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neighbour day

**ANU Evaluation
Supplementary Report**

March 2021

Report Authors

Associate Professor Tegan Cruwys
Jessica L. Donaldson

Research School of Psychology
College of Health and Medicine

+61 2 6125 5023
tegan.cruwys@anu.edu.au

The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
www.anu.edu.au

CRICOS Provider No. 00120C

Acknowledgements

This evaluation was funded by Relationships Australia with in-kind support from the Australian National University. All comments and enquiries regarding this report should be addressed to A/Prof Cruwys at the contact details above.

Any queries regarding the Neighbour Day campaign or Relationships Australia should be directed to Nick Tebbey: ntebbey@relationships.org.au.

We are grateful for the generous participation of over 400 Neighbour Day survey respondents across three time-points.

Report Date

17 March 2021

Suggested Citation

Cruwys, T., & Donaldson, J. L. (2021). Neighbour Day: ANU Evaluation Supplementary Report March 2021. The Australian National University and Relationships Australia.

What is Neighbour Day?

Neighbour Day is a year-long community-development campaign, which is celebrated in March of every year to support the development of social connections and healthy relationships within neighbourhoods and communities throughout Australia. In so doing, Neighbour Day aims to reduce loneliness and promote social inclusion. Neighbour Day was founded in Melbourne by Andrew Heslop in March 2003, who suggested a ‘National Check on Your Neighbour Day’ in the Melbourne Age in 2003 and managed the campaign with his own and in-kind resources. Since 2013, Relationships Australia – an Australian, not-for-profit, community-based organisation – has been the home of Neighbour Day. As a campaign, Neighbour Day functions within a collective impact-style framework and relies on (1) management by stakeholders, (2) tools and materials to support Neighbour Day events and platforms, and (3) a communication campaign.

Neighbour Day in 2020 and this evaluation

The 2020 Neighbour Day Campaign was run in unique circumstances against a backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. The [2020 ANU Evaluation Report](#), published in August 2020, reported on surveys of people who intended to take action for Neighbour Day 2020, run in March (Timepoint 1 ‘T1’; 235 respondents), and in April (Timepoint 2 ‘T2’; 273 respondents). This supplementary report analyses changes since these timepoints using data from a new survey run in October-November 2020 (Timepoint 3 ‘T3’; 151 respondents). Ethical approval for this study (Protocol: 2019/132) was obtained through the Human Research Ethics Committee at the ANU. All respondents who completed T1 and/or T2 were invited to complete this final follow-up survey. In particular, we were interested in respondents’ ability to ‘bounce-back’ from the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic. Full details of the measures are provided in the 2020 ANU Evaluation Report.



Among respondents of the T3 survey, the average age was 48 years and 81% were female. A large proportion of respondents were born in Australia (73%) and had English as their first language (98%); this is comparable to T1, where 84% of respondents identified as White/Caucasian. Around two-thirds of T3 respondents were tertiary educated (68%). This suggests that, like in March 2020, tertiary educated people were overrepresented within our sample, as 36% of Australians aged 15-64 hold a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹ The majority of respondents were in full-time employment (38%) and another 36% were employed part-time. Most respondents lived in detached houses (73%), with a further 17% residing in townhouses or units/low-rise apartments. One-third (34%) of respondents indicated that they had lived in their

¹. Australia Bureau of Statistics. (2020) Qualifications and Work. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/qualifications-and-work/latest-release#key-statistics>

neighbourhood for over 10 years, with 8% having lived there for less than a year. The majority of respondents (64%) either lived in a two-parent household with child(ren) under 18 years or were couples with no children at home.

An analysis was conducted to assess whether some T1 respondents were more likely to complete T3 than others. The only reliable difference was that older people were less likely to complete T3 than younger people, $b = -.06$; $\chi^2(53) = 74.21$, $p < .05$.

Findings

Does Neighbour Day facilitate social connection?

Respondents were asked a series of questions about Neighbour Day and their neighbourhood/community. The majority of respondents indicated that they planned on maintaining contact with their neighbours/community (95%; see Figure 1). They also indicated that Neighbour Day was a useful tool/mechanism to help people connect with their neighbours (86%; see Figure 2).

At T3, respondents also indicated how much they agreed with the statement “Before participating in Neighbour Day, I already knew my neighbours well”. A large proportion of respondents agreed with this statement (58%; see Figure 3). This suggests that our sample were, on average, already somewhat connected with neighbours before participating in the Neighbour Day campaign. Existing community links may facilitate engagement with Neighbour Day.

