



## Mind the Gap

### Collecting Evidence of Unmet Social Support Needs

**Mind the Gap (MTG)** is an initiative of the [Western Linkages](#) Social Isolation Workgroup. The Workgroup is made up of service providers from across the Western metropolitan region that meet monthly to discuss regional social support issues. The workgroup reported anecdotal information about the gaps in social support services, but there was a lack of evidence being collected at any level. This made it extremely difficult to identify trends, generate ideas and solutions.

MTG is an online survey tool that enables service providers to collect information about situations where they been unable to provide a potential client with a social support service. Commencing in May 2009, data has been collected from across the Western and Northern metropolitan regions. The initiative is supported in the North by the [Northern Collaborative Project](#).

Collecting evidence of unmet need in relation to social isolation and loneliness is difficult, because every situation is highly individual. The survey combines drop down boxes with space for open comments to enable

a more personal (but anonymous) description. The workgroup designed the survey to be to quick and easy to complete. On average each entry takes only 1.5 minutes. The survey is accessible from the webpages of Western Linkages ([www.westernlinkages.org.au](http://www.westernlinkages.org.au)) and the Northern Collaborative Project ([www.salisbury.sa.gov.au](http://www.salisbury.sa.gov.au)).

**Any service provider can contribute by clicking on the link to enter data. If you provide a social support service but have been able to assist a client, please tell us about it!**

Regular reports are provided through the workgroups of Western Linkages and the Northern Collaborative Project. A revised version of the survey was launched in February 2010. At this stage the workgroup plans to cease the survey in October 2010.

For further information please contact Jennifer Fischer, Western Linkages on 8440 6741 or email [jennifer.fischer@dfc.sa.gov.au](mailto:jennifer.fischer@dfc.sa.gov.au). In the Northern suburbs contact Sue Leckie, Northern Collaborative Project 8406 8566, email [sleckie@salisbury.sa.gov.au](mailto:sleckie@salisbury.sa.gov.au).

#### The outcomes.... A brief snapshot!!

In the first twelve months MTG collected data on ninety clients who had been referred to a social support program but were unable to be assisted:

- There was an even split between the under 64yrs and 65yrs+ age groups
- Highest numbers were reported in the 75-84yrs age group, with 60% of these people being 80-84yrs.
- One third of all persons were aged 45-64yrs.
- In the <64yrs age group, physical disability and mental health issues were the most reported known 'conditions'.
- In the 65yrs+ age group frail aged and living alone were the most reported known 'conditions'

Some of the reasons for the service gap included:

- Occupational health and safety issues for workers and/or volunteers. Examples included clients who are smokers, environmental / safety issues in the home.
- The persons needs extend beyond what can reasonably be expected of a volunteer program.
- The program was unable to accommodate the persons behavioural issues, for a range of reasons.
- The person requires a paid worker to support participation but Disability SA is unable provide this.
- And as always transport, transport, transport! Reported in higher numbers in the North.

'Social innovation is rarely stimulated by people sitting alone at their desk – complex social problems are likely to be solved only through intense and open collaboration between many participants'.

