



Closing the Loop

Minds Together

This series is designed to 'close the loop' between research and policy by translating research evidence into policy directions and advice. These papers review key findings from National Suicide Prevention Research Fund projects and identifies evidence-based policy recommendations. This edition focuses on the Minds Together Program for family and friends of someone who has attempted suicide.

Research summary

This article summarises the results of a pilot study that measured the feasibility and acceptability of the Minds Together online program for family and friends supporting someone who has attempted suicide. The program aims to build the skills, knowledge and confidence of family and friends of people who have attempted suicide and promote wellbeing for caregivers. Everymind has successfully consulted, developed and delivered the program and research trial with the support of the Innovation Research Grant provided by the National Suicide Prevention Research Fund, managed by Suicide Prevention Australia.

Minds Together

The Minds Together program was first trialled in 2020 by Everymind to support family and friends of individuals with mental ill-health experiences like depression and anxiety. The Minds Together program was later adapted specifically for families and carers supporting someone who had attempted suicide.

Developed with a program steering committee of people with lived experience and experts in the field, the tailored program consisted of three core topics focused on the caregiving role and looking after yourself as a support person.

Additionally, there were six topics relevant to supporting someone who has attempted suicide, such as talking about suicide, stigma and hypervigilance. The program was developed to be interactive, offering multimedia content, activities, and videos from people with lived experience.

The pilot program recruited 76 participants (family members or friends supporting someone who had attempted suicide) from the general Australian population. Forty percent of caregivers that were engaged with the program had supported someone through 2-4 suicide attempts. Three participants withdrew from the study due to increased carer load or loss. These participants were not included in the total participant numbers.

Over the 8-week access period, 57% of total participants (n=76) accessed the program, with over a quarter (27%) of participants completing at least half of the program. The program received a low post- and follow-up survey completion, with only 26% (n=20) of total participants completing post-surveys and 13% (n=10) completing follow-up surveys.

The program sought to measure the feasibility and acceptability of the Minds Together online program for family and friends supporting someone who has attempted suicide, through post-program surveys. Due to the small number of participants who completed the program and surveys, findings may be limited

Key Findings

- Of the people who accessed the program and completed post-program surveys (n=20), the program was reported to be feasible, acceptable, and safe to use.
- Eighty percent of these participants found activities and content summaries practical and would recommend the program to others.
- Qualitative responses indicated that the program gave them time to prioritise self-care, improved their relationship with the person they support and gave them practical tips they could implement in their day-to-day lives.
- Participants stated feeling less alone and more connected to others in similar situations, giving them hope in their caregiving journey.
- Several participants with lived and living experience of supporting someone who has attempted suicide noted that they found the videos in the program very helpful.

Whilst the program received positive feedback from those who were able to use the program, 60% of these participants found it “often” or “very often” hard to find time to use the program. The limitations of a research trial, where access was limited to eight weeks, may have exacerbated this issue. Due to the small sample size of individuals completing the program, feasibility and acceptability may require further analysis in future trials.

Further Developments

Everymind received external funding to implement trial feedback to revise the Minds Together online program and provide open and unlimited access to carers and family members across New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in 2024, with the addition of content related to supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress, as well as following a suicide attempt.

In 2025, the program will be delivered through universal aftercare services across NSW and the ACT, with the development of a face-to-face program utilising a train-the-trainer model currently underway. In addition, the findings of the trial have gone on to inform carer-related content in the service delivery model for Universal Aftercare in NSW.

Policy Implications

Research indicates that many people who experience suicidal distress may never present to health services (Lubman et al., 2019). Research further highlights the critical role family and friends play in reducing further suicidal distress, facilitating recovery and having a positive impact of managing experiences of social isolation and depression (Orden et al., 2010; Byrne et al., 2008, Pereira et al., 2018). The success of Minds Together underscores the importance of equipping those who support individuals at risk of suicide with tools, knowledge, and practical resources.

While the Minds Together program showed positive results, it's important that policies foster continued research into the effectiveness of caregiving support programs. Ongoing evaluation of carer support programs would provide robust evidence for scaling successful models and adapting them to different communities and populations.

Research has identified the benefits of online programs, citing their capacity to improve self-efficacy, self-esteem and feelings of depression (McKechnie, Barker & Stott, 2014). Digital services can also play a role in providing equity of access in areas where in-person services are limited, as well as fill gaps to complement the suicide prevention workforce capacity (Fitzgeraldson et al., 2023).

The study suggests that digital programs could support some family and friends supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress or following a suicide attempt, particularly given the strain and responsibilities they carry, which can be highly unpredictable. The self-paced nature of digital programs can be useful when it is difficult to navigate fixed time for face-to-face programs.

Integrating digital mental health programs, such as Minds Together, into aftercare pathways following suicide attempts could play a key role in improved coordination between health services and community support. This could be done through partnerships with hospitals, suicide prevention service providers, and non-government organisations, offering immediate access to these programs as part of discharge or follow-up care. This should include considerations for equipping the workforce with the skills to support families, carers and friends in their support journey.

Key Policy recommendations

1. Ensure the Suicide Prevention and Aftercare workforce are trained to appropriately support and refer family and friends of people who have attempted suicide or experience suicidal distress
2. Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments should commit to funding further research focused on trialling digital innovations for supporting family, friends and carers of people who have attempted suicide.
3. Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments should commit to integrating digital support programs such as the Minds Together program into aftercare service delivery models.

Note: recommendations are proposed by Suicide Prevention Australia based on the above research, they are not recommendations of the researchers referenced.

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There are crisis services available 24/7 if you or someone you know is in distress

Lifeline: 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

For general enquiries

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