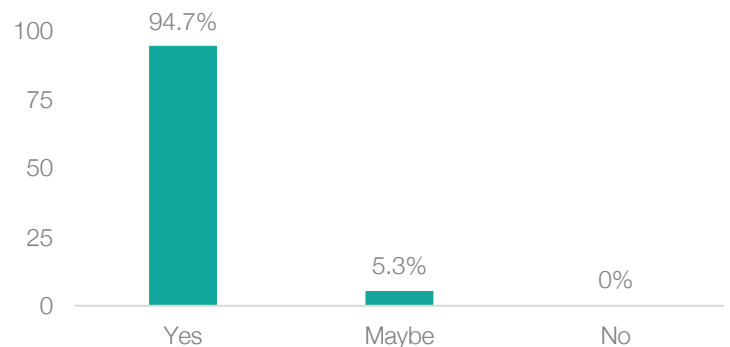


Figure 1. Are you planning on maintaining ongoing contact with your neighbours/community? (T3)

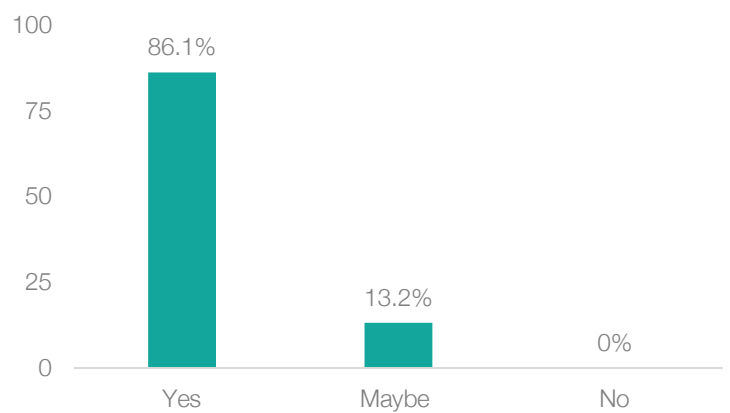


Figure 2. Is Neighbour Day a useful tool to assist people to connect with their neighbours? (T3)

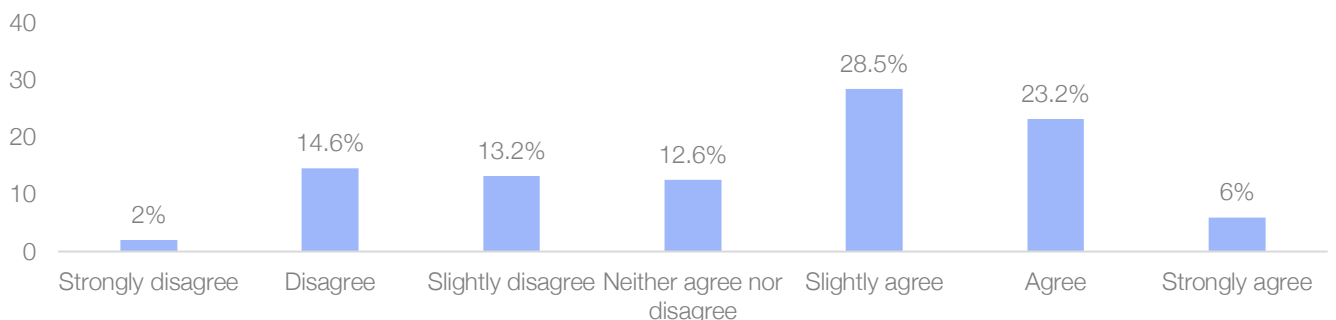


Figure 3. Before participating in Neighbour Day, I knew my neighbours well (T3)

Importantly, the majority of respondents (85%) agreed with the statement “After participating in Neighbour Day, I have stronger relationships with my neighbours” (see Figure 4). This indicates that the Neighbour Day campaign helped respondents to develop stronger connections with their neighbours. These two variables were not significantly related to one another ($r = .11, p = .173$), which suggests that the benefits of Neighbour Day for social connectedness were experienced equally by those who were well connected and less well connected prior to Neighbour Day.

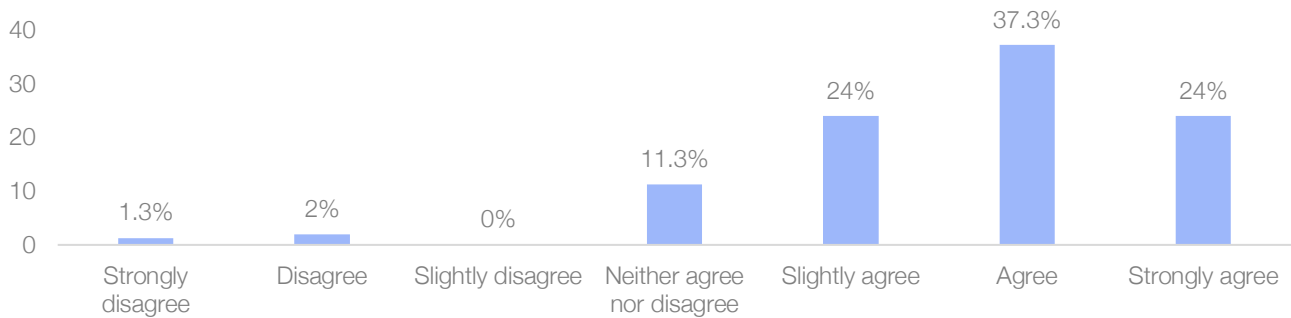
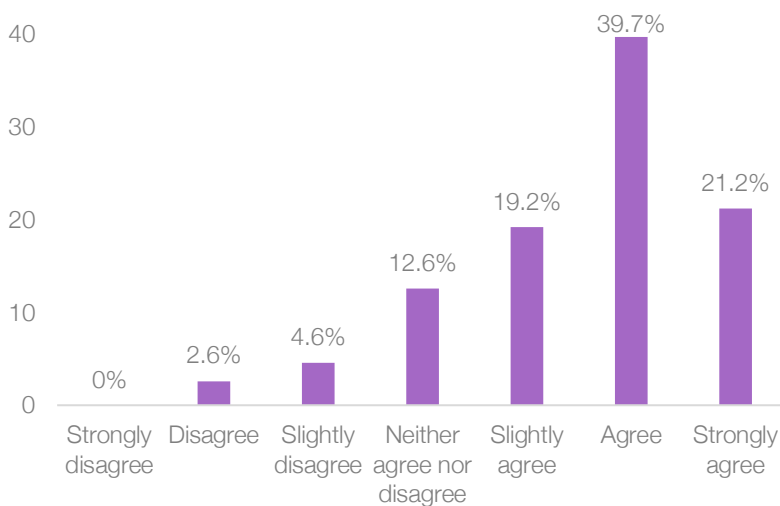


