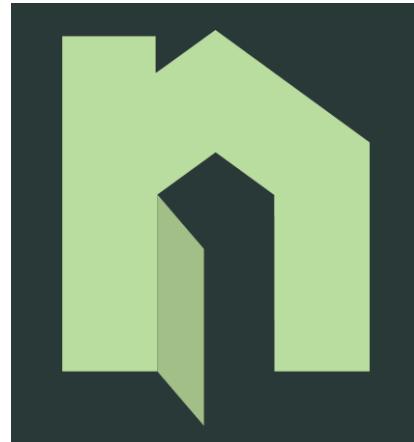


Relationships Australia.



Neighbour Day

Evaluation 2021 :

Creating Connection to Community



Australian
National
University



1.1 Report Authors

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1.2 Acknowledgements

This project was funded by Relationships Australia with in-kind support from the Australian National University. All comments and enquiries regarding the report should be addressed to A/Prof Tegan Cruwys: tegan.cruwys@anu.edu.au.

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We are grateful for the generous participation of over 800 survey respondents who shared their experiences.

1.3 Report Date

25 February 2022

1.4 Suggested Citation

Cruwys, T., Fong, P., & Rathbone, J. A. (2022). Neighbour Day Evaluation 2021: Creating Connection to Community. The Australian National University.



2 Executive Summary

An evaluation of the Neighbour Day Campaign 2021 was conducted by researchers at the Australian National University (ANU) in collaboration with Relationships Australia. A two time-point quantitative study of Neighbour Day participants was conducted. Surveys were administered two months after Neighbour Day (Time 1: 843 respondents) and again approximately 4.5 months later (Time 2), with 484 respondents providing complete data at both time-points. In terms of data collection, this year's evaluation is different to previous years in three ways: (1) both Neighbour Day participants *and non-participants* responded, (2) both hosts/organisers/co-organisers of Neighbour Day events *as well as attendees* responded, and (3) data was collected *after Neighbour Day at both timepoints*. The purpose of this sampling strategy was to answer four main research questions:

1. Compared to non-participants, did Neighbour Day participation boost neighbourhood identification?
2. Do the benefits of Neighbour Day differ between attendees and hosts?
3. How does Neighbour Day participation affect one's satisfaction with different kinds of social relationships?
4. Does Neighbour Day participation predict mental health and wellbeing across time?

Unlike in 2020, Neighbour Day activities in 2021 were less affected by the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. Data at Time 1 (T1) of the survey was collected during the month of June before the COVID-19 Delta variant became widespread throughout Australia and minimal restrictions were in place around the country. Consequently, between the survey time-points, most parts of Australia experienced severe lockdown restrictions for various time periods, (i.e., from 3-days and up to 3.5 months). By mid-November to early December, the follow-up period of the survey at Time 2 (T2), social restrictions throughout Australia had eased and normal activities had largely resumed.

The **main findings** of the evaluation were:

1. Compared to non-participants, **Neighbour Day participants had significantly higher sense of neighbourhood identification** (at both T1 and T2)
2. There were **no significant differences in neighbourhood identification between hosts and attendees of Neighbour Day**.
3. **Neighbour Day participation was associated with people having wider and larger social networks, and more frequent occasions and time spent socialising**. Moreover, compared to non-participants, Neighbour Day participants have a greater number of close neighbours and were more satisfied with their relationships with neighbours. **Neighbour Day participation predicted greater satisfaction with all types of social relationships at T2**.
4. Given the widespread and extended restrictions that occurred between data collection timepoints, it is perhaps unsurprising that on average, from T1 to T2, survey respondents reported **decreased subjective wellbeing and increased**



psychological distress. However, Neighbour Day participants were protected against this decline in mental health, because of their greater number of close neighbours and sense of neighbourhood identification.

Key recommendations from this report:

1. Australia should invest in Neighbour Day as a model of building community connection and wellbeing. The evidence base, which is growing and becoming increasingly robust, indicates that Neighbour Day presents an effective community-based campaign that can benefit social wellbeing and mental health at a whole of population scale.
2. Australian communities will continue to experience crises and threats to wellbeing in the future (e.g., bushfires, floods). Evidence from this evaluation suggests that Neighbour Day may be particularly beneficial in promoting resilience and protecting the mental health of Australian community members during times of collective change or crisis.
3. While the evidence supports Neighbour Day's role in benefitting community connection and wellbeing, future evaluations might focus on its potential benefits in particularly vulnerable communities.
4. Future economic evaluation may provide evidence for the cost effectiveness of Neighbour Day as a campaign to benefit population mental health.
5. The strongest possible evaluation of Neighbour Day would entail a controlled intervention study looking at how the introduction of Neighbour Day activities affected individuals and communities who had previously not been engaged with Neighbour Day. While the Council project in progress will go some way toward providing such evidence, a design which included a control group and random assignment of neighbourhoods to conditions (i.e., Neighbour Day activity vs. control) would be the gold standard in demonstrating causal evidence for Neighbour Day's benefits.



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3 Introduction

3.1 Preamble

“Group life is ... central to what we are as humans and it is a key source of meaning, purpose, and direction.” Haslam et al., 2018 (p.17).

“Because it is the basis for meaningful group life, social identity is central to both good and ill health.” Haslam at al., 2018 (p.17).

3.2 Neighbour Day

Neighbour Day (neighbourday.org), now in its 20th year, was founded in Melbourne, Australia in March 2003 by Andrew Heslop after the remains of an elderly woman were found inside her suburban home. It was the widespread local and national media interest and coverage following the discovery of Mrs Elsie Brown that prompted Mr Heslop to suggest a ‘National Check on Your Neighbour Day’ in a letter to the editor of The Melbourne Age in 2003. Mr Heslop managed Neighbour Day with his own and in-kind resources until Relationships Australia took responsibility for Neighbour Day on 1 January 2014.

Neighbour Day has evolved into a year-round grass roots community development campaign that aims to increase individual and community social connections, foster healthy relationships, reduce loneliness and promote social inclusion. The culmination of the Neighbour Day Campaign is celebrated on the last Sunday in March every year, with its key themes to be upheld throughout the year. People are encouraged to connect with their neighbours and the members of their local communities. Neighbour Day is estimated to reach almost 300,000 attendees each year (Cruwys et al., 2019) and is supported by a large number of Ambassadors, Very Neighbourly Organisations, Community Organisations, and Councils.

3.3 Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia (relationships.org.au) works in a variety of ways across Australia to support respectful relationships. Relationships Australia is a community based, not-for-profit Australian organisation with no religious affiliations. They provide services for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background, or economic circumstances.

Relationships Australia is a leading provider of relationship support services for children, adults, couples, families, and communities. Services around the country include counselling, family dispute resolution and mediation, family violence services, mental health services, and a range of family and community support and education programs. Relationships Australia is a federation of service providers in each Australian state and territory, with their national office based in Canberra.



Relationships Australia utilises Neighbour Day as a key platform of their social connection campaign to support and enable sustainable respectful relationships across communities.

3.4 Previous Neighbour Day Evaluations

In 2019, ANU and Relationships Australia evaluated Neighbour Day and found that, compared to baseline, participation was associated with an increased sense of neighbourhood identification. This, in turn, led to increased social cohesion, decreased loneliness, and improved wellbeing. These benefits were found to be sustained over time at the six-month follow-up (Cruwys et al., 2019; Fong et al., 2021).

In the following year, the 2020 Neighbour Day was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and unprecedented social restrictions imposed by the government. Many of the planned Neighbour Day activities were abandoned and alternative ways to connect remotely were carried out instead. Despite the mandated restrictions on social gatherings, the 2020 evaluation by the ANU and Relationships Australia again found that increased sense of neighbourhood identification was associated with better wellbeing (Cruwys et al., 2020). Those respondents who were able to celebrate Neighbour Day in some way were also more likely to report confidence that they could rely on their neighbours for support in a time of need.

4 The 2021 Neighbour Day Evaluation

At the outset of this year's research program, the ANU and Relationships Australia sought to build on the two previous 2019 and 2020 evaluations. Whereas in previous surveys, we compared respondents' sense of neighbourhood identification *before* and *after* taking part in Neighbour Day activities, this year we took a different sampling approach and recruited both *participants and non-participants* of Neighbour Day 2021 in the general population. This provided a comparison group so that we were able to contrast characteristics of Neighbour Day participants to the broader Australian population. We also sought to recruit *both* activity hosts/organisers/co-organisers as well as *attendees*. Doing so enabled us to address, for the first time, two research questions:

1. Are Neighbour Day participants' sense of neighbourhood identification higher than non-participants?
2. Are there any differences in the benefits of Neighbour Day participation between hosts/organisers/co-organisers versus attendees?

A key goal of the Neighbour Day Campaign is to connect people, with long-term goals of building neighbourhood social capital (network diversity, size). However, it is not clear whether Neighbour Day affects *only* relationships with neighbours, or alternatively, has more broad benefits in building social capital among both individuals and communities. Therefore, another key research question for this evaluation was to examine:



3. Does Neighbour Day participation predict the quantity and quality of different kinds of social relationships?

Finally, we anticipated that neighbourhood identification would be particularly important for mental health and wellbeing, especially in the context of prolonged lockdowns, which represent a significant and unanticipated threat to social connection and wellbeing. In this study we measured respondents' mental health and wellbeing at two timepoints. Our final research question investigated:

4. Does Neighbour Day participation benefit mental health over time, due to its effects on number of close neighbours and neighbourhood identification?

