

Margins 2 Mainstream Submission

PUTTING LIFE INTO PRACTICE: NEW DIRECTIONS IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

The *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) Framework* finds that one of the most significant factors in developing effective mental health promotion and disorder prevention interventions is using an evidence-based approach. Learnings are transferred globally by basing activities on what has been evaluated as effective and communicating such learnings and tools for program design through the LIFE website (www.livingisforeveryone.com.au).

The *LIFE Framework* supports cross agency learnings by referring to other relevant national policies such as the National Drug Strategy and the Family Court of Australia Mental Health Support Program.

The release of the updated *LIFE Framework*, produced by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, provides national policy for action based on the best available evidence to guide activities aimed at reducing the rate at which people take their own lives. LIFE resources aim to support population health approaches and prevention activities that will assist in reducing the loss of life through suicide in Australia.

The most recent research suggests that an understanding of risk factors in suicide is best used to identify populations or specific socio-economic groups that might be at risk, rather than attempting to

identify individuals at risk. The main reason is that the majority of people who can be categorised as 'at risk' do not and will not ever choose to take their own life. It is extremely difficult to determine from risk factors alone which individuals within an 'at risk' group are more or less likely to become suicidal.

Most researchers recommend that suicide prevention initiatives should focus on constellations of risk and protective factors. Activities may include:

- reducing exposure to social and contextual risk through structural changes that target specific 'at risk' groups such as remote Indigenous communities, socially or geographically isolated older men or people with a mental illness.
- increasing individual protective factors through activities that help to build self-esteem, psychological strength and personal competence.
- providing easier access to appropriate care and support that is in the right place, at the right time, using the right approach.
- reducing risk and increasing protection for people who are in current crisis. Such groups might include those who have attempted to take their own life, or who have been recently discharged from mental health care.

Recommendation for the charter is that:

- program design is based on the latest evidence and research
- programs evaluated in a consistent method to transfer learnings nationally and internationally

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; *Living Is For Everyone: A Framework for Prevention of Suicide in Australia*)