

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At least six Australian lives are taken by suicide every day, however there continues to be a lack of public awareness about the impact of suicide on the community. The title of the Committee's report *The Hidden Toll: Suicide in Australia* reflects this situation as well as the hope that increased public attention and support for suicide prevention can reduce the damage it causes. The following summarises the Committee's recommendations.

The costs for individuals, families and communities affected by suicide cannot be measured but are clearly enormous. The financial cost of suicide is likely to be measured in the billions every year. The Committee has recommended a detailed independent economic assessment of the cost of suicide and attempted suicide in Australia.

The number of suicides in Australia has been underreported. The Committee has recommended continued and expanded support for the activities of the National Committee for Standardisation of Reporting on Suicide, the standardisation of coronial legislation and practices, the national adoption of a standardised police form and additional resources and training for staff in coronial offices to improve accuracy of the statistics relating to suicide.

Frontline staff, workers in community organisations and other 'gatekeepers' need suicide awareness and prevention training. The Committee has recommended staff in primary care, law enforcement and emergency services receive mandatory suicide risk assessment, prevention and awareness training, all 'front line' staff should receive suicide awareness training and increased access should be provided for staff in community organisations and the general community to undertake suicide awareness and prevention training.

People who have attempted suicide, have suicidal ideation or have received psychiatric care should be assisted and supported. The Committee has recommended all hospital emergency departments should maintain at least one person at all times with mental health training and the capacity to undertake suicide risk assessments, mandatory procedures should be implemented to provide follow up support to those leaving care, programs should link services and agencies to improve the continuity of care for those at risk of suicide, and additional funding should be provided for stepped accommodation.

The public awareness of suicide needs to be increased through a long term awareness campaign and responsible reporting in the media. The Committee has recommended a national suicide prevention and awareness campaign using a range of media including targeted approaches to high risk groups as well as a review of the Mindframe guidelines and current media practices for the reporting of suicide. The Committee has also recommended national estimates on suicide should be released at least biannually to raise community awareness about suicide.

People seeking assistance from telephone crisis and counselling services should not be deterred by call costs. The Committee has recommended the Commonwealth government act to ensure affordable access to telephone crisis services are maintained and that an implementation study be commissioned for a national toll-free telephone crisis support service to assist those at risk of suicide.

Access to the means of suicide must be reduced and programs to address 'suicide hotspots' should be implemented. The Committee has recommended funding be made available for projects to aimed at reducing access to means of suicide and adding suicide prevention measures at 'suicide hotspots' according to established guidelines.

Groups with an increased risk of suicide should continue to be targeted with specific programs. The Committee has made number of recommendations:

- that there be an increase in the number of projects and funding for men;
- that a separate strategy be developed for Indigenous communities;
- that suicides by children should officially reported;
- that support group assistance should be developed for those who attempt suicide or self harm;
- that additional resources be provided to mental health services;
- that additional suicide awareness and risk assessment training be made available to 'gatekeepers' in regional, rural and remote areas;
- that LGBTI people be recognised in suicide prevention strategies and policies and the development of targeted programs;
- that a national suicide bereavement strategy be developed; and
- specific initiatives be developed to assist recently released prisoners.

New research should focus on the efficacy of suicide prevention interventions and results should be widely available to practitioners and others. The Committee has recommended additional funding for research should be provided through the National Suicide Prevention Program, including the evaluation of suicide prevention interventions. A suicide prevention resource centre should be established to collect and disseminate research and best practice regarding suicide prevention.

Increased coordination of programs and services is necessary for effective suicide prevention in Australia. The Committee has recommended a national suicide prevention strategy with participation and funding from all levels of government as well as collaboration with community stakeholders and service providers. The benefits of a national suicide prevention governance and accountability structure external to government should also be evaluated.

Increased funding of programs and support for those at risk of suicide is necessary to reduce the number of suicides and attempted suicides in Australia. The Committee has recommended that, at a minimum, Commonwealth government funding should be doubled and further increases should be assessed as the efficacy of suicide prevention

interventions is established by research. Furthermore a Suicide Prevention Foundation should be established to encourage funding from government, business, community and philanthropic sources and to direct these resources to priority areas of suicide prevention awareness, research, advocacy and services. Suicide prevention project and program funding should be provided in longer cycles to assist their success and stability.

Finally the Committee has recommended that a target should be set by government for the reduction of suicide in Australia by 2020 to focus the attention of the public and policy makers on suicide prevention.

