

From: Retired Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry David Horgan, on behalf of the Australian Suicide Prevention Foundation (ASPF).

To: Productivity Commission Review on Suicide and Mental Health

Date: 12/03/25

Dear Members

Re: A prize-winning extra tool in suicide prevention and self-harm prevention at **no cost to anyone, available without waiting, no training needed** (too good to be true you may think) has been omitted from government future plans in this area

Re: the App “**Prevent a suicide: what to say**” and www.InToughTimesText.org (the website front page has a 99 second video demonstrating the App)

The steps are simple

- 1) Someone mentions or hints at suicide (typically evoking paralysis in those around them, afraid anything they say will worsen the situation).
- 2) The App (or website) has hundreds of formally approved messages as appropriate responses, being the phrases used by mental health professionals, and refined by Lived Experience Australia and Roses in the Ocean.
- 3) The under-valued “reserve force” of highly concerned colleagues, friends and family can download the most suitable of these messages with one click, personalise any message if they wish, and send them to the person at risk.
- 4) Each message is a very personal bond, enmeshing the suicidal person progressively, and making self-harm or suicidal acts more difficult.
- 5) The messages can continue from individuals or from a group while the crisis lasts and/or until professional care becomes available, more impactful than a single call to a crisis line..

ASPF (a registered charity) has innovated what is a world-first concept, which strikes many people with its simplicity and the fact it is cost-free.

Evidence of effectiveness:

Suicide Prevention Australia awarded the App the 2024 prize in Victoria for Innovation. What better proof than such an award from the peak Australian body in suicide prevention?

The App has been applauded by many active in suicide prevention, ranging from a **Board member of Lifeline to an Emergency Department practising specialist.**

The Australian Medical Association has praised the concept, and in early March 2025 highlighted the innovation in a 3 page magazine article to members, Here is the link <https://www.paperturn-view.com/?pid=MjA206567&p=13&v=14.100>

Evidence of safety:

After extensive reviews by experts within ASPF and externally, there are **no identified risks**. The messages have been reviewed repeatedly, and revised as indicated, by a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a GP, the Board of ASPF, Lived Experience Australia, Roses in the Ocean, Suicide Prevention Australia, the above experts and organisations, multiple users, and a Resolve Strategic survey involving 2006 individuals representing a stratified sample of the Australian population.

Risk/Benefit ratio:

This no-cost extra tool, opening a whole extra dimension mobilising the population in suicide prevention, can **supplement all the other approaches to suicide prevention without risk, and with a very high probability of benefit.**

Research:

We are keen to prove the effectiveness of our concept. Once we are well known, we will have adequate numbers for research. AI will guide our users in selecting a sequence of messages as they have an exchange with the person they are supporting, and who has replied to initial contact.

Increasing the numbers of Australians receiving ant-suicide interventions at no extra cost by shifting the initiative:

The default advice in the media is to advise the vast number of people with suicidal ideas to call Lifeline, but only a small minority do so, and one phone call has limited power. Simple publicity about our App providing approved phrases **allows significant concerned people to initiate sending our messages. Personal and work relationships, and ongoing contact, magnify the impact of such messages.**

Productivity increases by current mental health workers at no cost:

With the consent of the person at risk, professionals can mobilise family and friends to use the App to keep **24/7 connections with their loved one**, and regularly send supportive messages, especially outside the working hours of the professional. This **converts lone therapists into team leaders**, with all involved sharing in the stress involved, and in the outcome. **People with suicidal ideas would receive far more inputs and support than a mental health service alone could provide.**

Minority groups will find replication of this App a great service:

This approach has particular obvious appeal for remote and isolated groups, and minority groups of every description. **CALD groups can easily have their own version of this discovery.**

We attach a summary of the features of the App.

We strongly request publicity to assist immediately in saving lives.

We look forward to further discussion of this Australian initiative which already has been copied internationally.

Yours faithfully,

David Horgan
Founder ASPF

Below is a categorized, point-form summary of the key features of both the **Prevent A Suicide: What to Say** app and its companion website (www.ittt.org.au / www.InToughTimesText.org) as described in the attached document .

1. Core Purpose and Approach

• Immediate, Practical Tool when suicide is hinted at or mentioned

- Offers hundreds of medically and lived experience approved phrases to help family, friends, and colleagues wrap personal bonds around someone with suicidal thoughts. Phone messages make discussion of sensitive topics easier for everyone.
- Designed to reduce isolation and emotional pain through ongoing, personal text messages.

