

**Submission
No 39**

PREVENTION OF YOUTH SUICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Committee Director
Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee,

**Submission to the Parliament of New South Wales
Committee on Children and Young People
Inquiry into the Prevention of Youth Suicide**

Introduction/Executive Summary

The YMCA NSW is committed to the delivery of programs that promote positive health and well-being for people living in New South Wales and we have a particular commitment to the welfare and empowerment of young people. We recognise that young people often face a number of challenges in relation to their mental health and we welcome and support any measures taken by our partner organisations including the New South Wales Government. This submission outlines our own undertakings in this area and recommends actions that would increase the availability for new and existing evidence based programs that impact positively on youth resilience and suicide rates.

YMCA NSW Vision and Programs

At YMCA NSW we believe in the power of inspired young people.

We are committed to a range of measures aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of all young people who participate in our services and programs or attend one of our centres.

While we do not deliver direct suicide prevention programs, we recognise the importance of exercise in promoting positive physical and mental health, as well as assisting people who may be experiencing mental illness to better manage their own mental health outcomes.

We offer a range of general fitness, sports and other exercise activities through around 100 recreation and children's centres across the state. These centres offer a number of tailored exercise programs and services that are popular with young people such as Teen Gym, Group Fitness and Small Group Programs, personalised programming and personal training.

We also offer the following targeted programs that promote positive mental health outcomes for young people:

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Brightside

Developed in partnership with Suicide Prevention Australia in 2009, Brightside is a unique, research-informed exercise program that supports people with mental health conditions by providing opportunities to improve physical wellbeing and build social connections. The program provides 60 days unlimited access to a YMCA recreation facility operating the program.

StreetgYm

Outdoor exercise activities are facilitated by a fitness instructor and youth services staff to promote confidence, good mental health as well as healthy active lifestyles. This program also serves as a soft entry point to engage with potentially 'at risk' young people and offer service information and referral.

Cobham

This outreach program in Cobham Juvenile Detention Centre offers exercise and related activities promoting health and well-being, resilience and skill development on around four afternoons every week.

Cooma Hub

A supportive space is provided so that young people who may be at risk can meet, engage in recreational and other activities and access information on services that may be of value to them.

Skate Events

As part of a national Skate Parks League, a number of preliminary skating competitions are coordinated. Finalists from these events get to compete in the national competition. As well as promoting confidence and healthy active lifestyles, this program offers a first point of contact for participants to learn about and engage with a range of services and opportunities to participate in other activities.

Youth Parliament

Each year round 100 young people receive training and support to, develop and debate legislative bills in the NSW Parliament in the presence of NSW parliamentarians. Through the program, participants develop personal qualities and skills such as confidence, respect, leadership, teamwork, analysis and advocacy. The program also highlights the capacity of young people to have and use a voice both personally and through formal institutions such as government in relation to issues that affect young people specifically or the community as a whole.

#Why Not

This online social media platform offers young people the opportunity to contribute to conversations about issues such as marriage equality, employment and mental health in ways that can support changes for a positive impact on the quality of life of all young Australians.

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Research has shown that regular physical activity reduces the incidence and severity of suicidal behaviour¹. It is also clear that regular exercise has a positive impact on mental health by improving energy levels and sleeping patterns, distracting from worries and ruminations, increasing social support and imparting a sense of control and self-esteem²

These impacts have been evidenced in a wide range of collaborative activities that we have undertaken with partner organisations such as Headspace, local government, Neamih National, New Horizons, Anglicare, Richmond PRA, Flourish Australia, and St Vincent's Private Hospital.

Recommendation

We respectfully request the Committee on Children and Young People to consider actions that would increase the availability of funding in New South Wales to deliver exercise programs that target young people who may be 'at risk' and could benefit from the early intervention and prevention benefits that such programs have been shown to produce.

YMCA NSW thanks the Parliament of New South Wales and the Committee on Children and Young People for including YMCA NSW in this inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Leisa Hart
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References:

¹ Taliaferro, L., Rienzo, B., R. Pigg R., Miller M. & Virginia J. Dodd V., *Associations Between Physical Activity and Reduced Rates of Hopelessness, Depression, and Suicidal Behavior Among College Students*, Journal of American Health, Vol 57 2009 Issue 4 Pages 427-436.

²http://blackdoginstitute.org.au/docs/default-source/factsheets/exercise_depression.pdf

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