

# 7 Keys to Local Social Connection

Social isolation and loneliness are significant community challenges, with clear impacts on health and wellbeing. These effects are particularly pronounced among people experiencing disadvantage and stigma, further contributing to health inequities.

These 7 keys to connection are drawn directly from the findings of the Activating Social Connection in Australia Project\*. They combine research evidence and community feedback from residents of Melbourne's urban fringe and outer metropolitan areas, including First Nations people, to provide a practical list for organisations and groups working to strengthen social connection in local areas.

	<b>What this means</b>	<b>What this could look like</b>
<b>1 Places to meet</b> 	<p>Safe, welcoming local places where people can gather and interact with others from their neighbourhood or community.</p>	<p>Local cafes, corner shops, parks, leisure centres, community hubs, sport clubs, and neighbourhood houses.</p>
<b>2 Connector people</b> 	<p>Community connectors and facilitators actively help people meet each other. They create an inclusive environment for all community members, including those new to the area or speaking languages other than English.</p>	<p>Volunteers or staff from local organisations, welcome coordinators, cultural liaison officers, social prescribing link workers.</p>
<b>3 Groups that foster belonging</b> 	<p>Activities and groups centred around shared interests, offering regular opportunities to meet and participate in different ways.</p>	<p>Community sports clubs, churches with services or online groups, and environmental or cultural organisations offering volunteering, workshops, or family-friendly events.</p>

#### 4 Problem-solving sessions



Regular local sessions that use problem-solving to connect people - working together on shared challenges creates organic connections.

Local problem-solving sessions where people come together to work on shared challenges - from improving public spaces to creating art.

#### 5 Food sharing events



Food can bring people together naturally through shared meals and cooking experiences.

Food swaps, cultural cooking sessions, community lunches, shared meals, multicultural food events.

#### 6 Social media and digital tools



Using digital tools to connect with residents who find it difficult to participate in person due to work commitments or long commutes.

Social media groups, online community forums, virtual meetups, digital neighbourhood networks, hybrid events.

#### 7 Accessible communication



Making local activities visible and accessible through multiple communication channels.

Local Good Karma pages, residents' online groups, community noticeboards, building notices, local newsletters.

Social connection is fundamental to community wellbeing, sense of place, belonging, and safety. Drawing on eight years of research and powered by a collaboration between universities, local governments and community organisations—with support and input from VicHealth—the findings show that building more connected communities requires regular opportunities to meet. Creating opportunities for initial meetings is an essential first step in fostering stronger local connections and neighbourhoods. Environments that promote welcome and belonging are also vital.

For more resources and practical tools to support social connection in your community, visit the Social Connection Project website: [www.social-connection.au](http://www.social-connection.au)

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#### \*THE ACTIVATING SOCIAL CONNECTION PROJECT

The Activating Social Connection project aims to fill gaps in evidence, resources and guidance for local social connection activation. Based on research evidence, our project is committed to developing practical resources and guidance that are useable by community workers, planners and community members. The focus is to understand the complex mechanics of fostering positive social connections for people, and to translate this into resources that help to activate change.

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