

Suicide Prevention Bill 2020

LGA Submission

February 2021

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Introduction

About the Local Government Association of South Australia

The Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) is the voice of local government in South Australia, representing all 68 councils across the state and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara.

The South Australian *Local Government Act 1999* recognises the LGA for the purpose of promoting and advancing the interests of local government. The LGA is also recognised in and has prescribed functions in 29 other South Australian Acts of Parliament. The LGA provides leadership, support, representation, and advocacy relevant to the needs of our member councils.

The LGA is a strong advocate for policies that achieve better outcomes for councils and the communities they represent. Councils are a partner in government and part of the solution. Working together we can make positive contributions to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The role of local government in suicide prevention

Local government is an efficient partner in government and provides value for money by contributing significant in-kind resources that stretches Federal and State funding further. Councils add value through volunteer networks and significant infrastructure, such as sporting clubs, libraries and community centres.

South Australian councils operate community development and local community services, including voluntary groups and organisations that are highly relevant to suicide prevention, but are not formally seen as such. In recent years, some councils have taken the leadership role for local suicide prevention networks and local suicide prevention action – including local capacity building and community campaigns.

In fact, many councils are key facilitators, partners, funders and advocates for the development and implementation of local Suicide Prevention Networks (SPNs) in their regions and often work closely together with the State and the non-government sector. However, a council's involvement in their local Network varies depending on available resources, ability to provide wrap around services and level of interest in the community.

There are over 40 SPNs in operation within South Australia, with many aligning to local government boundaries. It is acknowledged that there is a State level commitment in the current [SA Suicide Prevention Plan 2017-2021](#) to establish a SPN in each local government region across the State.

Many councils through their regional public health plans identify actions or strategies relating to the development of SPNs and suicide prevention activities.

Additionally, in 2017 the University of South Australia, in association with the Whyalla Suicide Prevention Network were funded by the Local Government Research and Development Scheme to develop an *Evaluation toolkit for South Australian Suicide Prevention Networks*. This toolkit was developed to support SPNs to evaluate their progress and achievement of aims set out in their own action plans.

Our submission

The LGA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Suicide Prevention Bill.

Public health promotion and protection is an important part of the work that that councils do, and the role of local government in public health has many community benefits. As noted in the Discussion Paper, suicide is a significant community and public health concern.

This submission has been informed by consultation with our member councils, the LGA's existing policy positions and evidence-based research.

The LGA supports the commitment by the State Government to have a legislative mechanism that aims to reduce incidences of deaths by suicide and suicide attempts in this State.

LGA policy

Policy Statement 3.1 – Public Health

Local government acknowledges that protecting the health and wellbeing of its communities is a shared responsibility of all tiers of government and recognises the significant contributions that councils make in this area. Councils should contribute equitably to providing preventative and on-going health services, notwithstanding the significant responsibilities of federal and state government.

Consultation questions considered

Question (Q) 2. Does clause 3 – Interpretation have all the terms that should be included or are there others that should be included?

The 'Explanatory Discussion Paper'¹ accompanying the *Suicide Prevention Bill 2020* makes it clear that:

The Act places an obligation on prescribed State authorities, i.e State Government departments only to develop agency suicide prevention plans. Other non-government agencies may wish to consider preparing their own suicide prevention plans as part of a whole of community effort in reducing the suicide rate. This would be encouraged, however, it would be voluntary on their part.

In this context, the LGA would like clearer interpretation of a 'State Authority' under section 3 – Interpretation developed to reflect the intention that the legislation would not mandate South Australian councils to develop suicide prevention plans.

It is noted that section 21 of the Bill imposes duties on State authorities. The LGA appreciates that the intention is to bind a range of State Government instrumentalities *but not* South Australian councils or the LGA. However, the definition of 'state authority', in the Interpretation section of the Bill (s3), is drafted in a manner that could potentially include local government bodies.

The LGA suggest that the first limb of the definition includes "a person who holds an office established by an Act". In South Australia, several 'offices' are creations of the *Local Government Act 1999* (LG Act).

¹ Discussion Paper - Suicide Prevention Bill 2020 - FINAL v2 20210114.pdf

This includes mayors, deputy mayors, council CEOs, council committee chairs, chairs of council subsidiaries, council auditors, etc. Furthermore, according to the LG Act, “*the LGA continues to be a body corporate...*”, although we note that the LGA existed before the commencement of the LG Act and did not need the LG Act to establish us.

The second limb of the definition includes “*a public sector agency.*” The expression ‘public sector agency’ is ambiguous. The definition of public sector agency in s3 of the *Public Sector Act 2009* probably does not include councils. However, councils are a tier of Australia’s public sector, and might be seen as agencies in the public sector, using those words as they are ordinarily understood.

For these reasons, the LGA submits that the definitions should be clarified to ensure that South Australian councils and the Local Government Association are specifically excluded from the definition of ‘State authority’.

Recommendation

Provide further clarity to the definition of a ‘State authority’ to ensure that South Australian councils and the Local Government Association of SA are specifically excluded from the definition of ‘State authority’.

Q3. Is the name of the Act appropriate?

The LGA is supportive of the proposed name for the Act.

Q4 & Q5. Are the objects appropriate and adequate? Are there any other Objects that should be considered?

The LGA considers the objects appropriate, however, the ‘Explanatory Discussion Paper’ notes that the Objects *outline what role the State will play in this area and makes it clear that the State has this responsibility.* The LGA considers that there is some vagueness to the objects and seeks further explanation.

The LGA note that Part 2 is titled ‘Objects and principles’ yet there are no principles identified. It is suggested that a set of principles be developed to guide the administration of the Act and that the principles can be referred to in seeking to further the Objects of the Act and guide the development of Suicide Prevention Plans.

