



New support service for people who have attempted suicide in ACT

Today ACT Minister for Mental Health Shane Rattenbury and *beyondblue* CEO Georgie Harman will launch The Way Back Support Service (ACT), a suicide prevention program that delivers personalised support to people who have tried to take their own lives.

Funded by ACT Health and *beyondblue* – and delivered by Woden Community Service – The Way Back Support Service targets people discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt.

Evidence shows 15 to 25 per cent of those who attempt suicide will try again in the three months following discharge from hospital. The Way Back Support Service is designed to guide such people safely through this critical period.

With three trial sites now operational in Canberra, the Hunter region of New South Wales and Darwin, *beyondblue* predicts the program could potentially provide life-saving support to 2000 Australians by 2018.

“Nationally, suicide rates are a growing concern and it is the leading cause of death for Australians between 15 and 44 years of age,” said ACT Minister for Mental Health Shane Rattenbury.

“Suicide is an issue the country needs to address and the ACT needs to address,” Mr Rattenbury said. “There is growing evidence services such as The Way Back can greatly improve recovery from suicide attempts.”

People referred from Canberra and Calvary Public Hospital to The Way Back Support Service will be assigned a Support Coordinator who will help them build a personalised safety plan, provide practical assistance, link them to community services and, if necessary, clinical care.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data reveals 3027 Australians took their own lives in 2015: a rate of more than eight a day. There were 46 suicides in the ACT in 2015.

“These figures are simply shocking,” said Ms Harman. “Suicide rates have never been higher. We need a new way of tackling suicide, of empowering the individual to regain strength and control of their lives.

“Nationally more than half those discharged from hospital following a suicide attempt receive no support or follow-up treatment and The Way Back Support Service fills that gap.

“But it isn’t a medical intervention. It’s about getting practical help and information into the hands of the people who need it. It’s about equipping them with the right resources and supporting them to find their way back.”

Chris Redmond, CEO of Woden Community Service, said: “Understandably, there has been a renewed focus on suicide and suicide prevention in recent years with so many Australians taking or attempting to take their lives.

“We are pleased to be working with *beyondblue* and ACT Health to deliver The Way Back Support Service. Our support coordinators motivate, encourage and talk to participants. They work to reduce future suicide attempts by providing understanding, connection and hope. Our aim will be to connect people to ongoing supports within the community.”

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Mel Thompson, a support coordinator for the Canberra Way Back Support Service, said:

“I help establish what hope looks like for people who have attempted suicide, so we can start walking together towards their future.

“When a person leaves hospital after a suicide attempt, they’re often going back to the same environment they were in before, so I help them make positive changes so they can feel a sense of hope. Sometimes that starts by doing something as simple as making origami with them in their lounge room, or accompanying them on a visit to an art gallery.

“During their recovery and our time working together, they have a safe space to talk about suicide, to build a plan about how they will stay safe, and to discover a life worth living.”

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