Haslam, S.A., Dingle, G.A., Jetten J. (2019). Groups 4 Health reduces loneliness and social anxiety in adults with psychological distress: Findings from a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 87(9), 787-801. doi: 10.1037/ccp0000427. PMID: 31403815.

[GROUPS 4 HEALTH reduces loneliness and social anxiety in adults with psychological distress: Findings from a randomized controlled trial - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

Groups 4 Health (G4H) is a recently developed intervention that targets the development and maintenance of social group memberships to support health. To investigate the efficacy of this intervention, a randomized controlled trial was conducted with 120 participants assigned to G4H or standard treatment. Assessment of primary (loneliness) and secondary (depression, social anxiety, general practitioner visits, multiple group membership) outcomes was conducted at baseline and at a 2-month follow-up, using mixed-model repeated-measures analyses. Findings suggest that G4H can be a useful way to treat loneliness and highlight the importance of attending to group memberships when tackling this important social challenge.

- **Loneliness and social isolation among older people**

[Loneliness among older people: A research roundup \(themandarin.com.au\)](#)

This fantastic article from the United States takes a detailed look at the complexities of loneliness and social isolation. It explores the poorer health and social outcomes for people suffering loneliness, potential interventions and policy approaches. Embedded in the article are some great links to relevant research.

- **Social Participation and Mental Health**

[Mental Health Australia Position Statement - Social Participation and Mental Health | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

Mental Health Australia's position statement on social participation and mental health aligns with QAMH submissions and advocacy work. It states that social connection protects and promotes mental health and community mental health services have an integral role to play in supporting social participation.