

Wednesday, 18 April 2018

## Suicide contacts to Kids Helpline are up by 22% but community cohesion can save young lives

**yourtown is calling on the Australian community to join forces to reduce deaths of children and young people due to suicide in a new 10 pronged approach to preventing youth suicide released today.**

Suicide related contacts to **yourtown's** Kids Helpline have risen by 22% since 2012 going from 8,728 to 10,636 in 2017. In 2017, suicide-related contacts to the national counselling service from children and young people aged 5-25 made up 16% of all counselling contacts. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of these were from young people 14 years or under.

**yourtown** CEO Tracy Adams said while it is great that children and young people are reaching out, there was a lot more the community could do to put in place strategies and resources that can save young lives.

"Suicide is the leading cause of death of children and young people in Australia accounting for more deaths than motor vehicle accidents.<sup>1</sup> Accepting this statistic is simply not an option. **yourtown** decided we needed to know more, to do more," Ms Adams said.

"**yourtown** asked young people with lived experience of suicide about their experiences – what helps, what doesn't. We looked at what we'd learnt from those reaching out to Kids Helpline about suicide, and asked those at the coal face, working with children and young people every day, what they saw and knew could save lives.

"Today we are proud to launch our Position Statement that outlines a 10 pronged approach to preventing suicide by children and young people. While there are already many working hard to protect our children we are calling on the entire community to get behind this issue and help make this approach a reality.

"**Australia needs a specific, youth suicide prevention strategy.** This means every state agreeing to a plan to oversee and coordinate activity to prevent and treat suicide that recognises children and young people are not just small adults.

"**Strategies to reduce stigma and to create a help-seeking culture are required.** This requires community-wide education and campaigns encouraging everyone to take steps to help effectively support and respond when young people seek help.

"Children and young people we surveyed told us they fear telling someone because they think they will be judged or called an 'attention seeker'. Around 60% of those surveyed had never sought help and of those that had, 20% had not received help until after they had attempted suicide.<sup>2</sup>

"**Youth suicide prevention interventions need to be tailored to different groups.** Given that suicidality affects different genders, cultures and other groups in different ways, we need to develop and respond to support needs in different ways.

"We know young females are around twice as likely as males to attempt suicide. Young males are at greater risk of death by suicide accounting for 71% of suicide deaths but sadly are less likely to seek help.<sup>1</sup> When Intersex, Trans, and Gender Diverse young people contacted Kids Helpline in 2017 they were more likely to talk about suicide than other genders.

"There are significantly higher rates of suicide amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, same-sex attracted young people, those living in rural and remote areas, in statutory care or in the justice system.<sup>1</sup>

"**Early intervention is key to prevention and to supporting lifelong mental health and wellbeing.** This means delivering more outreach services and services such as headspace, a service currently inaccessible to children younger than 12.

"Contacts to Kids Helpline about mental health by young people aged 10-14 have been on the increase, with mental health contacts increasing by 123% from 2011-17.

"**There should be no wrong door to accessing services.** This is critical and all key service staff must be trained to be gatekeepers to ensure they identify young people at risk.

**“Services need to be integrated to enable a seamless care journey.** We need to do all we can to ensure that young people in Australia receive continuing care, particularly after a suicide attempt, but also to ensure there are no service gaps for when they are transitioning from child to adult services.

**“Professional counselling and psychological therapy are effective interventions that must be available.** We know from our work with Kids Helpline and young people that these support services are invaluable.

**“Strategies to address suicide by children and young people must include families.** Parents matter. Our consultation with young people with lived experience of suicide showed parental support is crucial for children but that 44% of young people surveyed who had sought help from a parent thought they were ‘not helpful at all’.<sup>2</sup>

“We know it can be hard for parents to tell the difference between everyday ups and downs and distress that needs professional support, or what to do when faced with this situation. Parents need support too, both for their own wellbeing and so they can effectively support their child.

**“Research to better understand youth suicide, and what works to prevent and treat it, is needed.** We’ve been hearing lots lately about how social media can be harmful but we’d like to see more research into how it can effectively support young people.

**“Last but certainly not least, community support organisations and health services must commit to working together.**

“We know there are lots of organisations looking to prevent youth suicide but we will be way more effective if we join forces to drive increased wellbeing for children and young people in the Australian community. The good news is suicide is preventable if we, the Australian community, work together.”

Ms Adams said **yourtown** is also using what it’s learnt to create new resources to help children, young people and parents get the information and support they need.

“It’s important we listen to those who need help and reach out to them in creative ways that engage and promote understanding. Working with industry professionals, we have created two new comic books targeted to tweens and teens who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide,” she said.

“The comic books are designed to create conversations and promote help seeking behaviours by both those who are experiencing issues and those who are looking for ways to help their friend or family member.

“Our ‘Parents Matter’ information sheet provides parents with ideas about how to support children and young people with thoughts of suicide.”

Other resources for children, young people, parents and schools, including the new comics, can be accessed at [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

To access **yourtown**’s Preventing Suicide by Children and Young People: Position Statement; Survey Report and ‘Parents Matter’ tip sheet go to [www.yourtown.com.au/insights/advocacy](http://www.yourtown.com.au/insights/advocacy)

**Kids Helpline Insights 2017 Suicide & Young People Key Insights** and other **2017 Kids Helpline Insights Reports** can be accessed at [www.yourtown.com.au/insights/annual-overviews](http://www.yourtown.com.au/insights/annual-overviews)

Kids Helpline is Australia’s only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. **FREE call 1800 55 1800** or [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au) Primary schools across Australia can access free **Kids Helpline @ School - Wellbeing** supported by Bupa and Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline. See [www.kidshelpline.com.au/school](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/school) for more information.

<sup>2</sup>ABS data on Causes of Death, 2017; <sup>3</sup>yourtown (2018). Preventing Suicide: The Voice of Children and Young People.

-ENDS-

## INTERVIEW/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

Tracy Adams, CEO **yourtown**; John Dalgleish, **yourtown** Head of Strategy and Research  
Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Virtual Services Manager; Dr Samantha Batchelor, **yourtown** Senior Researcher  
Kids Helpline counsellors; Kids Helpline VNR available on request

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