

Wellbeing for the Bush

STAYING CONNECTED WHEN WORKING RURAL & REMOTE

Working in rural and remote healthcare is deeply rewarding, and it can also be lonely at times. Loneliness is a common human experience, and rural and remote health workers experience it for varying reasons, including:

- A single or frequent relocation, and needing to rebuild connections
- Navigating professional and personal relationships in small towns
- Uncertainty about debriefing with colleagues due to confidentiality concerns
- Being away from family, friends, kin, Country or cultural networks

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is a subjective experience, and is the gap between the social relationships you want and the ones you have. It isn't about the number of people you have around you; it's about whether your connections meet your emotional needs, such as feeling loved, secure, and connected.

Signs of loneliness

Loneliness can show up in different ways:

Physical signs

Headaches, pain, feeling unwell or tired, changes in sleep or appetite, low motivation or energy, or weight changes.¹

Emotional or mental health signs

Anxiety, low mood, panic, feeling paranoid, feeling hopeless and worthless, using alcohol or other substances to cope, or thoughts of suicide.



Being away from your usual connections or working long hours can make it hard to maintain social support.

Reducing loneliness begins with building or rebuilding quality social relationships that support your emotional and physical health.¹

What can I try?

Stay in touch

Reach out regularly via calls, texts or emails. Staying connected with people who know you best will help anchor you when you're experiencing your most challenging times. Also, be compassionate and caring to others who may need support to share in the reciprocity of relationships.

Connect with community

Join a local club, organisation, group, or cultural activity. Shared experiences foster belonging, especially in small communities.

Get active

Regular physical activity can help you meet new people and boost your mood, so look for options to join a walking group, sport or recreational club.

Give back

Volunteering helps people form meaningful connections while also giving them a sense of purpose. Choose something that aligns with your interests and values.

Spend time with animals

Pets provide unconditional love and companionship, can reduce anxiety and loneliness,² and improve overall mood. Dogs also encourage regular physical activity and encourage conversation with others.

Small actions count

If energy or motivation is low, a quick chat with a neighbour or a single message to a friend can be beneficial.

Seek culturally safe connection

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, connecting with cultural mentors, Elders, or Country can be deeply protective.



Finding the right balance

Anyone can experience loneliness, and each person's experience may differ from another's. Actively maintaining social connections helps reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing, and you deserve relationships that feel safe, supportive and genuine.

Whilst connection is essential, solitude can be nourishing. Try to find your balance. Find time for quiet moments of reflection that support recovery and clarity, whether that be at home, in nature, or on Country. Notice what fills your cup and what drains it and make choices that honour your needs.

When to seek extra support

If loneliness is impacting your mood, functioning or safety, or if you're finding it hard to connect with others despite trying, professional support can help. Reach out to your GP, mental health care provider, EAP, or call the **Bush Support Line on 1800 805 391** (available 24/7).

1. Healthdirect. (2022). Loneliness and isolation. <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/loneliness-isolation-mental-health#:~:text=If%20you%20feel%20alone%20or%20socially%20isolated,tired%2C%20having%20sleep%20problems%20or%20lacking%20motivation> [Accessed 29 August 2025]

2. Kazi DS. Who is rescuing whom? Dog ownership and cardiovascular health. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins Hagerstown, MD; 2019. p. e005887.