

“Putting the Pieces Together”

Presentation to the National Suicide Prevention Conference
“Suicide Prevention – Let’s Work Together...Life is for Living”
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Background

Suicide is a complex issue resulting most often from an accumulation of risk factors. This may include mental health problems but can also include family difficulties, sexual identity, unemployment, cultural identity, low educational attainment and poverty (Kasper, Dennis and Harrison, Principles of Internal Medicine, 16 Ed. McGraw-Hill. 2005).

Suicide prevention in Tasmania needs to consider a range of factors including economic, environmental and social determinants which have the potential to impact on the health and wellbeing of Tasmanians (Baum, 1999). A safe environment, adequate income, meaningful roles in society, secure housing, higher levels of education and social support within communities are associated with better health and wellbeing (Baum, 1999).

It is now widely accepted that suicide prevention extends beyond just clinical intervention. It is a broad continuum of activity that includes health and wellbeing promotion, prevention and early intervention and bereavement support work with individuals, families, communities and social groups.

In 2006, there were 1,799 suicides in Australia. Tasmania recorded 68 confirmed suicides for 2006 compared with 71 suicides in 2005 and 83 suicides in 2004.

National and State Policy, Plans & Initiatives

Nationally the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, LIFE Framework, National Mental Health Plan 2003-2008, National Mental Health Policy 2008 and National Safety Priorities Plan 2005 provide directions for suicide prevention in Tasmania.

In Tasmania, a range of statewide strategies, plans and initiatives will inform future suicide prevention activity, including:

Tasmania’s Health Plan, 2007

- The development of a social inclusion strategy for Tasmania and the work of the Social Inclusion Unit
- The development of a promotion, prevention and early intervention strategy by Mental Health Services

Tasmania also has a range of current initiatives, funded by federal and state governments, which have a specific focus on suicide prevention and initiatives that provide support to groups considered to be at increased risk of suicide:

- The Tasmanian Government currently contributes over \$80 million to fund mental health services statewide.
- The Tasmanian Drought Taskforce convened by the Premier and led by the Department of Primary Industries and Water which, along with the federal government, contributes funding to the Rural Alive and Well Project. Rural Alive and Well aims to build resilience and collaborative partnerships in the Central Highlands, Southern Midlands and Glamorgan Spring Bay areas. This program is derived from a suicide prevention program that was delivered in the ‘wheat belt’ in Western Australia.

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- The Tasmania Suicide Prevention Steering Committee (TSPSC) comprises community and State and Commonwealth Government representatives and was established in 1993, in response to growing concern about the high rate of youth suicide. The scope has since broadened to a whole of population approach.

TSPSC Statewide Community Consultation into Suicide Prevention

During 2007 and 2008, the TSPSC conducted a statewide community consultation into suicide prevention. The primary aim of the community consultation was to collect information from community members and key stakeholders, in order to identify existing suicide prevention activities and to inform the future direction of suicide prevention in Tasmania and to provide a basis from which to develop a Statewide Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Key Findings & Recommendations

Forty two community forums were conducted throughout Tasmania and were attended by over six hundred people. Written submissions were also received.

Suicide prevention was considered an important issue for communities, particularly rural and isolated communities.

Participants were also able to recognise a range of activities occurring in their communities which contribute to suicide prevention.

The consultation highlighted the need for specific strategies to:

1. Reduce isolation and increase community connectedness
2. Promote help seeking behaviour, diversity and stigma reduction
3. Build community capacity
4. Develop targeted suicide prevention programs for at risk groups

The primary recommendation from the community consultation is for the TSPSC to facilitate the development of a statewide strategy for suicide prevention.

It was considered that a whole of government and whole of community approach to suicide prevention is critical.

The development of a statewide strategy will build on existing activity, establish stronger linkages between the community and government sectors, reflect a whole of government and whole of community approach, and provide key directions for future suicide prevention initiatives in Tasmania.