

4 November 2024

Department for Correctional Services  
400 King William Street,  
Adelaide SA 5000

To the Department for Correctional Services,

**RE: Draft Correctional Services Suicide Prevention Action Plan**

Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Correctional Services Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2025-2028. We are the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. With over 350 members representing more than 140,000 workers, staff, and volunteers across Australia, we provide a collective voice for service providers, practitioners, researchers, local collaboratives, and people with lived experience.

We welcome the development of the Department for Correctional Services (DCS) first Suicide Prevention Action Plan (Action Plan).<sup>1</sup> The Action Plan is an essential step forward towards a comprehensive and coordinated approach to suicide prevention within South Australia's correctional system. As you are aware there is a well-established link between contact with the justice system and suicide.<sup>2</sup> Given this, it is critical that the Action Plan cultivates a culture of safety and support with the DCS and contains the right set of initiatives to help prevent suicide.

We note that the proposed Action Plan furthers the objectives of the South Australian Suicide Prevention Act 2021 and the Suicide Prevention Plan 2023-2026 by addressing the needs of high-risk priority populations within the correctional system across the five identified State priorities - Partner, Respect, Prevent, Review and Respond.<sup>3,4</sup> We support this approach and the inclusion of targeted actions under each of the five State priorities.

We are also pleased that under the first State priority 'Partner' that the commencing action is for the DCS to register as a member of Suicide Prevention Australia. Members are central to everything we do at Suicide Prevention Australia, and your involvement will enable us to influence policy reform, facilitate education and build best practice.<sup>5</sup>

While we believe that the overall framework for the Action Plan is appropriate, there are several additional initiatives which should be included as action items to help reduce suicide and suicide related distress within South Australia's correctional system. These action items should be included under three of the State priorities, Respect, Prevent and Review.

Firstly, we suggest that an action item is added to the State priority, 'Respect', which aims to promote social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal South Australians. In its current form, a key action item under this priority is that the DCS mandate cultural awareness training for all staff and incorporate cultural training learnings into decision-making. While cultural awareness training is important, we suggest that this action item goes further and builds the capacity of DCS staff to work both in a trauma-informed and culturally responsive way.



The research shows that to engage in culturally safe practice people who work with Aboriginal communities must have the capacity to recognise the role that historical and other traumas play in communities.<sup>6</sup> DCS staff should be required to complete both trauma-informed practice training and cultural awareness training as this will ensure that staff have a strong understanding of and ability to apply the guiding principles of trauma-informed practice in culturally responsive ways.

Secondly, we strongly suggest that the third State priority, 'Prevent', which aims to create compassionate, safe and resilient communities, is revised to include an action focused on routine suicide risk screening for people in contact with the correctional system. Worryingly, research has identified that 40% of prisoners who have died by suicide in South Australia have a documented history of previous suicide attempts.<sup>7</sup> Routine screening will ensure that people who are at risk of suicide are identified in a timely manner and referred onwards to appropriate support services.

To further ensure that the Action Plan prevents suicide, it should be designed to complement and work alongside the Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (the National Strategy).<sup>8,9</sup> The National Strategy is currently in draft form and has been developed by the National Suicide Prevention Office to guide long-term, coordinated suicide prevention activity in Australia.<sup>10,11</sup> It is important that actions to prevent suicide in the DCS Action Plan operate in concert with the National Strategy to ensure that suicide prevention efforts are aligned and that there is a coordinated approach. This action item could also be included under the State priority 'Prevent'.

Thirdly, the fifth State priority, 'Review', focuses on monitoring and evaluating suicide prevention strategies and includes an action to respond to relevant recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. We support this action and suggest that an additional and similar action item is included under this priority pillar. In particular, the DCS should undertake an audit of previous parliamentary reviews focused on contact with the justice system to identify other relevant recommendations which should be implemented in South Australia. A secondary action item is that the relevant recommendations identified by the DCS should be fully and meaningfully implemented to help improve wellbeing and reduce suicide risk among people in contact with the DCS.

