



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into men's suicide rates

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ACT Inquiry into Men's Suicide Rates

Mentoring Men Submission

8 August 2025

Mentoring Men

Mentoring Men is a national charity providing free, long-term, one-to-one life mentoring for adult men across Australia, including the ACT. Since 2018, we have delivered well over 3,000 mentoring relationships across Australia and achieved national suicide prevention accreditation. Our trained volunteer mentors support men navigating distress, isolation, and life transitions, many of whom are at risk of poor mental health or suicide if left unsupported. The program fosters a safe, non-judgemental relationship that builds resilience, self-awareness, and connection.

Men Do Talk 2025 Report

The 2025 "Men Do Talk" report, completed by Mentoring Men, surveyed over 2,000 men, aged between 35-50 years, across the ACT, NSW and Victoria. 400 of those men were living in the ACT. The report highlights distressing trends in relationship stress, loneliness, financial pressure, and low confidence among ACT men, factors strongly associated with suicidality. From those men surveyed in the ACT, 31% reported general stress and anxiety at a level that affects their everyday life. 39% responded that they felt lonely and isolated because of where they lived and 33% claimed a lack of opportunity in the area.

We speak to the report as being a call to action to invest in community-led programs that already work, such as mentoring, to obtain our vision of a connected and healthy society. The findings from the report will be referenced in this submission and the report submitted as supporting documentation.

This submission directly addresses the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Inquiry and aligns with the 2025 – 2035 National Suicide Prevention Strategy's focus on connection, early intervention, and community-led responses.

Engagement with Medical and Health Services (TOR 1a)

A consistent theme emerging from both our data and mentoring sessions is that many men experience discomfort or disconnection at times seeking out support. Despite high levels of distress, men can be reluctant due to perceived ideas, stigma, identity conflict, or a belief that their issues are not "serious enough." Mentoring offers a low-barrier, non-clinical point of connection that helps build trust and can lead to further help-seeking. Mentoring is able to sit alongside clinical services and be a de-stigmatising avenue to support men taking the next step into or staying with clinical services.

In the ACT, 31% of survey respondents to our survey reported that relationship stress significantly impacted their daily life, higher than the rates in NSW and Victoria. Encouragingly, 58% said they would accept a mentor if one were offered. These findings underscore the urgent need for diverse, flexible supports such as mentoring to be embedded in social prescribing and early intervention pathways.

One mentor in our program shared about his mentee, "He's opened up to talking. I think this relationship will help him connect to further help if needed."

Risk-taking Behaviours and Coping (TOR 1b)

Mentoring Men encounters a range of coping behaviours among mentees that are known to be potential risk factors to suicide, including substance use, risk-taking, and withdrawal. Financial pressure and interpersonal conflict have been seen to link to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol misuse. Mentors offer a non-judgemental space where men can reflect on their behaviours and identify safer alternatives.

As one mentor reported regarding his mentee, “He mentioned stress-related drinking when overwhelmed with finances and relationship pressures.”

Social and Emotional Development (TOR 1c)

One of the clearest impacts of the mentoring relationship is improved emotional literacy. Men may enter the program with limited experience having in depth discussions with others regarding emotional experiences. Over time, with the support of a consistent mentor who models vulnerability and compassion, they feel safe and develop the language and skills to navigate challenges with greater insight and confidence.

From our internal outcomes data, mentees report improved self-awareness, and increased confidence as results of mentoring. These gains are especially relevant given within our 2025 report 26% of ACT men cited low confidence as a major barrier in their daily life, and 31% reported general stress and anxiety.

As one mentor noted in reflecting on his mentee, “He’s seeing patterns in his behaviour. For the first time, he’s naming how he feels.”

A mentee stated, “I felt safe to be open. Our conversations has gone farther than I imagined.”

Education, Employment and Participation (TOR 1d)

Unemployment and loss of identity related to work and purpose are recurring concerns raised by mentees. Whether due to redundancy, retirement, or career disruption, men report feeling “lost” and unsure of how to re-engage in meaningful activity.

