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yourtown calls for greater awareness of suicidality in children as young as 10

With children as young as 10 expressing thoughts of suicide, yourtown is calling for more attention to be given to suicide awareness, prevention and research focused on those 14 years and under.

According to **yourtown's** Dr Samantha Batchelor, thoughts of suicide can start young. In the five years from 2012 to 2016, Kids Helpline had more than 59,000 contacts related to suicide, with one in five of those from a child aged 14 years or younger.

"We know children in this young age group can be experiencing severe suicidality. A 2016 **yourtown** survey of 472 children and young people with lived experience of suicide showed that of the 139 in the 14 years and under group, 82% had made a suicide plan and 54% reported having attempted suicide.

"Despite this, there is a limited awareness about suicidal thoughts and behaviours experienced by the very young because of the lack of available data and information in the community about suicidality and younger children.

"Of significant concern is that this lack of information means younger children are not getting the help they need early on.

"The 2016 **yourtown** survey of young people with lived experience of suicide showed that 42% of those aged 15-19 received help while only 26% of children aged 14 or younger received any help or support.

"Younger children are just as likely to talk to parents and carers about depression and suicide as older teens, but they were significantly less likely to get professional help."

Parental support is crucial for children, but it can be hard for parents to tell the difference between everyday ups and downs and distress that needs professional support.

"Children told us that parents and other adults can sometimes dismiss their concerns as attention-seeking or 'just a teen thing' and they fear 'being judged', which means that children don't always get access to professional help they need," Dr Batchelor said.

"Seeking help can be terrifying when you're that young. Children are scared no one will understand and that they won't be believed. They often feel ashamed and worthless, so they just stay silent.

"We need to increase awareness that suicide is a real issue amongst young people and ensure that every young person is taken seriously."

yourtown CEO Tracy Adams said **yourtown** was calling for more public education and intervention services for children thinking about suicide informed by a greater body of research into the younger age group and their relationship with suicidality.

“How common is suicidality in younger children in Australia? How do we reduce stigma, dispel the myth of attention-seeking, and encourage help-seeking?” Ms Adams said.

“If we can find out the help-seeking preferences and gather more data on the prevalence of thoughts and attempts of suicide then we can tailor the access to suicide prevention strategies.

“It’s also recognised that learning that your child is thinking about suicide is distressing. Parents need support too, both for their own wellbeing and so they can effectively support their child.

“We can use what we learn to better inform community education and create nation-wide interventions that will ultimately save young lives.”

Kids Helpline is Australia’s only national 24/7 counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call **1800 55 1800** or www.kidshelpline.com.au. It is a service of **yourtown** and is 72% funded by the **yourtown** Art Union, donations and corporate support. Federal and State Governments fund 28%.

ENDS

INTERVIEW/PHOTO/FILMING OPPORTUNITIES

- John Dalgleish, **yourtown** Head of Strategy and Research
- Dr Samantha Batchelor, **yourtown** Senior Researcher

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About **yourtown**:

yourtown is a charity with services young people can access to find jobs, learn skills, become great parents and live safe, happy lives. For over 55 years, we’ve been tackling the issues impacting young people in Australia - like mental health and unemployment, and taking on issues like family and domestic violence. See www.yourtown.com.au for more about **yourtown**.