5 Evaluation methodology

5.1 Purpose

The aim of this evaluation was to investigate the effects of the Neighbour Day Campaign 2021. This year, we were able to make comparisons between Neighbour Day participants and people in the general population who did not take part, to more rigorously establish the effects of Neighbour Day participation.

The methodology and research questions were co-designed between Relationships Australia and Australian National University. Data collection and analysis were conducted by the Australian National University authors independently of Relationships Australia.

5.2 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study (Protocol: 2019/132) was obtained through the Human Research Ethics Committee at the ANU.

5.3 Method

The pre- and post- event survey data was collected via advertising through Facebook, posts on Neighbour Day social media, and email invitation to previous Neighbour Day participants. An advertising campaign was run during the recruitment period at Time 1 (T1) and was open to all Australian residents who were 18+ years old. Survey respondents accessed the survey using the link in the advertisement. Respondents of the survey at T1 who were interested in participating in the Time 2 (T2) survey were asked to provide their email address. Participation in both surveys was voluntary (for the timeline, see Figure 1).

The survey included measures spanning three primary domains: social connection, wellbeing, and demographic characteristics. Reliable measures that had been validated in the psychological literature were prioritised wherever possible. The full survey is included in Appendix A.

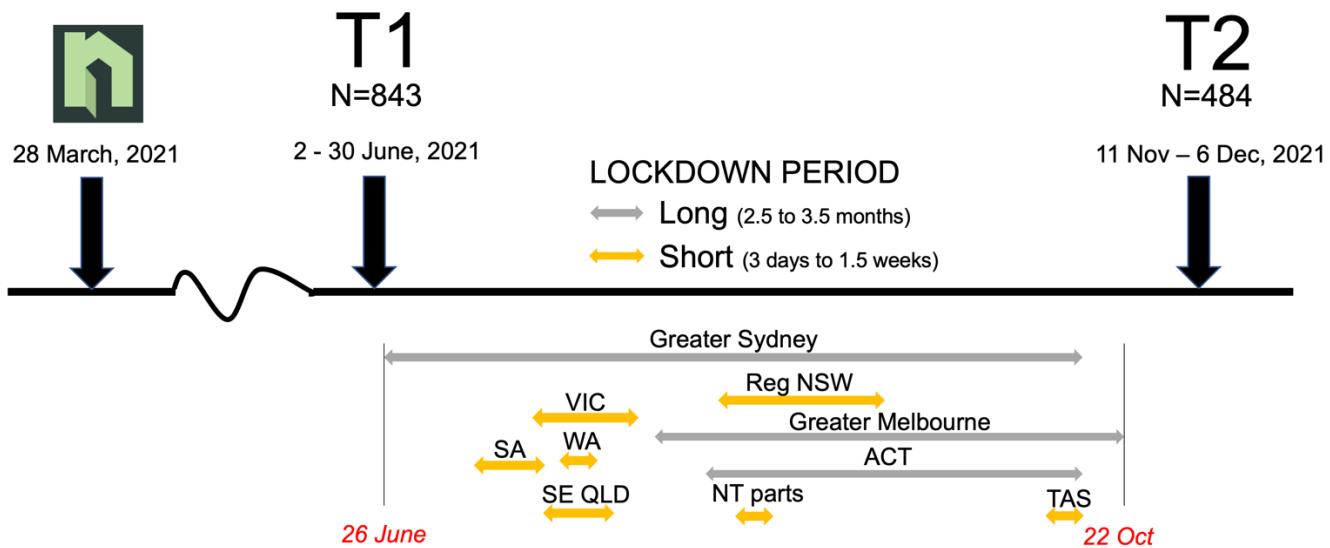


Figure 1. Timeline of data collection and lockdown period.

Between data collection timepoints in 2021 most of Australia's states and territories were impacted by community transmission of COVID-19 (Delta variant). States and territories imposed severe lockdown restrictions of various lengths lasting from 3 days (short lockdown) and up to 3.5 months (long lockdown). At T2, 29.1% of respondents had been affected by a long lockdown.

This year, 843 people responded at T1 and 484 at T2 (a retention rate of 57.4%).

5.3.1 Survey incentives

Respondents went into a prize-draw to win one of five \$100 Bunnings vouchers. Winners were randomly chosen from all those who completed the T1 survey. T1 responders were also invited to win one of 250 x \$20 shopping e-vouchers by being among the first 250 people to complete a T2 survey or the chance to win one of five Neighbour Day merchandise packages in a prize draw.

Additionally, survey respondents at T1 who were Neighbour Day participants were offered up to \$50 if they referred the survey to others who complete the survey at T1.

Respondents were offered \$10 for 5 successful referrals, \$20 for 10, or \$50 for 20 additional survey respondents that they referred.

5.3.2 Data screening

Because of the considerable prize pool, a variety of strategies were implemented to identify fraudulent responders. The survey software has inbuilt checks to counter 'bot-like' responses (e.g., using captcha and identifying duplicate IP addresses). In addition, several attention check questions were included, which asked participants to respond to survey questions in particular ways (e.g., "Strongly Agree") if they were paying attention. Finally, manual screening of the T1 data was undertaken to identify implausible responses based on demographics, postcode, email provided, survey timing, and IP addresses. The sample

size of 843 participants represents the final sample of legitimate, complete responses received at T1.

5.4 Respondents' characteristics

5.4.1 Respondents per state at T1

Survey respondents came from all states and territories in Australia. NSW and VIC were somewhat underrepresented in the survey, compared to their proportion of the Australia population (see Figure 2), whereas other states were better represented (especially SA and ACT).

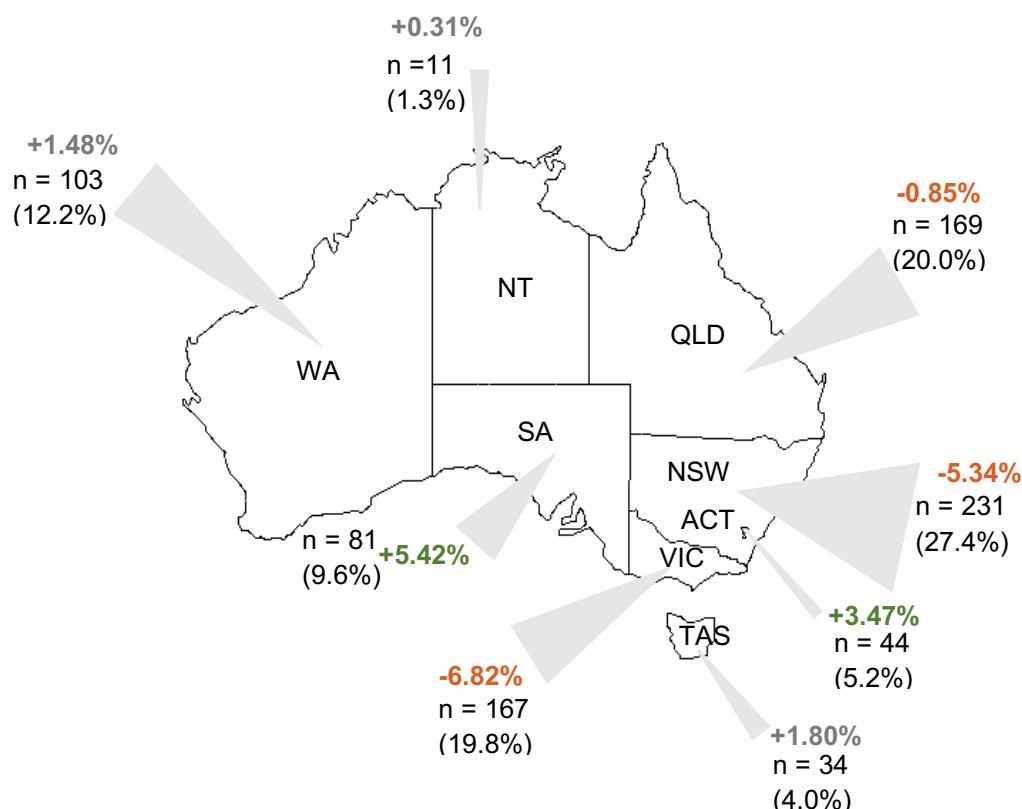


Figure 2. Survey participation at T1 by state.

Note. The percentages in this figure indicate the degree to which residents of each state were over (+) or under (-) represented as a proportion of survey respondents.

5.4.2 Respondents per state at T2

Survey respondents again came from all states and territories in Australia. There were no significant changes in representation of different regions.

5.4.3 Socio-demographics

Respondents (at T1) ranged in age from 18 to 87 years, with a mean of 52 years ($SD=14.7$). 73.5% identified as women. Respondents were diverse in education, with



11.4% holding Year 12 certificate or less, 20.7% holding a certificate or diploma, and approximately half (54.3%) of all respondents holding a tertiary level education. This suggests that tertiary educated people were somewhat overrepresented among survey respondents, as the national share of people who reported hold a bachelor's degree or above in the 2016 Census was 24% (ABS, 2017). The majority of respondents were in either full-time or part-time employment (52.7%) and a further 26.7% were retired. A large proportion of respondents reported Australia as being their country of birth (74.6%). 34% of respondents were living as a couple without children, while 22.7% lived alone, and 19.6% were living in a two-parent household with child(ren) under 18 years old. The most well-represented employment sectors were Education & Training, Healthcare & Social Assistance, and Administration & Support. Participants from all deciles of neighbourhood advantage versus disadvantage were represented in the survey, although more advantaged neighbourhoods were somewhat overrepresented (33.4% from the top 2 deciles). Nevertheless, a minimum 5% of the sample (approx. 44 respondents) were included from each socioeconomic decile. Respondents' socio-demographics at T1 are displayed in Table 1. There were no significant differences between the T1 and T2 sample on any of these characteristics.

