



**THE HON. MALCOLM TURNBULL MP  
PRIME MINISTER**

**TRANSCRIPT**

Tuesday, 12 September 2017

**Remarks at 'R U OK? Day' Breakfast  
Parliament House, Canberra**

E&OE...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well good morning. It's great to be here with Andrew Wallace who is standing in for Julian Leeser, who together with Mike Kelly are Co-Chairs of the Friendship Group. I acknowledge Greg Hunt, the Minister for Health and Sport, Bill Shorten, Julie Collins the Shadow Minister for Ageing and Mental Health, Murray Bleach, the Chairman Suicide Prevention Australia, Mike Connaghan - Chairman of RUOK? and Mike and I were reflecting on how many decades it is since we first met and worked together in advertising but there it is. You're looking very youthful. That's what happens if you don't go into politics.

And of course Professor Batterham is our guest speaker this morning – and so many other leaders in health and in suicide prevention, and of course all my Parliamentary colleagues here as well.

Now we're all united here behind Suicide Prevention Day and R U OK? Day. Suicide Prevention Day was on Sunday and R U OK? Day is later this week.

Each year, around one in every five Australians experience mental illness and in 2015, more than 3,000 took their own life.

Now, suicide is about people, it's about families, not numbers. But the statistics confront us all and call on us to do much better.

I am firmly of the view that our reluctance to talk about mental health issues – whether you call it a stigma or a taboo - has been a very real barrier to addressing this issue. You can't deal with a problem that you do not acknowledge.

So we have started to talk about suicide and mental health and in an open and honest way, as we have not done in the past.

Now my own electorate of Wentworth includes one of the most beautiful yet tragic places in Australia, The Gap. It is a place where many, many Australians take their lives. A part of The Gap story until he died in 2012 was an extraordinary man called Don Ritchie who was an old sailor and also very tall, I might add.

For the best part of half a century, he lived near The Gap and when he would go for walks and he saw somebody there – anxious, perhaps standing on the wrong side of the fence – he would talk to them.

He would say: “Are you OK? How are you going? Do you want to have a chat? Do you want to come in and have a cup of tea?” He would gently lure them back from the brink by doing no more than showing that he cared for them.

That is why ‘R U OK? Day?’ is so important. Because what it is all about, is showing that we do care. Four letters ‘R U O K’ import so much. They send a message of love, they send a message of care. Critically important and what could be more Australian than looking out for your mates? Or looking out for people you don’t even know? Looking out for somebody who seems anxious, worried, or someone at work that isn’t quite themselves. It is a caring and a loving question. And it raises very prominently this issue of awareness, to the forefront.

At Gap Park for example, as the local Member, I’ve pushed for more funding and support for suicide prevention. Since 2010 there has been implemented a ‘Gap Master Plan’ and I want to acknowledge the support that Julia Gillard provided as Prime Minister to support the local government, the Woollahra Council, towards that funding.

It was a series of measures of signs, telephones, obviously of cameras so that the police can keep an eye on what’s going on there and also a very innovative design in defences that are hard to get over, but easier to get back over, if you know what I mean.

So all of this makes a difference and since 2010 the local police tell me there has been a significant increase in the number of successful interventions at The Gap. But still, far, far too many people die there and in many other places around Australia.

Now, we’re working better to understand the factors that have contributed to rising suicide rates and to support communities to respond to their own unique circumstances.

We’re committed to reducing suicide rates through regional trials, research and building the evidence base with flexible models that address regional needs and work in our local communities.

This includes the implementation of 12 regional suicide prevention trial sites in Townsville, the Kimberley and Darwin and other places. Digital innovation trials and ten lead sites to trial different care models. All looking to see what actually works.

We’re also investing a great deal more in mental health and making services more effective, accessible and tailored to local needs.

Since 2016, we’ve invested an additional \$367.5 million in mental health and suicide prevention support.

That includes a \$194.5 million election package towards building a modern 21st century mental health system and our \$173 million in new funding in the 2017-18 Budget and \$58.6 million to expand mental health and suicide prevention services for current and ex-serving ADF members and their families.

So we're putting existing resources to work. But you know, the most important resource is you, is all of us. You know my very good friend and a good friend of all of yours, I know, Ian Hickie has got a great concept. He talks about the 'mental wealth of nations', sort of elaborating from Adam Smith.

The truth is that mental health is enormously costly, in every respect.

It's costly for individuals who suffer, it's costly to their families but it's especially costly when people take their own lives.

So we all have a vested interest in each others' mental health. The most important thing we can do is to look out for each other.

Yes, governments and parliaments and health professionals spend money and trial new approaches and use digital technologies more effectively and we're doing all these things and we'll no doubt do much more in the future.

But you know, just four letters 'R U OK?' can make a difference. Because they represent another four letters, 'L O V E' – love. That's what it's about; showing that love and care for the people with whom you are with, whether they are your families, your friends or your workmates. Reach out to them, ask are you okay, show you care. You could not just change a life, you could save a life.

Thank you very much.

**[ENDS]**