

## ILLNESS

### New suicide plan based on lived experience

A \$64 million radical government plan will dramatically overhaul the national approach to suicide prevention, focusing on some of the nation's most vulnerable groups.

Sue Dunlevy, National Health Reporter, News Corp Australia Network

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The rate at which people take their own lives has been increasing in recent years.

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Exclusive: Suicide will no longer be treated only as a mental illness and prevention will shift away from doctors, psychiatrists and hospitals into community programs under a revolutionary new government program.

Health Minister Greg Hunt will on Thursday announce \$64 million in funding for five key suicide prevention measures including new funding for people who have made a suicide attempt and relatives of people who took their own life.

Suicide will be deemed as much a financial, social and employment stress problem as a mental one and there will be a push to build strong social connections and better communities for those affected.

The funding comes after Prime Minister Scott Morrison received the draft report on suicide prevention from his new Suicide Prevention Adviser Christine Morgan in December and signals a dramatic reform of the national approach to suicide prevention.

Mr Morrison set his government the ambitious goal of working towards zero suicides when Ms Morgan was appointed to the role in July last year.

And she has controversially suggested the need to move away from a medicalised model of dealing with suicide.



Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Suicide Prevention Adviser Christine Morgan. Picture: AAP

"Whilst anyone that attempts suicide is certainly in mental distress it does not mean they have a mental illness," Ms Morgan said.

Half of the people who commit suicide never come into contact with mental health services so a successful prevention approach needed to look outside health services, she said.

It was the social determinants of health that were often behind suicide, issues like housing security, financial security, food security, trauma and relationship break ups, she said.

If these real life problems could be solved the person may not even need mental health care, she said.

The extra funding will bolster community based mentoring and support programs.

"In talking to individuals and communities over the past six months, it has been clear to me that we need to co-design our suicide prevention approach in a way that is led by those with lived and living experience of suicide," Ms Morgan said.

"We often think about services and systems and what is available, rather than truly understanding what people need and what has worked, and not worked, for them in the past. We need to put people back at the centre of policies and planning."



The rate at which people take their own lives has been increasing in recent years.

More than 3000 people committed suicide in 2018, around eight people per day.

The rate at which people take their own lives has been increasing in recent years and it is now the leading cause of death for young Australians, accounting for more than one-third of deaths among those aged between 15 and 24.

"This is a national tragedy. Every life lost to suicide has a devastating impact on families, friends and communities. Every life lost affects our whole country," Mr Hunt said.

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Ms Morgan consulted with individuals who had attempted suicide and families and her initial advice based on the experience of these people was to intervene early, focus on specific at-risk groups, strengthen families and communities, and ensure that all government services – not just health services – are working to reduce risk.

One suggestion was that all frontline public servants in Centrelink, immigration, tax and other office receive training in suicide prevention.



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People who have attempted suicide will get three months of individualised support.

Her report will be made available shortly for public consultation and members of the public are being urged to provide feedback before the final report is presented to the Government in July.

#### IF YOU NEED HELP





For help with emotional difficulties, contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

For help with depression, contact Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

The SANE Helpline is 1800 18SANE (7263) or at [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

For more information on how to support others who might need help and what warning signs to look for, visit: [Conversations Matter](#).

### WHO WILL BENEFIT

These initiatives will focus on supporting some of the most vulnerable groups, including:

- \* Australians who have been discharged from hospital after a suicide attempt.
- \* Families and carers who have lost a loved one to suicide.
- \* Young Australians, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and in regional and rural areas.
- \* Australians in crisis, and in need of immediate assistance.

### WHAT THE \$64 MILLION INCLUDES

\*An additional \$7 million to the Beyond Blue Way Back Support Service and HOPE services which provides a support worker to people who have attempted suicide for a three-month period to connect them to services and provide tailored individualised support.

\*An additional \$10 million for the StandBy program which provides support and one-on-one counselling to people who have lost a loved one to suicide because evidence shows they too are at increased risk of suicide.

\*\$9.8 million to youth support including

\* \$3 million increased funding for the Raise Foundation a mentoring program that connects children in schools to community mentors who help with life issues

\*\$4.4 million for Headspace to provide training to teachers and students in schools on suicide prevention and help equip schools with knowledge on how to respond if there is a suicide event in the school. There will also be funding to extend Headspace centres in Karratha, and Port Hedland, Roma and Emerald will be expanded.

\*\$1 million for the Mental Health Commission to work on a child mental health strategy (this was announced last year).

\* The government will bring forward funding for 8 adult mental walk in centres. People experiencing a mental health crisis will be able to walk in to these centres and be assessed by a mental health professional and sent on to a mental health nurse or a drug and alcohol counsellor or a psychiatrist and be given a case manager who will follow up their care and connect them with support at Centrelink, or social workers, financial counsellors or psychiatrists if needed.

\*\$12 million will be spent extending the government's 12 suicide prevention sites and \$1 million will be provided to allow Christine Morgan's office to draw together results from these sites and combine them with 14 other prevention programs being run by the states.

Some of the \$64 million has previously been announced.



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