



Mental health: taking action to tackle suicide

Julia Gillard and Labor
Let's move Australia forward



TAKING ACTION TO TACKLE SUICIDE

Suicide is a tragedy – for individuals, for families, and for communities in which someone has taken their own life. More than 2000 Australians take their lives every year.

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will redouble our national efforts to prevent the tragedy of suicide in order to reduce the tragic toll it imposes on individuals, families and communities.

The Government will invest \$276.9 million over four years to:

1. Provide more services to those at greatest risk of suicide – including psychology and psychiatry services, as well as non-clinical support to assist people with severe mental illness and their carers with their day-to-day needs.
2. Invest more in direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention, including through boosting the capacity of counselling services such as Lifeline and providing funding to improve safety at suicide 'hotspots'.
3. Provide more services and support to men – who are at greatest risk of suicide, but least likely to seek help.
4. Promote good mental health and resilience in young people, to prevent suicide later in life.

Why we need to act

Suicide is a national tragedy that has devastating impacts on individuals, families and communities.

On average, around 6 Australians take their own lives each day. Attempted suicide is also a serious issue in Australia: more than one in eight Australians have thought about taking their own life, 4 per cent have made suicide plans and 3.3 per cent have attempted suicide during their lifetime.

The social and financial costs of suicide are substantial. The human cost is incalculable.

FACT #1: *Too many Australians take their lives by suicide*

More than 2000 Australians each year take their own lives. This is more people than die in the national road toll each year.

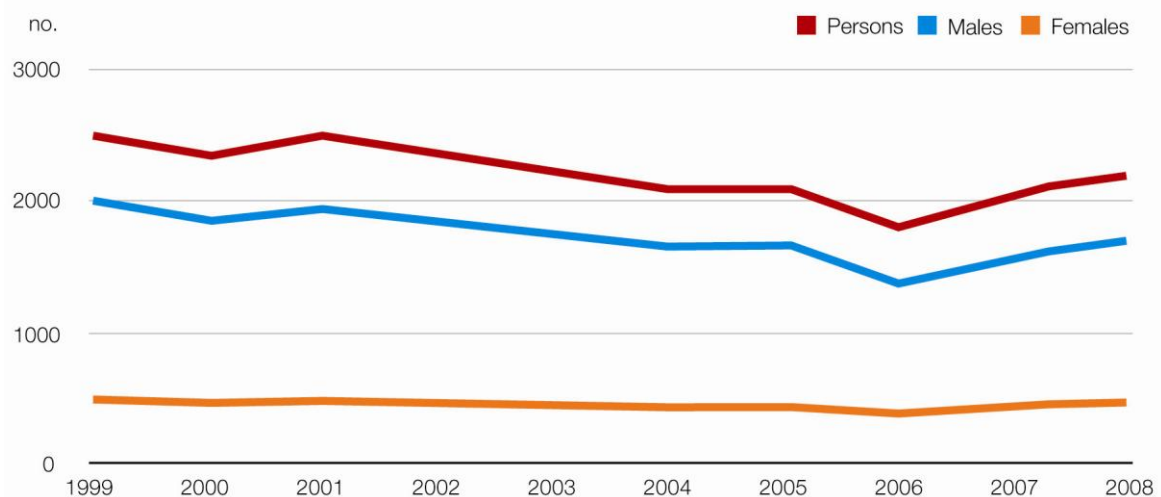
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from the past decade suggests an overall decline in suicide rates, but mental health experts have expressed concern about the accuracy of the ABS data. Irrespective of the precise number, any suicide is one suicide too many.

FACT #2: *Some groups are at much higher risk of suicide than others*

Some groups in our community are at much higher risk of suicide than others:

- Men are much more likely to take their own lives than women: men account for around 75 per cent of suicide deaths in Australia.
- Other groups, including Indigenous Australians, people in rural and remote areas, gay, lesbian bisexual and transgender people, and children and young people are also at greatest risk.

Suicide deaths in Australia, 1999-2008 *Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics*



FACT #3: *Men are at greatest risk of suicide but least likely to seek help*

While men account for three-quarters of deaths from suicide, an estimated 72 per cent of males don't seek help for mental disorders. This is because of the stigma associated with mental illness, and because men are more likely to think they need to 'tough it out'. Men also often turn to alcohol to mask the symptoms of mental illnesses such as depression.

FACT #4: *Promoting good mental health and building resilience in young people can help to prevent suicide*

Many of our kids have mental health or serious behavioural problems. About one in seven children aged 4 to 14 years are estimated to experience a mental health condition in a year, with one in ten children having a long term mental or behavioural condition. These problems can include behavioural problems as well as conditions such as anxiety and depression.

But overwhelmingly, the evidence shows that intervening early can help reduce the incidence and severity of mental health problems later in life.

