



20 July 2021

Timely and accurate data key to suicide prevention

Data released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reinforces the value of data collection to help save lives.

Despite a rise in demand for helplines and mental health services, the AIHW's National Suicide and Self-Harm Monitoring System shows the numbers of suspected deaths by suicide in 2020 were similar to those in previous years.

Suicide Prevention Australia, CEO, Nieves Murray said, "Monitoring the number, trends and rates of suicide in Australia is key to understanding who is at risk and for the planning and targeting of suicide prevention activities.

"Every life lost to suicide is heartbreaking. It's important to remember that every statistic represents a life lost and a cascade of grief amongst family, friends, schools, workplaces and community groups.

"The AIHW's focus on understanding the experience of someone's journey in the 12 months before taking their life is a critical step for suicide prevention. Service provision can be better designed to meet the needs of those in distress and increase the chances of them interfacing with the right services, at the right time.

"We know that less than 50% of people in distress engage with support services before taking their life. This reiterates the need for building community capability where people are trained and equipped with the skills to respond to someone in need of help. Suicide is more than a mental health issue and while the Government has a role to play in suicide prevention, that's not where it stops. The wider community needs to be empowered and educated so they can support those in distress, much like people are trained in first-aid.

"There are many services and programs available and we need to ensure that everyone in distress gets access to them. Upskilling those working in the community helps to identify those in distress and direct them quickly to the right service – before they reach crisis point.

Support. Collaborate. Advocate.

Suicide Prevention Australia is the peak body for suicide prevention in Australia. We work to build a stronger suicide prevention sector, a more aware and engaged community, and a more effective regulatory and funding environment. Together we can achieve our shared vision of a world without suicide.



“While positive progress has been made in suicide prevention data collection with the establishment of the National Ambulance Surveillance System, there are still gaps in sourcing data around priority populations such as First Nations and LGBTQI communities.

“The data points to the importance of the protective measures put in place by Governments across Australia, like Jobkeeper and increased funding for mental health services, played an important role in protecting people from suicide risks during the first stage of the pandemic. The report notes the levels of poverty and housing stress were lower than they otherwise would have been because of these payments.

“The social support structures have clearly helped to manage distress throughout the pandemic. However, as much of Australia is currently grappling with more lockdowns due to the recent COVID-19 outbreaks, we caution any winding back of these protective measures.

“Governments need to continue to coordinate funding and build suicide prevention solutions into their policy decisions about issues as diverse as housing, employment, and helping people to build healthy social connections.

“Suicide is an incredibly complex issue that requires multiple touchpoints and responsibilities throughout all Government departments.

“The range of other factors impacting suicide like child abuse and neglect, alcohol and other drug use, intimate partner violence, family disruption, problems relating to legal circumstances, low educational attainment, lack of employment; shows the need for a whole-of-government approach.

“It is encouraging that we have not seen an increase in suicide rates as a result of the pandemic, but we can’t underestimate the levels of distress and anxiety due to COVID-19.

“It’s important to look out for signs of pandemic fatigue in yourself and those around you. Take practical steps to be kind to yourself, stay connected, check in with each other, and seek professional support when needed,” said Ms Murray.

Further information: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring>

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To get help 24/7, phone Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467. If you or someone you know are in immediate danger, phone 000 for emergency services.

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Help to report about suicide safely is available online: Go to www.mindframe-media.info

About Suicide Prevention Australia

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body and we've been providing support for Australia's suicide prevention sector for more than 25 years. We support and advocate for our members to drive continual improvement in suicide prevention policy, programs and services. Our reach is broad, including member organisations, governments, businesses, researchers, practitioners and those with lived experience. We are focused on an integrated approach to suicide prevention encompassing mental health, social, economic and community factors. We believe that through collaborative effort and shared purpose, we can achieve our vision of a world without suicide.

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