

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING AND
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

REPORT NUMBER 8

INQUIRY INTO YOUTH SUICIDE AND SELF HARM IN THE ACT

**Presented by
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Minister for Health**

Initial Submission to the Inquiry

The ACT Government encourages readers to refer to the initial whole of government submission to the Standing Committee's Inquiry in conjunction with this Response. It contains comprehensive detail regarding the full range of ACT Government programs and services that specifically target children and young people experiencing suicidal ideation and/or self harm in the ACT.

This is in addition to a wide array of other universal, whole-of-population measures which focus on the promotion, prevention, early intervention and treatment/support services to encourage mental health wellness, social connectedness and resilience building to fully participate in, and contribute towards an inclusive Canberra for all.

Background

Suicide and self harm impacts everyone. As such, they require a whole-of-population, whole-of-community approach to truly make a difference.

ACT Government would like to thank the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services for their Inquiry into Youth Suicide and Self Harm in the ACT and welcomes the opportunity to respond to their final report.

Suicide and self harm are issues that have been raised and debated in the ACT Legislative Assembly and broader Canberra community for some time, due to the devastating impact it has on individuals, families, friends and communities. The various submissions provided by individuals and stakeholders alike signify the importance of this issue, and the passion and dedication our community has in driving continuous improvements in this space.

Australia has undergone significant health reforms over the last few years that have both directly and indirectly impacted on mental health and suicide prevention across all levels of government.

Coordination, collaboration and integration have been aspirational words used for some time to describe how our mental health programs and services should be working in unison, as distinct from the haphazard and disjointed system it has instead evolved into - despite the best of intentions from all parties involved.

ACT Government recognises the opportunity the current landscape provides in turning aspirations into actual on-the-ground outcomes within ACT's mental health and suicide prevention sector, and looks forward to nurturing its partnership with the Capital Health Network and achieving a more holistic and efficient system to effectively tackle youth suicide and self harm in the ACT.

Many unique factors outlined in the Inquiry's report speak largely to the various social determinants which impact on children and youth – including basic necessities such as appropriate housing and support for young people in schools. While not specifically targeted towards reducing youth suicide and self harm, recent announcements in the 2016-17 ACT Budget regarding improvements to public housing and transportation, and significant investment in domestic violence and child abuse provides further opportunity and protective supports. These measures only reinforce and bolster current activity across all directorates which actively contribute to reducing suicide and self harm amongst ACT's children and young people.

The Commonwealth have advised that they will seek the support of states and territories in delivering enduring reform in key areas which align with the *Australian Government Response to Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities: Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services*. ACT Government looks forward to engaging and contributing to this mental health agenda going forward, including in the context of suicide and self harm prevention and reduction.

The Commonwealth has also advised that they will be taking a national leadership role in the development of the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan.

Recommendation 1

2.28 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government update the Legislative Assembly on both the development of the national database and progress made in relation to improving the collection of ACT data, particularly in relation to receiving consistent data from community based organisations.

Agreed

The ACT Government will update the Legislative Assembly on progress made to improve the collection of ACT data, including receiving consistent data from community-based organisations. The ACT Government submission to the Standing Committee in April 2016 reported that work is underway at a national level to develop a national child death and injury database. The ACT Government notes that work to develop this national database is not being progressed at this time.

The *Australian Government response to the Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities - Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services* (Australian Government Response) highlighted the role that primary health networks will have in commissioning suicide prevention services at the regional level. Given the Commonwealth's shift towards outcomes focussed measurement, ACT Health expects that nationally consistent data or a specific key performance indicator will inevitably be required to successfully monitor and evaluate suicide prevention outcomes at the regional level.

Should this be the case, ACT Health looks forward to discussions with Capital Health Network on this issue, particularly in the context of joint service planning within the mental health and suicide prevention setting.

Recommendation 2

3.65 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government update this Committee in relation to Australian Government funding negotiations in relation to mental health funding, including the Capital Health Network.

Agreed

ACT Health will provide the Standing Committee with an update on Australian Government mental health funding negotiations where they relate to, or integrate with, joint activity on mental health or suicide prevention between Capital Health Network and ACT Health.

ACT Health will also provide Capital Health Network with a copy of the Standing Committee's Report given their specific responsibility for regional-based primary mental health and suicide prevention commissioning in the ACT region.

Australian Government funding negotiations is outside ACT Government's remit and ACT Health is currently only privy to information that is publicly available. The Commonwealth Department of Health or Capital Health Network may be better placed to provide such information either at a national or regional level.

Recommendation 3

5.63 The Committee recommends that the ACT Legislative Assembly consider re-examining this matter when funding and research outcomes are made public in order to determine the most appropriate way to further develop early intervention measures, education approaches and access to service for suicide prevention activities in the ACT.

Noted

The ACT Government notes this recommendation and will await future advice from the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The Capital Health Network has undertaken a preliminary regional needs analysis for the ACT and is required to produce a comprehensive mental health and suicide prevention needs assessment in March 2017, followed by a regional mental health and suicide prevention plan. This plan will aim to support a broader regional model of stepped care, support the process of integration with state services, make optimal use of available workforce and resources, and help to target investment by primary health networks in mental health and suicide prevention activity. ACT Health is contributing to this activity and is liaising with the Capital Health Network on strategic opportunities in mental health and suicide prevention policy going forward.

The Education and Training Directorate has an important role to play in the prevention and intervention of suicide in young people. ACT Health will work with the Education and Training Directorate and the Capital Health Network to operationalise support for young people in schools when the changes to funding models and approaches to prevention initiatives and services are finalised.

Additional information

ACT public schools are committed to providing positive and engaging environments where children and young people feel connected, respected, achieve success and are fully engaged in education. Schools are committed to developing and maintaining safe schools through a whole-school and evidence-based approach to building the social and emotional skills to build self awareness, self management, social awareness and social management capabilities of students that in turn support their ability to develop and maintain relationships and enhance resilience. These elements are strong protective factors against suicide.

The Children and Young People Death Review Committee also acknowledges the complexity of identifying predictive factors for a first attempt at suicide. However, it reiterates that after a first attempt has been made the risk of completing suicide from a second or subsequent attempt increases significantly.