



## Summary of Congress Submission on Youth Suicide

November 6, 2011

### **The Prevention of Youth Suicide**

Youth suicide is primarily a problem for young people who grow up with the character traits of impulsivity and lack of self control. It is not primarily a problem created by clinical depression

These character traits are established primarily as a result of severe social disadvantage which especially impacts in the early years and leads to life long disadvantage. This is characterised by lack of routine and parenting practices where children are immediately gratified and are not taught to experience not having their demands immediately met. The types of routines that matter include:

1. Regular and consistent sleep times and duration
2. Regular physical activity
3. Regular conversation and reading without the television on
4. Regular positive reinforcement not negative reinforcement

In addition to these routines the Californian study into Adverse Early Childhood events reveals how important it is for children not to be exposed to a negative environment including violence and stress.

All of this is critical if children are to enter school well developed and with the ability to listen, concentrate, learn and be in control of their emotions.

A further contributing factor is that these problems are much more likely to occur in families where the parents are addicted to substances.

What then is need to help to ensure that more and more children grow up in families that are more likely to promote well rounded, resilient young people?

The key recommendations that need to be implemented in relation to this from the "Rebuilding Family Life Paper" include:

1. The implementation of early childhood program including the nurse home visitation program, the Abecedarian program and 2 years of pre-school
2. The implementation of public health measures to reduce the consumption of alcohol including the floor price
3. The implementation of the concept of a Family Responsibility Commission

4. The implementation of a Targeted Family Support Service as part of all primary health care services within a Social and Emotional Well being Service that is also able to offer the Parents Under Pressure program when needed
5. The implementation of effective alcohol treatment programs within Social Emotional Being Service in primary health care.
6. Much greater access to affordable public housing and supported accommodation options especially for parents of young children trying to overcome addictions and/or deal with mental health disorders
7. The ongoing funding for the “Stop the Violence” program
8. Culturally appropriate adult literacy and numeracy programs

All of this as a package will greatly enhance the capacity of all parents and families to better support the growth and development of children in early childhood and prevent youth suicide along with improving school outcomes and promoting health and well being throughout life.

### **The treatment of young people who have made suicide attempts and the prevention of Copy Cat Suicides**

The key recommendation in the Rebuilding Families Paper that is relevant to this is that every primary health care service in the NT needs to be resourced to ensure that they have a Social and Emotional Well Being program that needs to include at a minimum a resident social workers and Aboriginal Case Workers or Family Support Workers. Larger communities will also need resident psychologists.

In addition there needs to be youth programs and services with an effective mechanism for interagency coordination and case management as soon as there has been either a completed or attempted suicide.

There also needs to be a 24/7 after hours crisis intervention service which is the entry point into case management and social and emotional well being services.

The funding is currently in the system to achieve this it just needs to be pooled into a single source and then re-allocated according to need and in a planned manner through existing primary health care services and not new private providers.