

Survey reveals high levels of stigma and low levels of suicide literacy

UNDER EMBARGO until 6am Sunday 10 September 2017

Survey findings released on World Suicide Prevention Day today indicate that Australians have mixed attitudes and behaviours towards people who die by suicide and an inaccurate understanding about suicide and its prevention.

This nationally representative survey was conducted by Colmar Brunton in August 2017 and included two sets of questions relating to suicide prevention. Survey respondents were asked to complete the Literacy of Suicide Scale (LOSS) and a short form Stigma of Suicide Scale (SOSS), both of which have been validated through a range of suicide prevention research, programs and trials.

Suicide Prevention Australia CEO Sue Murray said of the findings: “Evidence tells us that stigmatising attitudes result in people being less likely to get help or give help. If we don’t speak up about persistent stigma, we are at risk of perpetuating a society where we remain reluctant to reach out for help for ourselves or others.”

This year’s WSPD theme ‘Take a minute, change a life’ highlights the importance of speaking up, taking the time, and listening.

“It is reassuring to learn through this survey that more than 70% of Australians think that people who are suicidal should tell others about it. It shows we are willing to help others. We are willing to listen.”

“I am also encouraged by the finding that increased knowledge about suicidal behaviours and how to manage them seems to correlate with a lower level of stigma. This tells me that as well as reflecting on our personal attitudes and behaviours, we must continue efforts to improve every Australian’s understanding of suicide and its prevention.”

“We must work to debunk the myths surrounding suicide and change the way we think and communicate about its prevention. These are big changes, but changes that need to begin with the individual, the family, and the community. This is how we can change a life. This is how we can improve all our lives”.

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Two key myths that need to be debunked

MYTH: People who talk about suicide just want attention

SURVEY FINDING: Almost a third of Australians think that “People who talk about suicide rarely kill themselves”.

FACT: Talking about suicide is a warning sign. Warning signs should be taken seriously and listened to.

Existing evidence tells us that many people either communicate with a health professional directly about their suicidality, or convey indirectly their desire/intent to die, in the 3 months prior to death. Very few people who attempt to take their own life have not communicated in some way with those around them or exhibited warning signs.

MYTH: Talking about suicide increases the risk of suicide

SURVEY FINDING: Almost 20% of Australians think that talking about suicide increases the risk of suicide, and more than a third admit they don't know.

FACT: Asking someone about suicide directly opens the channels to talk honestly and openly about the problem. People who are suicidal feel listened to and better able to identify what is happening for them.

People from our Lived Experience Network tell us that although it is extremely hard to identify their experience when it is acute, they do get a sense of relief and ‘getting the world off their shoulders’ once they have the opportunity to talk with others and have others ‘hear’ their story. You cannot ‘plant’ the idea in someone’s head. In fact, discussing suicide can save lives by opening the door for someone to get help.

This reinforces the theme for World Suicide Prevention Day 2017 ‘Take a minute, change a life’. This theme encourages us all to take a greater interest in those around us. Look for changes in behaviour. If you notice something is a little different, perhaps in their energy or demeanour, ask them if they are doing ok. Encourage people to share their thoughts by taking a minute to ask the question, ‘Are you ok?’.

Myths and facts from <https://communitiesmatter.suicidepreventionaust.org/find-out-more>

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Key Survey Findings

Respondents with greater knowledge about suicide prevention had significantly lower levels of stigma.

Factors associated with suicide literacy

- Most respondents knew that seeking professional help (67%) or disclosing suicidal thoughts (70%) could be beneficial.
- Knowledge about risk factors for suicide was generally limited. For example, just 32% realised that there is a strong relationship between alcoholism and suicide, and less than 50% understood that men are more likely to suicide than women.
- In this sample, residents of regional/rural areas had significantly greater knowledge of suicide prevention than those in capital cities.

Suicide stigma

- Suicide was frequently attributed to isolation and feeling lost, lonely and disconnected (which is consistent with existing evidence that people who die by suicide often feel isolated). It highlights an opportunity to focus on prevention efforts in relation to increasing inclusion and connectedness.
- When asked to agree with a range of descriptors associated with people who die by suicide, several stigmatising views were present in this sample including more than a third of respondents selecting “irresponsible.”

About the Survey

This nationally representative survey of 1200 Australians aged 18+ was conducted by Colmar Brunton in August 2017 and included two sets of survey questions relating to suicide prevention. Survey respondents were asked to complete the Literacy of Suicide Scale (LOSS) and a short form Stigma of Suicide Scale (SOSS), scales which have been validated through a range of suicide prevention researchers, programs and trials. Associate Professor Phil Batterham of the Australian National University assisted in the analysis of the survey results.

Lessons from people with lived experience of suicide

Some Members of our Lived Experience Network tell us that overuse of the word ‘stigma’ is unhelpful – suicide prevention should be more focused around promotion of properly informed, positive attitudes and behaviours that encourage help seeking as well as challenge negative attitudes and behaviours about suicide prevention and living with suicidal behaviour.



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About World Suicide Prevention Day and R U OK?Day

World Suicide Prevention Day takes place on 10 September each year since 2004. World Suicide Prevention Day is an international day to recognise the impact of suicide and how to build more resilient communities across Australia.

This year, on Sunday 10 September, the international theme for World Suicide Prevention Day is 'Take a minute, change a life'. Organisations, communities and individuals around the world commemorate this important day by engaging in events leading up to, during and following the 10 of September. Visit www.wspd.org.au for [more information and list of registered events](#).

On social media use **#WSPD** and **#RUOK**

Another annual suicide prevention event held at this time of year is R U OK?Day. This year in Australia, R U OK?Day falls on Thursday 14 September 2017. To mark both World Suicide Prevention Day and R U OK? day, Suicide Prevention Australia and its Members are standing behind two important campaigns:

1. WSPD theme, 'Take a minute, change a life' to encourage us to take a minute to think about personal attitudes and behaviours around suicide. Findings from a representative survey will help us better understand Australian attitudes to suicide and suicide literacy.
2. R U OK?Day theme, 'You've got what it takes' to support those who may be struggling with life. The campaign equips Australians with the four steps to navigating a conversation when someone says, "No, I'm not ok" – 1. Ask, 2. Listen, 3. Encourage action, 4. Check In. www.ruok.org.au

Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) provides national leadership for the suicide prevention sector in Australia. SPA is a Member based Organisation with more than 70 organisations working in the field of suicide prevention currently as Members. SPA works collaboratively to develop a community that knows how to ask for help and how to give help.

We build and facilitate partnerships to change attitudes and behaviours around mental illness and suicide, and to assist the healing for people with lived experience of suicide attempts and suicide. Suicide Prevention Australia believes that the wisdom gained by those with lived experience of suicide must be used to inform suicide prevention.

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Talking about suicide in the media

A reminder of the Mindframe Media guidelines - <http://www.mindframe-media.info/> - and <http://www.conversationsmatter.com.au> for tips on how to talk safely and constructively about suicide.

Crisis support information

- Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 www.kidshelp.com.au
- MensLine 1300 78 99 78 www.mensline.org.au

For additional services and support visit www.suicidepreventionaust.org and click on the **Get Help** button.