5.4.4 Sample representativeness

Two measures of social connection were drawn from the Household Income Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) Release 20 (Department of Social Services; Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2021) in order to compare our sample on the identical questions administered in our survey. The two measures were: *social support* ($M=5.36$, $SD=1.04$) and *relationship satisfaction with partner* ($M=8.30$, $SD=1.84$). The latter was only administered to respondents in a committed romantic relationship. Results of the one sample *t*-test for each measure against the HILDA mean score showed that there were significantly lower levels of *social support*, ($T1\ t(841)=-8.96$, $p<.001$; $T2\ t(466)=-7.74$, $p<.001$) and *relationship satisfaction with partner* ($T1\ t(564)=-6.11$, $p<.001$; $T2\ t(319)=-5.26$, $p<.001$) in our sample when compared to the levels in a nationally representative sample of Australians (see Figure 3). This suggests that the survey respondents may have been somewhat more vulnerable in their social relationships than the general population.



Table 1. Socio-demographic summary (T1; N = 843)

	N (%)
Gender	
Female	613 (73.5%)
Male	221 (26.2%)
Non-binary, other, or preferred to not say	8 (0.9%)
Relationship Status	
Married/defacto	535 (63.5%)
Single/never married/divorced/widowed	305 (36.3%)
Employment Status*	
Full-time	244 (28.9%)
Part-time	201 (23.8%)
Retired	225 (26.7%)
Not working	77 (9.1%)
Disability	64 (7.6%)
Student	52 (6.2%)
Carer	49 (5.8%)
Living situation	
Couple no children	287 (34.0%)
Living alone	191 (22.7%)
Couple with child(ren)	165 (19.6%)
Single parent with child(ren)	38 (4.5%)
Housemates	33 (3.9%)
Other	128 (15.2%)
Education	
Less than Year 12	55 (6.5%)
Year 12 Cert	41 (4.9%)
Certificate/Diploma	174 (20.6%)
Some university	114 (13.5%)
Bachelor	301 (35.7%)
Post-graduate	157 (18.6%)
Country of birth	
Australia	624 (74.6%)
Other	213 (25.4%)
Language Spoken at Home	
English	814 (96.6%)
Other	27 (3.2%)

*participants could select multiple options

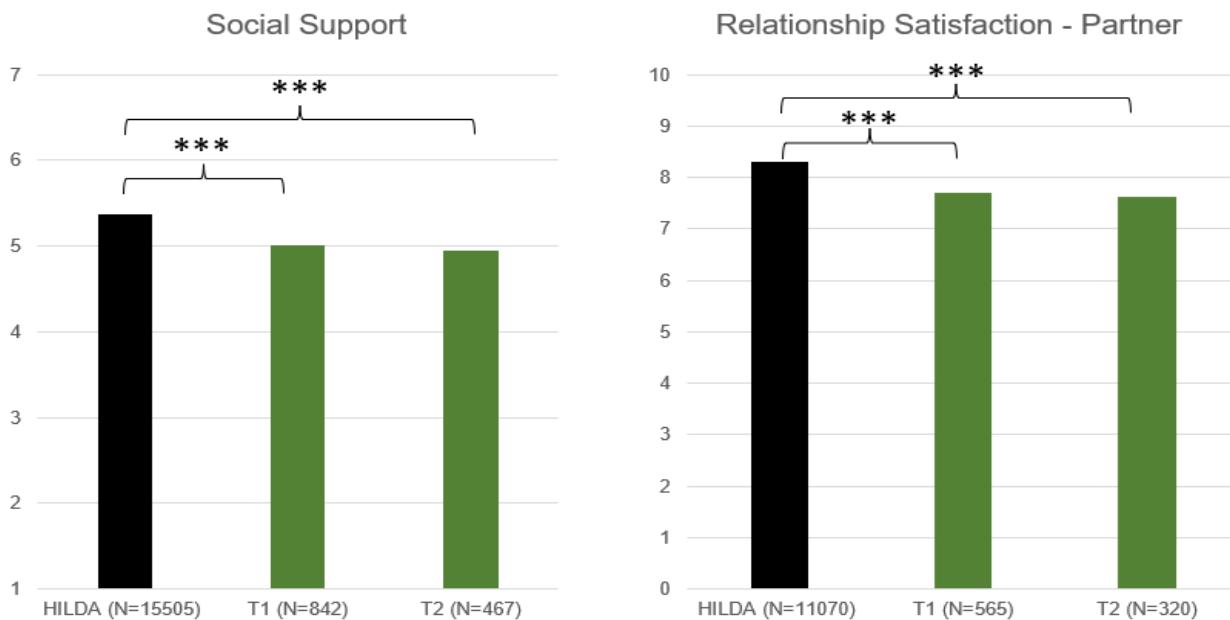


Figure 3. Comparisons on two relational measures

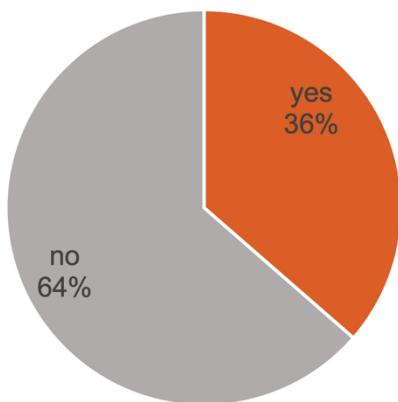
5.4.5 Responders vs. non-responders at T2

To test response bias between responders and non-responders at T2, a series of independent samples *t*-tests on key demographic variables was conducted, using whether participants were respondents or non-respondents at T2 as the grouping factor. The demographic variables investigated were age, gender, relationship status, educational attainment, neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES) and long lockdown. Results indicated that responders at T2 were more likely to have **higher educational attainment** ($p=.008$), live in a **higher SES neighbourhood** ($p=.019$), and live in a **postcode affected by long lockdown** ($p=.020$). Responders and non-responders did not differ on the other variables (p s. .082 to .991). This suggests that findings from analyses of T2 data may be less representative of the experiences of people with lower educational attainment, from a lower SES neighbourhood, and who were affected by short lockdown.

5.5 Neighbour Day 2021 participation

At T1, 35.1% of participants indicated that they had heard of Neighbour Day, and 14.8% indicated that they had participated in the events or activities related to Neighbour Day in 2021 (see Figure 4). While this represents a small percentage of respondents, the large sample size meant that we still had sufficient power to investigate this group, with 128 respondents in the Neighbour Day 2021 participant subgroup.

Have you heard about Neighbour Day before?



Did you participate in any events or activities related to Neighbour Day 2021?

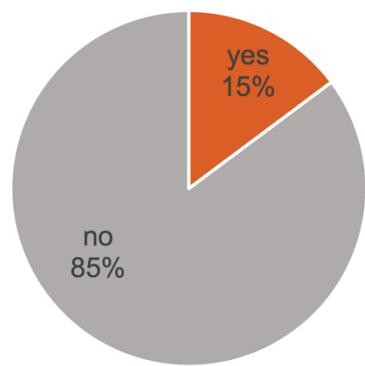


Figure 4. Prior knowledge of Neighbour Day and 2021 participation

5.5.1 Neighbour Day 2021 activities

At T1, Neighbour Day participants reported on the ways in which they took action or celebrated. About two-thirds of participants took part in 2 or more activities. Activities were diverse, including BBQs, morning or afternoon teas, social media posts, and other kinds of activities, see Figure 5 for details. Overall, Neighbour Day 2021 activities ranged in size from 2 to 750 attendees ($M=38.85$, $SD=86.58$).

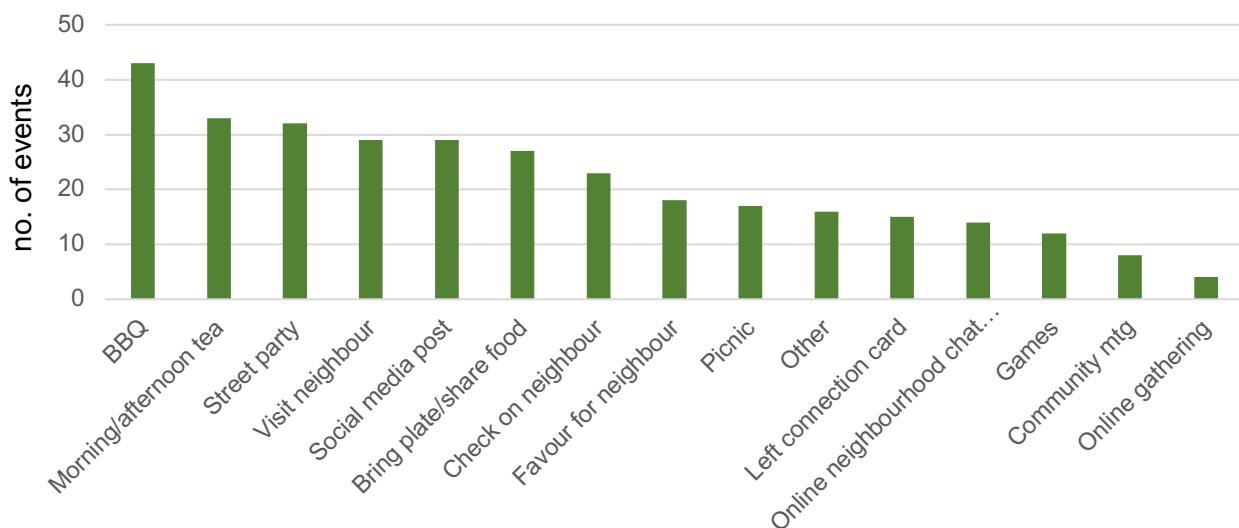


Figure 5. Prior knowledge of Neighbour Day and participation

5.6 Analytic approach

Data analysis used all available data for each evaluation. For example, analyses that used T1 data only had a sample size of 843 and analyses that used both T1 and T2 data had a sample size of 483. These numbers vary slightly because some participants had missing data for a small number of survey questions and were included only in those analyses for which they had full data available. The specific statistical technique used to assess each

research question is described below. Only effects which reached a 95% level of statistical confidence are described as significant ($p < .05$).

