

The Senate

---

Community Affairs  
References Committee

---

The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia

June 2010

© Commonwealth of Australia 2010

ISBN 978-1-74229-209-0

Senate Community Affairs Committee Secretariat:

Ms Naomi Bleeser (Secretary)

Mr Hamish Hansford (Secretary)

Mr Owen Griffiths (Principal Research Officer)

Ms Leonie Peake (Research Officer)

Ms Lauren Burke (Research Officer)

Ms Sophia Fernandes (Executive Assistant)

Ms Victoria Robinson-Conlon (Executive Assistant)

The Senate

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: 02 6277 3515

Fax: 02 6277 5829

E-mail: [community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au)

Internet: [http://www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_ca](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca)

This document was produced by the Senate Community Affairs Committee Secretariat and printed by the Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House, Canberra.

# **HELP INFORMATION**

## **Lifeline**

**13 11 14 (24 hour crisis hotline)**

**[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)**

## **Kids Help Line**

**1800 551 800**

**[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)**

## **Mensline**

**1300 78 9978**

**[www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)**

**Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service**

**1800 011 046**



---

# MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

## 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament

### Members

Senator Rachel Siewert, Chair	AG, Western Australia
Senator Claire Moore, Deputy Chair	ALP, Queensland
Senator Judith Adams	LP, Western Australia
Senator Sue Boyce	LP, Queensland
Senator Carol Brown	ALP, Tasmania
Senator the Hon Helen Coonan	LP, New South Wales

### Participating Members for this inquiry

Senator Mark Furner	ALP, Queensland
Senator Gary Humphries	LP, Australian Capital Territory
Senator Catryna Bilyk	ALP, Tasmania
Senator Gavin Marshall	ALP, Victoria
Senator Dana Wortley	ALP, South Australia



---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Terms of reference.....	1
Conduct of the inquiry .....	1
Acknowledgements .....	2
Appropriate language .....	3
Suicide and euthanasia .....	3
Structure of the report.....	3
Background to suicide and suicide prevention.....	4
<b>CHAPTER 2 .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>COSTS OF SUICIDE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Introduction .....	7
Personal costs .....	7
Social costs .....	9
Financial costs .....	10
Conclusion .....	13
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>SUICIDE REPORTING &amp; STATISTICS .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Introduction .....	15

---

Data on suicide and trends.....	15
The collection of suicide data in Australia.....	17
Impediments to accurate suicide reporting.....	20
Consequences of underreporting.....	26
Scope of reporting.....	28
Conclusion.....	30
<b>CHAPTER 4.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>ROLES AND TRAINING.....</b>	<b>33</b>
Introduction.....	33
Suicide prevention roles.....	33
Discharge and follow up support.....	40
Stepped care and accommodation services.....	43
Coordination of care.....	45
Patient information and privacy.....	48
Pharmacological issues.....	49
Suicide assistance training.....	50
Conclusion.....	52
<b>CHAPTER 5.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS.....</b>	<b>57</b>
Introduction.....	57
Awareness in the community.....	57
Stigma.....	59
Public discussion of suicide.....	62
Suicide awareness programs.....	63
Media guidelines and reporting.....	65
A National Suicide Awareness Campaign.....	68
Targeted awareness-raising programs.....	71
Issues for consideration.....	74



---

Conclusion .....	77
<b>CHAPTER 6 .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>TARGETED PROGRAMS AND UNIVERSAL INTERVENTIONS .....</b>	<b>81</b>
Introduction .....	81
Universal, selective and indicated interventions .....	81
Universal interventions.....	82
Access to means and suicide hotspots .....	84
Alcohol and drugs.....	86
Targeted programs.....	87
Men.....	87
Indigenous communities.....	89
Children and Young People.....	93
People who attempt suicide or self harm.....	96
People with mental illness .....	97
Rural and remote areas .....	99
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people .....	102
People bereaved by suicide .....	104
Culturally and linguistically diverse people (CALD) .....	107
Prisoners .....	109
The elderly.....	110
Other groups .....	111
Conclusion .....	112
<b>CHAPTER 7 .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>SUICIDE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>119</b>
Introduction .....	119
NSPS suicide research.....	119
A focus on the evaluation of interventions.....	120
Disseminating research.....	122

---

Gaps in research .....	124
Funding.....	125
Conclusion.....	127
<b>CHAPTER 8 .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY.....</b>	<b>129</b>
Introduction .....	129
Suicide prevention in Australia .....	130
Coordination and collaboration.....	134
Governance and accountability .....	136
Funding issues .....	139
Conclusion.....	142
<b>CHAPTER 9 .....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1.....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>LIST OF PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS, TABLED DOCUMENTS AND     ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AUTHORISED FOR PUBLICATION BY     THE COMMITTEE.....</b>	<b>149</b>
Tabled Information.....	157
Additional Information Received.....	159
<b>APPENDIX 2.....</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>WITNESSES WHO APPEARED BEFORE THE COMMITTEE AT PUBLIC     HEARINGS.....</b>	<b>167</b>