In addition, a further action item that should be added to the 'Review' priority pillar is that the DCS should undertake a review of the Australian research to identify evidence-based initiatives which may prevent suicide within South Australia's correctional system. Under this action item the DCS should engage the National Suicide Prevention Research Fund to facilitate this review.

Suicide prevention research is funded by the Commonwealth Government at a national level through the National Suicide Prevention Research Fund (Research Fund).<sup>12</sup> The Research Fund aims to support world-class research and to facilitate the translation of knowledge into more effective suicide prevention services for individuals, families and communities.<sup>13</sup> Suicide Prevention Australia manages the Research Fund on behalf of the Commonwealth Government.

Lastly, we note that implementation of the Action Plan is supported by regular reporting to the Deputy Chief Executive of the DCS. However, to ensure accountability and transparency it is vital that regular and public reporting at one-yearly intervals to the South Australia Parliament occur. This will ensure that progress is adequately monitored at a state level. To further ensure

transparency and accountability we also suggest that the Action Plan is updated to include a timeline for delivery of each action.

In addition, it is proposed that implementation of the Action Plan occurs over a four-year period. Given this lengthy timeline, we suggest that the Action Plan is evaluated following two-years of operations. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential to the success of the Action Plan and will ensure that the strategies identified today remain appropriate for suicide prevention tomorrow.

We applaud the Department for Correctional Services commitment to prioritising suicide prevention. The Action Plan is a much needed and positive step forward to reversing the high rate of suicide among people in contact with the correctional system. However, it is vital that further improvements are made to help prevent suicide and ensure that people in contact with the DCS are adequately supported to reduce suicide risk.

If you require any further information please contact Anne Leslie, Suicide Prevention Australia's Director of Policy, [annel@suicidepreventionaust.org](mailto:annel@suicidepreventionaust.org).

Yours sincerely



Nieves Murray  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>1</sup> SA Department for Correctional Services. (2024). Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2025-2025 – Draft for Public Consultation September 2025. [Suicide Prevention Action Plan](#)

<sup>2</sup> Suicide Prevention Australia. (2023). *Socio-economic and Environmental Determinants of Suicide project*. [SPA-SEDS-Background-Paper-August-2023-Designed.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> Preventative Health SA. (2023). *South Australia Suicide Prevention Plan*. [Plan • Suicide Prevention](#)

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Chief Psychiatrist South Australia. (2021). *Suicide Prevention Act 2021*. [Suicide Prevention Act... | Office of the Chief Psychiatrist | SA Health](#)

<sup>5</sup> Suicide Prevention Australia. (2024). *2024 Membership Opportunities*. [FINAL MEMBERSHIP PROSPECTUS](#)

<sup>6</sup> Tujague, N. A., & Ryan, K. L. (2021). Ticking the box of 'cultural safety' is not enough: why trauma-informed practice is critical to Indigenous healing. *Rural and remote health*, 21(3), 6411. <https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH6411>

<sup>7</sup> Austin, A. E., van den Heuvel, C., & Byard, R. W. (2014). Prison suicides in South Australia: 1996-2010. *Journal of forensic sciences*, 59(5), 1260–1262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.12454>

<sup>8</sup> Australian Government. National Mental Health Commission. (2024). *Public consultation – Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Consultation Draft*. [Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy - Consultation draft | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government. National Suicide Prevention Office. (2024). *Media release: The draft Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy is now open for public consultation*. [Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy | National Suicide Prevention Office | National Mental Health Commission](#)

<sup>10</sup> Australian Government. National Suicide Prevention Office. (2024). *National Suicide Prevention Office*. [National Suicide Prevention Office | National Suicide Prevention Office | National Mental Health Commission](#)

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government. (2024). *Overview of the development process of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy*. [Overview of the development process of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy | Have Your Say - National Mental Health Commission](#)

<sup>12</sup> Suicide Prevention Australia. (2024). *The National Suicide Prevention Research Fund*. [Research Grants - Suicide Prevention Australia](#)

<sup>13</sup> Suicide Prevention Australia. (2024). *Latest Research*. [Latest Research - Suicide Prevention Australia](#)