

Opinion



How Australia prevents male suicides; lessons learnt and implications to Sri Lanka

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 700 000 persons commit suicide each year and it has become a major public health issue. Nearly 77% of suicides in the world usually happens in low- and middle-income countries like Sri Lanka (1). In Australia, 3139 deaths occurred in 2020 due to suicide (2). Males have a higher risk of suicide, approximately 3-4 times more than for females (3). Sri Lankan male suicide rate was 22.3 per 100,000 population in 2019 (1), which was also 3-4 times higher than that among females. In this paper, we consider the implications for Sri Lanka of Australia's suicide prevention initiatives.

Australia has approximately a 30-year history of Commonwealth public policy in the prevention of suicide. History of public policy in the prevention of suicide in Australia is given in Figure 1. Men's suicide pathways are very complex and multifactorial, and it is strongly associated with a previous suicide attempt, substance misuse, long term physical/mental disease, legal/financial problems, adverse childhood experiences, violence victimization, social isolation, bullying and

family/loved one's history of suicide, stigma associated with mental illness and help-seeking and easy access to lethal means and unsafe media portrayals of suicide (4).

A scoping review conducted on men and suicide prevention revealed that interventions conducted for men's suicide prevention are awareness programs, psychological support, education programs which targeted general practitioners/depressed or suicidal men and training programs for community gatekeepers and men preferred getting help in an informal setting from a trustworthy and respectful person (5). Factors which interrupted the suicide process were reframing help-seeking as masculine, using emotional regulation techniques, and connecting with other people.

The concern about the rising suicide rate in Australia, led to the funding of several programs/initiatives. Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission funded the Buoy Project in 2022. It is about promoting men's help-seeking and then making mental health services more male friendly when they do seek help. It tests the effectiveness of

seven male suicide prevention programs. Thus, we can consider promoting culturally sensitive suicide prevention trials in Sri Lanka and use the evidence to develop male suicide prevention programs. Improving mental health literacy and gate keeper training is important to reduce suicides in Sri Lanka (6). Thus, implementing already developed mental health first aid programs in Sri Lanka is a good initiative to reduce the suicide rates (7).

Australia Men’s Health Forum (AMHF) is promoting lives of men and boys in Australia. Male suicide prevention Australia is dedicated to reducing male suicides for 25 years with principles such as ensure supports, respect and value men’s strengths, take a situational approach, support men in all their diversity and created with lived experience and support provision expertise, and informed by research and data.

Australian Institute of Male Health Studies (AIMHS) Menswatch Suicide Prevention Initiative, Beyond Blue, Men’s Sheds and Life in Mind are other initiatives to reduce male suicides. Sri Lanka

also can promote an online male suicide prevention initiative with all the helplines to improve the awareness of this public health issue. Anti-stigma campaigns can also be used to break the barrier to access mental health services (6). Defining the vulnerable groups and providing culturally appropriate interventions in Sri Lanka is very important. As in Australia, the primary health care system can be used to deliver suicide prevention services effectively (6). Media professionals and health experts can work together when reporting male suicides (6) and continuous surveillance is important as conducted by SANE’s stigma watch program. According to Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA) Expert Committee suggestions, it is important that involvement of all stakeholder groups in the development of policies (8). As in Australia, a continuous commitment is needed to prevent male suicide through policy and regulatory approaches. Incorporating suicide prevention strategies from a developed country will be useful to mitigate this public health issue in Sri Lanka.

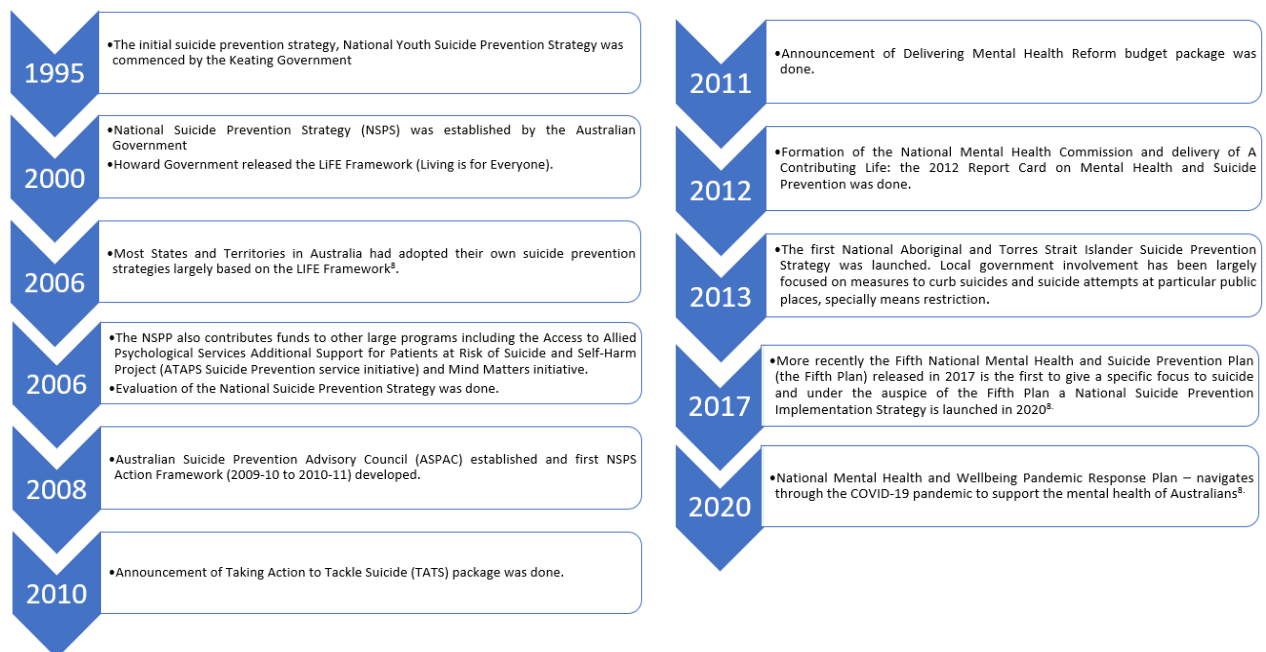


Figure 1: History of public policy in the prevention of suicide in Australia *

(*https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/242429/sub523-mental-health.pdf)

Author Declarations

Competing interests: Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Author contributions: BD and NR proposed the topic of the study. BD searched the literature drafted the manuscript. All authors contributed to revisions of the draft and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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