

Welcome to the Illawarra Shoalhaven Suicide Prevention Collaborative



We would like to pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, and pay our respects to the elders, past, present and future. Your contributions to the work of the Collaborative have always been deeply appreciated. We warmly welcome your leadership in teaching us what can be done to reduce the impact of suicides in our local communities.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank all of those who have come forward to share their expertise, gained from personal experience of suicide and recovery. We simply could not be effective without you. We can't underestimate the power of having a voice, and that voice being heard.



"The Collaborative is about help, hope & possibility" - Ann

Welcome



We warmly welcome the contributions of all who seek to help reduce suicide deaths and attempts. We genuinely believe in the goal of zero suicides, and appreciate all who share in the journey towards making this a reality.

We believe that suicide prevention activities are made more effective and efficient when developed through a broad range of perspectives. Both people who have their own experiences of suicidality and those who provide support, want things to improve. Both have experienced how the current support systems have caused additional distress and trauma. We want to hear all these perspectives.

We acknowledge the adversity faced by those with a lived experience of suicide, and commend their willingness to work alongside support systems to look at what can be done to improve services and ultimately help people achieve positive outcomes.

We appreciate how difficult it can be for people to share their experiences, particularly in front of others. We invite people to engage in whatever way they are able. We want people to feel their contributions are heard and valued, regardless of in what way, or how often these contributions are made. Whether it be in meetings, or outside of meetings, all contributions are significant and valuable to this work.

We genuinely offer our support to do whatever we can to make your involvement with the Collaborative a positive experience. Creating this supportive environment is a shared responsibility of all those involved. Having said that, it is perhaps necessary for discussions about suicide prevention to be challenging for us to achieve real change. But we expect people to be respectful and considerate towards others at all times, and encourage people to let us know if there is something we can do to further support their participation in this important work. Please see [What support is available](#) section below for more information.

About the Collaborative

The 'Collaborative' is simply a term we use to describe the organisations and individuals who have come together to reduce suicide deaths and attempts in the Illawarra Shoalhaven region.

The Collaborative first met in September 2015. We have since continued to grow and now consist of 40 local organisations from across health, education, community, local media, police, ambulance, employment agencies, Aboriginal organisations, local councils, and transport. Countless people from the community have also contributed to our collective success, including people who have generously shared their own personal experiences with suicide and recovery. These perspectives have been at the heart of our efforts from the beginning.

Making sure we do what works

Before undertaking any work, the Collaborative looks at the evidence – both the evidence for what's needed, and the evidence for what will successfully address those needs. We consult the suicide prevention literature, as well as the practical wisdom of our local communities and the expertise of people with lived experience of suicide.

Our approach isn't just evidence-based, however. We are also **committed to growing the evidence**. We embed feedback loops into all our activities. This allows us to monitor whether activities are working and to share this information with the people who are working on the front line.

Genuine collaboration

The Collaborative has two 'backbone' staff. And so the work is largely done by Collaborative members who contribute via the various working groups, at monthly meetings, or by supporting and advocating for suicide prevention efforts out in the community.

Anyone is welcome to join the Collaborative, and the growing diversity of our membership echoes the need for a whole of community approach. All members have an equal say, and **all contributions are respected and welcome**. We need everyone in the community to understand what role they can play in suicide prevention, and feel confident to play that role.

The Collaborative is building a culture where, rather than working in silos, our members are committed to playing their role in a genuine collaboration, working towards the shared mission of reducing suicides.



Involvement of people with lived experience

“Someone once said the best antiseptic is sunlight and I think that’s very much the case with mental health and suicide. Things won’t get better if we don’t talk about them.” - Bruce

When we talk about someone having a lived experience of suicide, we usually mean that someone has experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through suicidal crisis, or has lost someone close to them to suicide.

People with lived experience have a practical wisdom about what supports will work, and they keep our focus on what people really need.

One of the Collaborative’s fundamental guiding principles has been the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience. We’re achieving this by having people with lived experience involved in all our working groups and leading many of our activities. To help them do this work, we have provided whatever support our lived experience members have needed, and invested in building their capacity, to use their voices more confidently and with purpose.

The Collaborative is proud to support the growing number of lived experience advocates driving real system change in suicide prevention.



“The Collaborative really value our input as people with a lived experience. When I go to a meeting, I feel like my voice matters as much as anyone in the room even if they have degrees as long as their arms!” - Ann

What support is available?

We genuinely offer our support to do whatever we can to enable this process to be a positive experience. Supports that members have found useful to-date include:

Support from Collaborative backbone staff

The Collaborative staff are keen to support you to be involved however we can.

As you get started, we will aim to regularly check in with you – particularly whilst you are finding your feet and deciding what areas of work are best suited to your interests, skills etc.