6 Results

6.1 Did Neighbour Day participation boost neighbourhood identification?

While previous evaluations have shown that Neighbour Day participation leads to an increase within individuals in their sense of social identification with their neighbourhood, this has not previously been compared to a group of non-participants (which would increase our confidence that this change is directly attributable to Neighbour Day). Therefore, this evaluation conducted this comparison between Neighbour Day participants and non-participants at both timepoints.

6.1.1 Neighbourhood identification

Two independent samples t -tests, with Neighbour Day participation as a grouping factor, revealed that compared to non-participants, **Neighbour Day participants had significantly higher sense of neighbourhood identification** at both T1 $t=5.88(840)$, $p<.001$ and, T2 $t=3.29(469)$, $p=.001$.

6.1.2 Multiple groups identification

Similar analysis revealed that compared to non-participants, Neighbour Day participants had significantly higher sense of social identification with multiple groups at both T1 $t=7.37(840)$, $p<.001$ and, T2 $t=5.26(469)$, $p<.001$. See Figure 6 for details on differences in neighbourhood and multiple groups identification between Neighbour Day participants and non-participants.

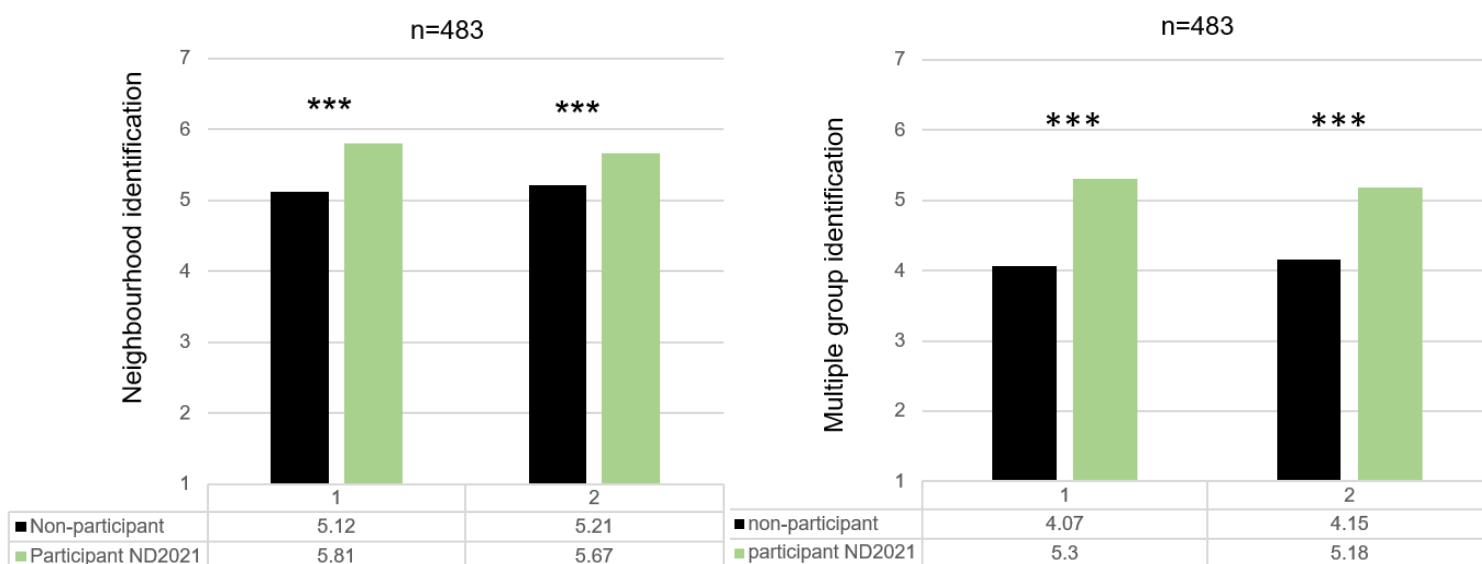


Figure 6. Neighbourhood identification (left), multiple group identification (right) between T1 and T2 by whether participant or non-participant of Neighbour Day in 2021.



6.1.3 Do some kinds of people get more benefit out of Neighbour Day participation than others?

We conducted follow up analysis to determine whether the relationship between Neighbour Day participation and neighbourhood identification was moderated by socio-demographic variables. The results of six linear regressions with Neighbour Day participation, (1) age, (2) gender, (3) educational attainment, (4) relationship status, (5) employment status or (6) neighbourhood SES and their interaction term was conducted to predict neighbourhood identification at T1. Results revealed that the relationship between Neighbour Day participation and neighbourhood identification at T1 was not dependent on these socio-demographic covariates (p s. .223 to .975). In other words, the **benefits of Neighbour Day were the same across different ages, genders, educational background, relationship status, employment status, and socioeconomic background.**

6.2 Differences in neighbourhood identification between hosts and attendees

In our sample, 55.2% of Neighbour Day participants self-described as a host/organiser/co-organiser, while 40.8% self-described as an attendee (the remainder selected ‘other’, and were excluded from this analysis). Two independent samples t -tests, with host versus attendee status specified as the grouping factor, revealed that hosts ($M_{T1}=6.00$, $SD_{T1}=.98$; $M_{T2}=5.83$, $SD_{T2}=1.10$) and attendees ($M_{T1}=5.71$, $SD_{T1}=.80$; $M_{T2}=5.41$, $SD_{T2}=.74$) did not differ in neighbourhood identification at T1 or T2 ($p=.077$). Similarly, there was no difference between hosts ($M_{T1}=5.35$, $SD_{T1}=1.13$, $M_{T2}=5.16$, $SD_{T2}=1.16$) and attendees ($M_{T1}=5.32$, $SD_{T1}=.98$, $M_{T2}=5.28$, $SD=.90$) in multiple groups identification at T1 ($p=.898$) or T2 ($p=.642$). Therefore, **the benefits of Neighbour Day for social connection appeared to be largely indistinguishable between hosts and attendees.**

6.3 Does Neighbour Day participation predict the quantity and quality of different kinds of social relationships?

Respondents were asked questions related to their social network diversity, social network size, the frequency of social contact, and time spent socialising. Social network diversity was measured by asking respondents whether they had contacts in a range of social categories (e.g., spouse/partner, close neighbours, friends) and with whom they talked to at least once every 2 weeks. Network size was the number of contacts within each social category. Frequency of social contact was measured by asking respondents the number of times they had communicated with people in their network over the past week using a range of contact modes (e.g., face to face, phone). Time spent socialising was an estimate of the number of hours spent socialising with people in their network in the past week. Finally, respondents were asked questions related to their relationship satisfaction with their partner, parents, parents-in-law, children, family members, neighbours, friends, workmates, schoolmates, fellow volunteers, fellow group members, and religious group.

6.3.1 Social network diversity and participation characteristics

At T1, 80% of participants reported having friends, while only 45% reported having close neighbours with whom they see or talk to at least once every 2 weeks. On average, participants reported having eight friends in their network, and around two close neighbours (see Figure 7 for details).

