

10 May 2024

Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)

RE: Suicide prevention and the opportunities and impacts of AI technology

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into the opportunities and impacts for Australia arising out of the uptake of AI technology. We are the national peak body for suicide prevention, with over 300 members representing more than 140,000 workers, staff, and volunteers across Australia. We provide a collective voice for service provider organisations both large and small, as well as practitioners, researchers, local collaboratives, and people with lived experience.

We note that there are a number of opportunities and risks associated with the use of AI technology which could impact the rate of suicide in Australia. Accordingly, this submission will address the following key points:

- Access to suicide prevention resources and support services.
- Actions to address the following issues that are risk factors for suicide:
 - Labour underutilisation and the protection of vulnerable workers.
 - Online harmful behaviours such as cyberbullying and cybercrime.
 - Regulation of AI-generated content which could harm and endanger people.
 - Mitigate AI-generated data bias which could perpetuate stereotypes and entrench discrimination and stigma.

Firstly, we recognise that AI could be used to help prevent suicide and to facilitate access to suicide prevention resources and support services. When a person experiencing suicidal behaviour searches online for suicide prevention content, AI technology could be utilised to redirect that person to a suicide prevention chat resource to ensure access to helpful resources and timely support. The Commonwealth Government should invest in the development of suicide prevention specific support powered by AI.

We note that people experiencing suicidal behaviour could potentially access non-evidence-based resources, and that AI generated data could facilitate the dissemination of inaccurate and harmful content. As an example, we have found that one generative AI service will, under certain circumstances, provide information about support services that do not exist. AI capabilities should



Phone 02 9262 1130
admin@suicidepreventionaust.org
www.suicidepreventionaust.org
GPO Box 219 Sydney NSW 2001
ABN 64 461 352 676
ACN 164 450 882

operate in a safe and accurate manner, and it is vital that when a person is provided with suicide prevention resources that they receive accurate, helpful information. This requires that evidence-based information is consolidated in one location and fact-checked. A national dataset of suicide prevention resources that can be utilised by AI services should be established, and its ongoing maintenance for accuracy resourced, to help counter the spread of misinformation.

We also recognise that there are several risks and implications associated with generative AI which could heighten suicide risk. We are concerned that AI could reshape the future of work and lead to growing unemployment as jobs are automated. Research undertaken in the United Kingdom suggests that AI could eliminate a substantial number of jobs, up to a third in administrative occupations, and could disproportionately impact women and people in junior roles.¹ There are also concerns that older workers may have difficulty retraining and adapting to AI-driven jobs.²

Both unemployment and underemployment can significantly increase the risk of suicide.^{3,4} In particular, research undertaken in Australia suggests that nearly 10% of all suicides reported between 2004 and 2016 are attributable to labour underutilisation.⁵ In addition, the repercussions of experiencing unemployment or underemployment such as financial challenges, family disruption, poverty, low-self-esteem, social withdrawal, and isolation can also increase suicide risk.^{6,7} To help prevent suicide among workers impacted by AI it is critical that the Government invests in a strategy which includes clear actions to prevent suicide such as safety nets to help ensure that displaced workers are supported throughout the transition to AI and find suitable employment.

We are also concerned that generative AI could increase online harmful behaviours ranging from cyberbullying, to cybercrimes such as fraud and extortion.⁸ Sadly, the research shows that victims of cyberbullying are at elevated risk of suicide.^{9,10,11} Young people who are victims of cyberbullying are more than twice as likely to experience suicidal behaviour.¹² In addition, the consequences of cybercrime such as financial challenges and feelings of inadequacy could potentially increase suicide risk among victims of crime.

Given that there is a risk that AI generated content could cause harm and potentially increase the risk of suicide among vulnerable communities, the Government must have the power to prevent harmful and inaccurate material from being published. In addition, the Government must have the power to act quickly to intervene and remove harmful AI-generated material from circulation to prevent it from causing distress.

We are also concerned that generative AI could inadvertently perpetuate social biases and stereotypes as it may use and generate datasets which are not diverse or representative of diverse population groups. Without human oversight these AI-generated algorithms which can guide



healthcare decisions could make inferences from an incomplete dataset which underrepresents a particular gender or population group, and this could have significant repercussions and potentially reduce access to care or increase stigma. Research indicates that stigma and discrimination can increase the risk of suicide.¹³ It is critical that all AI-generated data and tools which have the potential to guide decision-making promote equality and support diversity and inclusion. The Government should work with technology companies to ensure that AI-generated content does not entrench disadvantage and perpetuate bias and stereotypes which could potentially increase suicide risk among minority groups.

