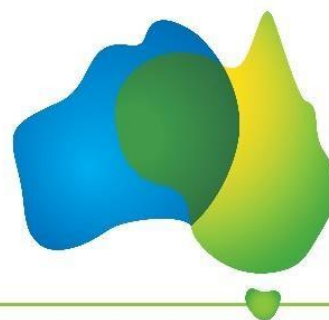


**DECEMBER 2024**



**Suicide Prevention  
Australia**

# **New South Wales Pre-Budget 2025-26**

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## **Submission**

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## Summary

Suicide Prevention Australia has developed the following recommendations to help bolster a collective, community-based effort toward suicide prevention:

1. Support government agencies to develop suicide prevention plans
2. Equip the community to help prevent suicides
3. Expand the reach and accountability of support programs through accreditation
4. Implement suicide prevention guidelines in Emergency Departments
5. Connect men with the supports they need
6. Fund suicide-specific research focussed on translation into practice
7. Build capacity on responding to suicide risk in high-risk industries
8. Strengthen the suicide prevention peer workforce through training assistance

Measure	Description	Expenditure over forward estimates
1. Support government agencies to develop suicide prevention plan	A future NSW Suicide Prevention Act, which is currently being drafted, will likely require agencies across all government portfolios to have suicide prevention plans (this is similar to the South Australian Suicide Prevention Act). The majority of these agencies will not have had suicide prevention plans previously and will require resources and support to consult and develop these plans relevant to their area.	\$500,000
2. Equip the community to help prevent suicides	Make evidence-based “first aid” suicide prevention training more easily accessible to key members of the community who commonly encounter people at risk. A range of evidence-based short training courses exist. \$400,000 per annum over 4 years could fund 2,400 key community members to undertake training and facilitate access to the training courses that meet their needs by expanding the Learnlinc education platform. Learnlinc provides links to evidence-based short training course provided by a range of organisations, as well as education support structures to enhance learning in these course and over 150 free resources.	\$1.6M (\$400,000 per annum for four years)
3. Expand the reach and accountability of support programs through accreditation	Fund smaller organisations to undertake the Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program, with a special focus on programs for priority groups and regional areas. This program assists support services with continuous improvement, while providing certainty to government commissioning process that these services are safe and effective.	\$120,000 (\$22,500 per year for 4 years)
4. Implement suicide prevention guidelines in Emergency Departments	Training and implementation of guidelines at each of the emergency departments across NSW could save lives by to ensuring compassionate and consistent treatment of people in suicidal distress or mental health crisis.	\$16M (\$4M for 20 EDs per annum for four years)

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5. Connect men with the supports they need	Men are three times more likely to die by suicide. To reduce the risk of suicide for men in distress, provide continuation of the funding for the <i>Doing it Tough?</i> online directory dedicated to connecting men in New South Wales with the support they need.	\$400,000 (\$100,000 per annum for four years)
6. Fund suicide-specific research focussed on translation into practice	Ensure innovation and continuing improvement through research on suicide prevention in a NSW context by contributing to the Suicide Prevention Research Fund (SPRF). The SPRF, guided by independent experts, awards grants in this otherwise under-resourced area of important research. The SPRF targets research with a focus on translation into practice, ensuring high impact.	\$5M (\$1.25M per annum for four years)
7. Build capacity on responding to suicide risk in high-risk industries	Fund the development of industry-specific competency frameworks in high-risk sectors. Building on the Suicide Prevention Australia Framework this can provide a tailored approach to build on the evidence of 'what works' regarding the knowledge and skills required for workforces in suicide prevention across diverse settings.	\$800,000 (\$200,000 per annum for four years)
8. Strengthen the suicide prevention peer workforce through training assistance	Establishing a program to provide training assistance for 50 peer workers per annum and professional development for a further 50.	Uncosted

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# Introduction

## Suicide Prevention Australia

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. With more than 350 members, including 119 organisations in New South Wales, we represent the largest, and many of the smallest, organisations working in suicide prevention.

We exist to provide a clear, collective voice for the suicide prevention sector. We support and strengthen the services of our members, serve as 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 sector.

Suicide Prevention Australia releases the quarterly [Community Tracker](#) to analyse trends in levels of distress in the community, and the annual [State of the Nation in Suicide Prevention](#) report to provide a unique perspective on suicide risks and issues facing the sector.

## Suicide rates in New South Wales

Every year, over 3,000 Australians die by suicide and over 55,000 Australians attempt suicide. Of annual suicide deaths in 2023, 847 were registered in New South Wales in preliminary figures with an age standardised suicide rate of 9.9 per 100,000.

