

**Submission
No 21**

PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Suicide Prevention Collaborative - Illawarra Shoalhaven
Name: Dr Alex Hains
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29 August 2017

Ms Melanie Gibbons MP
Chair, Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Gibbons,

Re: Response to Parliamentary Inquiry into the Prevention of Youth Suicide

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention Collaborative (the Collaborative) are pleased to offer this submission to the *Inquiry into the Prevention of Youth Suicide*.

The Collaborative began in September 2015, founded on the common ambition of multiple government and non-government agencies and community groups to reduce the impact of suicide in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region. The Collaborative aims to achieve this by:

- improving the supports available to people at risk of suicide and their families, carers and friends, and improving people's experience of these supports;
- encouraging systems change through collaboration; and
- ensuring that suicide prevention efforts are effective.

For more information about the Collaborative, please see our contact details at the bottom of this submission. We would of course be very pleased to speak with you more about some of the great work being done in our region.

We have structured our submission to align with the themes highlighted in the Inquiry's *Terms of Reference*.

a. Any gaps in the coordination and integration of suicide prevention activities and programs across all levels of government

Coordination and information exchange between government agencies has been identified as an area critical to improved suicide prevention for young people. In particular, communication between health and education warrants further improvement. We continue to hear accounts of where a young person has presented to an Emergency Department during the evening after attempting suicide, then returned to school the next day without any communication with the school about what has occurred or the school's role in the young person's discharge plan.

Also, there is currently a lack of services working with young people at risk of suicide who are equipped to address the needs of the whole family. Poor family functioning not only causes distress, but also denies a major source of support and supervision for young people.

b. Governance arrangements and accountabilities for suicide prevention

Evidence shows that most people who die by suicide are not already linked in with mental health services. This reinforces that suicide prevention warrants a whole-of-community approach, not just health-based interventions. Such an approach would benefit from having a Minister for Suicide Prevention who could coordinate publicly-funded activities across portfolios and ensure they are aligned with the evidence base.

The [Illawarra Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention Collaborative](#) (the Collaborative) brings together multiple government and non-government agencies and community groups, who work together to reduce the impact of suicide in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region. Regionally-based multi-agency collaboratives such as ours are well-placed to support the implementation of systems-based approaches that involve multiple sectors, and could be empowered by the NSW Government through the provision of resources.

The Collaborative welcomed the investment of the Paul Ramsay Foundation to implement a systems approach to suicide prevention, now called the [LifeSpan project](#) and supported by the Black Dog Institute. This is a fantastic opportunity for regions to ensure they have all the evidence-based strategies in place. In the context of the school-based programs that are part of the LifeSpan project, we have been very impressed by the commitment from the Department of Education and Training (DET) to support the rollout of the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program. We would strongly encourage the NSW Government to continue to invest in this systematic, cross-sectorial and collaborative way of working.

d. Provision of services for vulnerable and at-risk groups

The Collaborative has identified the following young people as at significantly high risk of suicide:

- Aboriginal people
- LGBTIQ people
- Young men

For youth suicide prevention initiatives to be successful, it is crucial that they involve representatives from these high risk groups in their development, implementation and evaluation.

e. Data collection about the incidence of youth suicide and attempted suicide

Current delays in accessing data on suicide deaths prevent this information from being useful in planning and evaluating local suicide prevention activities. Furthermore, there is virtually no systematic collection of data on suicide attempts.

Integration of data on suicide deaths and attempts from locally-based state-funded agencies (i.e. police, ambulance, health services) would enable more accurate and timely data being available to inform local suicide prevention activities.