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FAMILY AND FRIENDS PROVIDE THE CRUCIAL FIRST STEP IN SUPPORTING YOUNG MEN AT RISK OF SUICIDE

The '*Taking The First Step*' Suicide Prevention Research Project has highlighted the critical importance of family and friends in supporting of young men at risk of suicide in the Great South Coast.

Led by **headspace Warrnambool**, the research project found men aged 18-25 have high levels of mental health literacy. However, when experiencing distress, they were found to turn to a partner, family or friends before seeking professional help.

Family and friends were also found to have the greatest influence in encouraging them to access support services and be involved in their recovery journey.

This has reinforced the need for community-wide suicide first aid training - subsequently now offered to everyone aged 15+ in the Great South Coast region.

With Western Victoria being a priority population, the **Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place Based Trial** (GSCSPPB) was developed in 2021 - a joint commitment between the **Western Victoria Primary Health Network** and the **Australian Government** to recognise the benefits of collaborative approaches to suicide prevention. Headed by a local leadership committee, the GSCSPPB comprised 12 community-based programs aiming to reduce the rates of suicide, reduce suicide attempts, build resilience and wellbeing and improve systems to prevent suicide in an ongoing way.

As part of this trial, the '*Taking the First Step*' research project was implemented in collaboration with **headspace Warrnambool and Portland** to better understand the attitudes and help-seeking behaviours contributing to young men's mental health, well-being and service access. Completed in July 2021 and implemented by **headspace Warrnambool**, 81 young males took part in the research deployed via survey (66 participants) and focus groups (15 participants).

Courtney Shiells, headspace Operations Manager (pictured) said the project's research has "highlighted young males in the region have high levels of mental health literacy, compassion for males experiencing mental health problems, and knowledge of how to access mental health services".

"The research also found young males are most likely to reach out to their partner, mothers or family and friends when needing to seek mental health support," Courtney said.

The project also identified perceived traditional masculine attitudes and stigma surrounding mental health are significant risk factors for suicide, with young men being disproportionately deterred from help-seeking as a result.



While young men are demonstrating higher levels of mental health literacy than ever before and are aware of the professional services available, they are not accessing them directly and are instead going to their partner or parent for support as the first step. This highlights the need for the community to be educated and armed with how to provide the necessary support and connect them to the relevant services.

Anne Waters, headspace Regional Manager (pictured) said “The research has supported us to re-focus community awareness and engagement strategies for young males in the Great South Coast, with evidence already of an increase in young males accessing headspace Warrnambool and Portland services”.

“This also reaffirms the critical importance of family and friends support for young males to access services early and be involved throughout the mental health recovery journey,” Anne said.

As part of this trial, the Great South Coast communities are also being offered **free** training to better recognise and respond to those who are at risk of suicide. The online training is conducted by LivingWorks Start - access it here: bit.ly/STARTtraining.

- ENDS -

Available for interview:

- Rowena Clift, Chief Executive Officer - WVPHN
- Cr Anita Rank, Chair - Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place Based Trial Leadership Group and Mayor - Glenelg Shire Council
- Anne Waters, Executive Manager Health Service Division - Brophy Youth & Family Services

Photography:

Program photography courtesy of headspace - [Click here to download](#).

Further Information On The Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place Based Trial:

The Great South Coast Suicide Prevention Place Based Trial is an initiative aimed at delivering activities to reduce the suicide rate in the shires of Corangamite, Glenelg, Moyne and Southern Grampians and the City of Warrnambool. Coordinated by Western Victoria Primary Health Network (WVPHN) in partnership with the Federal Government and a range of health care service providers, the trial offers a coordinated approach to reducing the suicide rate in the Great South Coast with a range of community network support activities.

WVPHN Chief Executive Officer Rowena Clift said: *“Many families across the Great South Coast are struggling to understand why their loved ones have taken their own lives. From teenagers to adults and both male and female; the suicide rate for Great South Coast is unacceptably high. We want to ensure that every single person who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide or has attempted suicide has*

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GREAT SOUTH COAST
**Suicide Prevention
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support networks available to help them when and where they need it. These activities will help us achieve this by filling identified service gaps and giving the community the support it requires.”

Media can find more information on the all of the individual projects in the trial here:

<https://bit.ly/GSCSPBBackgrounders>

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Support Services

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or lifeline.org.au

Head to Health: 1800 595 212

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 or beyondblue.org.au

Suicide Callback Service: 1300 659 467

MensLine: 1300 789 978 or mensline.org.au

QLife: 1800 184 527 (support for LGBTI community)

Emergency Services: 000 (triple zero)

SANE Helpline: 1800 187 263 (talk to a mental health professional weekdays, 10am-10pm)