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All-encompassing effort required to reduce suicide rates

Tackling Australia's suicide rate will require the same long-term, whole-of-community commitment that has seen a decades' long fall in the national road toll, **beyondblue** CEO **Georgie Harman** says.

The highest number of road deaths recorded in a single year was 3,798 in 1970, leading to the introduction of compulsory seatbelt legislation, blood-alcohol limits, tighter speed controls, safer cars, advertising campaigns and better roads.

The measures have resulted in reducing the road toll by almost two-thirds, down to 1,293 last year.

With Australia's official suicide rate at 3,027 in 2015, Ms Harman said a similar approach involving governments, a range of organisations, and people from all corners of the community was required to prevent those at risk taking their own lives.

"We need to start tackling suicide in the same way we have the national road toll," Ms Harman said.

"On average eight Australians take their own lives each day. As a community, we need to get serious about addressing that issue."

Ms Harman pointed to the effectiveness of summits, plans and national forums that continue to reduce road deaths each year.

"All of this has improved public awareness and promoted an understanding that by changing behaviour, we can reduce road deaths," Ms Harman said.

"Addressing suicide can be complicated, but now is the time to think big, keep the momentum rolling and embrace new ideas."

Ms Harman said openly discussing suicide and its risk factors was an important step.

"*beyondblue* knows that people are unsure how to raise the subject and that those who think about taking their lives often can't find a way through the pain to ask for help," she said.

"Equally, there is uncertainty about how to support those affected by suicide — those who have lost a loved one, have attempted suicide themselves or have expressed suicidal thoughts.

"The facts are, all signs and talk of suicide should be taken seriously. Asking direct questions and raising concerns can help. It won't make things worse."

beyondblue's suicide prevention work already offers a range of services, including The Way Back Support Service. The program assists people who have been released from hospital after a suicide attempt.

Statistics show this group is at high risk of attempting suicide again within three months of being discharged if they do not have a support network.

"We wouldn't discharge from hospital someone who has had a car accident without follow-up care and support. People who have attempted suicide deserve the same approach," Ms Harman said.

"We give the person the tools, the practical and emotional support, and motivation to stay alive. We help them stay safe and link them to community and health services, family and other support networks."

The *beyondblue* website carries practical advice about [how to have a conversation about suicide](#).

Mental health professionals are available at the *beyondblue* Support Service via phone 24/7 on 1300 224 636 or via www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support for online chat (3PM-12AM AEST) or email responses (within 24 hours).