Suicide Prevention makes the following recommendations:

1. The Commonwealth Government should invest in a strategy which includes clear actions to support workers impacted by AI in the workplace which includes initiatives so that vulnerable workers are retrained and find suitable employment.
2. The Commonwealth Government should invest in a strategy to mitigate the potential effects of AI-driven crime which includes initiatives to help prevent suicide among victims of AI-related crime.
3. The Commonwealth Government should fund the development of AI powered suicide prevention services, such as suicide prevention chat resources which provide evidence-based resources and information about suitable support services to people at risk of suicide.
4. The Commonwealth Government should ensure that AI generated suicide prevention data and resources is evidence-based and accurate by funding the development and maintenance of a national suicide prevention resources database.
5. The Commonwealth Government should enhance the powers of the eSafety Commissioner to prevent and remove harmful and inaccurate AI-generated content from being published online.
6. The Commonwealth Government should work with technology companies to ensure that AI-generated content and datasets do not perpetuate biases and stereotypes which could entrench disadvantage and increase risk of suicide among minority groups.

If you require any further information please contact Christopher Stone, Suicide Prevention Australia's Director of Policy and Government Relations, chriss@suicidepreventionaust.org.

Yours sincerely,



Nieves Murray
Chief Executive Officer



Phone 02 9262 1130
admin@suicidepreventionaust.org
www.suicidepreventionaust.org
GPO Box 219 Sydney NSW 2001
ABN 64 461 352 676
ACN 164 450 882



- ¹ Jung, C., Srinivasa Desikan. B. (2024). *Transformed by AI: How generative artificial intelligence could affect work in the UK – and how to manage it*. Institute of Public Policy Research. [Transformed by AI: How generative artificial intelligence could affect work in the UK – and how to manage it | IPPR](#)
- ² The Guardian. (2024). *AI will affect 40% of jobs and probably worsen inequality, says IMF head*. [AI will affect 40% of jobs and probably worsen inequality, says IMF head | Artificial intelligence \(AI\) | The Guardian](#)
- ³ Skinner, A., Osgood, N. D., Occhipinti, J. A., Song, Y. J. C., & Hickie, I. B. (2023). Unemployment and underemployment are causes of suicide. *Science Advances*, 9(28), eadg3758. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adg3758>
- ⁴ Suicide Prevention Australia. (2023). *Socio-economic and Environmental Determinants of Suicide: Background Paper*. [SPA-SEDS-Background-Paper-August-2023-Designed.pdf \(suicidepreventionaust.org\)](#)
- ⁵ [Unemployment and underemployment significant drivers of suicide analysis - The University of Sydney](#)
- ⁶ Brand J. E. (2015). The Far-Reaching Impact of Job Loss and Unemployment. *Annual review of sociology*, 41, 359–375. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043237>
- ⁷ Suicide Prevention Australia. (2023). *Socio-economic and Environmental Determinants of Suicide: Background Paper*. [SPA-SEDS-Background-Paper-August-2023-Designed.pdf \(suicidepreventionaust.org\)](#)
- ⁸ Monteith, S., Bauer, M., Alda, M., Geddes, J., Whybrow, P. C., & Glenn, T. (2021). Increasing Cybercrime Since the Pandemic: Concerns for Psychiatry. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 23(4), 18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-021-01228-w>
- ⁹ Schonfeld, A., McNeil, D., Toyoshima, T., & Binder, R. (2023). Cyberbullying and Adolescent Suicide. *The journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 51(1), 112–119. <https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.220078-22>
- ¹⁰ Rodway, C., Tham, S. G., Richards, N., Ibrahim, S., Turnbull, P., Kapur, N., & Appleby, L. (2023). Online harms? Suicide-related online experience: a UK-wide case series study of young people who die by suicide. *Psychological Medicine*, 53(10), 4434–4445. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291722001258>
- ¹¹ Gavrilovic Nilsson, M., Tzani Pepelasi, K., Ioannou, M., & Lester, D. (2019). Understanding the link between Sextortion and Suicide. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 13(1), 55-69.
- ¹² John, A., Glendenning, A. C., Marchant, A., Montgomery, P., Stewart, A., Wood, S., Lloyd, K., & Hawton, K. (2018). Self-Harm, Suicidal Behaviours, and Cyberbullying in Children and Young People: Systematic Review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 20(4), e129. <https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.9044>
- ¹³ Suicide Prevention Australia. (2023). *Socio-economic and Environmental Determinants of Suicide: Background Paper*. [SPA-SEDS-Background-Paper-August-2023-Designed.pdf \(suicidepreventionaust.org\)](#)