How this policy will work

Tackling suicide in our community over the long term requires interventions in a range of different areas: it requires providing more support to people who have attempted suicide or who have a severe mental illness and are at high risk of doing so, as well as direct investments in stopping suicides from taking place, for example through reducing physical access to known suicide ‘hotspots’. And it means targeting particular groups who the evidence shows are at greatest risk – such as men, and Indigenous people.

But reducing suicide rates over time also requires a comprehensive approach long term. For example, we know we can make a difference if we invest early – in promoting good mental health in our kids, because we know this can reduce the incidence and seriousness of problems that develop later in life.

Building on Federal Labor’s investments in mental health in our first term, a re-elected Gillard Labor Government will focus on tackling each of these areas as part of a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention.

1. Providing more frontline services and support for those at greatest risk of suicide

A re-elected Gillard Government will invest \$113.9 million in providing more frontline services – including psychology and psychiatry services, as well as non-clinical support services – for people with severe mental illness, and in ensuring these services deliver better health outcomes.

Mental illness remains the single biggest risk factor for suicide. Yet some studies have shown that only a quarter of people who take their own lives were in contact with a mental health service before their death. It is therefore critically important that we boost frontline services for people with serious mental illness, in particular people who have already attempted suicide.

More psychological services for people who have attempted or are at risk of suicide (\$22.9m)

This funding will provide more psychological counselling services for up to 37,500 people who have attempted or are at risk of suicide, to help reduce repeated attempts at suicide. This initiative will be delivered through additional funding to the existing Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program, which will be delivered by Medicare Locals – the new primary health care organisations.

Medicare Locals will identify areas in their communities where there is a need for additional psychological services, and target the additional resources to these areas.

More psychiatry services for people with severe mental illness (\$22.0m)

In addition to providing funding for more counselling services, targeted funding will be provided to improve access to specialist psychiatry services in the community for people with severe mental illness.

The new Medicare Locals will be provided with funding to “purchase” around 20,000 services from psychiatrists each year, and to work with primary and community mental health providers in their area. The Gillard Labor Government will consult closely with psychiatrists on the detailed implementation of this initiative.

Boosting non-clinical support services (\$60m)

In addition to boosting clinical support services for the severely mentally ill, Federal Labor will also provide a significant boost to non-clinical community support services. People with serious mental illness often require assistance to manage day-to-day activities, and critically – their carers need opportunities for respite.

Under this initiative, selected Medicare Locals would be provided with flexible funding pools to purchase additional services from existing community-based, non-government providers who currently provide services through the Support for Day to Day Living, Personal Helpers and Mentors, and Mental Health Respite programs.

The kinds of services these programs provide include structured social activities, personal helpers to help manage daily activities, or respite services to provide carers of people with severe mental illness with time off.

This boost will provide a 15 per cent increase to funding currently available under these programs – sufficient to provide the equivalent of an additional 15,000 Support for Day to Day Living places, 3,000 Personal Helpers and Mentors places, and around 800 episodes of respite.

Making sure our investments deliver better outcomes (\$9.0m)

As well as investing in more frontline services for the severely mentally ill who are at greatest risk of suicide, a re-elected Gillard Labor Government will also ensure that these investments in services are delivering better outcomes, by establishing:

- An Annual National Report Card on mental health and suicide prevention.
- Nationally consistent local reporting by Medicare Locals and Local Hospital Networks on the performance of mental health services, including carer and consumer outcomes – giving those who matter most – mental health consumers, carers and their families – direct input into monitoring the performance of mental health services across the country.

2. Doing more to stop suicide and support communities affected by suicide

A re-elected Gillard Government will invest \$74.3 million in direct suicide prevention activities – including counselling services, training for frontline community workers in suicide awareness, securing suicide ‘hotspots’, and supporting communities, including school communities, affected by suicide.

Boosting the capacity of crisis hotlines, including Lifeline (\$18.1m)

Funding will be provided to Lifeline Australia to increase the capacity of their support hotlines. Lifeline currently receives around 450,000 per year. Almost 6 per cent of these calls involve a high risk of suicide. Labor's additional funding will enable Lifeline to increase their call capacity by around 60 per cent – to around 700,000 – over time.

Labor's additional funding will also enable calls to Lifeline from mobiles to be toll-free. More than half of all callers to Lifeline are from mobile phones, which frequently attract higher call costs. High call costs can be a real barrier to people seeking crisis counselling services.

Lifeline will also be provided with funding to establish dedicated lines at suicide 'hotspots' – so that people who are actively contemplating suicide and have taken the step of going to a destination where they could commit suicide, have help at hand.

'Mental health first aid' training: for frontline community workers (\$6.1m)

Under this initiative, funding will be provided to train front line community workers, such as financial, legal and relationship counsellors, and healthcare workers, to better identify and respond to the needs of people at risk of suicide or who have attempted suicide. According to suicide experts, this kind of training has been shown to reduce suicide rates.