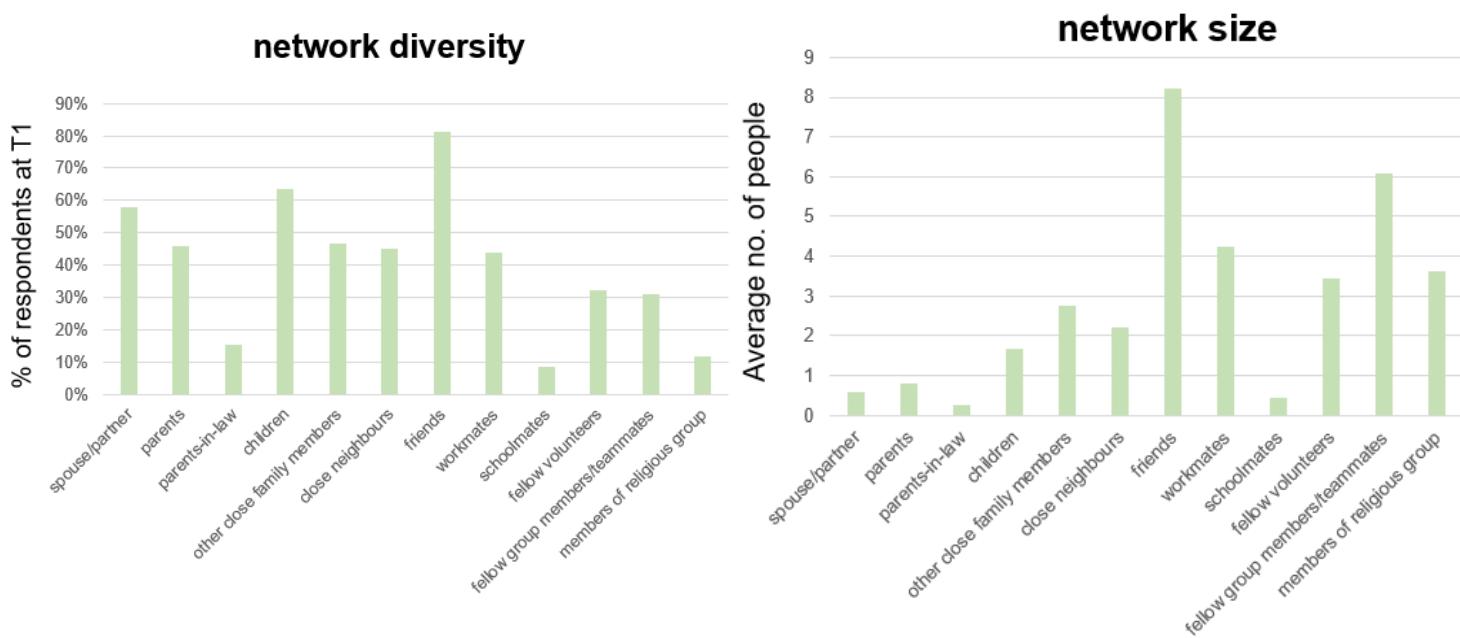


Figure 7. Social network diversity (left) and network size (right) at T1.

6.3.2 Frequency of social contact and time spent socializing

Participants were asked how frequently they communicated with people in their social network in the past week using various contact modalities (i.e., *face to face/in person meetings, phone, email, text messages, social media/online and other e.g., letter, postcard, gift*). On average, at T1, participants reported using these means of communication between 27 to 46 occasions a week. In terms of time (in hours) spent socialising, at T1, just 5.9% of participants reported spending less than 1 hr per week socialising (see Figure 8).

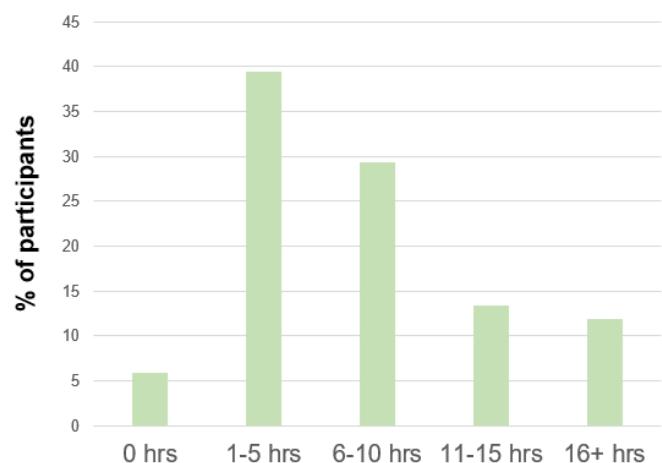


Figure 8. Time spent socialising at T1.

6.3.3 Neighbour Day participation and social relationship factors

Four independent samples t -tests, with Neighbour Day participation versus non-participation as the grouping factor, revealed that Neighbour Day participation was associated with greater social network diversity $t(831)=5.20, p<.001$, having larger network size $t(828)=2.05, p=.040^*$, more social contact frequency $t(840)=5.75, p<.001$, and more hours per week socialising, $t(840)=2.34, p=.019$. See Figure 9 for details.

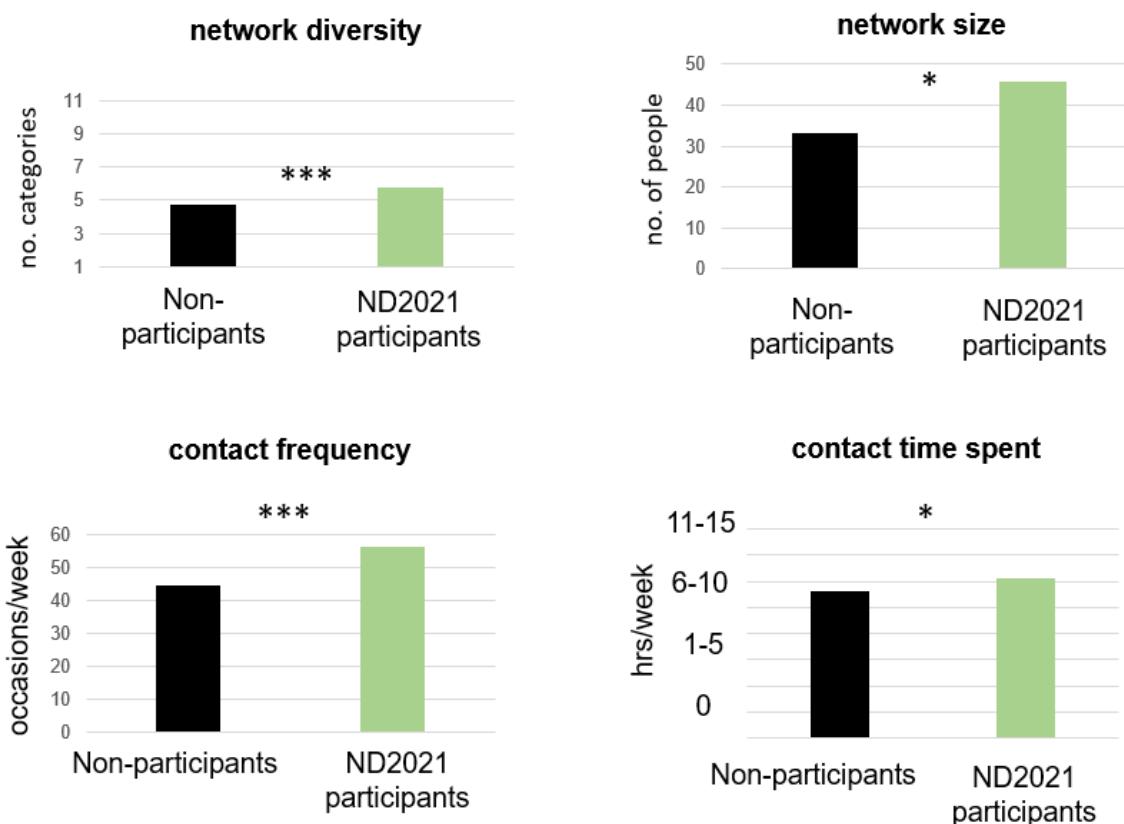


Figure 9. Social factors associated with Neighbour Day participation

Note. Due to presence of extreme values (ranging from 1 to 800) further sensitivity analysis using a robust independent t -test revealed that network size was associated with Neighbour Day participation, Yuen's $t(95.53)=3.91, p=.001$.

6.3.4 Neighbour Day participation and Modes of social contact

A further six independent samples t -tests, with Neighbour Day participation/non-participation as the grouping factor, revealed that **Neighbour Day participation was associated with more time spent per week socialising across all modalities** (face to face, $t(838)=4.27, p<.001$; phone, $t(831)=4.22, p<.001$; email, $t(834)=5.29, p<.001$; text messages, $t(833)=4.61, p<.001$; and other, $t(804)=5.96, p<.001$), **except via social media** ($p=.838$). See Figure 10 for details.

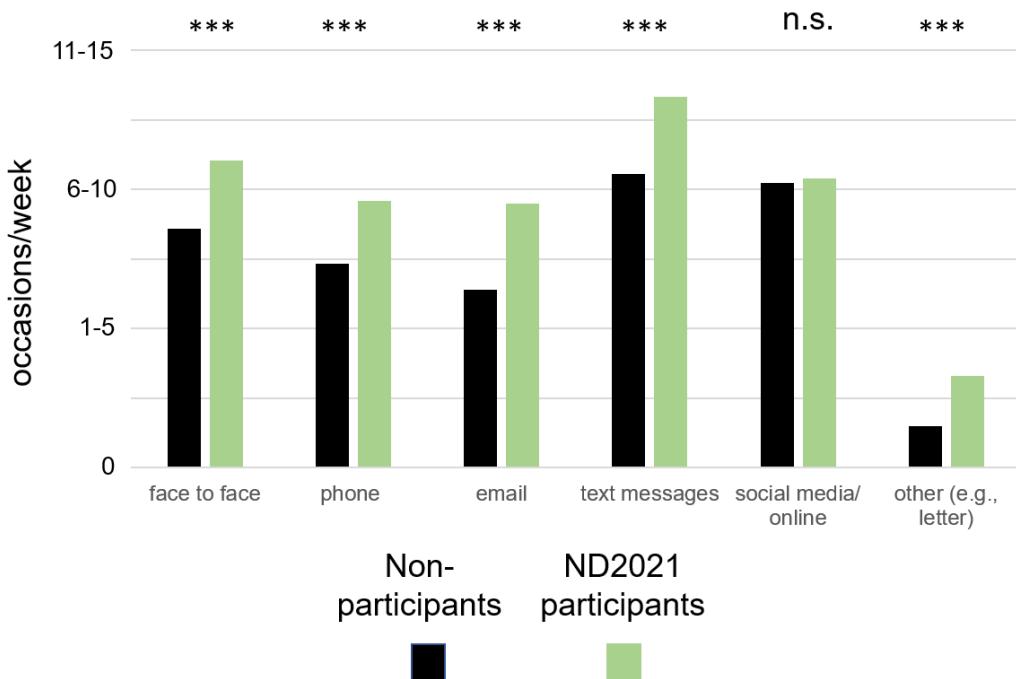


Figure 10. T1 Modes of social contact associated with Neighbour Day participation

6.3.5 Neighbour Day participation and number of close neighbours

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to test whether Neighbour Day participation was associated with having more close neighbours with whom they were in contact at least once a fortnight at T1. Compared with non-participants ($M=1.92$, $SD=3.29$), Neighbour Day participants ($M=3.83$, $SD=6.36$) at T1 reported having significantly more close neighbours with whom they talked to at least once every two weeks, $t(841)=5.05$, $p<.001$.

