

# Cost of living pressures in Australia sees social cohesion hit record low

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Financial and cost-of-living pressures are among the top issues impacting Australians' sense of belonging, pride and social cohesion in 2023, according to a major study from The Australian National University

(ANU) and the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute.

Economic and [social issues](#), compounded with growing concern about [inequality](#), has seen [social cohesion](#) in Australia plummet to its lowest level in 16 years.

The [2023 Mapping Social Cohesion study](#) of more than 7,500 people found almost half of participants, 48%, believe [economic issues](#) are the most important set of problems facing Australia today, followed by housing affordability and shortages (14%).

"This is comfortably the largest share of the population citing these problems since the question was first asked in 2011," lead researcher Dr. James O'Donnell, from ANU, said.

"With [financial pressures](#) heightened, the proportion of people who reported being satisfied with their finances dropped to 61% in 2023, down from 64% in 2022; 12% of respondents in 2023 reported that they often or sometimes went without food, and 22% often or sometimes could not pay for medicines or [health care](#)."

The study also found about 2 in 5 Australians, 41%, describe themselves as either poor, struggling to pay their bills or just getting by in 2023. This is up from 37% in 2022.

Dr. O'Donnell said Australians are increasingly concerned about economic inequality.

"A record high 84% of people believe the gap between those with high and low incomes is too large. This is up from 76% in July 2020," he said.

"People who are struggling financially are much less likely to feel a great sense of worth and belonging in Australia, and much more likely to feel

pessimistic about the future. We know social and economic inequalities in Australia negatively impact social cohesion more broadly.

"With more Australians under financial pressure in 2023, it's perhaps not a surprise that our sense of belonging and connectedness to each other are also lower this year.

"With more people worried about [economic inequality](#), we're less trusting of government, more worried about the future and less connected to Australian values and society.

"This is an important call to action for governments and the community to consider policies and programs that give everyone the opportunity to contribute to society to the fullest."

The study found the proportion of people who feel a great sense of belonging in Australia fell to a record low of 48% in 2023. But despite this decline, the researchers say there are signs of optimism for social [cohesion](#) in Australia moving forward.

"Aussies continue to hold high and growing support for multiculturalism and diversity and remain connected in their local neighborhoods," Dr. O'Donnell said.

"In 2023, 89% of Australians agree that multiculturalism has been good for Australia.

"Meanwhile 80% of people feel like they belong in their neighborhood, while 64% of people think their neighborhood has a strong sense of community."

Provided by Australian National University

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