

17 September 2021

Social Housing Regulation Review
c/o Old Treasury Building
20 Spring Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Professor Hayward, Dr Holst, and Dr Cousins,

Re: Submission to Social Housing Regulation Review

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Victorian Government's independent Social Housing Regulation Review, and we write to address the questions on the scope for workforce professionalisation in *Consultation Paper 2: Service delivery and the tenant experience* (Questions 25 to 28).

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for suicide prevention, we have over 350 members including the largest, and many of the smallest, suicide prevention and mental health organisations across Australia.

As noted in the background paper for this review, many tenants of social housing have experienced past homelessness, family violence, poor mental health, a history with the justice system or a combination of these. All of these are linked with a heightened risk of suicide. This means that there will be many social housing tenants who, while not currently in suicidal crisis, may be at heightened risk of suicide in future. And the present COVID situation, including lockdowns, potentially increases many risk factors such as poor mental health and family violence.

Suicide Prevention Australia advocates that there is a need to build workforce capacity in suicide prevention, beyond the bounds of the mental health sector and healthcare system. All workforces that engage with people or communities experiencing distress and suicidal behaviour must have the capacity to provide a compassionate response, relevant to their role. The Final Advice of the National Suicide Prevention Advisor, released in December last year, found similarly that people experiencing suicidal distress interact with workforces across various sectors. And that Advice recommended that all governments to commit to prioritising evidence-based and compassion-focused workforce development to improve capacity and capability in responding to the risk of suicide. This was also the recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System which recommended "providing training in appropriate responses for members of workforces likely to come into contact with people experiencing suicidal behaviour".

As noted in the background paper for this review, there are concerns that many staff in the social housing workforce do not have the capability and skills to respond to people with a diverse range of needs.

On this basis we recommend that the current social housing workforce be better equipped to perform the role of a social landlord by enhancing competency in suicide prevention. Measures required would

be for all social housing providers to identify the gaps and areas of need in specific roles for improvement in suicide prevention, and ensure that the organisational structures and the induction and training programs that they provide meet the competences for the specific roles. Regulations should be put in place to mandate that this work is undertaken.

A potential barrier to this work is some social housing providers lacking the capacity to identify what is needed in responding to suicide risk. It will be important to provide support and a framework for this work.

To support efforts to build capacity on responding to suicide risk, Suicide Prevention Australia has developed a Competency Framework. The Framework builds on the evidence of 'what works' regarding the knowledge and skills required for workforces in suicide prevention across diverse settings. It recommends the essential competencies for organisations and their staff to work safely and effectively to reduce suicidal behaviour.

Attached to this letter is a copy of the report *Suicide Prevention: A competency framework*. Which can also be accessed here: <https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/competency-framework/>

The report is informed by, and brings together, knowledge experts in workplace suicide prevention and training. and aims to enhance and build the capacity, and capability of diverse workforces to respond to people experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviours. The Framework provides a starting point for employers and staff to consider what they need to know to promote wellbeing and intervene effectively to reduce distress and suicidal behaviour in their workplace.

The Framework can be a useful aid in ensuring the social housing workforce is equipped to address the heightened risk of suicide in the communities it serves. We would welcome further engagement on applying it to the social housing context. If you would like further information please contact Matthew McLean, Director of Policy & Government Relations, matthewm@suicidepreventionaust.org.

Yours sincerely,



Nieves Murray
Chief Executive Officer
Suicide Prevention Australia

About Suicide Prevention Australia

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. Our over 350 members include the largest and many of the smallest organisations working in suicide prevention, practitioners, researchers and community leaders. We've been providing national support for Australia's suicide prevention sector for more than 25 years. Suicide Prevention Australia supports and strengthens the services of our members, is an information channel connecting the sector and the voice of lived experience to government, as well as providing leadership, policy services, and research support to the suicide prevention sector.

We're committed to driving continual improvement in suicide prevention policy, programs and services to achieve better outcomes for all Australians. We are focused on an integrated approach to suicide prevention encompassing mental health, social, economic and community factors.

Our [National Policy Platform](#) is our guiding framework for change. The platform calls for three key pillars which, if in place, will create an environment for suicide prevention reform. These are:

- A **whole of government, whole of community approach**, where suicide prevention becomes everyone's business
- **Accurate, reliable, timely data on suicide**, which will help the sector drive change in policy and interventions for suicide prevention
- A cohesive **workforce strategy for suicide prevention**, so that everyone involved has the training and skills they need

We believe that through collaborative effort and shared purpose, we can achieve our shared vision of a world without suicide.