

Suicide prevention group pushed for more investment and legislation as Top End rates climb

Mental health advocates are calling for more investment in suicide prevention programs as rates continue to climb across the Northern Territory.



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The Northern Territory is at a “critical juncture” in preventing suicide, a leading advocacy group says as it can be revealed the Top End’s death data is climbing.

Pauline Neil works for Sabrina’s Reach4Life, which started after the [death of 19-year-old Darwin woman Sabrina Di Lemb](#) in 2017.

Ms Neil said while some achievements had been made by the Northern Territory Government over the past five years, a lot more needed to be done.

“We can do better, we can do so much better,” she said.



Ms Neil, who has lost both her brother and nephew through suicide, said she wanted to see more people with lived experience included in the decision making along with community.

“The lived experience you must not ignore it, it’s incredibly valuable,” she said.

“There’s the saying that goes ‘not about us without us’.

“We need to have people sitting at the table be open to changing it up.”

[Fresh Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) data shows the NT is consistently recording the highest number of deaths by suicide in the country.

Preliminary data has the rate for 2020 and 2021 at 21 and 20.4 per 100,000 respectively.

When the Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework was introduced in 2018, the rate was 19.5.

It comes as the fourth progress report into the framework was released last week.

An NT Government spokesman said the Framework was “informed by cross-sector government and non-government experts and public consultation, from which there is significant lived experience of suicide.”

The major achievements from the report included more than \$200,000 in grants awarded to community initiatives, including a community suicide intervention skills workshop by the West Daly Regional Council.

Since the start of the framework more than \$1.22 million in grants have been provided in the community.

The funding has also included a new 18-bed inpatient unit as well as introducing universal after-care services.

The report also revealed prioritised education and professional development with 1463 Territorians trained in suicide prevention in the past 12 months.

“Territorians deserve access to the best possible mental health services and our Government has taken decisive action to deliver,” Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Minister Lauren Moss said.

“The Territory’s population is over-represented in suicide statistics, more so the Aboriginal population, so we need to ensure Territorians have access to appropriate mental health and suicide prevention services.



 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Minister Lauren Moss. Picture: Glenn Campbell

“The Government is determined to reduce suicide rates in the Territory and supporting grassroots organisations is recognised as one of the best ways we can make an impact.”

But Ms Neil said a lot of the investment was concentrated in the downstream approach.

“We invest in putting in ambulances at the bottom of the cliff, where it’s too late,” she said.

“We need new money that truly looks at prevention, that lifts our gaze from the acute end and invest in an upstream model.”

Introducing a Suicide Prevention Act, like the government did last year in South Australia, and holding a two-day summit for suicide prevention, to look at what the collective can do. The outcomes can then feed into the next NTG suicide prevention framework.

The framework was brought in with the goal of reducing the Territory’s rate by half over the next 10 years.

Ms Neil said her goal was to bring it toward zero.

“We won’t give up, we’re in it for the long haul,” she said.

“If we can help government be the best it can be and set the Territory up as a leader in suicide prevention I don’t think that’s aspirational I think that’s an achievable goal.”