

29th November 2013

Mr Tony Shepherd AO
Chair, National Commission of Audit
Via email:

Dear Mr Shepherd

Re: Submission to the National Commission of Audit

I am writing for Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) in response to the call for submissions to the Government's National Commission of Audit.

Suicide Prevention Australia is a non-profit, community organisation working to inform and educate the community about suicide and suicide prevention. SPA is a broad-based organisation bringing together diverse interests across disciplines, practitioners, researchers, and the community affected by suicide. SPA supports organisations throughout Australia, and promotes collaboration and partnerships in suicide and suicide prevention, intervention and postvention.

SPA recommends that the Commission of Audit defer any specific recommendations in relation to suicide prevention until the Government has had an opportunity to respond to the report on the evaluation of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) undertaken during 2012-13. Findings from this report, along with the outcome of the NMHC's review of mental health will help the Government avoid unintended consequences, compounding the fragmentation and unpredictability that has characterised previous changes to the mental health system.

The breadth and depth of programs and activities funded under the NSPS and the interdependencies across both Federal and State Government systems responsible for managing those who either attempt or do take their own life make it difficult to identify specific ways in which government funds are misspent or poorly allocated without very careful consideration.

Data collection for suicide is both inaccurate and inconsistent across jurisdictions and as such we are not able to fully gain a true picture of suicides in Australia - what it is, how much it costs, how it interacts with other systems, and most importantly whether there are more efficient and effective ways of supporting those who are suicidal. At the same time, we have limited information on people who cannot or do not access the services they need at the right time – a fact that suggests significant under-investment, rather than over-spending, is at the core of the system's failings.

Suicide is a wicked social problem:

- The Global Burden of Disease Report cited 36 million years of healthy life were lost as a result of suicide in 2010
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for men under the age of 44 yrs
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for women under the age of 34 yrs

- The population death rates are around 10/100,000 people every year.
- Annual number of deaths by suicide has changed little over the last two decades remaining plateaued at around 2,300 each year.
- 65,000 plan or attempt to take their life
- 400,000 people think about taking their life each year

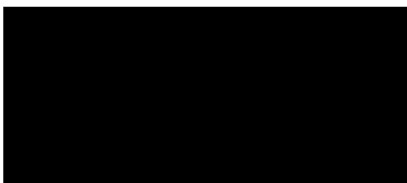
The Commission is guided by the principle that “government should do for people what they cannot do, or cannot do efficiently, for themselves, but no more”. While individual self-efficacy has an important part to play in suicide prevention, governments must retain significant role if the costs associated with suicide and mental ill-health are to be minimised, and the participation and productivity benefits of good mental health are to be maximised. With the right programs and support, however, the nation’s economy and social fabric benefit from better mental health at a population level. The case for substantial government action on mental health and suicide prevention is clear.

There is considerable room both for improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of government spending on suicide prevention and for further productive investment. SPA is currently the lead organisation for the National Coalition for Suicide Prevention. This collective of 25+ organisations working in mental health and suicide prevention have recognised the need to change the way we are working and have adopted the *collective impact* approach. This requires agreement on a common agenda, shared goals, measures and reporting and the delivery of mutually reinforcing activities. This approach will result in strong collaboration across the NFP sector and we eagerly await participation by Governments at the State and Federal level.

SPA agrees with those working in the mental health sectors that there is under investment in the prevention, early intervention and community based programs that could prevent many suicides. SPA looks forward to receiving the Government’s response to the evaluation report and to working together to deliver on its recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. We would be very pleased to provide any further information that could assist the Commission of Audit’s work.

Yours sincerely



CEO