

# Media release



19 February 2021

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## Psychiatrists essential in suicide prevention says taskforce

At a time of increasing public interest and government focus on the reduction of suicide, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) taskforce on suicide prevention has released a new position statement.

The new statement, [\*Suicide prevention – the role of psychiatry\*](#), acknowledges suicide is complex but there is substantial evidence regarding clinical and social measures which can help to prevent suicide.

RANZCP President, Associate Professor John Allan explained that the taskforce has brought together leading psychiatrists across Australia and New Zealand in the field of suicide prevention, along with people with lived experience.

‘Suicide is one of the most troubling and difficult aspects of the work we do as psychiatrists. There is no simple answer to why someone has taken or wishes to take their life.

‘As mental health specialists, psychiatrists work hard to understand causes and triggers of suicide and to support people – with or without mental illness – who are experiencing suicidal distress.

‘We understand suicide is often the crisis point following a culmination of stressors and a desire to escape intolerable pain.’

Suicide risk fluctuates and is strongly influenced by an individual’s own perceptions of their circumstances. Psychiatrists endeavour to take a structured approach to risk reduction, which includes assessing the strength of the intention to act, developing safety plans and identifying access to available supports for points of crisis.

'Risk reduction and thorough assessment is something psychiatrists are skilled in, and we want to share this knowledge with government, other health professionals, communities and individuals in order to reduce suicide,' Professor Allan explained.

'The best opportunities to make a difference come from approaches that are warm, empathetic, respectful, culturally-responsive and non-judgmental.

'We recognise the best outcomes are achieved from working in partnership with other mental health professionals and those with suicide ideation, in a collaborative, all-of-community approach to suicide prevention'

Psychiatrists' ability to provide high-quality care and support is dependent on the adequate resourcing and provision of community mental health services.

'There is need for a comprehensive whole-of-life approach which spans systems, organisations and environments, combining treatment, support and intervention.

'This must include access to 24/7 crisis care for those in suicidal distress, as well as post-attempt care.

The RANZCP commends the Ministry of Health's renewed focus on suicide prevention in New Zealand, with the implementation of the Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan, and establishment of the Suicide Prevention Office which is working to change the narrative to reflect the ongoing, intergenerational impact of social determinants of suicide, this is vital in moving toward our goal to reduce suicides in New Zealand.

The RANZCP is committed to working with government and communities to prevent suicides and sees the involvement of psychiatry as a crucial element to suicide prevention efforts.

Professor Allan added, 'There is always an opportunity for individual growth and recovery from trauma and mental illness. Psychiatrists have a key role to play in suicide prevention.

'We are committed to alleviating the pain and distress associated with suicide and suicidal behavior, but to harness this energy and expertise we need to have a seat at the table to inform interventions.'

For all other expert mental health information, visit [Your Health in Mind](#), the RANZCP's consumer health information website.

**ENQUIRIES:** For more information, or to arrange an interview call Sarah Carr on +61 437 315 911, or email [media@ranzcp.org](mailto:media@ranzcp.org).

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*If you or someone you know needs help, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au) or the Suicide Callback Service on 1300 659 467 or [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au).*