Figure 4. After participating in Neighbour Day, I have stronger relationships with my neighbours (T3)



Respondents were asked if their neighbours had been a source of support during 2020. Again, the majority of respondents (80%) agreed with this statement (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. My neighbours have been a source of support during 2020 (T3)

“I have always considered neighbours important. 2020 has made the connection all the more important.”

Finally, we asked respondents how many years they had participated in Neighbour Day. A reduction in participation in 2020 was expected, given the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, most respondents had commenced their involvement with Neighbour Day in the past 1-2 years (see Figure 6), which suggests that the campaign is gaining momentum.

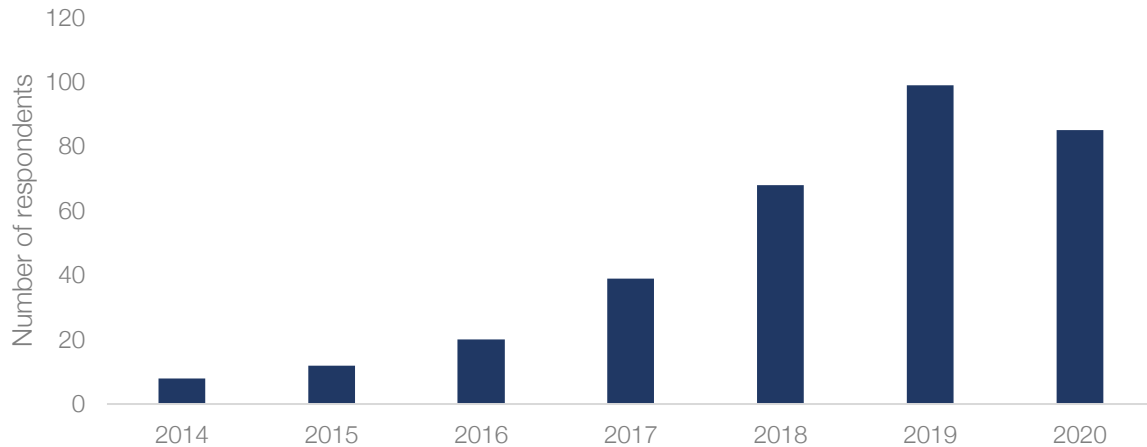


Figure 6. Years when T3 respondents participated in Neighbour Day

Does Neighbour Day contribute to resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In response to the COVID-19 context, respondents were also asked who they could rely if they had to self-isolate. The majority of respondents agreed that they could rely on their neighbours (81%; see Figure 7).

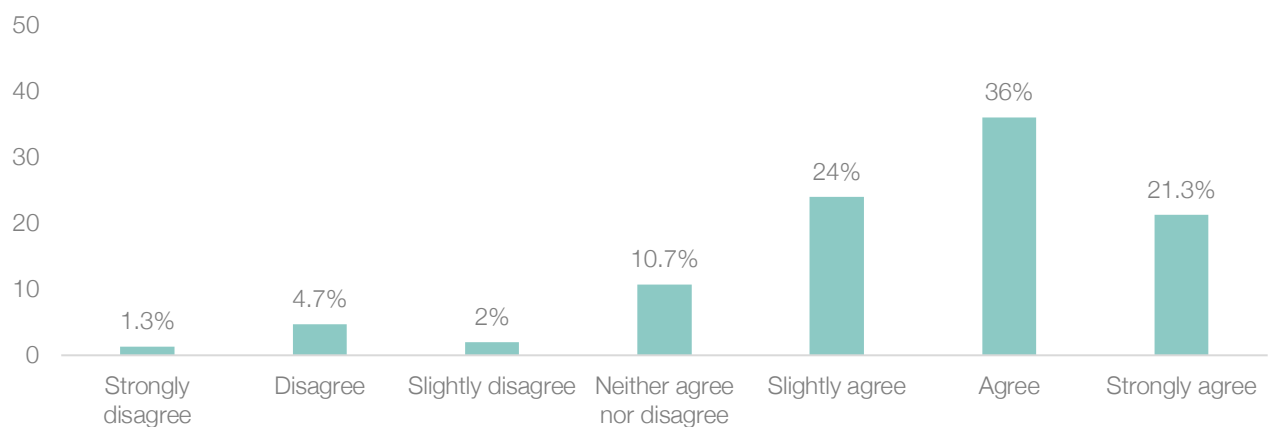


Figure 7. If I had to self-isolate, I feel I could rely on my neighbours for support (T3)