We also invite you to get in touch at any time if you have any questions or would just like to catch up.

Support from existing lived experience members

You will have the option to be connected with an existing lived experience member, who will walk alongside you as you get started. This could include informal catch ups or check-ins after meetings etc.

"I don't know if I would have had the courage to join the Collaborative, if not for the encouragement, kindness and wisdom of the other lived experience members. They are inspirational. Because of their support, I've done things I didn't think I could. I've found confidence; there's a quiet strength in me now that I didn't see before." - Kat

Paid participation

In recognition of the valuable input and expertise of people with lived experience, the Collaborative is committed to paying people with lived experience for their time in Collaborative meetings. This payment is for anyone attending a meeting who:

- Identifies as having a lived experience of suicide
- Is not attending as part of a paid role

Paid participation is not intended to make you feel pressured to contribute, and does not increase the expectations of how much you contribute at all. The Collaborative sees the value in people with lived experience being involved, including for their own recovery, and is happy to pay people to come to meetings no matter how much they contribute.

The paid participation form is available here: www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/paidparticipation



Training

To help build your confidence and capacity to be involved with this work, and use your voice more confidently and with purpose, we are keen to connect people with lived experience to training with [Roses in the Ocean](#) – a national organisation working to support people with lived experience.

Programs which are offered throughout the year include:

- [Our Voice in Action](#)
- [Voices of Insight](#)

If these trainings are of interest to you and you'd like to participate, please let the Collaborative staff know. They can talk you through which program would best suit you and put you on the list for the next available training.

“I have felt so empowered by the training experiences I have attended. I grew as an individual and learnt that my experiences, while different to others, have similar threads. We are all a part of the same tapestry. I found wisdom and guidance from other souls who have been walking with me all along, though I didn't always know they were with me.” – Caitlin

“I've benefited enormously from going through the Roses in the Ocean trainings. It's given me the skills to use my voice with confidence and purpose, and to share the valuable insights I've gained from my lived experience, rather than just the experiences themselves.” – Carrie

Other supports

We encourage all Collaborative members to reflect on what supports are available for you prior to getting involved so you can lean on them if you need to at any time. These supports could be natural supports, like friends and family, or support services.

If you are in need of additional support, you can find a list of available support services on the Collaborative's website: <https://www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/need-help/>

What if I no longer want to be involved or need to take a break?

It's normal for your energy for this work to ebb and flow, or you may simply not always have the same amount of time available to put into this work. Similarly, some people have tried 2 or more working groups before finding the one that was the best fit for them. If this happens for you, that's perfectly ok. Don't be discouraged. The Collaborative staff and other members are keen to help you find your way.

We do ask that you let us know if / when you are planning to take a break or discontinue, so that we know everything is okay and whether to keep you on the mailing lists etc.



What are we working on?

The Collaborative is working to improve supports available for people who are suicidal, and to help connect people with supports when they need it.

We have a number of different working groups working on different projects aiming to achieve this. The work that we do is driven by our members and projects will emerge / evolve over time. Here are two examples of projects which have been driven by our lived experience members:

Safe Space initiative

“We need a genuine alternative for people like me, who have been through the system and have found that very traumatic and don’t want to go back, but also even more importantly, for people to avoid ever having exposure to that system in the first place.”
- Carrie

People with a lived experience of suicidality and/or suicide attempt have been clear that what they need and want in times of crisis are non-clinical supports that offer a genuine alternative to ED and hospital. In 2018, the Collaborative supported its lived experience members to establish a working group to develop a proposal for this type of Safe Space in our region.

The group decided that a local Safe Space should be a drop-in space open outside business hours that can offer a warm, welcoming environment in which to reduce distress, staffed by peer workers with their own lived experience of suicide.



The local Safe Space initiative was showcased by the NSW Mental Health Commission at a regional consultation forum in 2019, and in a video produced by the Commission.

A co-design process was undertaken in 2020 to develop a local Safe Space as part of the NSW Ministry of Health’s *Towards Zero Suicides* initiatives. The co-design involved people with lived experience (including original members of the Safe Space working group) and health professionals coming together in equal partnership to develop a Safe Space model that met the needs and wants of the local community. For more information about the Safe Space: <https://www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/whats-happening/towards-zero-suicides/#documents>



Postvention for families

Improving supports available for people and communities affected by a suicide death is a big priority for the Collaborative. Lived experience members of the Collaborative saw the need to improve postvention support particularly for children and families, setting up the postvention for families working group.