Suicide is a complicated human behaviour with many, varied risk factors, with only half of those who tragically lose their life to suicide accessing mental health services in the year prior. We know that suicide is complex and often linked to many risk factors like cost of living, housing affordability, unemployment, family breakdown, social isolation, and mental health.

This means that addressing suicide prevention in New South Wales needs to incorporate several factors. It needs to adopt a whole-of-Government, whole-of-community approach, based on the strengths of lived experience and evidence, and supporting the sector and workforce.

## The Community Tracker – December 2024

Key findings from the Community Tracker show families are at the forefront of distress levels.

- 31 per cent of Australians with children under 18 sought help from a suicide prevention service in the last 12 months, an increase of 10 percentage points in 12 months.
- 85 per cent of Australians with children under 18 at home are feeling elevated levels of distress. This figure is significantly higher than the general population (75%) and Australians without children under 18 at home (69%).
- Cost-of-living and personal debt is the number one cause of distress for people with children under 18 at home (50%), followed by family and relationship breakdown (32%), housing access and affordability (28%), Social isolation and loneliness (20%), Unemployment and job security (20%), Environmental and climate change (16%), Social media, self-image and bullying (16%), and Alcohol and other drugs (13%).
- Nine in ten Australians continue to believe that social and economic circumstances will still pose a significant risk to suicide rates in Australia this time next year.

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- Twenty-eight per cent of Australians say they know someone in their personal life or networks who has died by or attempted suicide.

### State of the Nation 2024

The 2024 State of the Nation in Suicide Prevention reports shows that 71 per cent of suicide prevention organisations have seen an increase in demand over the last 12 months and 80 per cent require additional funding to keep up.

Respondents highlighted service gaps in the areas they service, including: lack of services and support for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; lack of access to community services and wrap-around support; not enough face-to-face, peer-led crisis intervention suicide prevention services; considerable staffing gaps and limited capacity to meet high levels of demand; significant wait times for services for people at risk of suicide; services not available in all areas, and limited capability to address the broader, systemic drivers of suicide.

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# Recommendations

## 1. Support government agencies to develop suicide prevention plans

**A future NSW Suicide Prevention Act, which is currently being drafted, will likely require agencies across all government portfolios to have suicide prevention plans (this is similar to the South Australian Suicide Prevention Act). The majority of these agencies will not have had suicide prevention plans previously and will require resources and support to consult and develop these plans relevant to their area.**

*“No single government portfolio can undertake the breadth of actions that are required to reduce suicides, reduce suicide attempts and respond effectively to distress”.<sup>1</sup>*

Suicide Prevention is everyone’s business. Distress and risk factors span multiple portfolios, including Treasury, Justice, Housing, Transport, and Health. Socio-economic and environmental determinants of suicide need to be core to a Government’s approach to suicide prevention, with funding and policy to address the social, economic, health, occupational, cultural, and environmental factors involved.

As the next step in working towards a Suicide Prevention Act in New South Wales, agencies within Government need to start preparing Suicide Prevention plans.

These plans will enable each agency to identify risks and opportunities for reducing the risk of suicide, and assist with the efficacy and implementation of an Act.

The plans, across Departments, as well as agencies including Service NSW, will equip the workforce with a better understanding of suicide prevention, enable necessary changes to be identified, and equip each agency with the ability to make a positive difference as suicide prevention relates to their Department.

**Suicide Prevention Australia is calling on the Government to enable agencies to begin preparing their Suicide Prevention Plans to equip each department and agency with a view of risks and opportunities.**

## 2. Equip the community to help prevent suicides

**Make evidence-based “first aid” suicide prevention training more easily accessible to key members of the community who commonly encounter people at risk. A range of evidence-based short training courses exist. \$400,000 per annum over 4 years could fund 2,400 key community members to undertake training and facilitate access to the training courses that meet their needs by expanding the Learnline education platform. Learnline provides links to evidence-based short training course provided by a range of organisations, as well as**

<sup>1</sup> National Suicide Prevention Taskforce. (2020). Interim Advice Report: Towards a national whole-of-government approach to suicide prevention. Canberra; August 2020, p 8. Accessed online at [https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/CBD1A157EC292D9FCA2584700028CC75/\\$File/3.%20Interim%20Advice%20Report.pdf](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/CBD1A157EC292D9FCA2584700028CC75/$File/3.%20Interim%20Advice%20Report.pdf).

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**education support structures to enhance learning in these course and over 150 free resources.**

Distress factors in the community are at significant levels and continue to increase. Cost of living and personal debt remain the highest causes of distress, with housing access and affordability, and social isolation adding to the burden.

