



## **Social Connection Reduces Dementia Risk - and 90,000+ Australians are already doing something about it**

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*Probus responds to WHO dementia prevention report, calling on older Australians to act now*

AUSTRALIA - As the World Health Organization releases new guidelines identifying social isolation as one of the leading modifiable risk factors for dementia, one of Australia's largest networks for retirees and semi-retirees is calling the findings a wake-up call - and a clear call to action.

Probus in Australia, which brings together more than 90,000 members across 1,300+ local clubs, says the WHO report reinforces what it has known for 50 years: staying socially connected isn't a nice-to-have in retirement. It's a health imperative.

"The science is clear and it keeps getting clearer," said Silvana Martignago, CEO of Probus South Pacific. "Social isolation is one of the most significant and preventable risks to our health as we age - and yet it remains one of the least talked about. The WHO's findings are a timely reminder that social connection is not a luxury. It is essential."

The WHO guidelines, released this week, identify nearly half of all dementia cases as potentially preventable through lifestyle changes - with social isolation and loneliness among the key modifiable risk factors alongside physical inactivity, hearing loss, and depression. The findings build on a growing body of research linking social disconnection to cognitive decline, with some studies comparing the health impact of chronic loneliness to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Probus CEO Silvana Martignago said the report underscores the quiet but vital work Probus clubs do every day across the country.

"People often think of Probus as a social club - and it is - but what these findings remind us is that regular social connection, having people to turn to, having somewhere to go each week, is one of the most powerful things an older Australian can do for their long-term health and their brain. I have spoken to so many members who have said that Probus has made such a difference to their lives, with their only wish is that they had joined sooner."

Australia's population is aging rapidly. 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 total population. At the same time, rates of loneliness and isolation among older Australians are rising - and the downstream impacts on the health system are significant.

Probus clubs operate in communities across all states and territories, offering retirees and semi-retirees a low-barrier entry point to regular social connection. Clubs meet monthly with regular outings, shared meals, guest speakers, and interest groups tailored to members'

interests. Membership is open to anyone at or approaching retirement - there are no religious or political affiliations, no fundraising requirements, and no obligation beyond showing up.

"This is exactly the kind of community-led, locally rooted solution the health system needs more of," said Martignago. "Every person who walks through the door of a Probus club is doing something proactive for their health. They just might not have thought of it that way before today."

Australians looking to find a Probus club in their area are encouraged to visit [probussouthpacific.org](http://probussouthpacific.org) or call 1300 630 488.

## **ENDS**

**For media enquiries and interview bookings:**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

- Probus is a social organisation offering clubs for retirees, semi-retirees, and those planning retirement. Clubs operate throughout Australia and New Zealand.
- Probus is non-political, non-religious, and inclusive - open to all backgrounds and beliefs.
- Silvana Martignago, CEO of Probus South Pacific, is available for interview.
- [The WHO report referenced: \*Risk reduction of cognitive decline and dementia\*, updated guidelines, July 2026.](#)