

The connection recession: Australians are lonelier than ever, with friendships and romantic relationships

New report reveals Australia's deepening friendship crisis, with close to 1 in 3 feeling socially isolated

SYDNEY, November 2025 – Aussies are lonelier and more isolated than ever, with nearly 1 in 3 (32%) currently feeling socially isolated – a figure that skyrockets to almost 3 in 5 (58%) among Gen Z.

Data from the Real Relationships Report 2025 by life insurance provider Real Insurance reveals that over 1 in 2 Australians (54%) have shrinking friendship circles, while 2 in 5 (44%) go out less due to the cost of living.

The report also found that 2 in 5 (41%) have been ghosted by a friend – no wonder 1 in 2 (50%) Australians who've tried making new friends say it's become harder in recent years.

The Real Relationships Report 2025, commissioned in partnership with consumer research group MYMAVINS, surveyed 1,204 Australians aged 18 and over. The report highlights a significant decline in close friendships, with more than half of respondents reporting fewer close friends and a growing difficulty forming new connections – both platonic and romantic.

“Hannah Zaslowski, an Australian digital creator who shares her life as a single girl in her 30s explains, ‘I’m lonely. In fact, 1 in 3 Australians are. That’s a crazy number. Don’t get me wrong, I keep myself busy with a million hobbies, but that doesn’t change the fact that, like 54% of Australians, I feel my friendship group shrinking and it’s getting harder and harder to connect, even though my phone tells me I pick it up an average of 116 times a day,’ she said.”

The U-Curve of Australian friendships

The report reveals a “U-shaped” pattern in friendships across age groups. While Gen Z and Gen Y each report having around four close friends, this drops slightly to three for Gen X. Baby Boomers and older Australians average nearly five friends, suggesting that time and space may allow for greater investment in social connections. Conversely, the unemployed report the fewest, with only three friends on average.

The cost of living: A barrier to socialising

Financial pressures are significantly impacting how Australians socialise. Beyond going out less frequently (44%), over 3 in 10 (31%) are choosing more low-cost or free activities, and a quarter (25%) suggest staying in or meeting locally to save money. Close to 1 in 5 (19%) avoid social plans altogether due to cost, and a similar proportion (17%) are more careful about splitting bills.

For younger generations, the impact is even more profound, with nearly half of Gen Z (48%) and 1 in 3 Gen Y (33%) saying they miss out on making memories with friends due to financial concerns. This highlights how economic realities are not only limiting activities but also reshaping the social lives of younger Australians. Despite this, Gen Y spend the most on social catch-ups, averaging \$163 per month, compared to Baby Boomers at \$70.

“Even though we’re connected all the time, we feel more socially isolated than ever. I understand how people feel closer to ChatGPT or a social media influencer than their real-life friends. But this rise in online connection over face-to-face connection is leaving us feeling drained rather than connected, with 73% of Gen Z reporting digital fatigue,” Hannah said.

“People are craving real-life connections, which is evident in the rise of in-person dating meet-ups and apps that match you with strangers for dinner. I also find it interesting that Boomers, who say their main communication method is phone calls, are the ones with the most friends.”

The double-edged sword of digital connection

While digital platforms offer new ways to connect, they also present challenges. Australians connect with more friends online (an average of six per month) than in person (an average of four). Texting (63%) and phone calls (57%) remain the top digital communication methods, but generational differences are stark: Gen Z prefer Snapchat (60%) and Instagram DMs (55%), while Baby Boomers favour phone calls (72%) and email (38%).

Over 3 in 5 Gen Z (63%) and Gen Y (61%) use apps to connect with new people, primarily due to difficulty meeting others in person (37%) or for convenience (34%). However, this digital reliance comes at a cost, as a significant portion of the population – particularly younger adults – experience digital fatigue. Nearly 2 in 5 (37%) Gen Z sometimes feel more connected to online personalities than to some of their real-life friends, underscoring the evolving nature of connection in the digital age. Among AI tool users, about 1 in 3 (34%) say they feel a personal connection with the technology.

The complexities of love down under

The path to romance is becoming more challenging, with over half (51%) finding dating harder than in the past. This difficulty is more pronounced among women (57%) than men (45%), though nearly 1 in 3 Gen Z (32%) find dating easier – likely due to new dating platforms.

Australians report an average of three romantic partners in their lifetime, with most meeting through mutual friends (17%), work (15%), or online dating (15%).

The rise of “situationships” – relationships that lack clear definition – is a notable trend, experienced by over 2 in 5 Australians (45%), with Gen Z leading the way (20% currently in one, 47% have had at least one before). Breakups and divorces are also common, with over a quarter (27%) experiencing one in the past five years. Notably, 3 in 5 (60%) Gen Z have had a breakup in this period. The aftermath can be complex, with more than 2 in 5 (45%) not on good terms with any of their ex-partners.