“However wide my contacts are, it's my neighbours who are my immediate source of friendship and support. In a year when wider interactions have been restricted, my close neighbours have become closer. It's made the connection all the more important.”

The more strongly participants agreed with the statement that they had stronger relationships with their neighbours after participating in Neighbour Day, the more likely they were to agree that they could rely on neighbours if they were self-isolating, see Figure 8, $r = .47, p < .001$.

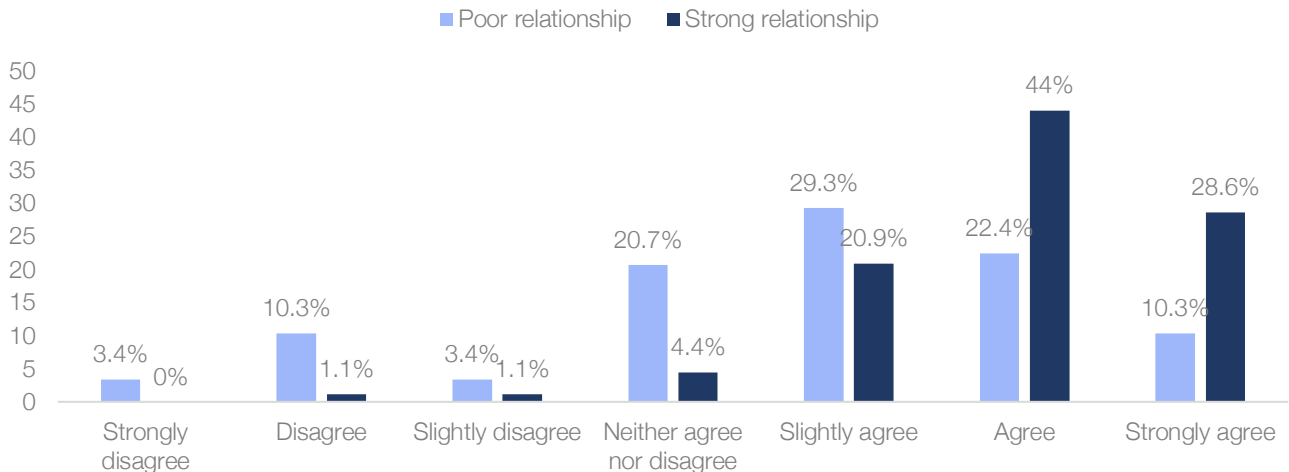


Figure 8. Respondents felt more able to rely on their neighbours if self-isolating if they had a stronger relationship with the neighbours because of Neighbour Day.

What is a Neighbour?

At T3, we asked respondents who they considered to be their neighbours (see Figure 9). This revealed a broad range of responses, however, people were most likely to agree that people who lived in their street ($M = 5.62, SD = 1.42$), local area (5-15 streets; $M = 5.53, SD = 1.38$), and suburb ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.44$) were their neighbours. Respondents were less in agreement about whether people in their town or their friends and acquaintances were ‘neighbours’.

