

# National Review of the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement

## Summary of yourtown's advocacy submission 2025



### What is it about?

The Australian Government has tasked the Productivity Commission with conducting the final review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement. The review will assess the impact of programs delivered under the Agreement and make recommendations that aim to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, affordability and safety of the mental health and suicide prevention system.

### Why is it important?

The Agreement establishes a framework for reform of the mental health and suicide prevention system. It identifies priority areas for action within the mental health and suicide prevention system, including enabling a whole-of-government approach to services, data improvements and consistent evaluation. Mental health and suicide remain key concerns for children and young people. In 2024, Kids Helpline counsellors provided 133,386 responses to children and young people across Australia, 75% of these responses occurred outside of normal business hours. Mental health and suicide-related concerns were among the top reasons for children and young people contacting Kids Helpline. One-in-four contacts were about emotional wellbeing, one-in-four were about mental health, and one-in-six were about suicide-related concerns. There were 4,632 crisis interventions. The most common reason for these interventions was suicide attempts.

### Some of yourtown's key messages:

#### 1. Equitable funding is needed to address the diverse needs of children and young people

Children and young people are struggling to access appropriate support because their issues are beyond early intervention support, but they are too young or their issues may not be severe enough to access services that support issues further along the mental health care continuum. This is commonly referred to as the 'missing middle'. The Agreement should address the issue of this 'missing middle' by prioritising funding for services that aim to address the highest prevalence of mental health issues and greatest barriers to accessing support.

Kids Helpline continues to be a critical safety net for children and young people; however, the service cannot keep pace with demand. Kids Helpline's professional counsellors are often the last line of support when there is limited after-hours mental health support available. The current serious funding shortfall means many children and young people are not able to access timely support. Governments should explore the provision of equitable financial support for national services as part of the Bilateral Agreements between the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments.

#### 2. Mental health literacy and early intervention programs need funding to address stigma and encourage help-seeking

The stigma associated with mental health and suicide is widespread in the community and is higher among cohorts such as young males. This can result in people limiting their engagement with supports. School-based interventions are effective in improving mental health literacy and reducing mental health stigma. A stronger focus on promotion and mental health education in schools and communities will reduce the stigma associated with mental health (particularly around accessing support for good mental health and not just when there is a problem) and improve engagement with early intervention. Furthermore, governments should allow flexible funding arrangements for early intervention mental health programs to conduct promotion and education activities to raise awareness about mental health, suicide prevention and help-seeking.

#### 3. Prevention and early intervention supports should be prioritised for children and young people and take into account their age and developmental needs

The Agreement mentions outcomes for people across the lifespan, commensurate with age and development needs; however, we advocate for more focus and investment to be placed on supports for children and young people because mental health issues typically start in people's younger years. Governments should invest in supports that are holistic and work with children and young people considering their ecological factors, including family, school, transition periods, and community contexts.

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