



Are international students finding support and community in Australia?

Studying abroad opens the door to new experiences, but it can also feel overwhelming. For many international students, it means leaving behind friends, family, and familiar support networks to start fresh in a completely new environment.

Allianz Partners Australia's latest State of Student Healthcare Report surveyed 2,038 international students from 114 countries around the world. As part of this report, we invited students to share their experiences of social wellbeing, connection and sense of community.

Read on to discover what we found.

17.5%

reported finding it difficult or extremely difficult to make new friends

It's hard to make friends

Almost one in five students (17.5%) reported finding it difficult or extremely difficult to make new friends. This challenge was particularly evident when trying to build connections with domestic students. Many respondents shared they relied heavily on other international students, due to their shared experiences and understanding.

One international student and Allianz Care OSHC member shared she also struggled to make friends when she first arrived.

"Many of us come from homes where we were super supported, and suddenly we're in a totally new place where nothing feels familiar. It's easy to start thinking, 'I don't belong here,' or 'people here won't understand me or really accept me', she explains.

Increasing opportunities for international students to interact with others, particularly domestic students, could be a valuable way to improve their social connections and their experience of living in Australia.

Students are finding help offshore

While only 10.4% of students reported having no active support network (either in Australia or back home), many still find it difficult to access help locally. The most commonly relied-upon support system was friends from home, with 41.6% reporting this was their primary source of support.

"Back when I first arrived, I mostly relied on my family and old friends from home," one international student shares. "But over time, I made more friends here in Australia who really got what I was going through, because they were living it too."



41.6%

reported their primary source of support was friends from home

She adds she eventually sought support from mental health services offered by her university and OSHC, which helped her tackle some important issues.

Staying connected to home offers comfort and reassurance, but highlighting available onshore support ensures international students feel just as supported in their new environment.

Students from some countries struggle more

While the data indicates some widespread issues, it's clear these experiences are felt more acutely by students from certain countries.

For example, students from Europe and Africa generally reported higher levels of satisfaction with their relationships and support networks. On the other hand, students from South America, South Asia, China and Hong Kong were the least satisfied.

This could indicate that students from these home countries face more challenges adapting to life in Australia and could benefit from targeted support.

Loneliness is a key concern

When community and connection are missing, loneliness often follows. For some international students in Australia, this is an all-too-familiar reality.

18.7% of students who responded to our survey reported always feeling lonely, and over 20% said this sense of isolation had caused them to consider withdrawing from their course and returning to their home country.

One international student agreed she also experienced feelings of loneliness and isolation.

"What helped me was talking to old friends, using the uni's free counselling service, and forcing myself to attend social events," she explains.

By increasing awareness of mental health services, we can ensure international students feel seen, supported, and better equipped to embrace all that life in Australia has to offer.

Financial stress is also a factor

There's no doubt Australia's rising cost of living is impacting international students, impacting not just their finances, but their overall wellbeing and student experience.

With over 80% of students experiencing financial hardship, stress or vulnerability, it's no surprise many are trying to save wherever they can – even at the expense of valuable social experiences.

More than half of students said their financial situation prevented them from regularly participating in social activities such as going to bars, playing sports or attending movies and other paid events.

Increasing free or low-cost opportunities for international students to socialise with peers and make new connections could make a meaningful difference in their social wellbeing.

Making a difference

One international student's advice for other international students is simple: Get involved.

"Go to that social event, even if you feel awkward. Look around for another international student who looks just as lost as you! Start a convo, be kind, and find common ground."

For the international education sector, enhancing how we support international students in building a sense of community and connection is integral to the international student experience. Not only will this help future students settle in, feel at home and make the most of their experience, it will safeguard Australia's reputation as a leading destination for international study.

Go to that social event, even if you feel awkward. Look around for another international student who looks just as lost as you! Start a convo, be kind, and find common ground.

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