6.3.6 Relationship satisfaction across social categories

Overall, respondents were most satisfied in their relationships with their partner, followed by friends and family. Of all the social categories measured, participants indicated the least satisfaction with their neighbours on average (see Figure 11), $M=6.86$, $SD=1.93$ at T1 and $M=6.73$, $SD=1.91$ at T2.

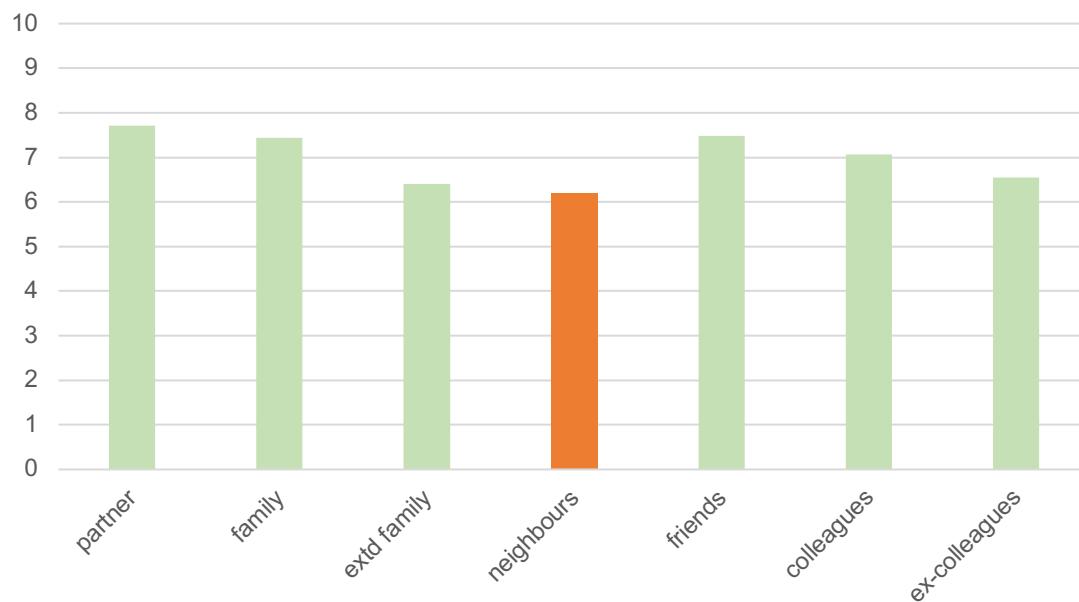


Figure 11. T1 Relationship satisfaction across social categories

6.3.7 Neighbour Day participation and satisfaction with neighbours

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to test whether Neighbour Day participation versus non-participation (the grouping factor) was associated with satisfaction with neighbours at T1. Compared with non-participants ($M=6.03$, $SD=2.73$), Neighbour Day participants ($M=7.07$, $SD=2.08$) at T1 reported having significantly higher relationship satisfaction with neighbours, $t(806)=4.06$, $p<.001$ (see Figure 12).

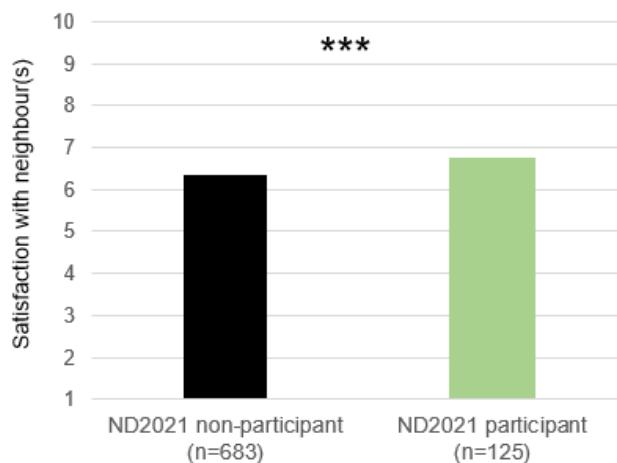


Figure 12. T1 Relationship satisfaction with neighbours and Neighbour Day participation.

6.3.8 Neighbour Day participation and satisfaction with diverse social relationship types

Satisfaction with the six non-neighbour categories (i.e., partner, family, extended family, friends, colleagues, and ex-colleagues) were collapsed into a single average score for satisfaction with relationships. Neighbour Day participation was positively associated with self-reported number of close neighbours, higher neighbourhood identification and this, in turn, predicted positive change in relationship satisfaction across all social categories from T1 to T2. All three indirect pathways were significant in the serial mediation model, see Figure 13. This model controls for T1 relationship satisfaction, which means that the indirect effect of Neighbour Day participation is predicting *change* in relationship satisfaction from T1 to T2.

Neighbour Day participation was associated with a greater number of close neighbours reported ($b=1.91, p<.001$). More close neighbours at T1 was associated with a higher sense of neighbourhood identification at T1 ($b=.10, p<.001$) and higher relationship satisfaction at T2 ($b=.15, p=.006$). Neighbour Day participation ($p=.189$) did not have a direct pathway to relationship satisfaction at T2, however, number of close neighbours did ($b=.03, p=.044$). This suggests that **Neighbour Day participation affects relationship satisfaction via both increased number of close neighbours and greater neighbourhood identification**. These results controlled for T1 relationship satisfaction ($b=.70, p<.001$), and covariates such as age ($p=.059$), gender ($p=.562$), educational attainment ($p=.688$), neighbourhood SES ($p=.984$), long lockdown ($p=.380$), and relationship status ($b=.33, p=.009$). Of the covariates, only relationship status was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction at T2, where respondents who were married/partnered reported higher relationship satisfaction.

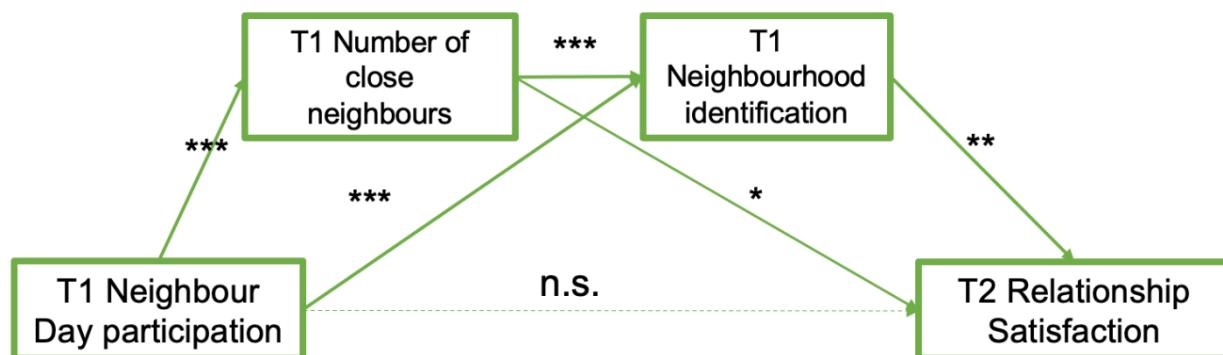


Figure 13. The relationship between Neighbour Day participation and relationship satisfaction via number of close neighbours and neighbourhood identification.

Note. Indirect effects were significant: (1) Neighbour Day participation → number of close friends → neighbourhood identification → relationship satisfaction, $\gamma=.03, SE=.01$ bootstrapped 95% CI [0.00, 0.06]. (2) Neighbour Day participation → number of close neighbours → relationship satisfaction, $\gamma=.07, SE=.04$ bootstrapped 95%CI [.01, .13]. (3) Neighbour Day participation → neighbourhood identification → relationship satisfaction, $\gamma=.09, SE=.04$, bootstrapped 95%CI [.02, .17].

*** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

6.4 The benefits of Neighbour Day participation for mental health and wellbeing

Two indicators were used to measure mental health and wellbeing across the two timepoints.

6.4.1 Wellbeing WHO-5

Respondents were asked to rate their wellbeing on a validated five-item scale (e.g., I have felt active and vigorous). A paired samples *t*-test revealed that on average respondents had significantly decreased wellbeing at T2 from T1, $t(467)=3.91$, $p<.001$ (see Figure 14).



Figure 14. Significant decrease in wellbeing at T2.