In the ACT, 30% of respondents cited career stress, and 33% identified a lack of opportunity in their area. Through mentoring, men have the opportunity to regain confidence and set goals that support re-engagement in education, work, or volunteering.

A mentor observed, “He is unsure how to get back into meaningful work. He worries about interviews and confidence.”

Loneliness, Identity, Financial Stress (TOR 1e)

Loneliness is one of the most urgent, yet under-addressed, contributors to suicide risk. 68% of mentees report reduced loneliness through their mentoring relationship. ACT-specific data reveals 27% of men report loneliness affecting daily wellbeing, and 39% feel isolated because of where they live.

A number of men seeking a mentoring through Mentoring Men have expressed the extent of this impact, “I feel completely alone in dealing with my challenges... feel isolated”. Another, “Dealing with stress from home and work, I feel so alone in handling all of it”.

Mentoring Men’s previous 2024 submission to the NSW parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Issues inquiry and report on the prevalence, causes and impacts of Loneliness in NSW outlined the intersection between social disconnection and health decline. Loneliness has been linked to depression, anxiety, substance use, and chronic illness, and yet remains largely invisible in mental health service design. The report acknowledged and recommended that mentoring be recognised as a key strategy to address loneliness. Speaking to the need to expand such support to make more readily available across communities.

Financial stress is another key issue. 29% of ACT men reported it was affecting their day-to-day life. Men often carry silent financial burdens, especially during job loss or family change. Mentoring Men provides emotional support in these periods, preventing escalation into crisis.

As reported by mentors, “He talked about the mental load of providing for his family after losing his job,” and “He’s feeling disconnected after retirement, unsure of what’s next.”

A mentee spoke of the impact of mentoring, “I feel less lonely, I’ve gotten a job, I was able to rekindle my relationship with my little brother...I feel a sense of purpose.”

Promoting Positive Health Behaviours and Support (TOR 2)

Mentoring Men directly supports positive health behaviours by offering an emotionally safe space for men to reflect, learn, and grow. Mentees gain tools for managing conflict, accessing further support, and improving their relationships.

In past internal outcome measures many mentees reported greater hope for the future, as well as a significant stating reduced stress, and improved relationship management as outcomes. These outcomes align with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy’s emphasis on upstream, community-led protective factors.

Mentoring is especially effective because it meets men on their terms of relational, practical, and respectful. With training, supervision, and clear boundaries, mentors deliver a vital form of early intervention that complements professional services.

As one mentor described, “(mentee) and I meet every Monday. It gives him a space to reflect and plan.”

Systemic Enablers and Funding Needs (TOR h–i)

Despite its demonstrated effectiveness, Mentoring Men remains under-resourced relative to demand. We are limited in capacity and constrained in our ability to scale, train, integrate outcome measurement frameworks, and support our growing mentor community.

As outlined in our NSW submission on loneliness, social disconnection carries significant economic costs, including increased health service use and lost productivity. Community-based programs like Mentoring Men offer a cost-effective, volunteer-led solution that can alleviate those pressures and impact on the protective factors that reduce risk factors of suicide.

To truly meet the needs of men in the ACT and across Australia, we urge the government to fund mentoring programs as preventative mental health services, embedded in wellbeing and health strategies and agendas.

Call to Action

Men are not unreachable, they are underserved. When offered support that respects their identity and meets them where they are, men respond with trust, openness, and change.

We urge the Committee to formally recognise mentoring as a core element of suicide prevention, recommend investment in its sustainable expansion, and ensure every man in the ACT has access to support before crisis. The opportunity for upstream, scalable, cost-effective intervention is already here.

Men do talk. It's time we funded the listening.

Mentoring Men thanks the Standing Committee on Social Policy for considering our submission and look forward to the efforts to address

Sincerely,

Cassandra Gray

Chief Operating Officer

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Supporting Documentation

Mentoring Men – Men Do Talk – 2025

www.mentoringmen.org.au/reports

Mentoring Men Model of Care

www.mentoringmen.org.au/model-of-care