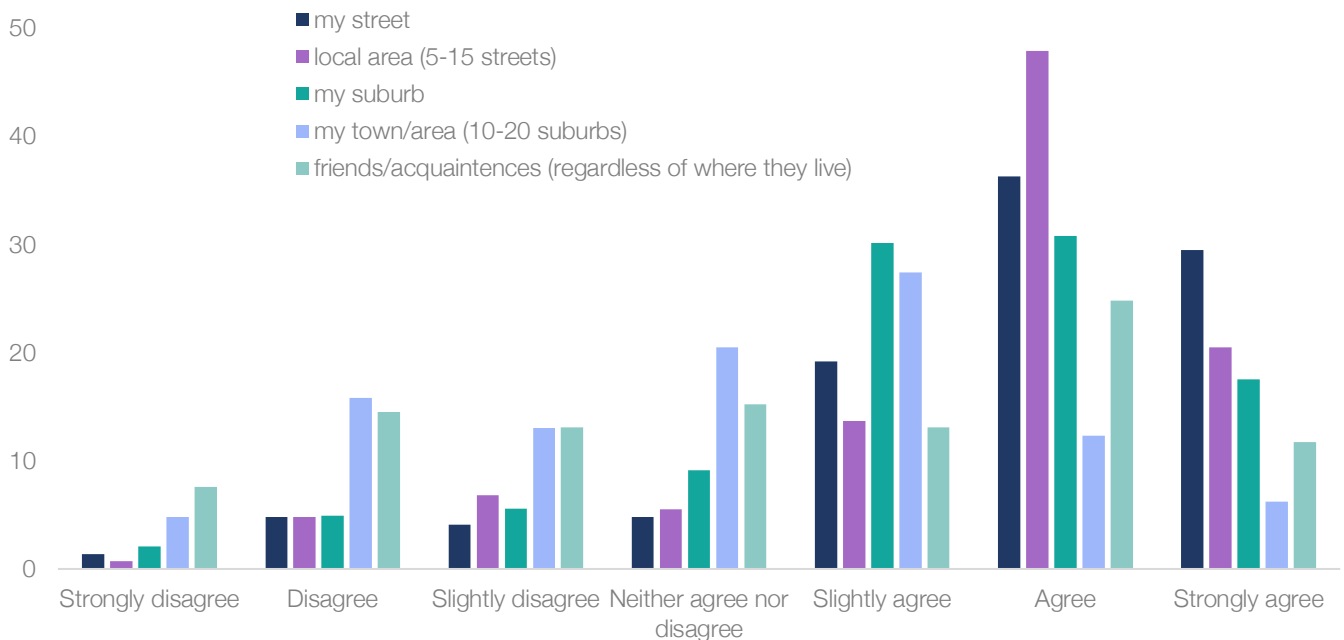


Figure 9. When I think about 'my neighbourhood', I'm focusing on ...

“My ideas about neighbourhood have broadened to include the suburb and streets around my other community groups too.”

“It has become more about online connections this year”

What ongoing benefits does Neighbour Day have?

At T3, we asked respondents which neighbourly actions they have taken since April 2020, when the T2 survey was completed (see Figure 10). Like in April, saying hello to a neighbour or a visit to neighbours were two of the most frequently reported actions (83% and 70%, respectively). A large proportion of respondents also reported doing a favour for a neighbour (70%). Respondents also mentioned a variety of other actions they completed, such as: welcoming new neighbours, checking-in on neighbours, supporting elderly neighbours, organising community activities (e.g., exercise classes), sharing food and drinks outside with their neighbours, and distributing COVID-19 information.

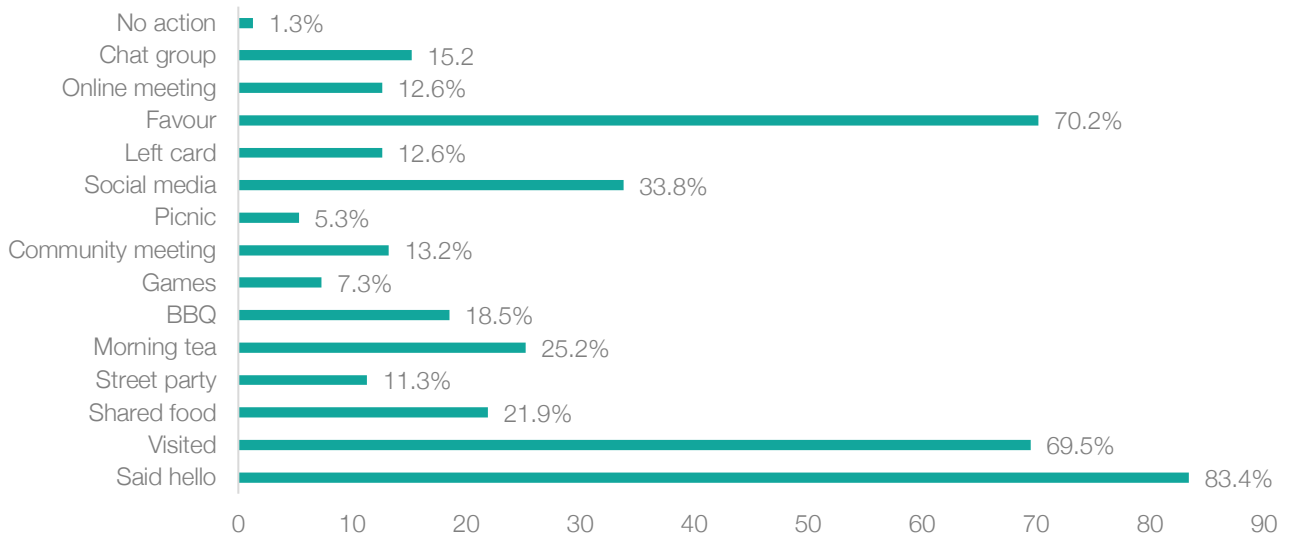


Figure 10. Neighbourly actions since April 2020

Respondents considered a range of potential benefits of connecting with their neighbourhood or community (see Figure 11). At T3, the top benefits were: getting to know neighbours/community (85%), helping to create a strong community (78%), and showing support/checking in with neighbours (78%). Respondents also noted benefits for their own mental health (63%) and creating feelings of safety and support (75%). This focus on community wellbeing was consistent with their responses at T2 during COVID-19 lockdown, but differed markedly from 2019 responses, when respondents were more focused on personal and recreational benefits.