6.4.2 Psychological distress K6

Respondents were asked to rate on a validated six-item scale on how often they felt (e.g., nervous, everything was an effort). A paired samples *t*-test revealed that on average respondents had significantly increased psychological distress at T2 from T1, $t(467)=-2.14$, $p=.033$ (see Figure 15).

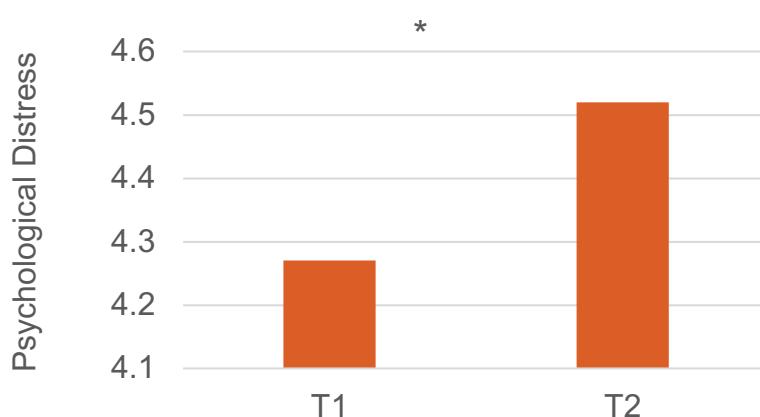


Figure 15. Significant increase in psychological distress at T2.

6.4.3 Neighbour Day participation and wellbeing

The relationship between Neighbour Day participation and wellbeing was indirect – it was via two significant indirect pathways in the serial mediation model (see Figure 16).

Neighbour Day participation was positively associated with self-reported number of close neighbours, and this, in turn, was associated higher sense of neighbourhood identification and higher wellbeing.

Neighbour Day participation was associated with a greater number of close neighbours reported at T1 ($b=1.84$, $p<.001$). Having more close neighbours was associated with a higher sense of neighbourhood identification at T1 ($b=.11$, $p<.001$), which was in turn associated with higher levels of wellbeing at T2 ($b=1.45$, $p=.024$). Neither Neighbour Day participation ($p=.313$) nor number of close neighbours ($p=.526$) had a direct pathway to wellbeing at T2. This suggests that Neighbour Day participation had its effects *via* increased neighbourhood identification. These results controlled for T1 wellbeing ($b=.74$, $p<.001$), and covariates such as age ($p=.085$), gender ($p=.124$), educational attainment ($p=.836$), neighbourhood SES ($p=.867$), long lockdown ($p=.691$), and relationship status ($p=.658$).

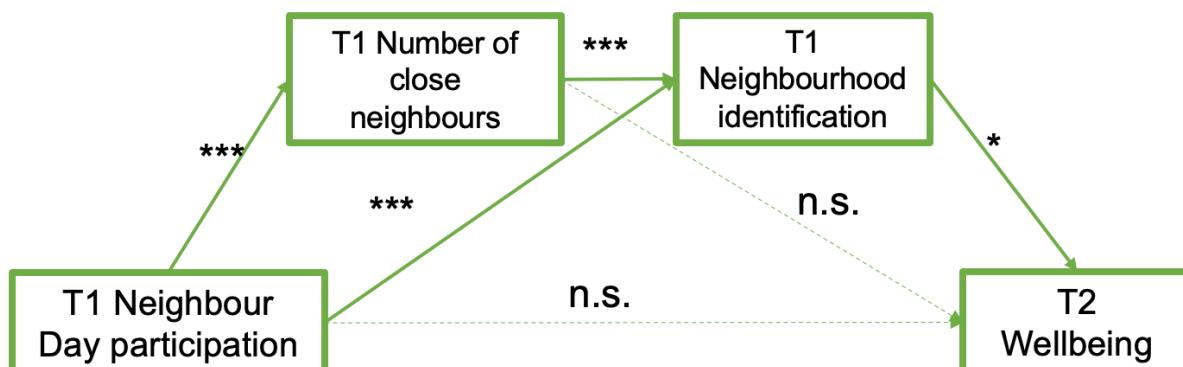


Figure 16. The relationship between Neighbour Day participation and wellbeing via number of close neighbours and neighbourhood identification.

Note. Indirect effects were significant: (1) Neighbour Day participation → number of close friends → neighbourhood identification → wellbeing, $\gamma=-.30$, $SE=.15$ bootstrapped 95% CI [0.03, 0.63]. (2) Neighbour Day participation → neighbourhood identification → wellbeing, $\gamma=.86$, $SE=.42$ bootstrapped 95%CI [.09, 1.71]. *** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

6.4.4 Neighbour Day participation and psychological distress

Neighbour Day participation was positively associated with self-reported number of close friends and higher neighbourhood identification and this, in turn, predicted lower psychological distress. The indirect effects of the serial mediation model were significant for all three pathways (see Figure 17).

Neighbour Day participation was associated with a greater number of close neighbours reported ($b=1.80, p<.001$). More close neighbours were associated with higher sense of neighbourhood identification at T1 ($b=.11, p<.001$) and more likely to report lower levels of psychological distress ($b=-.32, p=.003$). Neighbour Day participation ($p=.086$) nor number of close neighbours ($p=.286$) did not have a direct pathway to psychological distress at T2, which suggests that it has its effects *via* increased neighbourhood identification. These results controlled for T1 psychological distress ($b=.79, p<.001$), and covariates such as age ($b=.00, p=.069$), gender ($p=.822$), educational attainment ($p=.912$), neighbourhood SES ($p=.270$), long lockdown ($p=.149$) and relationship status ($p=.652$). Of the covariates, age was a significant predictor of psychological distress at T2, where younger people reported higher psychological distress.

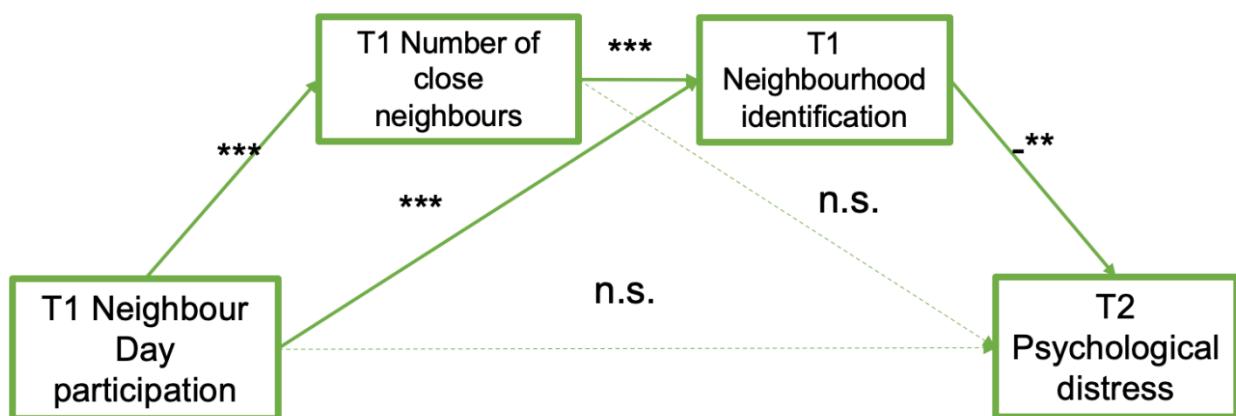


Figure 17. The relationship between Neighbour Day participation and psychological distress via number of close neighbours and neighbourhood identification.

Note. Indirect effects were significant: (1) Neighbour Day participation → number of close friends → neighbourhood identification → psychological distress, $\gamma=-.06, SE=.03$ bootstrapped 95% CI [-.13, -.01]. (2) Neighbour Day participation → neighbourhood identification → psychological distress, $\gamma=-.18, SE=.08$ bootstrapped 95%CI [-.34, -.05]. *** = $p < .001$, ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$



7 Discussion and Recommendations

7.1 Key Findings

Neighbour Day represents an investment in community resilience. **People who were involved in Neighbour Day were protected against detriments to mental health and wellbeing** that occurred nationally in the context of a global pandemic and the unpredicted and significant impact on peoples' freedoms, employment, and finances.

There was no evidence that the benefits of Neighbour Day are limited to particular subgroups – such as certain age groups, or hosts rather than attendees. Instead, **people from all walks of life reaped the benefits of Neighbour Day involvement**. This is unusual in social and health research and is potentially attributable to the grass-roots nature of Neighbour Day that enables people to tailor their activities to the needs of their specific community, rather than a 'top down' imposition of a one-size-fits-all model.

Neighbour Day participation supported social connection with a more diverse range of social connections than just neighbours. Neighbour Day participants had more diverse social networks, and greater frequency of contact with those networks, across all modalities except social media. Looking at changes over time, we found that **Neighbour Day participants tended to experience improved satisfaction with all relationship types and improved mental health and wellbeing over time**, and this occurred indirectly via their more positive and rich neighbourly relationships.

7.2 Limitations

The conclusions of this evaluation are derived from the available data, and should not be extrapolated beyond this sample and context. This dataset only had post-Neighbour Day timepoints, which means that the direction of the effect is not always clear. For example, people with stronger social connections may be more likely to participate in Neighbour Day, rather than the other way around. However, this limitation is mitigated somewhat by two years of previous data (2019 and 2020) which did include a pre-Neighbour Day timepoint and found the same pattern of results. This increases our confidence that Neighbour Day has a causal effect on social connection. However, without experimental data (e.g., a randomised controlled intervention study), it is not possible to obtain strong evidence of causality.

