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## 5m Australians hit by suicide during COVID-19

One in four Australians report knowing someone who died by suicide during the past 12 months of the pandemic – the equivalent of 5 million people – with social isolation, the economy and jobs driving concerns, particularly amongst women.

It comes as two-thirds of Australians (66%) back the Federal Government introducing a standalone national suicide prevention act requiring all government decisions to consider and mitigate suicide risks two years in a row.

The findings are from Suicide Prevention Australia's second *State of the Nation report*, which will be officially released next week on World Suicide Prevention Day 2021 (Friday, 10 September).

Suicide Prevention Australia CEO Nieves Murray said history showed major increases in suicide were linked to major social and economic events\* and there was none more concerning facing Australia than right now.

Ms Murray said legislation was the best prevention against suicide rates increasing, particularly given the major government decisions about economic, employee and welfare to support Australia's COVID-repair and recovery.

"There have never been more lives lost to suicide in this country," said Ms Murray.

"Australia needs a national Suicide Prevention Act and we need to act now.

"We all have a role to play in preventing suicide. An Act will legislate a whole-of-government priority to prevent suicide and focus the attention of every agency to address the risk of suicide across our community.

"Suicide prevention isn't limited to health portfolios. Housing is suicide prevention, employment is suicide prevention, finance is suicide prevention, and education is suicide prevention.

"We know social and economic isolation are the biggest drivers of suicide rates and COVID-19 has seen Australians subject to 18 months of rolling lockdowns and disruption to their personal lives, employment and businesses.

"We've seen how quickly COVID-19 cases can get out of hand and we need to have the same national policy focus and vigilance to stop suicide rates doing the same.

"The fact an overwhelming majority of Australians support this low-cost, low-risk, low-impact, high-outcome option should be the green light the Federal Government needs.

### **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.



“The heightened economic and social threat posed by COVID-19 means we cannot afford to wait to legislate,” said Ms Murray.

Australia’s annual suicide rate (3,318) are currently more-than-three times that of deaths from COVID-19 (1,012).

**\*According to the Federal Government’s Australian Institute of Health & Welfare:** “While an individual’s reasons are personal and often complex, overall peaks and troughs in rates and numbers of deaths by suicide coincide— more or less—with social and economic events.”

**Key findings**

- In the past year, one in four (25%) Australians say they know someone in their personal life or networks, who has died by or attempted suicide either directly (15%) or indirectly (11%).
- More than one in four (27%) Australians say they have ever directly (16%) or indirectly (16%) sought help or searched for advice from a suicide prevention service in the past 12 months.
- Australians believe that the people most at risk of suicide over the next 12 months are young people 12-25 years (42%), middle-aged Australians 25-55 years (29%) and men (29%).
- Other groups thought to be most at risk include Australians living in regional and rural areas (24%), LGBTIQ Australians (21%), Indigenous Australians (18%) and older Australians 55+ years (18%)
- Two thirds (67%) of Australians agree that all Government decisions should consider the risk of suicide and have clear plans in place to mitigate any negative impacts following from the decision while just 10% disagree.
- Two thirds (66%) of Australians agree, when advised of successes achieved by similar legislation in Japan, that Australia should introduce a standalone Suicide Prevention Act similar to Japan, that looks to take a whole-of-government and not just a health approach to suicide prevention. Of the remainder just 8% disagree with this sentiment.

<b>The biggest risk to suicide rates over the next 12 months?</b>			
Risk	National	Male	Female
Social isolation and loneliness	64%	58%	70%
Unemployment & job security	58%	53%	64%
Family and relationship breakdowns	57%	52%	62%
Cost of living and personal debt	55%	50%	61%
Drugs and alcohol	53%	50%	56%

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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.*

### **About the survey**

The 2021 Suicide Prevention Australia State of the Nation report is an annual suicide prevention and mental health sector survey, which will be officially released on World Suicide Prevention Day (10 September 2021).

It also includes public survey results commissioned by Suicide Prevention Australia from YouGov plc. Total sample size was 1049 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th - 22nd August 2021. The survey was completed online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Australian adults (aged 18+).

**Help to report about suicide safely is available online:** Go to [www.mindframe-media.info](http://www.mindframe-media.info)

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### **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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