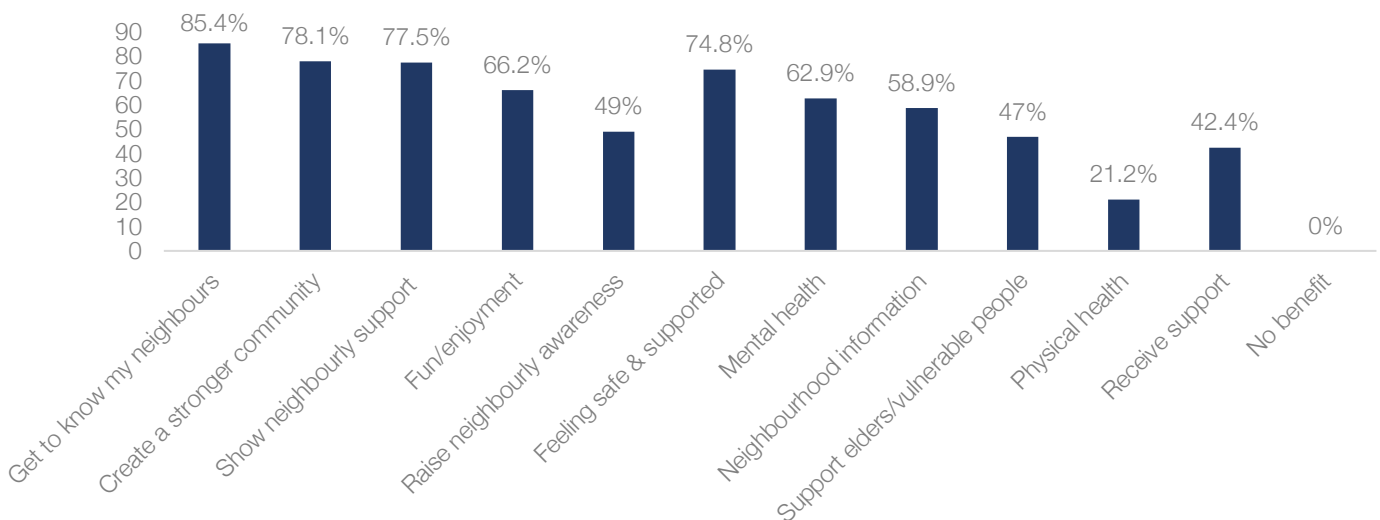


Figure 11. Perceived benefits of connecting with their neighbourhood/community

Finally, we conducted an analysis of how respondents' wellbeing and social connections had changed across the course of 2020. These analyses are based on a series of t-tests comparing each pair of timepoints, so that participants who had data available for 2 out of 3 timepoints could be included in the analyses in order to maximise statistical power.

From T1 to T2, respondents reported an increased sense of belonging to their local community, although this was not a statistically reliable increase, $t(96) = -1.61, p = .111$. However, this improvement had consolidated by T3 such that belonging was significantly higher at T3 than T1, $t(78) = -3.01, p = .004$, see Figure 12.

Similarly, respondents reported increased neighbourhood identification between T1 and T2, although this increase was not statistically reliable, $t(96) = 1.35, p = .181$. However, the sustained improvement in neighbourhood identification at T3 was statistically significant, $t(78) = -2.47, p = .016$, see Figure 13.

Comparable patterns were observed for neighbourhood satisfaction, which improved significantly between T1 and T2, $t(96) = -3.26, p = .002$, see Figure 14. There was no significant reduction in neighbourhood satisfaction from T2 to T3, $t(119) = 1.07, p = .285$, see Figure 14.

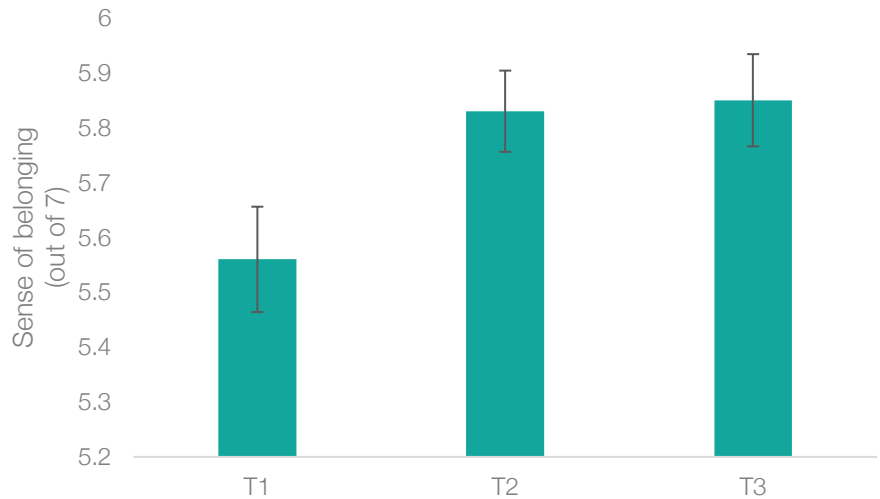


Figure 12. Respondents' sense of belonging
Note. Error bars represent standard error.