A good example would be akin to the Principles outlined in sections 5-14 of the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011.*

Suicide prevention requires the whole of government to work in partnership with individuals and communities. Therefore, it is suggested that the roles of partners and likewise partnerships are included as a principle to articulate this important component in suicide prevention.

Recommendation

Include a set of principles that will guide the administration and implementation of the Act.

Examples of principles that could guide suicide prevention activities and action include:

- *A principle recognising partnerships and the role of collaboration.*
- *A principle recognising a whole of population focus, as well as targeting at risk individuals or communities.*

- *A principle recognising the social determinants of health and the factors that support mentally healthy communities.*
- *A principle recognising equity.*
- *A principle recognising appropriate social and cultural needs of target groups.*
- *A principle recognising the need for sustainability of activities.*
- *A principle recognising that the interventions funded are prioritised on a strong evidence base and are outcome focussed.*

Q6. Do you support the nomination and appointment of members to the Suicide Prevention Council?

The LGA is supportive of the process outlined in the Bill.

The LGA considers that there must be local government representation on all appropriate state committees, commissions, working groups (not an exhaustive list) where the subject matter affects or is likely to affect local government.

The LGA shall continue to advocate for greater representation in the interests of the local government sector. Therefore, the LGA request consideration for an identified member who has experience in local government be strongly considered as one of the 13 members in addition to the *ex officio* members; due to the important role that local government plays in public health planning and prevention and in recognition as their status as public health authorities for their area.

South Australian councils are key stakeholders in the current *South Australian Suicide Prevention Plan 2017-2021*.

It is suggested that the process for selecting a member could be based on the process of other Acts which state something like '*...must have a local government sector representative, with one person nominated by the LGA*'.

Recommendation

Consider the inclusion of 'one person nominated by the LGA' under s.9(2), to ensure the local government sector is adequately represented.

Q7. Do you support the inclusion of a Member of Parliament, the *ex officio* members and a Mental Health Commissioner on the Suicide Prevention Council?

The LGA considers that the Suicide Prevention Council should be reflective of a whole-of-government approach and suggests the *ex officio* members also include representatives from Premier and Cabinet and the Education Department.

Recommendation

Consider the inclusion of representatives from the Departments of Premier and Cabinet and Education.

Qs11-14. Suicide Prevention Plans

The LGA is supportive of the concept of Suicide Prevention Plans as well as the option for non-government organisations to consider developing a plan should they wish to.

However, there needs to be strong regard for the resourcing requirements and expectations placed on organisations to develop and implement meaningful plans and not ‘just another plan that sits on a shelf’.

It is suggested that templates, guides and resources need to be developed, in addition to a cohesive workforce strategy for suicide prevention, so that everyone involved has the training and skills they need.

Recommendation

Ensure that the resourcing requirements are adequately scoped to ensure that State agencies have the organisational capability and capacity to develop and implement Suicide Prevention Plans, relevant to their organisation.

That the guides, common templates and other resources are delivered in a timely manner to support State authorities and other agencies in developing Suicide Prevention Plans.

Qs 20-21. South Australian Suicide Register

The LGA is supportive of the development of a Suicide Register. The availability of robust data will be critical to tackling suicide risk and help guide prevention interventions.

It is understood that not all jurisdictions maintain a Suicide Register and that only Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania currently have in place Suicide Registers; consequently, providing an accurate source of information on suicides and suspected suicide deaths in their jurisdiction².

Establishing and maintaining a South Australian register will provide crucial information to assist the State Government with accurate, reliable, timely data on suicide, which will help drive change in policy and interventions for suicide prevention.

General comments

Community partnerships

South Australian councils can influence changes in attitudes and can partner with other organisations to the benefit of local communities to develop suicide prevention measures. Many councils actively seek out opportunities for funding and collaboration to enable the development of community awareness programs, referral pathways and build supports for their communities.

Local government is uniquely placed to support local organisations, whether that be through managing funding and reporting to providing facilities or promoting programs or brokering relationships. We understand that it takes many expert organisations and specialist skills to combine in order to effect sustainable change in this area.

Partnerships with community organisations can lead to a greater contextual understanding of the community and the services needed to support suicide prevention activities, as evidenced by the developing of SPNs in over 40 council regions.

Many councils aim to maximise value by leveraging multiple networks, investments and activities to deliver outcomes for communities. However, resourcing is necessary to assist local government drive and embed change across services and programs.

² Suicide Prevention Australia and Mental Health Australia (2020) Joint submission Inquiry into National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention legislation - Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
<https://www.suicidepreventionaust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SPA-MHA-Joint-Submission-Senate-Inquiry-on-Veteran-Suicide-Commissioner-Legislation.pdf>

Recommendation

By way of grant monies, consider supporting local government's role and capability to progress suicide prevention measures and influence attitudinal change through resourcing the local government sector or peak agencies to coordinate and inform sector efforts.

Conclusion

As the level of government closest to communities, councils play a significant role in creating safe public environments, developing community facilities, and providing health and community services.

This suggests that local government is an important part of the solution in a whole of government, whole of community approach, where suicide prevention becomes everyone's business.

Local government remains an important host and catalyst for the development of SPNs. Their role in planning for strong, resilient healthy communities is evidenced by the various roles and functions that they undertake.

The LGA is committed to working in partnership with the State Governments, as well as non-government organisations to assist in developing preventative place-based responses to suicide prevention.



Local Government Association
of South Australia

The voice of local government.

148 Frome St
Adelaide SA 5000

GPO Box 2693
Adelaide SA 5001

T (08) 8224 2000

E lgasa@lga.sa.gov.au

www.lga.sa.gov.au