“Connections in dating can be so complicated. As someone who’s been on a lot of first dates, I can tell you ghosting, situationships, and dating fatigue are just part of the journey. I’m old enough to remember the pre-dating-app era, when you met people in the wild, through friends, at bars, even stopping at a red light, and the days it took to type a single text on T9, tapping 4-3-5-5-6 for one word. Now, those connections are largely lost, and people prefer to hide behind screens, sending likes instead of putting themselves out there,” Hannah said.

The modern workplace and romance

Workplace romances, while not uncommon in the past – with 3 in 10 Aussies (30%) saying they’ve been in one, either currently or previously – are now approached with greater caution. A significant majority (66%) believe employers actively discourage such relationships.

Among those currently employed, nearly 3 in 5 (56%) say they personally avoid dating a colleague. Men are more likely than women to be currently in, or to have ever been in, workplace romances (34% vs 26%), while women are more likely to rule them out entirely (57% vs 42%). This shift reflects evolving workplace cultures and a heightened awareness of professional boundaries.

The findings from the Real Relationships Report 2025 underscore a growing need to address social isolation and foster meaningful connections in Australia. As digital interactions become more prevalent and financial pressures continue to mount, understanding these dynamics is crucial to supporting the well-being of individuals and communities.

The most common factors negatively affecting friendships are having different lifestyles (34%) and different priorities or goals in life (32%), highlighting the challenges of maintaining connections amidst life’s changes.

As Australians navigate the shifting dynamics of modern relationships, the ability to connect both in person and online remains paramount.

Key findings at a glance:

- **Shrinking circles:** Over 1 in 2 Australians (54%) say their number of close friends has decreased, with women more likely to report this decline (60% vs 48% for men). Only 13% report growth in their friendship networks.
- **Friendship famine:** Nearly 1 in 8 Australians (12%) report having no close friends, rising to almost 1 in 5 among Gen X (17%).
- **Harder to connect:** Among those who have tried making friends, 1 in 2 (50%) say it has become harder in recent years, a sentiment felt most strongly by younger generations (55% of Gen Z and 57% of Gen Y).
- **Ghosted generation:** About 2 in 5 Australians (41%) have been ghosted by a friend, with Gen Z (54%) and Gen Y (59%) experiencing this far more often than Baby Boomers (25%).
- **Social isolation on the rise:** Nearly 1 in 3 Australians (32%) currently feel socially isolated, a figure that skyrockets to almost 3 in 5 (58%) among Gen Z. Women are also more likely to report current isolation (40% vs 23% for men).
- **Digital fatigue:** Over 1 in 3 Australians (35%) experience digital fatigue or burnout from maintaining online relationships, with 73% of Gen Z and 54% of Gen Y reporting this occasionally or frequently. Women are also more likely to feel digitally drained (41% vs 28% for men).
- **Cost of connection:** Over 2 in 5 Australians (44%) go out less frequently due to the cost of living, and nearly 1 in 2 Gen Z (48%) feel they miss out on making memories with friends due to financial concerns.
- **Dating harder:** Over 1 in 2 Australians (51%) say dating has become harder in recent years, with women more likely to report difficulty (57% vs 45% for men).
- **Situationship surge:** Over 2 in 5 (45%) Australians have experienced a “situationship,” with Gen Z most likely (20% currently in one, 47% have had one before).
- **Workplace romance taboo:** Nearly 3 in 5 (56%) would avoid dating a colleague in today's workplace, and 2 in 3 (66%) believe employers discourage such relationships, with 84% of Gen Z agreeing.

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About the Real Relationships Survey 2025

The Real Relationships Report 2025 is part of the ongoing Real Insurance Research Series. It explores how Australians are meeting new friends, nurturing existing bonds, and navigating the complex dynamics of social interaction in contemporary society. The report examines the influence of technology, social media, and shifting cultural norms on how relationships are formed and sustained. It also considers the rising costs – both emotional and financial – associated with maintaining these connections. The research looks at generational differences in social connections, the lifespan of friendships, and the effects of broader social divides, particularly in the context of political polarisation.

Commissioned by Real Insurance and conducted by MYMAVINS, the research is based on a quantitative online survey undertaken between 13 and 18 August 2025, with 1,204 Australian adults. The sample is broadly representative across age, gender, wealth, and location.

About Real Insurance

Real Insurance is an award-winning provider of insurance products, specialising in life, income protection, funeral, health, home, car, pet, travel and landlords insurance. In the market since 2005, Real Insurance have protected the quality of life of many Australians through the delivery of innovative products. Real Insurance is the proud recipient of many product and service awards, including being announced as the 2023 Roy Morgan Customer Satisfaction - Risk & Life Insurer of the Year, 2026 Mozo Experts Choice for Exceptional Value Car Insurance, 2025 Product Review award for Life Insurance and Funeral Insurance, 2023 WeMoney Finalist award for Best in Flexibility in the life insurance category, and Feefo's 2025 Platinum Trusted Service Award across a range of products. Real Insurance is a trading name of Greenstone Financial Services Pty Ltd.