

Ombudsman's Foreword

As Western Australian Ombudsman, I review certain child deaths, identify patterns and trends arising from these reviews and make recommendations about ways to prevent or reduce child deaths. Of the child death notifications received by my office since I commenced my child death review responsibility, nearly a third related to children aged 13 to 17 years old. Of these children, suicide was the most common circumstance of death, accounting for nearly forty per cent of deaths. Furthermore, and of serious concern, Aboriginal children were very significantly over-represented in the number of young people who died by suicide. For these reasons, I decided to undertake a major own motion investigation into ways that State government departments and authorities can prevent or reduce suicide by young people.

The objectives of the investigation were to analyse, in detail, deaths of young people who died by suicide notified to my office, comprehensively consider the results of this analysis in conjunction with the relevant research and practice literature, undertake consultation with government and non-government stakeholders and, if required, recommend ways that agencies can prevent or reduce suicide by young people.

I have found that State government departments and authorities have already undertaken a significant amount of work that aims to prevent and reduce suicide by young people in Western Australia, however, there is still more work to be done. I have found that this work includes practical opportunities for individual agencies to enhance their provision of services to young people. Critically, as the reasons for suicide by young people are multi-factorial and cross a range of government agencies, I have also found that this work includes the development of a collaborative, inter-agency approach to preventing suicide by young people. In addition to my findings and recommendations, the comprehensive level of data and analysis contained in this report will, I believe, be a valuable new resource for government departments and authorities to inform their planning and work with young people. In particular, our analysis suggests this planning and work target four groups of young people that we have identified.

Arising from my findings, I have made 22 recommendations to four government agencies about ways to prevent or reduce suicide by young people. I am very pleased that each agency has agreed to these recommendations and has, more generally, been highly co-operative and positively engaged with our investigation.

Suicide by young people is a tragedy. Government agencies, through collaborative policy development and service provision, have a vital role to play in preventing youth suicide. Ultimately, my investigation, and this report, are intended to enhance and improve the way that government agencies undertake this vital work.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest personal sympathy to the parents, families and communities that have been personally affected by youth suicide in Western Australia.

If you need crisis support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14, or call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800, 24 hours a day. For general support, talk to your GP or local health professional. Contact details for other services and information are provided on the following page.