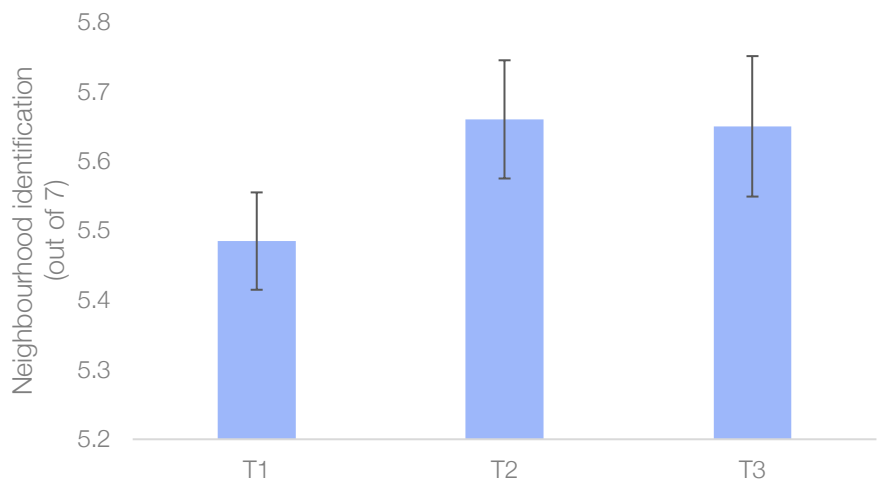


Figure 13. Respondents' neighbourhood identification
Note. Error bars represent standard error.

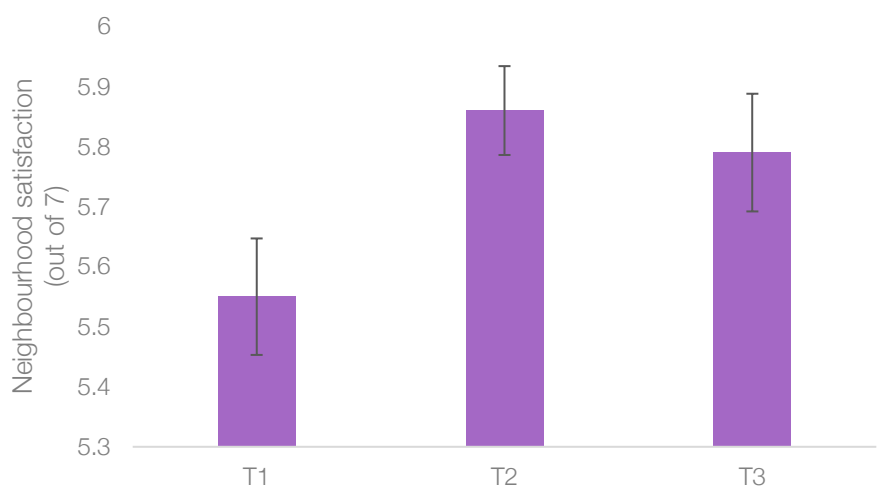


Figure 14. Respondents' neighbourhood satisfaction
Note. Error bars represent standard error.

Respondents reported a marginally significant increase in loneliness from T1 to T2, $t(94) = -1.68, p = .096$. However, loneliness had reduced significantly by T3, $t(120) = 4.09, p < .001$. In fact, this decrease in loneliness was so large that loneliness was reliably lower at T3 than at T1, $t(77) = 1.99, p = .050$, see Figure 15.

Finally, we investigated change in wellbeing across 2020. Respondents experienced a significant decrease in wellbeing from T1 to T2, $t(95) = 2.54, p = .013$. Wellbeing remained suppressed at T3 with no significant improvements from T2, $t(121) = -.18, p = .861$, see Figure 16.

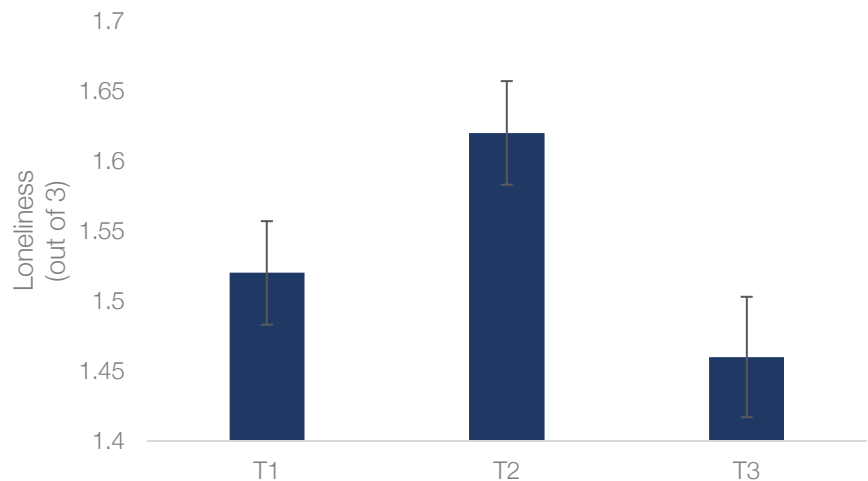


Figure 15. Respondents' sense of loneliness
Note. Error bars represent standard error

