



Heather Ewart announced as Probud Ambassador amid rising loneliness in ageing population

National broadcaster backs 90,000-member organisation focused on connection, wellbeing and community in retirement

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As Australia grapples with rising rates of loneliness and isolation among older people, one of the country's largest social networks for retirees, Probud, is stepping forward with a renewed national focus on connection, community and wellbeing.

With more than 90,000 members and over 1,300 clubs across Australia and New Zealand, Probud has quietly become one of the country's longest-running, community-led responses to social isolation in later life. In its 50th year in Australia, the organisation is strengthening its voice on the importance of social connection - and encouraging more Australians to get involved.

Probud has appointed respected journalist and broadcaster Heather Ewart as Ambassador and National Spokesperson of their organisation to help amplify this message through 2026.

Best known for her decades-long career with the ABC, including the much-loved program *Back Roads*, and recently appointed on the board of the Mental Health Foundation of Australia, Heather brings both professional credibility and a personal connection to Probud and its purpose. Her own mother was a Probud member, giving Heather firsthand insight into the powerful role social connection can play when Australians quit full time work, lose a partner or live remotely.

Since stepping back as presenter of *Back Roads*, Heather has remained an active and respected voice in Australian media and public life. She and her husband, journalist Barrie Cassidy, live in Melbourne and spend time at their holiday home on the New South Wales south coast.

Heather said Probud fills a vital role in the community both in the country, regional areas and in the city, and offers intellectual and social stimulation.

"When some Australians retire they miss the purpose and the companionship of the workplace or increasingly they find their time is taken up with caring for grandchildren," Ewart says.

"In my mother's case in country Victoria, she was a semi-retired widow, and joined Probud to meet new people in her own age group. She enjoyed the many social outings and events both local and interstate that were organised by Probud. It's wonderful to think that Probud has given so many Australians the opportunity to connect, to belong, and to keep learning over the past five decades."

Founded in Australia in 1976, Probus has grown into a nationwide network of local clubs open to retirees and semi-retirees from all walks of life. The organisation is non-political, non-religious and inclusive, welcoming people regardless of gender, cultural background or beliefs.

At its core, Probus is about social connection - something increasingly recognised as a critical contributor to physical and mental wellbeing. Studies consistently show that staying socially connected can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, both of which are significant challenges for older Australians.

By the early 2060s, the number of Australians aged 65 and over is projected to more than double, representing close to one quarter of the population. As Australians live longer, the importance of strong, local community networks continues to grow.

“As we live longer, staying socially engaged is essential,” Ewart said.

“Probus creates spaces where friendships are formed, ideas are exchanged, and people support one another through life’s changes - including retirement, health challenges and caring responsibilities. That kind of connection strengthens communities and can help ease pressure on an already stretched health system.”

Probus CEO Silvana Martignago said Heather’s appointment reflects the organisation’s enduring values.

“Heather embodies what Probus is all about- curiosity, community and connection. Her personal experience , combined with her deep understanding of both regional and metropolitan Australia, makes her an authentic and compelling advocate for what older Australians need in later life.”

As Probus marks 50 years in Australia, the organisation is encouraging Australians approaching or navigating retirement to rethink what this stage of life can look like.

“For many people, retirement can be the start of a richer, more connected chapter,” Ewart said. “Probus has been making that possible for 50 years.”

For more information about Probus or to find a local club in your area, visit the club locator page on: <https://probussouthpacific.org>.

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FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES & INTERVIEW BOOKINGS:

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- Hunters Hill in Sydney was the first Probus club in Australia to open in February 1976.
- With over 90,000 members, Probus is one of the largest social networks for retirees in Australia and New Zealand. Unlike service clubs such as Rotary or Lions, Probus is focused entirely on social connection and wellbeing - positioning it as a significant, long-running response to loneliness and isolation in later life.
- Probus is a social organisation offering clubs for people seeking connection, friendship and shared activities.
- Probus clubs operate throughout Australia and New Zealand.
- Membership is open to retirees, semi-retirees and those planning their retirement.
- A formal letter of recognition for their 50 years has been received from the Governor-General of Australia and numerous Federal and State MPs in Australia.
- Additional media assets and talking points are available on request.