

**Submission
No 1**

PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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To Whom It May Concern,

I write this as a 22-year-old sufferer of PTSD, with a past medical history of depression and anxiety. I am a “consumer” of mental health programs and have used various programs across all levels of Government. I am critical of some and supportive of others, but at the end of the day, I just don’t want another young person to go through what I have been through.

My experiences are one of a kind. At the age of 15, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety because of an emotionally abusive boyfriend. A combination of medication, school counsellors and my family helped me get through this. But this isn’t where my nightmare ended. On March 1 2014, I was subjected to something no person should ever have to go through. I was raped. By someone who I thought was a friend but was indeed not a friend and was also addicted to the drug we know as “ice”.

I want to address a few issues with the current programs that I have used and offer some suggestions for improvements. I also wish to note that I live in Yass NSW, about 45 minutes outside of Canberra.

Headspace:

I agree that a program such as Headspace works for some people, but I do not agree that this is the best way to provide young people with the help that they require. I know that some level of triaging is required in all care but to have to tell your story to 5 different people before reaching the right person to speak to, is just too much.

If I had to tell 5 different people every piece of my story before I got to the person who could actually help me, I think that I would just give up. I would get exhausted and angrier and upset about what is going on.

We do not expect people when they go to hospital, to have to tell 5 different people their issue before they receive the help that they need, so why do we expect people with mental health issues to do it? It is beyond a joke. I love Headspace’s online resources and I think that they are an amazing organisation, but there is a better way of providing what the care that they do.

Community Health Care:

I have used Community Health Care when I lived in Sydney, and had a truly horrible experience. I had not been diagnosed with PTSD at this stage, but I had just reported my rape to the Police and was feeling alone and vulnerable. I went to the Blacktown clinic and met with the person who was meant to put me in contact with a psychologist or counsellor who specialised in my area.

I went to the appointment thinking that I would get the help I needed, but my how wrong I was. A few weeks after I had the initial appointment, I was told that I would need to wait 6 weeks before being able to see a psychologist. And this is where my anger took over. I had

waited 18 months to tell the Police that I am a victim of rape, I then went to the appointment, waited 6 weeks to hear back from them, to then be told that I had to wait another 6 weeks to be able to receive the support I needed? HOW WRONG IS THIS! I shouldn't have to wait 3 long months to receive support. I should be able to get it within a month. I know that Community Health Care is understaffed, but that is no excuse.

As I stated above, I now live in a regional area of NSW. If this occurred in Sydney, a place where we are meant to "have everything", how do young people in regional and rural areas receive the help that they require? The cities have public transport, the cities have many hospitals and many Community Health Care places, but country areas do not. I have 1 local hospital (Yass and District Hospital) and it covers the entire Yass LGA and more. We do not have a fulltime OBY/GN, we barely have enough people to staff it, and I bet you that most of them live in Canberra. We have a Community Health Care Centre but how are young people meant to access it when they don't have public transport, or they live out of town? It just is not feasible without family support. But what if they don't want to speak to their family about it? What if they are nervous about talking or they think that their family will react badly and what if their family does not acknowledge mental health issues as a genuine health concern? Then what are we meant to do? Just sit by idly and let them go about their business? Let them become another statistic? Or do we make the changes that are needed to ensure that they feel loved and cared for, to make sure they know that no matter what, that there is a community that is standing behind them?

Private Health Insurance:

I have private health cover but there are a few things that my private health does not cover as a "standard". And one of those is mental health issues. My private health cover does not cover me if I need to attend a psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor or anyone for my mental health issues. These cost a lot and if you run out of your mental health care plan visits, or your health professional is not covered, it can cost anywhere from \$75 to \$200 depending on who it is. It is called health cover for a reason, so why don't we make it mandatory for private health companies to cover mental health issues as a 'standard' in their protection?

What worked for me:

What has worked for me has been a combination of anti-depressants, anxiety medication, visits to a psychotherapist and my family and friends. Ultimately without this expensive mix of things, I would not be here today.

Carers and Support Persons:

Carers and support people are often taken advantage of and they are have a lot taken out of them when caring for someone with mental health issues. They are often forgotten about as well. They need to be recognised as without them and the feeling of support that they give to the mental health patient, it makes it very hard to cope. If there could be more support for these people, it would be greatly appreciated. Not just by the carers themselves but also for those who are the patients. It means that the carers are able to take care of them to the greatest of their ability.

To finalise my submission, I want to say this. I do not have all the answers, I do not have all the statistics or know the ins and outs of the issue, but I do know what I have been through, how far I have come and how far I have still to go. But the only way I can do that is with the support of everyone around me. And as a highly political person, knowing that the Parliament is investigating ways to improve it, gives me some hope that we can save our young people from this group of horrible diseases.