



**Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian:
*Supplementary submission to the Senate Community Affairs
References Committee regarding the 'Inquiry into Suicide in
Australia'***

On behalf of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, I would like to sincerely thank the Senate Community Affairs Committee for the opportunity to appear on 2 March 2010 at the Brisbane hearing of the Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia.

During the Commission's address to the Committee, Ms Angela Ritchie, Manager, Child Death Review, undertook to provide the Senate with a supplementary submission in relation to the following issues:

1. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people that have suicided compared to other Queensland youth
2. The geographical location of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth suicides in Queensland compared to other Queensland youth, based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA)
3. The number of youth suicides by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, where contagion was identified, compared to other Queensland youth
4. The number of youth suicides by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, where familial or imitative contagion was identified, compared to other Queensland youth

The following supplementary submission is based on the preliminary findings of the Commission's Reducing Youth Suicide in Queensland project (2004-2007), the details of which are outlined in the Commission's original submission.

The Commission is committed to finding ways to reduce the number of young people who suicide and commends the Senate for advancing this very important issue. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Angela Ritchie on (07) 3211 6771.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Fraser
**Commissioner for Children and Young People
and Child Guardian**



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Supplementary submission to the
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
regarding the
Inquiry into Suicide in Australia

Date: 9 March 2010

Table of contents

Over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

- 1 Suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- 2 Geographical location of youth suicides in Queensland

Contagion-related suicide

- 3 Contagion issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- 4 Familial and imitative contagion

Over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

The Commission's original submission to the Senate Inquiry (submission 99) outlined a number of key findings related to the over-representation of suicide among Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. The tables below outline additional information regarding the Commission's findings as requested at the recent Senate hearing.

1 Suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Table 1 below shows the extent of suicide among Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, compared to other Queensland youth. This highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were more likely to be younger in age at the time they suicided compared to other Queensland youth.

Table 1: Number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicides compared to other youth in Queensland by age category, 2004–2007

| Age Category | Queensland Aboriginal Youth | | Queensland Torres Strait Islander Youth | | Other Queensland Youth | | Total | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| 10–14 years | 11 | 68.8% | 1 | 50% | 10 | 21.3% | 22 | 33.8% |
| 15–17 years | 5 | 31.3% | 1 | 50% | 37 | 78.7% | 43 | 66.2% |
| Total 10-17 years | 16 | 100% | 2 | 100% | 47 | 100% | 65 | 100% |

Data source: RYSQ Preliminary Findings Database (2004–2007)

2 Geographical location of youth suicides in Queensland

Table 2 outlines the extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in suicides that occurred in remote and very remote regions of Queensland.

Table 2: Number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicides compared to other youth in Queensland by ARIA classification

| ARIA of Usual Residence | Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth | | Other Queensland Youth | | Total | |
|-------------------------|--|------------|------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Major Cities | 2 | 11.1% | 23 | 48.9% | 25 | 38.5% |
| Inner Regional | 3 | 16.7% | 12 | 25.5% | 15 | 23.1% |
| Outer Regional | 5 | 27.8% | 11 | 23.4% | 16 | 24.6% |
| Remote | 2 | 11.1% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 3.1% |
| Very Remote | 6 | 33.3% | 1 | 2.1% | 7 | 10.8% |
| Total | 18 | 100 | 47 | 100 | 65 | 100 |

Data source: RYSQ Preliminary Findings Database (2004–2007)

Notes: 1. ARIA refers to the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Table 2 shows that:

- The majority of youth suicides occurred in Queensland's major cities and regional areas between 2004-2007 (86.2%)
- However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth constituted a far higher proportion of youth suicide in remote areas (44.4%), compared with other Queensland youth (2.1%)

These findings highlight the need for evidence-based approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth suicide prevention that differ from approaches targeting other children and young people in Queensland. As in all communities, strategies aimed at preventing these deaths should not only be suicide specific but focus more holistically on building supportive families and safe and healthy communities, particularly given the challenges facing those living in remote and very remote locations. The incorporation of community-level cultural and traditional influences, aimed at improving the overall health and wellbeing of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, is recognised as an essential step in preventing suicide among these children and young people.

Contagion-related suicide

The preliminary findings of the Commission's *Reducing Youth Suicide in Queensland* project (RYSQ) identified that 42% of children and young people who took their own life did so after the suicide, or an attempted suicide, of a friend, family or community member. The finding that a suicide or attempted suicide can provide a model for subsequent suicides by means of identification and imitation demonstrates not only the far-reaching impact suicide can have on others but the catastrophic effect it can have on vulnerable individuals, particularly children and young people. The tables below outline key findings related to contagion issues in the suicide of young people in Queensland and the type of contagion identified.

3 Contagion issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Contagion suicide refers to the occurrence of a suicide or attempted suicide influencing or causing suicidality in another person. Table 3 below shows a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people suicided after the suicide or attempted suicide of someone they knew.

Table 3: Number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicides where contagion was identified compared to other youth in Queensland

| Contagion identified | Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth | | Other Queensland Youth | | Total | |
|----------------------|--|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| No | 9 | 50.0% | 29 | 61.7% | 38 | 58.5% |
| Yes | 9 | 50.0% | 18 | 38.3% | 27 | 41.5% |
| Total | 18 | 100% | 47 | 100% | 65 | 100 |

Data source: RYSQ Preliminary Findings Database (2004–2007)

Notes: 1. Contagion refers to both familial and imitative forms of contagion

As shown in Table 3, contagion (both imitative and familial) was identified in 50% of suicides by Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people compared with 38.3% of other Queensland youth.

4 Familial and imitative contagion

Familial contagion refers specifically to the suicide or attempted suicide of a member of the young persons family¹, whilst imitative contagion refers to persons such as friends or community members who were known to the child. Table 4 below outlines the identification of both familial and imitative contagion among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth compared to other Queensland youth.

Table 4: Number and proportion of suicides where familial or imitative contagion was identified

| Contagion type identified | Queensland Aboriginal Youth | | Queensland Torres Strait Islander Youth | | Other Queensland Youth | | Total | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|---|--------|------------------------|--------|----------|--------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Imitative Contagion | 6 | 37.5% | 0 | 0.0% | 8 | 17.0% | 14 | 21.5% |
| Familial Contagion | 2 | 12.5% | 1 | 50.0% | 9 | 19.1% | 12 | 18.5% |
| Both Imitative and Familial | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 2.1% | 1 | 1.5% |
| No contagion | 8 | 50.0% | 1 | 50.0% | 29 | 61.7% | 38 | 58.5% |
| Total | 16 | 100.0% | 2 | 100.0% | 47 | 100.0% | 65 | 100.0% |

Data source: RYSQ Preliminary Findings Database (2004–2007)

As shown in Table 4:

- 38% of suicides by Aboriginal youth followed the suicide or attempted suicide of a friend or community member, compared to 17% of other Queensland youth
- Both familial and imitative contagion were identified as factors in the suicide of one Queensland youth
- 62% of non-Indigenous youth were identified as having no contagion identified, compared to 50% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

¹ Family and familial contagion refers to both immediate and extended family members. The Commission acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander definitions of family may include persons from the broader community. However, the suicides of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in this project that were identified as having a familial contagion factor, included members of their immediate and extended families. In general, the suicide or attempted suicide of community members prior to a young persons death are therefore considered *imitative*.