

On World Mental Health Day, marked annually on 10 October, the AASW calls on all Australian governments take action to address the suicide epidemic we currently have in this country. “We need a need a multifaceted and systemic approach to mental health supports that are person-centred and human rights-based,” said AASW National President Christine Craik. “Suicide is the leading cause of death in Australia for people aged 15-44[1], and the suicide rate is more than four times higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities[2]. During Mental Health Month, it is important to not only challenge how people understand mental health and suicide, including negative assumptions and stereotypes, but to talk about how to have supportive conversations with friends and family who may be at risk,” said Ms Craik. “Social workers see firsthand the resilience and courage of individuals and families impacted by suicide, and the effects that the inability to access adequate care can have of the lives of so many. “Our mental health system is crisis-driven and does not adequately address the full psychosocial needs of individuals, groups and communities. Mental health is a complex issue, but we do know that prevention and early intervention are key in order to address family violence, homelessness, sexual assault and other issues that lead to poor mental health and its devastating impacts. We need a much greater focus on early intervention, recovery and community to effectively support individuals, families and communities,” said Ms Craik. “We need to see mental health as fundamentally a human rights issue. “By taking a human rights approach to mental health, we need to focus on the needs of traumatised individuals and disadvantaged groups, and to the interaction between discrimination and marginalisation. It demonstrates the importance of many principles that underpin the service system such as equality of access to services and the need for standards and accountability in the delivery of services,” she said. “Furthermore, the mental health system is built on colonising practice and is deeply failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The disproportionate rates of suicide are a national emergency that needs immediate state and federal action. “Change is possible and central to this is strengthening the participation and collaboration of people with lived experience within the system.” The AASW represents over 12,000 professional social workers, many of whom work at the forefront of mental health and suicide prevention and support. The AASW encourages people seeking external support for mental health issues to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or their online chat or trial text service at <https://www.lifeline.org.au>, 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732), BeyondBlue on 1300 22 4636, Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800, MensLine on 1300 78 99 78, Emergency Services on 000, or to visit their GP. ENDS To interview Christine Craik, please contact Angela Yin on 0413 532 954. [1]

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/leading-causes-of-death> [2]

<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-natsisps-strat-toc-mental-natsisps-strat-1-mental-natsisps-strat-1-ab>

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