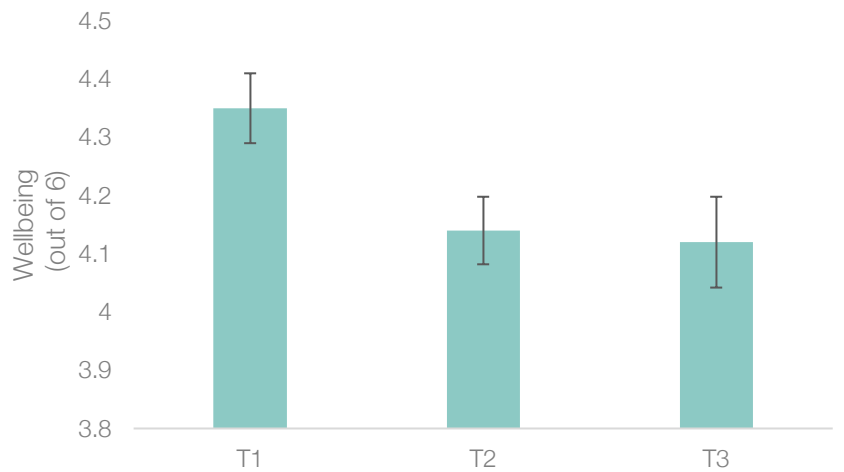


Figure 16. Respondents' sense of wellbeing
Note. Error bars represent standard error

“Hoping to participate in neighbour day again in the future. COVID has unfortunately taken a toll on many opportunities [for] our community to get together and reduced our capacity to offer social activities in our region. Loved the ideas and suggestions for connecting with our neighbours.”

“Neighbour Day is always very important for the street and other locals. Just keep doing what you are doing now!”

“Neighbour day was such a huge success for me and my neighbourhood. Thank you so much...for promoting it and making the gathering possible.”

“I feel a little bit like people in my neighbourhood don't know what it is. I think it should try to become more of a thing that people know about - like clean up aus day. Maybe if you have the money you could spend it on a TV advertising campaign? ...I feel like your target market does and would respond positively to an ad about neighbour day and would want to be involved if they knew what it is.”

Summary and Recommendations

Key Finding 1. Respondents were engaged and positive about the sustained value of Neighbour Day in their communities, despite setbacks in 2020 related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The benefits of Neighbour Day for community wellbeing were emphasised, and 7/10 respondents had visited a neighbour and done a favour for a neighbour in the last six months.

Key Finding 2. Most respondents were confident that their neighbours would support them in times of need (e.g., if required to self-isolate). Endorsement of this was stronger among respondents who perceived a closer bond with their neighbours since Neighbour Day 2020.

Key Finding 3. ‘Neighbourhood’ was most commonly defined as one’s street or local area (5-15 streets). However, respondents also somewhat agreed that a neighbourhood could be a suburb, a town/area, or even one’s friends and acquaintances, regardless of where they lived.

Key Finding 4. Despite the pandemic (or perhaps, in part, because of the pandemic), respondents reported significant increases in neighbourhood belonging, neighbourhood identification, and neighbourhood satisfaction from March-November 2020. They also reported significantly less loneliness (after a temporary, but significant, increase during lockdown).

Key Finding 5. Wellbeing decreased significantly across the course of 2020. This finding should be interpreted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to elevated rates of anxiety and depression within Australian adults.²

Caveats. The conclusions of this evaluation are derived from the available data, and should not be extrapolated beyond this sample and context. The modest sample sizes for some analyses mean that the true effect sizes may be smaller or larger in the full population. It is also the case that while multiple timepoints of data can provide some insight into the direction of relationships between variables, a true test of causality would require an experimental research design.

Recommendation 1. Local community connections are an essential resource for bolstering social cohesion and wellbeing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing investment in developing neighbourhood connection is likely to have wide-reaching benefits for Australia, both in the short and longer term.

Recommendation 2. Conduct a more nuanced evaluation of the kind of social connections that are bolstered by Neighbour Day activities. The role of Neighbour Day in promoting strong vs. weak ties, and group vs. individual relationships, remains relatively unexplored. Future research might establish the link between neighbourhood engagement and particular kinds of social relationships.

Recommendation 3. The next step in building an evidence base for Neighbour Day is to reach attendees and others who are more peripherally or fleetingly engaged in neighbourly activities. A strong test of the benefits of Neighbour Day would compare a population of people who engaged in a Neighbour Day activity as attendees to a matched control group of people who did not.

² Dawel, A., Shou, Y., Smithson, M., Cherbuin, N., Banfield, M., Calear, A. L., Farrer, L. M., Gray, D., Gulliver, Housen, T., McCallum, S. M., Morse, A. R., Murray, K., Newman, E., Harris, R. M. R., & Batterham, P. J. (2020). The effect of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing in a representative sample of Australian adults. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.579985>