



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into men's suicide rates

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Inquiry into men's suicide rates

RACGP NSW&ACT

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) NSW&ACT Faculty welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into men's suicide rates.

The NSW&ACT faculty supports over 14,000 members across NSW&ACT, which accounts for approximately 33% of the total RACGP membership. We are committed to advocating for the profession and to providing members with opportunities for participation, quality education and collegiality.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is the voice of general practitioners (GPs) in our growing cities and throughout rural and remote Australia. For more than 60 years, we have supported the backbone of Australia's health system by setting the standards for education and practice and advocating for better health and wellbeing for all Australians.

As a national peak body representing over 46,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice, our core commitment is to support GPs from across the entirety of general practice address the primary healthcare needs of the Australian population.

We cultivate a stronger profession by helping the GPs of today and tomorrow continue their professional development throughout their careers, from medical students and GPs in training to experienced GPs. We develop resources and guidelines to support GPs in providing their patients with world-class healthcare and help with the unique issues that affect their practices. We are a point of connection for GPs serving communities in every corner of the country.

Patient-centred care is at the heart of every Australian general practice, and at the heart of everything we do.

Background

Suicide remains one of the leading causes of premature death in men, both in the ACT and nationally. In 2019, the suicide rate for ACT males was 19.4 deaths per 100,000 persons, more than three times higher than that for ACT females (5.6 deaths per 100,000 persons). Self-harm, which includes any behaviour involving intentionally causing pain or injury to oneself, is often a precursor to suicide and reflects unmet needs in mental health support.

Key Issues and Recommendations

Gaps in Mental Health Services Access

There remains a significant “missing middle” in the ACT mental health system for individuals who do not meet the threshold for acute public care but cannot afford or access private services. Public referrals often prioritise psychosis or active suicidality, excluding those with chronic or treatment-resistant conditions who require consistent care

Community-based services such as Headspace or Catholic Care’s Next Step program are valuable, but they experience long wait times and operate with exclusion criteria that leave out more complex or unwell patients. Though private psychology access has improved, affordability continues to present a significant barrier.

Role of General Practice

General practitioners (GPs) have become the primary point of contact for many individuals navigating mental health concerns. However, the ACT faces unique cost pressures that limit access to bulk-billed GP care, and Medicare rebates for mental health consultations remain insufficient.

We would support policy and legislative change that enabled:

- Expansion of the Canberra Health Services psychiatry advice line to support primary care practitioners.
- Publicly funded referral access to Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) for treatment-resistant depression.
- Direct engagement from public services with referring GPs before declining referrals.
- Advocacy for the inclusion of agomelatine on the PBS for resistant depression.
- Funding support for longer mental health consultations in general practice.
- Expansion of bulk billing incentives for mental health-related Medicare item numbers.

Public Understanding and Navigation

Mental health service pathways are often poorly understood by the public. Many individuals report uncertainty about where to begin seeking help or what the process entails. This confusion is compounded by symptoms of depression, such as low motivation and poor executive functioning.

A public awareness campaign should encourage early engagement with trusted health providers through messaging such as: “See your GP – Book a long consult – Access a Mental Health Care Plan.” Clear promotion of this process can improve access and outcomes.

Improved access to wellbeing initiatives such as social prescribing, community groups and structural / built environment changes such as access to green spaces and local sporting groups that encourage a diverse range of participants, such as park run.

Continuity of Care and Community Support

Individuals discharged from public mental health services after being deemed no longer at acute risk often lack appropriate ongoing support. This can result in cyclical re-entry into the system or escalation of risk factors.

Improving continuity of care, particularly for individuals with complex needs who are not in crisis but remain vulnerable, is essential. Opportunities also exist to strengthen early interventions through local awareness efforts and low-cost community-based mental health signage (e.g., helpline details). These strategies should be deployed sensitively and in collaboration with stakeholders.

Ensuring that all primary care team members, allied health professionals, pharmacy staff, GPs, and community supports can communicate safely with one another would significantly enhance collaboration and safety for this population. Currently, there is no clear, funded communication network that facilitates multidisciplinary care.

Conclusion

Improving mental health outcomes for men in the ACT requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the accessibility, affordability, and navigability of services. Support for general practice, investment in intermediate care options, expanded access to evidence-based treatments, and improved public messaging are all key pillars of effective suicide prevention.

The recommendations outlined in this submission are intended to strengthen the ACT's mental health system and reduce the tragic impact of suicide on individuals, families, and communities.