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New suicide data highlights need for bereavement support to be available to all: Jesuit Social Services

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' annual Causes of Death data, released today, shows that the suicide rate for men and women has increased over the last decade. It is a stark reminder that specialist support must be available to the thousands of people bereaved by the suicide of a loved one each year, says Jesuit Social Services.

"Today's statistics show that more than 3,100 people took their own lives across the country last year. Each of these deaths is a tragedy, and leaves behind family, friends and other loved ones who experience complex and prolonged bereavement that can be extremely challenging to navigate," says Dr Louise Flynn, General Manager at Jesuit Social Services' Support After Suicide program.

Data shows that suicide was the 15th leading cause of death last year, and that three quarters of people who died by suicide were male. Over the past decade, the suicide rate for males increased between 2012 and 2021 from 17.0 to 18.2 deaths per 100,000 and the suicide rate for women increased from 5.6 to 6.1 deaths per 100,000. The report also highlights that the number of deaths by suicide for 2021 is expected to increase due to changes in the way data is captured and coded.

"It's imperative that we have access to accurate and up to date statistics to effectively understand the impact of suicide across Australia. Data plays a crucial role in allowing decision makers to direct funding and resources to where it is most needed and where it can make a significant difference.

"Researchers have found that bereaved people are 65 per cent more likely to attempt suicide if they are grieving for loved ones who took their own lives, so a program like Support After Suicide not only provides bereavement support but also works to prevent further suicide," says Dr Flynn.

Since 2004, Support After Suicide has provided services including counselling, support groups and online resources throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria. More recently, the program has expanded into New South Wales. It provides direct support to more than 1,000 people bereaved by suicide each year, and is one of the few services in Victoria to support those bereaved by suicide.

As participant John (not his real name) said, "it is such an important distinction between feeling depressed and sad because I had lost my son, but not feeling so depressed and sad that I would end up like my son. I cannot imagine where I would be without the service."

Support After Suicide is only funded by the Commonwealth Government through four of the six Victorian Primary Health Networks to June 2023 and has no long-term funding certainty. The program does not receive any funding from the Victorian Government. Dr Flynn hopes the incoming Victorian Government commits to funding postvention services including Support After Suicide.

"The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System highlighted the importance of postvention as part of any effective mental health service system. An additional \$1.5m in funding for Support After Suicide would service immediate need and allow for expansion to ensure all Victorians bereaved by suicide have access to the support they need."

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au