

Inquest into the death of JE and JJ

JE and JJ who were indigenous young men living in Mackay who died in 2008 at the age of 16. Their deaths formed part of an apparent cluster of suicides involving young people in Mackay during 2007-2008. The State Coroner examined the circumstances of the deaths and to consider ways to prevent similar deaths.

State Coroner Terry Ryan delivered his findings on inquest on 9 June 2015.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported.

The department named in this response will provide implementation updates until the recommendation is delivered. Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible minister named in the response.

Comment 1

While it is important not to impose programs on communities that do not recognise local culture and conditions, I recommend that the Mackay community response to these deaths be considered in the finalisation of the Queensland suicide prevention action plan. It is an example of an effective local response, elements of which may be adapted in other parts of the state.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Queensland Health.

On 21 January 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The Department of Health is considering the coroner's recommendation and will provide more information in early 2016.

On 10 May 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The Mackay community response has been considered in the finalisation of the whole-of-government *Queensland suicide prevention action plan 2015-17* (the action plan) which aims to reduce suicide and its impact on Queenslanders.

The action plan aims to reduce suicide and its impact on Queenslanders. It outlines 42 actions under four priority areas:

1. Stronger community awareness and capacity so that families, workplaces and communities are better equipped to support and respond to people at risk of, and impacted by, suicide.
2. Improved service system responses and capacity to ensure people at risk, including those who have attempted suicide, get the support they need, when and where they need it.
3. Focused support for vulnerable groups to address the specific needs of groups and communities experiencing higher rates, and at greater risk, of suicide.
4. A stronger more accessible evidence base to drive continuous improvement in research, policy, practice and service delivery.

Underpinning the action plan is the principle that interactions with state government services, including health and social services, offer an opportunity to support those at risk of suicide and families of those who have attempted suicide.

The action plan includes actions that support the Mackay community response, which was the community having access to information and research, the capacity to respond to suicides and the flexibility in provision of service responses. The actions include the development and implementation of a data and information sharing network which will include providing information and data to communities; actions to provide training to frontline workers in a range of areas including child protection and emergency departments in Queensland's public hospitals to improve the identification of people at risk of suicide and improve responses.

One action will be led by the Queensland Mental Health Commission, who will bring these actions together by developing and trialling a place-based suicide prevention initiative that builds on community strengths in up to two sites including a rural and remote community. Work has commenced to develop the pilot project and it is anticipated that the pilot will commence in 2016.

The action plan will be implemented from 2015 to 2017 and will be reviewed after 12 months. The Queensland Mental Health Commission will lead the monitoring of the action plan's implementation, supported by a whole-of-government Queensland suicide prevention reference group.

Comment 2

I also recommend that the Queensland suicide prevention action plan include specific strategies aimed at addressing the unacceptably high rate of deaths from suicide for young Indigenous Australians.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Queensland Health.

On 21 January 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The Department of Health is considering the coroner's recommendation and will provide more information in early 2016.

On 10 May 2016 the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services responded:

The whole-of-government *Queensland suicide prevention action plan 2015-17* (the action plan) includes specific strategies aimed at addressing the unacceptably high rate of deaths from suicide for young Indigenous Australians.

Action 32 is in progress, to scope the current service models, barriers for accessing services and options for improvement, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at risk of suicide within the Townsville region. It is anticipated that the scoping of current service models in Townsville will be completed in 2016.

Action 32 is complemented by action 17 and 13 as outlined in the action plan. These include actions led by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to support children and young people in the child protection system such as provide training, support and resources to assist staff, as well as foster and kinship carers, to understand and respond to the mental health needs of children and young people (action 17) and the Department of Education and Training's action to

provide mental health training for school staff to identify individuals at risk and respond appropriately (action 13).

Future directions in this area will be informed by findings from the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention evaluation project, funded by the Australian Government, when the information become available. This project aims to evaluate the effectiveness of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention services and programs, and where relevant, will make recommendations in relation to areas of improvement, or alternative, evidence-based service and program delivery models.