Suicide Prevention Australia's Community Tracker has identified elevated levels of distress across all sections of the community with more than 75% of Australians reporting elevated distress.

People experiencing suicidal distress interact with diverse sectors of the community. It is a critical moment when a person discloses their distress or suicidal thoughts for the first time, so it is vital to build suicide prevention skills and knowledge throughout the community. This can include everyone from clinicians to frontline service workers and teachers, along with members of the broader community who often provide informal support, such as pharmacists or barbers.

With appropriate evidence-based suicide prevention training, these connectors within communities are capable of having a conversation with a patient, customer, student or neighbour and provide vital assistance to help reduce their risk of suicide.

"First aid training" in suicide prevention equips recipients with the capacity to detect the signs someone may be experiencing a mental health or wellbeing issue, the confidence to refer them to external support, and the capacity to secure crisis support for someone who may be at risk of suicide.

Suicide Prevention Australia has designed and piloted an online suicide prevention learning platform to help upskill and equip the community. LearnLinc is an ongoing and supported learning-based platform for individuals to identify learning needs, fulfil learning goals, and apply that learning to suicide prevention. It was created in collaboration with experts in suicide prevention and suicide prevention training to provide a space for individuals and organisations to identify and access a variety of learning resources.

**Suicide Prevention Australia is calling on the Government to fund training in-community, to ensure the support is there for people in distress when they need it.**

### **3. Expand the reach and accountability of support programs through accreditation**

**Fund smaller organisations to undertake the Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program, with a special focus on programs for priority groups and regional areas. This program assists support services with continuous improvement, while providing certainty to government commissioning process that these services are safe and effective.**

The Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program supports and promotes the delivery of safe, high-quality, and effective suicide prevention and postvention programs across Australia. It embeds a

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continuous improvement approach to ensure that suicide prevention programs utilise the latest knowledge and best practice.

Suicide Prevention Australia is seeking Government funding to enable smaller community-based organisations to undertake the Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program, with the aim of ensuring accredited providers are available across all regions of the State.

Accreditation requires training providers to demonstrate a commitment to quality improvement, by allowing the team to take active steps to implement best-practice programs and services.

Currently, 115 programs have received SPA accreditation nationwide, with 95 available in New South Wales.

Additional funding for accreditation would enable a focus on priority populations, specifically programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (who experience double the rate of suicide); men (who account for 75 per cent of suicides); regional and rural communities (which have a higher rate of deaths by suicide than metropolitan areas); and Veterans (18 per cent higher than the general population). Additional resourcing would also allow us to expand the program to culturally and linguistically diverse populations. The resourcing would include \$1550 each for ten organisations to achieve accreditation in 2025-26, with 50 hours of support provided.

The Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program is governed by the Suicide Prevention Australia Standards for Quality Improvement, 2nd Edition (the Standards), which have been precisely developed in collaboration with individuals who have lived experience of suicide, help-seekers, clinicians, service providers, and accreditation experts.

**Suicide Prevention Australia is seeking funding from the Government to assist organisations gain accreditation for their suicide prevention programs, increasing access to evidence-based programs, especially in regional areas.**

#### 4. Implement suicide prevention guidelines in Emergency Departments

**Training and implementation of guidelines at each of the emergency departments across NSW could save lives by ensuring compassionate and consistent treatment of people in suicidal distress or mental health crisis.**

Suicide Prevention Guidelines can help Emergency Departments to deal more effectively and compassionately with suicidal behaviours.

Emergency Departments are often the first point of contact for someone in suicidal crisis, and the support and treatment provided has a significant impact on their risk of attempting or dying by suicide in the future.

Implementing Emergency Guidelines throughout Tasmania will build a strong and consistent process, which assists both staff and patients in Emergency Departments. Two examples of

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relevant guidelines are: *Suicide Prevention: A Competency Framework for the Health Sector*<sup>2</sup> and the *Guidelines for integrated suicide-related crisis and follow-up care in Emergency Departments and other acute settings*.<sup>3</sup>

These Guidelines provide the health system with tools to better equip and support staff, ensuring adequacy of care that is compassionate and respectful to every person in suicidal crisis who presents to the emergency department and other acute settings. Providing incentives through each PHN will help to ensure that Australians can receive this level of care regardless of where they live.

**Suicide Prevention Australia calls on the Government to improve Emergency Department responses to suicidal behaviours by implementing suicide prevention Guidelines across each of the public hospital Emergency Departments.**

## 5. Connect men with the supports they need

**Men are three times more likely to die by suicide. To reduce the risk of suicide for men in distress, provide continuation of the funding for the *Doing it Tough?* online directory dedicated to connecting men in New South Wales with the support they need.**

A collaboration project between Suicide Prevention Australia, Australian Men's Health Forum, health professionals, research experts, people with lived experience, and support groups, *Doing It Tough?* is a targeted program for men.

