

16th July 2026

Dear Australian National Audit Office,

Re: Management of Centrelink automated decision-making

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian National Audit Office's audit regarding the management of Centrelink automated decision-making. We are the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. With over 360 members representing more than 140,000 workers, staff, and volunteers across Australia, we provide a collective voice for service providers, practitioners, researchers, local collaboratives, and people with lived experience.

Recommendations:

1. Services Australia's automated decision-making frameworks should include an implementation plan that considers how automated systems and associated administrative processes may impact suicide risk.
2. Services Australia should commit to the development of an agency-based suicide prevention action plan to ensure suicide prevention considerations are embedded across oversight mechanisms, risk management arrangements and quality assurance measures.
3. The Commonwealth Government should fund the development of psychosocial risk frameworks for suicide prevention for workforces across Services Australia who are interacting with individuals experiencing distress.

Research has demonstrated that people experiencing financial hardship, relationship breakdown and employment uncertainty are at a higher risk of experiencing suicidal distress.¹ As such, many Australians who receive supports or access services delivered by Services Australia, including Centrelink, may experience elevated levels of distress. For people experiencing these compounding drivers of distress, automated systems used in areas such as income support, healthcare access, compliance and debt recovery have the potential to cause harm if not safeguarded adequately. The experience of the Robodebt Scheme demonstrated the serious harms that can occur when automated compliance systems are implemented without adequate safeguards, transparency and human oversight.²

Effective oversight and risk management arrangements to support automated decision-making across Services Australia should include an implementation plan that considers how automated systems and associated administrative processes may contribute to suicide risk or psychosocial harm. This implementation plan should include effective safeguard mechanisms such as mandatory psychosocial risk assessments, clear escalation pathways to human review and ongoing monitoring processes to identify unintended harms arising from system operation. Within these processes; where the potential for harm is identified, all practical measures must be taken and reported on to ensure that suicide risk is mitigated meaningfully. Implementation of this would support response efforts to Recommendation 10.1 of the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme, which highlights the need for the design of policies and

¹ Suicide Prevention Australia. (2023). Socio-economic and environmental determinants of suicide: Discussion Paper.

² C, Holmes. (2023). Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme. Report Volume 1. Commonwealth Government of Australia. [Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme](#)



processes to place a primary emphasis on the recipients it is meant to serve; including taking all practicable steps to avoid the possibility that interactions with the government might exacerbate stresses or introduce new ones.³ Establishment and adherence to effective suicide prevention safeguards could further strengthen commitments and targets under *Priority 2 of Services Australia's Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-27* that highlights the commitment to ethical, human-centred design in developing innovative solutions that do the least harm.⁴

There is an opportunity for Services Australia to develop a tailored suicide prevention action plan that sets out the strategies and measures that the agency intends to put in place to prevent suicide. This could support any efforts to ensure that automated decision-making processes are transparent and subject to suitable quality assurance processes. South Australia, under statewide suicide prevention legislation, has mandated that government agencies develop, publish, implement and review agency-based suicide prevention plans with promising early results. Implementation of these plans has seen agencies like the Department of Human Services commit to reviewing and developing targeted Risk Registers to address hazards that may contribute to suicide risk for staff or clients.⁵ The development and implementation of an agency-based suicide prevention action plan could further strengthen commitments and targets under *Priority 3 of Services Australia's Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-27* which prioritises ensuring consistency in governance, assurance and investment frameworks.⁶ In addition, this could strengthen Services Australia's ability to demonstrate effective implementation of success measures relating to responsible, ethical, lawful, transparent and safe use of automation and AI outlined within the aforementioned strategy.⁷

People experiencing distress interact with a wide range of government systems and services. Every interaction represents an opportunity either to reduce distress and connect people with support, or to exacerbate harm. Workforce capability is therefore a critical component of safe service delivery. Suicide Prevention Australia has previously developed [psychosocial risk frameworks for suicide prevention in the workplace](#), which are designed to strengthen the capacity and capability of non-clinical workforces to respond to people experiencing suicidal distress.⁸ These frameworks promote compassionate and collaborative responses and provide guidance regarding the knowledge and skills required to respond safely and effectively to distress. As automated systems continue to expand, it is essential that staff responsible for overseeing or supporting these systems are appropriately trained to identify distress,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Services Australia. (2025). Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-27. Australian Government. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-05/automation-and-ai-strategy-2025-27.pdf>

⁵ Department of Human Services. (2025). Department of Human Services Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2025-2028. Government of South Australia. https://dhs.sa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/181307/DHS-Suicide-Prevention-Action-Plan.pdf

⁶ Services Australia. (2025). Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-27. Australian Government. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-05/automation-and-ai-strategy-2025-27.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Suicide Prevention Australia. (n.d.) Psychosocial Risk Frameworks for Suicide Prevention: Delivering psychosocial risk frameworks for suicide prevention in the workplace. <https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/competency-framework/>

manage referral pathways and provide compassionate human engagement where required. Across Services Australia, and specifically the Centrelink service, this includes frontline staff, compliance officers, customer service teams and personnel involved in reviewing automated decisions. Implementation of targeted psychosocial risk frameworks could further strengthen Services Australia's commitment under *Priority 5* of the Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-27 to uplift workforce capability and capacity to develop and manage automation and AI safely, ethically, and responsibly.⁹

In review of the management of automated decision-making across Services Australia and the Centrelink service, considerations should be made for ensuring that robust safeguards that reduce suicide risk are in place for staff and consumers; supported by the delivery of targeted training for all relevant workforces. Any efforts to implement effective oversight mechanisms, risk management arrangements and quality assurance measures could be strengthened through the implementation of a service-based suicide prevention action plan.

If you require any further information please contact Tom Riley, Director, Policy, Suicide Prevention Australia at tomr@suicidepreventionaust.org.

Yours sincerely



Nieves Murray
Chief Executive Officer
Suicide Prevention Australia

⁹ 4 Services Australia. (2025). Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-27. Australian Government. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-05/automation-and-ai-strategy-2025-27.pdf>