



Fact sheet 11

Types of suicide prevention activities

Suicide prevention can involve all levels of society; from individuals and families to local, State and Commonwealth Governments. Anyone can help people at risk of suicide to feel supported during times of adversity so they don't see suicide as their only option.

This fact sheet discusses the various kinds of suicide prevention activities and how to go about starting an initiative in the community.

The importance of suicide prevention activities

Suicide is a tragedy that affects many Australians every year. We can all work together to prevent suicide and to support people who have been affected by it.

There are a variety of things we can do to help prevent suicide in Australia. These can range from working to increase awareness and knowledge about suicide through to knowing what works and providing interventions for people at risk. Getting involved in suicide prevention does not necessarily mean starting a new program.

Who should be targeted in suicide prevention activities?

It is important that any suicide prevention initiative is based on a reliable assessment of the needs within the community including identifying those who may benefit from suicide prevention activities in the local area. Suicide prevention initiatives should target any, or all of the following:

- Everyone in the community (universal intervention) – Some activities, such as awareness building and community education, can help the entire community to have a better understanding of the issues around suicide and respond appropriately in times of need.

- Groups potentially at risk (selective intervention) – There are some groups within the community that may be at a heightened risk of suicide because of a combination of risk factors and absence of protective factors. This includes men aged 20-54 and over 75, men in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people with a mental illness, people with substance use problems, people in contact with the justice system, people who attempt suicide, people in rural and remote communities, gay and lesbian communities, and people bereaved by suicide.
- Individuals at a high risk of suicide (indicated intervention) – People who have previously attempted suicide or who have received treatment in a psychiatric facility are at a higher risk of suicide. Also, people who are exhibiting the warning signs of suicide, including talking about suicide, having a plan or a sense of hopelessness, may require immediate assistance and support.

Planning and implementing suicide prevention activities

It is important to identify the goals and expected outcomes at the start of any suicide prevention activity, so they can be used as the basis for planning interventions and evaluating the effectiveness of activities. It is obviously desirable to use reduced suicide rates as a measure of effectiveness but this can be difficult to track, particularly within a local region, and should not be the only measure used. Assessing the effectiveness of suicide prevention activities can use measures such as:

- reductions in suicide attempts and/or suicidal thinking;
- reductions in risk factors and vulnerabilities to suicidal behaviours (eg mental illness, feelings of hopelessness);
- increase in individual and/or community awareness of appropriate suicide prevention;
- changes in behaviours and response to suicide prevention strategies; and/or
- improvements in individual protective or resiliency factors (eg improved coping skills, more help-seeking behaviours, better social connectedness, better understanding of mental illness).

Suicide prevention activities and interventions

Suicide prevention can happen anywhere, anytime, by simply supporting your family, friends, work colleagues and community members during times of need. The following is a list of activities that may be used to guide the development of suicide prevention initiatives and activities.

Activities that aim to provide targeted support and specialised care

- Providing a first point of care – The first and earliest point of contact or care with a person who needs assistance can make a big difference. It is very important to act quickly if someone needs help and to provide access to information and care that is appropriate to their need for and receptiveness to help.
- Providing specialised care – Some people may require specialised treatment and care (such as treatment for mental illness or alcohol and other drug problems), counselling, therapy or hospitalisation. Specialised training in suicide first aid and prevention can help workers in these fields to provide effective care.

Activities that aim at individual, family and community growth and development

- Providing ongoing care – There is substantial evidence that the likelihood of suicide increases once people have left clinical treatment. It is crucial to ensure that people have access to continuous care from services that work together to support each person in their recovery.
- Providing support for people bereaved by suicide – People who have been affected by the suicide of a family member, friend or colleague may be at greater risk of suicide. Support and assistance for these people can reduce the risk of further suicides and improve individual and community resilience.

Activities that aim to promote help-seeking and create a self-help environment

- Improving community education and awareness – Improving understanding and awareness of suicide, suicide prevention and the issues that are associated with suicide can help to reduce stigma and the myths often associated with suicidal behaviours.
- Building resilience in individuals – A person's resilience is strongly influenced by the family and community around them. The accumulation of life events can determine how an individual will respond to difficult or traumatic experiences. Activities include creating a supportive environment to assist people to deal with life events.
- Building social connectedness – Many activities can help to create a sense of community, belonging and being cared for. Groups such as sporting clubs, craft groups, musical or theatre organisations, social and volunteer groups all increase people's connectedness within the community.

Working together to care for people who may be going through tough times helps to ensure that they feel supported and understand that suicide is not their only option. Sometimes this can be difficult because it is hard to know what to say, or the person's problems may seem overwhelming. However, there are still many things we can do to provide support and care.

- Building community capacity involves strengthening the cooperation between local service providers, carers, local doctors, families and friends so that people in need of support have many opportunities for care and understanding.

Activities that aim to increase local understanding and support

- Building a ready-response capability entails providing coordinated support services within the community that respond quickly and effectively in times of need. It is also important to train key people within the community to recognise and respond to suicidal behaviours (gatekeeper training).
- Increasing the community's ability to recognise warning signs can include promoting and educating the local community about the risk factors, possible warning signs and the main tipping points for suicide and how to respond appropriately.

More information

- *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) – A Framework for Prevention of Suicide in Australia* (2007). Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.
- *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) – Research and Evidence in Suicide Prevention* (2007). Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.