Men account for 75 per cent of deaths from suicide. Age-standardised rates of death by suicide tend to increase in line with remoteness.

Guiding men through from the first steps of seeking support, the program allows men to access community-led programs in their area. Making the program available would ensure that all men at risk of suicide would have access to support.

The service allows men to decide for themselves what is appropriate to their need, from local men's groups to online resources or specialist support.

The service has successfully run in New South Wales, but current lack of funding means that men at risk are unable to access the resources and programs. Funding will enable the continuation of collation of services, roll out and administration of the site, and the support required to ensure regional coverage of resources and programs.

**Suicide Prevention Australia is seeking continuation of funding to ensure access to the *Doing it Tough?* Program for men at risk of suicidal behaviours.**

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.suicidepreventionaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2300905-SPA\\_Competency-Framework-Healthcare\\_v2.pdf](https://www.suicidepreventionaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2300905-SPA_Competency-Framework-Healthcare_v2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/delphi-guidelines-clinical-summary\\_web.pdf](https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/delphi-guidelines-clinical-summary_web.pdf)

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## 6. Fund suicide-specific research focussed on translation into practice

**Ensure innovation and continuing improvement through research on suicide prevention in a NSW context by contributing to the Suicide Prevention Research Fund (SPRF). The SPRF, guided by independent experts, awards grants in this otherwise under-resourced area of important research. The SPRF targets research with a focus on translation into practice, ensuring high impact.**

Suicide Prevention Australia administers the Suicide Prevention Research Fund, which was established by the Federal Government to support research into suicide prevention. This has enabled research projects to examine important aspects of suicide risk and methods of prevention. The work is important and is as yet unfunded beyond 2025.

There is a valuable role for States to be able to harness the work of local universities in producing similar research projects which can cover gaps in suicide prevention knowledge and provide innovative responses which can be translated into local action.

Awarding research grants to up to five research projects in suicide prevention per annum would significantly enhance the knowledge base of suicide prevention in New South Wales.

**Suicide Prevention Australia urges the NSW Government to invest in suicide prevention-specific research to increase the levels of knowledge and innovation in suicide prevention responses.**

## 7. Build capacity on responding to suicide risk in high-risk industries

**Fund the development of industry-specific competency frameworks in high-risk sectors. Building on the Suicide Prevention Australia Framework this can provide a tailored approach to build on the evidence of ‘what works’ regarding the knowledge and skills required for workforces in suicide prevention across diverse settings**

Particular industries, including those involving shift work, are more susceptible to suicide risk. Adversely impacted industries include farmers, construction workers, ambulance and fire services, veterinarians, entertainers, artists and the transport industry – as well as in female doctors and male nurses.

Providing access for workers in this space to resources and training, such as is available through Suicide Prevention Australia’s Learnline, would provide much-needed ways to reduce suicide risk.

Targeting this funding to high-risk workers within high-risk industries would enable improved sector knowledge of employee care and self-care.

**Suicide Prevention Australia is urging the Government to fund access to suicide prevention resources for workers in high-risk industries.**

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## **8. Strengthen the suicide prevention peer workforce through training assistance**

**Establishing a program to provide training assistance for 50 peer workers per annum and professional development for a further 50.**

Lived experience is central to suicide prevention, and a lived experience and peer workforce is a vital component of an empathetic and effective response.

Building this workforce requires training alongside retention strategies to help both the professional development of the workers and protect against burnout.

Investment is needed to build and strengthen this workforce, and ensure that the workforce is able to cover all regions of New South Wales. Implementing a program to provide assistance to 50 peer workers a year to undertake training to begin their employment, and to 50 existing workers for professional development, will help both expand and retain the workforce, while also continuing to improve skills and service delivery.

**Suicide Prevention Australia is seeking the establishment of a program to assist peer workforce training and professional development.**

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## **Acknowledgements Statement**

Suicide Prevention Australia acknowledges the unique and important understanding provided by people with lived and living experience. This knowledge and insight is critical in all aspects of suicide prevention policy, practice and research. Advice from individuals with lived experience helped guide the analysis and recommendations outlined in this submission.

As the national peak body for suicide prevention, our members are central to all that we do. Advice from our members, including the largest and many of the smallest organisations working in suicide prevention, as well as practitioners, researchers and community leaders is key to the development of our policy positions. Suicide Prevention Australia thanks all involved in the development of this submission.

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