

We are wired for social connection.

Humans are social animals. This is not a metaphor, it is biology. Our brains and bodies are built for belonging, and when we experience genuine connection with others, everything works better: our thinking, our mood, our immune system, and our sense of purpose.

For many Lions members, the club has always been a place of connection. But as we move through later life, that connection can quietly erode, through retirement, loss, distance, busyness, or simply a change in life circumstances. When it does, it matters more than most people realise.

Why Connection Matters - The Science

Social isolation is now recognised as one of the most significant risks to health in later life. Decades of research on what makes people live longer, healthier, happier lives points to the same answer again and again — the people around us matter more than almost anything else.

But here is what is equally important to understand: connection is not just the absence of loneliness. Genuine, meaningful social connection actively protects us.

Social connection:

- **Reduces levels of cortisol**, the body's primary stress hormone
- **Boosts immune function**, helping us fight illness more effectively
- **Increases oxytocin**, the 'trust and bonding' neurochemical, which calms anxiety and builds resilience
- **Improves cognitive function** and reduces the risk of memory decline
- **Gives us a sense of purpose and identity**, which is particularly vital in later life

The quality of connection matters, not just the quantity. Sitting in a crowded room but feeling unseen is not connection. A genuine conversation, a shared laugh, or a moment of being truly listened to - these are the things that register in our nervous system as belonging.

Did You Know

Research from the Harvard Study of Adult Development - one of the longest-running studies of human wellbeing ever conducted - found that the single greatest predictor of a long, healthy, and happy life was not wealth, fame, or achievement. It was the quality of a person's relationships.

Not how many relationships they had. How good they were.

What This Means for Lions

Lions clubs offer something genuinely rare: a community built around shared values and shared purpose. That is a powerful foundation for connection. But belonging to a club does not automatically mean feeling connected.

Some members attend meetings regularly yet feel invisible. Others drifted away during illness or a life change and never fully found their way back. Some are navigating the quiet grief of losing a partner, a role, or a sense of identity, and don't know how to say so.

The goal of this project is to help Lions clubs become places where members genuinely thrive - not just serve.

Simple Ways to Strengthen Your Connection

Connection does not require grand gestures. The most powerful shifts often come from small, consistent acts of attention

For Individual Members

- Make one phone call this week to a fellow Lion you haven't spoken to in a while, not about club business, just to check in
- Arrive early to a meeting and spend five minutes in genuine conversation before it starts
- Notice the member who sits quietly and make a point of sitting near them
- Share something personal, not just practical, what you are enjoying, struggling with, or looking forward to
- Accept invitations, even when it feels easier to stay home

For Clubs and Leaders

- Build five minutes of informal connection into every meeting, not agenda time, just talking time
- Pair newer members with more experienced ones in a genuine mentoring or friendship role
- Check in on members who have been absent, a text, a call, a visit
- Create opportunities that are social, not just service-based
- Name connection as a club value, and mean it

Connection is not a program. It is a practice. It is built in the small moments - the phone calls, the conversations after meetings, the willingness to show up and be present.

You already have what it takes. Lions have been doing this for over a century. This is simply an invitation to do it a little more intentionally.

Thriving Members. Thriving Clubs.

An Australian Lions Foundation Wellbeing Initiative

RESOLVE model developed by Andrew Fuller, Clinical Psychologist

www.andrewfuller.com.au

Member Wellbeing Series:

Social Connection | Sleep | Anxiety | Identity | Motivation | Movement | Nutrition

A Moment to Reflect

The following questions are not for anyone else. They are just for you.

Think about the last time you felt genuinely connected to another person.
What made it feel that way?

Is there someone in your club, or your life, who might be lonelier than they appear?

What is one small thing you could do this week to reach out to them?

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