Within a few months the group published a comprehensive 'Support after suicide' resource hub that brings together useful information for people bereaved by suicide – from practical supports, to local support services and programs for kids. Find out more here: <https://www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/support-after-suicide/>

“There is little help for those bereaved by suicide, and what is out there is hard to find. I searched and searched after Kurt died and the help I did find for the boys fell short of anything appropriate and understanding to suicide. I’ve been working with the Collaborative, with other inspiring people who have been affected by suicide to co-design a website to help those bereaved by suicide. We hope everyone who is struggling can have access to this simple and easy resource in one of the hardest times of their lives” - Sandy

The group is now working to set up supports for children and families bereaved by suicide, including suicide bereavement specific online education programs and weekend camps.

Driving these sorts of initiatives has given our lived experience members confidence in their own expertise. They are now contributing to systems change in other ways, and spreading the collaborative way of working to their growing lived experience networks, both locally and at a national level.

To find out more about our current projects go to:

<https://www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/whats-happening/what-are-we-working-on/>



Ways you can contribute

There are a number of ways you can get involved with the work of the Collaborative.

1. Monthly meetings

On the second Thursday of each month, the Collaborative's broader membership meets to update, discuss and get input on the projects we are working on. These meetings can be a good first step for new members as they can help give you an overview of what is happening across a range of areas, and consider which aspect of the Collaborative's work you'd like to contribute to. They also create an opportunity to meet other people involved.

Although there are discussions during the meeting, we also encourage members to ask questions or provide feedback outside of meetings. You can do this by contacting the Collaborative staff via phone, email or organise a time to catch up over a coffee.

To get an idea of what happens at the Monthly Meetings, check out the minutes on our website:

<https://www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/whats-happening/meeting-minutes/>

2. Working groups

The Collaborative has a number of working groups who meet regularly to progress specific projects in different areas of work. To see a full list of our current working groups, visit our website:

<https://www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/whats-happening/meeting-minutes/>

Collaborative staff will work with you to find the working group / projects that most align with your interests, skills etc.

3. Tell us what you think needs to be done

The work of the Collaborative is determined by its members. If there is an area or project you would like to work on or feel is a priority we need to address, let us know!

“People that have had the actual experience of suicidality need to be involved in determining what, how an alternative to clinical services looks, how it will feel, how it will operate, and hopefully how it will work to start to bring down the incidence of suicide in this region.” - Carrie

4. Help spread the word

An important role for all Collaborative members is supporting and advocating for suicide prevention efforts out in the community. Here are some examples of how you can do this:

- Share [videos of hope and helpful resources](#) with your mates, neighbours, family and colleagues
- Advocate for suicide prevention trainings, such as [Question Persuade Refer \(QPR\) online](#), in your workplace.
- Let people know about opportunities to get involved as they come up.
- Don't be afraid to **talk about suicide** with your friends, family or doctor.

5. Learn how to help

We as community members are well placed to notice when someone close to us may be struggling, so it is critical that we know what to do.

Do suicide prevention training to learn how to recognise and respond to the warning signs of suicide.

QPR online is a good starting option that can be done online in just one hour – you can sign up here: www.suicidepreventioncollaborative.org.au/QPR.

Examples of what contributions may look like

During meetings

- Sharing thoughts and ideas about the work being discussed.
- Asking questions if you're not sure about something.
- Agreeing with what is being said or the direction of the work (e.g. simply stating, I agree).
- Disagreeing with what is being said or the direction of the work - the Collaborative values and promotes debate. Every perspective is important and different perspectives are critical in this work.
- Listening and paying attention to support those who are talking.

Remember, there is no pressure or expectation that you speak during meetings. We welcome you to attend and listen – this is equally important, particularly when you are first starting. You can also give feedback in whichever way works for you; whether it be by phone, email or catching up in person. Collaborative staff are always keen and available to chat with you if you would like to follow up on what has been said in a meeting and/or progress a new initiative. Please let us know how best to support your voice being heard.

'Just listening can be a powerful thing and my grandfather always said something to the effect of "you have 2 ears and 1 mouth, you need to listen twice as much as you talk." Just listening in meetings has been the core part of my approach with the collaborative & their projects and has been very helpful. I listen, take in as much of the information as I can, I go away to process and think about it further, then I act on the result of that.' - Corey

Outside of meetings

There is also a lot of things you can do to contribute outside of meetings:

- Sharing feedback on work via phone, email, catch ups.
- Working to progress specific projects.
- Reviewing meeting minutes & asking questions.
- Spreading the word about initiatives across your networks and encouraging people to get involved.
- Advocating for suicide prevention out in the community.

"I have been more motivated to contribute to a life I want to lead as a result of being a part of the Collaborative. Knowing there are beautiful people striving for change and that my voice is valuable in this pursuit, has changed the way I wake up in the morning. It is no longer as hard as it used to be, because now I know there is a crew of people with me." – Caitlin