Additionally, investigation of potential response bias revealed that people were more likely to respond to the follow-up survey at T2 if they had a higher level of educational attainment, came from a higher SES neighbourhood, and had experienced long lockdown between T1 and T2. Steps were taken to account for the effects of these socio-demographic indicators by controlling for them in our analyses. Nevertheless, we should be tentative in applying the conclusions of this evaluation to people who experienced short lockdown, or to people from potentially vulnerable communities (i.e., those with lower educational attainment or from lower SES neighbourhoods).



7.3 Conclusions

Overall, this investigation found a clear link between Neighbour Day participation (either as a host or attendee) and wellbeing. Neighbour Day participants were more likely to have high quality social relationships of all kinds (e.g., with their colleagues and friends), rather than only their neighbours. Furthermore, there was evidence for positive changes in both social connection and wellbeing over time among Neighbour Day participants. When considered together with previous evaluations (Cruwys et al., 2019; 2020; Fong et al., 2021), we can be confident that Neighbour Day represents a scalable, grass-roots approach to building community connection that benefits wellbeing.

7.4 Recommendations

1. Australia should invest in Neighbour Day as a model of building community connection and wellbeing. The evidence base, which is growing and becoming increasingly robust, indicates that Neighbour Day presents an effective community-based campaign that can benefit social wellbeing and mental health at a whole of population scale.
2. Australian communities will continue to experience crises and threats to wellbeing in the future (e.g., bushfires, floods). Evidence from this evaluation suggests that Neighbour Day may be particularly beneficial in promoting resilience and protecting the mental health of Australian community members during times of collective change or crisis.
3. While the evidence supports Neighbour Day's role in benefitting community connection and wellbeing, future evaluations might focus on its potential benefits in particularly vulnerable communities.
4. Future economic evaluation may provide evidence for the cost effectiveness of Neighbour Day as a campaign to benefit population mental health.
5. The strongest possible evaluation of Neighbour Day would entail a controlled intervention study looking at how the introduction of Neighbour Day activities affected individuals and communities who had previously not been engaged with Neighbour Day. While the Council project in progress will go some way toward providing such evidence, a design which included a control group and random assignment of neighbourhoods to conditions (i.e., Neighbour Day activity vs. control) would be the gold standard in demonstrating causal evidence for Neighbour Day's benefits.



8 References

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9 Appendix A | T1 & T2 Survey

(Questions not asked at T2 highlighted)

Have you heard about Neighbour Day before?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Did you participate in any events or activities related to Neighbour Day *< />* this year (2021)?

- Yes
- No
-

If you did participate in 2021, were you a Neighbour Day ...

- organiser, co-organiser, or host
- participant or attendee
- other, please state: _____

What kind of Neighbour Day event or activity were you involved in? You can select more than one if applicable.

- Morning/Afternoon teas
- BBQ
- Street party
- Bring plate/shared food
- Picnic
- Games
- Visited neighbour(s)
- Left connection or calling card
- Community meeting
- Posted a message on social media
- Started a neighbours chat group
- Checked in with a neighbour
- Had an online gathering
- Did a favour for a neighbour
- Other, please state: _____

Approximately how many people were involved in the event or activity that you were involved with? (e.g., 10) If you were involved in more than one activity, think about the largest one.

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

(strongly disagree to strongly agree)

- I feel a part of my local community
- I identify with (the people in) my neighbourhood
- I see myself as a resident of this neighbourhood
- I am pleased to be a neighbourhood resident
- I have strong ties with other residents in this neighbourhood
- I belong to lots of different groups



- I join in the activities of lots of different groups
- I am friendly with people in lots of different groups
- I have strong ties with lots of different groups

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

(*strongly disagree to strongly agree*)

- I feel safe being outside and alone in my neighbourhood at night
- I feel safe being outside and alone in my neighbourhood during the day
- People around here are willing to help their neighbours
- People in this neighbourhood can be trusted
- People in this neighbourhood generally do not get along with each other
- This is a close-knit neighbourhood
- People in this neighbourhood do not share the same values
- I feel that most people can be trusted

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following questions:

(*hardly ever, some of the time, often*)

- How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel isolated from others?

During the past month, how often did you feel

(*at no time, some of the time, less than half of the time, more than half of the time, most of the time, all of the time*)

- I have felt cheerful in good spirits
- I have felt calm and relaxed
- I have felt active and vigorous
- I woke feeling fresh and rested
- My daily life has been filled with things that interest me

In the past 7 days, my sleep quality was

- very poor
- poor
- fair
- good
- very good

In the past 7 days....

(none of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time)

- ...my sleep was refreshing
- ...I had a problem with my sleep
- ...I had difficulty falling asleep
- ...my sleep was restless.
- ...I tried hard to get to sleep.

To make sure you are paying attention please select the third option.

- first
- second
- third



- fourth
- fifth

During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel....

(none of the time, a little of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all of the time)

....nervous?

....hopeless?

....restless or fidgety?

....so depressed that nothing could cheer you up?

....that everything was an effort?

....worthless?

How satisfied are you with..... (where 0 = not at all satisfied and 10 = completely satisfied)

Not Applicable

...your relationship with your partner?

...your relationship with your family?

...your relationship with your extended family?

...your relationship with your neighbours?

...your relationship with friends?

...your relationship with colleagues?

...your relationship with ex-colleagues?

In general, how often do you do the following things: (Never to Very Often)

- Have telephone, email or mail contact with friends or relatives not living with you
- Chat with your neighbours
- Attend events that bring people together such as fetes, shows, festivals or other community events
- Get involved in activities for a union, political party, or group that is for or against something
- Make time to attend services at a place of worship
- Encourage others to get involved with a group that's trying to make difference in the community
- Talk about current affairs with friends, family or neighbours
- Make time to keep in touch with friends
- Volunteer your spare time to work on boards or organising committees of clubs, community groups or other non-profit organisations
- See members of your extended family (or relatives not living with you) in person
- Get in touch with a local politician or councillor about issues that concern you
- Give money to charity if asked

How much do you agree or disagree with each statement?

(strongly disagree to strongly agree)

- People don't come to visit me as often as I would like
- I often need help from other people but can't get it
- I seem to have a lot of friends
- I don't have anyone that I can confide in
- I have no one to lean on in times of trouble
- There is someone who can always cheer me up when I'm down



- I often feel very lonely
- I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me
- When something's on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better
- When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone

My current social network (people you see or talk to at least once every 2 weeks) comprises of...

(Tick if applicable)

- Spouse/partner(s)
- Parent(s)
- Parent(s)-in-law
- Children
- Other close family members
- Close neighbours
- Friends
- Workmates
- Schoolmates
- Fellow volunteers
- Fellow group members/ teammates
- Members of religious group

How many people do you have in each social network category?

Number of persons (e.g., 1, 5, 10)

- Spouse/partner(s)
- Parent(s)
- Parent(s)-in-law
- Children
- Other close family members
- Close neighbours
- Friends
- Workmates
- Schoolmates
- Fellow volunteers
- Fellow group members/ teammates
- Members of religious group

How many times have you communicated with people in your network over the past week?
via.... (0 times, 1-5 times, 6-10 times, 11-15 times, more than 15 times)

- face to face/ in person meetings
- phone
- email
- text messages
- social media/ online/ virtual
- other (e.g., letter/ postcard/ gift etc)



How many hours have you spent socialising with people in your network in the past week?

- 0 hrs
- 1-5 hrs
- 6-10 hrs
- 11-15 hrs
- 16+ hrs

Relationship status. Are you...?

- married / partnered / in a relationship
- single / never married
- divorced / separated
- widowed

Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship (with your partner/s):

- extremely unhappy
- fairly unhappy
- a little unhappy
- happy
- very happy
- extremely happy
- perfect

I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner

- not at all true
- a little true
- somewhat true
- mostly true
- almost completely true
- completely true

How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

- not at all
- a little
- somewhat
- mostly
- almost completely
- completely

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

- not at all
- a little
- somewhat
- mostly
- almost completely
- completely

What is your age in years?



What is your gender?

- female
- male
- non-binary
- other
- rather not say

What is your current living situation?

- living alone
- couple with no children under 18 living at home
- couple with at least 1 child under 18 living at home
- single parent with at least 1 child under 18 living at home
- living with housemates
- other, please specify: _____

What is your highest level of education?

- Less than Year 12
- Year 12 Certificate
- Certificate or vocational diploma
- Some university
- Completed a Bachelor Degree
- Completed a Master/Doctorate Degree

What is your current employment status? (you can select more than one answer)

- Full time employed
- Part time employed
- Student
- Retired
- Disability pension
- Carer / parent
- Not currently working

What is your industry of occupation? (Please select the one that applies best.)

- Accommodation and food services
- Administrative and support services
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
- Arts and recreation
- Construction
- Education and training
- Electricity, gas, water, waste services
- Emergency services
- Financial and insurance services
- Healthcare and social assistance
- Information media and telecommunications
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Professional, scientific, technical services
- Public administrative and safety
- Real estate services



- Retail trade
- Transport, postal and warehousing
- Wholesale trade
- Other, please specify: _____

In which country were you born?

- Australia
- Other, please state: _____

What language do you predominantly speak at home?

- English
- Other, please state: _____

What is your postcode?

How were you directed to this survey?

- Relationships Australia mail-list
- Friend / acquaintance
- Facebook / social media
- Other, please specify _____

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your neighbourhood, or about the survey?
