



MEDIA RELEASE

OLDER PEOPLE STRUGGLING TO STAY CONNECTED DURING COVID-19

Australians are being reminded to keep in touch with their elderly loved ones, with research released today by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) revealing older Australians were among the most isolated from family and friends during the coronavirus pandemic.

Staying Connected – a new research paper drawing on AIFS' *Families in Australia: Life during COVID-19* survey of more than 7,000 Australians in May 2020 – looks at how Australians maintained connections during unprecedented lockdown restrictions and social isolation.

While the great majority (93%) of respondents contacted family members living elsewhere at least once a week during the pandemic, many people (37%) said they found it more difficult to connect.

Older people struggled more with staying in touch, with just 23% of people over the age of 70 reporting daily contact with their family – almost half that of people under the age of 40 (40%).

Ten per cent of people over 70 also reported having less-than-weekly contact with loved ones, compared to just 4% of people under 40.

AIFS Director Anne Hollonds said the findings were an important reminder to continue reaching out to our elderly loved ones – especially those who might not be as confident with new ways of staying in touch.

“Six in ten Australians stayed connected using talking and texting during the pandemic, and quarter of Australians embraced other unique activities – like virtually sharing meals, playing games or exercising,” Hollonds said.

“However a lot of older respondents shared that they were struggling with video calls and new online technologies; 30 per cent of people over 70 used handwritten letters to stay in touch, and many older Australians still depended on face-to-face visits for contact and support.”

Staying Connected includes tips and links to resources that families can use to help older loved ones engage online.

“Grandparents often trust their grandchildren to help them out without any judgement, so teaching them a new skill, like how to jump on a video call, is a great way of engaging, while also setting grandparents up to keep connected,” Hollonds said.

The paper also outlines other creative ways survey respondents – including singles and households without kids – had stayed in touch during the pandemic, which Hollonds said could provide inspiration to other Australians doing it tough during isolation.

“We’ve heard about people organising birthday parties over Skype, playing online video games with relatives and friends, or introducing virtual story times with nieces and nephews.

“COVID-19 might be changing the way we’re connecting with our loved ones – but it doesn’t mean we have to lose contact entirely. There are plenty ways we can stay in touch, we might just need to be a bit creative,” Hollonds said.

The Staying Connected paper is part of the Life during COVID-19 survey, aimed at understanding how Australia is adjusting to unprecedented lockdown restrictions and social distancing measures. Read the full paper and find more tips to stay connected at: [Families in Australia Survey: Life during COVID-19 Report no. 2: Staying connected when we're apart](#)



Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies



Families in focus
for 40 years 1980-2020



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AIFS' top tips for staying connected with elderly loved ones:

- Build them into your day-to-day life by setting up a regular phone call or video call with them that coincides with other routine activities (like a mealtime, or your daily walk)
- Connect your elderly loved ones to some of the free services that support older people who want to use technology – (see AIFS' *Staying Connected* paper for resources)
- Once you have made a connection using technology, consider shared online activities like reading, exercising, or playing an online game together
- Go back to basics and write hand-written letters to keep in touch
- If you live close to an elderly loved one or neighbor, leave a care package on their doorstep or offer to pick up essential items, such as groceries, for them.

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AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them. See aifs.gov.au for more.