This initiative will provide funding for "mental health first aid" training in around 40 regions around Australia.

Improving safety at 'hotspots' (\$9.0m)

To reduce access to common means of suicide, capital funding will be provided to local governments to improve safety and infrastructure at notable suicide 'hotspots', such as the Gap in Sydney – for example by improving fencing barriers, night lighting, and closed circuit television monitors.

This is in addition to the funding which will be provided to Lifeline to establish dedicated phone counselling lines from 'hotspots'.

Outreach teams to schools (\$18.7m)

Tragically, an estimated 2-3 high school aged young people die by suicide each week in Australia. As well as doing as much as possible to reduce the incidence of young people taking their own lives, it is critically important to ensure appropriate support is in place for school communities affected by suicide – to support young people whose schoolmates have taken their own lives, and to reduce the chances of 'copycat' suicides.

This measure will fund a nationwide network of mental health promotion officers, to provide outreach services from local headspace sites or local psychology services, to work with government and non-government school-based mental health workers and provide counselling and other support to school communities.

Supporting communities to reduce risk of suicide (\$22.4m)

This initiative will provide funding to support community-led suicide prevention activities – targeted at groups and communities which are at high risk of suicide, including Indigenous people, men, gay, lesbian and bisexual people, and families and colleagues recently bereaved by suicide.

Activities funded under this initiative could include training community leaders to better identify and respond to suicide, and activities to better build resilience and positive mental health – for example, in Indigenous communities, brokering visits by elders from communities that have successfully responded to suicide clusters in the past to communities currently experiencing a spate of suicides, to help these communities build their own responses to their community circumstances.

3. Targeting men who are at greatest risk of suicide – but least likely to seek help

While men are far more likely than women to commit suicide, an estimated 72 per cent of men do not seek help for mental health problems. A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will invest \$22.8 million in providing more services and programs targeted at men, to ensure more men get the mental health help that they need.

Expanding the National Workplace Program (\$11.0m)

Funding will be provided for the National Workplace Program currently delivered by Beyondblue, which helps workplaces identify and support workers with depression who are not receiving treatment.

An additional 350 workplaces each year will benefit from being assisted to identify and support workers with depression. The expanded program would target particular sectors (such as blue collar work and trades) and subsidise increased participation by small businesses.

Increasing the capacity of helplines for men (\$2.8m)

Beyondblue will be provided with funding to increase the capacity of their helpline to provide information and assistance to up to 30,000 more men each year.

This is important because helplines are often the first place that people in crisis will approach, with many men not having seen a doctor for their depression and not being in receipt of any medical treatment or support. Help lines provide an anonymous way to seek information and advice.

Targeted campaigns for men's mental health (\$9.0m)

Funding will also be provided with funding for targeted campaigns on mental illness for men – to reduce stigma associated with mental illness and encourage more men to seek help for depression and mental illness. Stigma associated with mental illness is one of the major reasons men who have depression or other mental health problems don't seek help.

These campaigns will target high risk groups of men – including single men, fathers, older men, men who are unemployed, men in rural areas, and Indigenous men.

4. Promoting good mental health and resilience in young people

A re-elected Gillard Labor Government will invest \$65.9 million in providing more services for children with mental health problems, as well as in promoting resilience and good mental health in young people – so the children of today are less likely to develop problems later in life.

Kidsmatter expansion (\$19.6m)

Under this initiative, around 1700 additional primary schools will be provided with funding to promote good mental health and improve children's resilience through the Kidsmatter program. This program provides participating schools with professional development for teachers to promote resilience and identify and respond to mental health problems; training for teachers and parent associations; and resources for teachers, parents and carers.

This investment will assist schools to tackle issues like bullying, by helping children to develop social and emotional skills, and creating a supportive school environment.

About 348,000 children will benefit from developing greater resilience and positive mental health under this initiative. Parents, families and school communities will also benefit from more supportive school environments that better respond to and treat children with serious problems.

Services for children with mental health and developmental issues (\$24.0m)

As well as investing early to build resilience and head off problems, especially in the teenage years, the Government will invest in additional services and training frontline health and community workers to better identify and support children with serious mental health, developmental and behavioural issues.

Medicare Locals will be supported to work with local GPs, child and maternal health clinics, schools and other social services to develop linkages and support networks with local mental health providers. Funding will also be provided to new Medicare Locals to purchase services, such as psychological services, for parents and children. Around 26,000 children with severe behavioural problems or mental health issues such as anxiety or depression will benefit from the additional services provided through this program.

Expanding online mental health and counselling services (\$22.3m)

To provide more avenues through which people with mental health problems, particularly young people, access mental health services, the Government will invest \$22.3 million in online mental health and counselling services.

About 40,000 people, particularly young people and people who are reluctant or unable to access face-to-face mental health services, will benefit from online treatment.

Building on a strong record

Julia Gillard and Labor are strongly committed to improving mental health services. The 2010-11 Budget included \$175.8 million for mental health:

- \$78.8 million to deliver up to 30 new headspace sites provide extra funding for the existing 30 sites, and improve telephone and web-based support services for young people.
 - The first ten of the new *headspace* sites will be located in Parramatta and the Shoalhaven (NSW), Collingwood and Bendigo (Victoria), Cairns, Inala and Nundah (Queensland), Noarlunga (South Australia), Central Perth (WA) and Hobart (Tasmania).

- When all new sites are operational, an additional 20,000 young Australians each year will have access to mental health services.
- \$25.5 million to expand the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC) model in partnership with States and Territories.
- \$13 million to employ 136 extra mental health nurses under the Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program.
- \$58.5 million for coordinated care packages, to better support up to 25,000 people with severe mental illness.

Foundations for long term mental health reform

As part our investments in the National Health and Hospitals Network, the Labor Government is investing \$1.6 billion in providing 1300 sub-acute beds around the country which will help to provide more mental health beds.

Through our health reforms, the Gillard Government is building the foundations of the health system on which we can build better health services for Australians, including better mental health services – including through providing better access to GP and primary care services, and better coordination to ensure that people with mental illness don't fall through the gaps.

The investments we are making now are a down payment to address the immediate service gaps in mental health – but we know there is more to be done. Labor will move towards providing greater funding and policy leadership for community mental health services over time.

THE LIBERALS' RECORD

As Minister for Health under the former Coalition Government, Tony Abbott:

- ✗ Saw \$1 billion cut from public hospitals around the country – enough to provide 1000 hospital beds
- ✗ Capped GP training places at 600 per year – creating a shortage of GPs in the community
- ✗ Left a nationwide shortage of 6000 nurses.

If he is elected Prime Minister, Mr Abbott said that he would invest in mental health services by cutting health services:

- ✗ **Scrapping Medicare Locals** – which will play a critical role in expanding mental health services, and in improving coordination between the range of providers who deliver services to people with mental illness.
- ✗ **Scrapping GP Super Clinics** will mean that 23 communities miss out on one stop shops and up to 425 communities miss out on upgrades to their GP practices.
- ✗ **Scrapping the After Hours GP Helpline**, which will deny hundreds of thousands of services, including potentially mental health information and advice, after hours.
- ✗ **Scrapping funding for e-health records**, which many experts have said will be critical to improving coordination of care for people with severe mental illness who often need to seek the services of a range of health care providers.

COSTINGS

	2010-11 (\$m)	2011-12 (\$m)	2012-13 (\$m)	2013-14 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
1. Boosting frontline services to support those at risk					
More community-based psychiatry services		7.3	7.3	7.3	22.0
More community-based psychology services		7.6	7.6	7.6	22.9
Non-clinical services for the mentally ill and their carers		20.0	20.0	20.0	60.0
Nationally consistent reporting		3.0	3.0	3.0	9.0
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>38.0</i>	<i>38.0</i>	<i>38.0</i>	<i>113.9</i>
2. Taking action to prevent suicide and boost crisis intervention services					
Boosting capacity of crisis lines, including toll-free calls from mobiles		6.0	6.0	6.0	18.1
"Mental Health first aid" training	0.2	1.2	2.4	2.4	6.1
Infrastructure for "Suicide hotspots"		3.0	3.0	3.0	9.0
Community Prevention activities for high risk groups	0.2	6.6	7.8	7.9	22.4
Outreach teams to schools impacted by suicide		6.2	6.3	6.2	18.7
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>23.0</i>	<i>25.4</i>	<i>25.5</i>	<i>74.3</i>
3. Providing more services and support for men					
Expansion of the National Workplace Program	1.1	3.3	3.3	3.3	11.0
Increased helpline capacity	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.8	2.8
Targeted campaigns on depression and reducing stigma	1.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	9.0
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>6.6</i>	<i>6.6</i>	<i>6.6</i>	<i>22.8</i>
4. Promoting good mental health and resilience in young people					
KidsMatter Expansion	2.5	5.2	5.5	6.4	19.6
Additional services for children with problems	0.4	7.8	7.8	8.0	24.0
Online mental health and counselling services	2.0	6.6	6.8	6.9	22.3
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>4.8</i>	<i>19.7</i>	<i>20.1</i>	<i>21.3</i>	<i>65.9</i>
TOTAL	8.1	87.3	90.1	91.4	276.9

Funding for these investments will be fully offset over the forward estimates, consistent with the Gillard Labor Government's commitment to return the Budget to surplus in three years.

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