• Empowers the Person's Support Network

- Encourages multiple people close to someone at risk to send high impact messages, wrapping a "safety net" around them.
- Converts isolated professionals or volunteers into "team leaders" who can guide a larger support team (with the individual's consent).

No pressure on the person at risk! Family and friends now take the initiative

They do not have the embarrassment of formally asking for help or discussing in detail being suicidal. They just have to read their messages, not be pressurised to do more such as get through to a crisis line, or go somewhere to find a professional.

• No Training Required

- Simple, intuitive design; any member of the public can use the tool immediately.

• No Cost, No Ongoing Fees

- Free to download and use; only cost is simply raising public awareness.

• 24/7 Availability

- Offers help and reassurance around the clock, no waiting, not limited to business or crisis line hours.

2. App Features (Prevent A Suicide: What to Say)

• Extensive Library of Pre-Approved Messages

- Offers hundreds of messages modeled on mental health professionals' language.
- Each phrase has been specifically vetted to ensure it is compassionate and non-harmful.

• One-Click Message Sending

- Lets users select a pre-written message and automatically copy it to SMS or WhatsApp.
- Messages can be sent immediately or personalized before sending.

• Ongoing Support Over Time

- Encourages repeated or extended messaging rather than a single intervention.
- Aims to maintain a continuous sense of connection and support while suicidal risk persists.

• No Demands on the At-Risk Person

- They only need to read incoming supportive messages; no requirement to call or travel for help.

• Anonymous and Private

- Use of the app does not force involvement of external services unless the user wishes.
- Can be particularly important for families wanting privacy and to avoid stigma.

• Adaptable for Specific Groups

- Designed to be replicated or customized in partnership with high-risk communities (e.g., LGBTQI+, veterans, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants).
- Content can be adjusted to the cultural or social nuances of each group.

• Future Multilingual Expansion

- App is being reworded to support multiple languages (in line with the website's multilingual functionality).

3. Website Features (www.ittt.org.au / www.InToughTimesText.org)

- **Foundational Resource**

- Preceded the app and contains a similar collection of supportive messages.
- Serves as an alternative for those who prefer a browser-based approach.

- **Multilingual**

- Already offers information in multiple languages, addressing the needs of diverse communities.

- **Easy, No-Training Access**

- Anyone can visit and quickly find suggested messages or phrases to help someone at risk.

- **Scalable and Customizable**

- Like the app, the website can be replicated or adapted for specific demographic or cultural groups.

- **No Login/Registration Required**

- Immediate access to resources without creating accounts, protecting user privacy and anonymity.

4. Key Advantages and Benefits

- **Mobilizes Friends and Family**

- Empowers the closest contacts—often the first to notice warning signs—to intervene immediately.
- Allows them to “know what to say” even if they previously felt uncertain or anxious about broaching the subject. Our research identified this uncertainty applies to 57% of the population.

- **Complement to Professional Care**

- Reinforces and extends the impact of therapy or crisis services by creating a continuing supportive presence outside clinical settings.
- Potentially reduces workload on professionals by engaging a personal support network.

- **Addresses Common Barriers**

- Stigma, lack of knowledge, and fear of saying “the wrong thing” are mitigated by structured, approved messaging.
- Repeated texts ensure ongoing emotional contact, rather than a single, one-off conversation.

- **Low-Cost, Broad Reach**

- Suited to large populations; no requirement for extensive training budgets.

- Ideal for situations where mental health services are under-resourced.

.No running costs

5. Potential Future Directions

• Wider Multilingual Rollout

- Plans to translate the app into more languages to match the website's existing multilingual approach.

• Customized Versions for High-Risk Groups

- Partnerships already forming with farming organizations, African community groups, and others.

• Research and Formal Evaluation

- Interest in formal studies to validate the strong anecdotal and professional support for the approach.

• National and Global Promotion

- Awarded a major Suicide Prevention Australia Innovation accolade.
- Seen as a potentially transformative approach able to be adopted widely, including by international organisations. Sane UK replicated many of our phrases and diagrams on their website.

Role of Artificial Intelligence

. It is envisaged AI will make continuous suggestions to friends and family about ongoing selection of phrases in any exchange between them and then person with suicidal ideas,

AI will also allow rapid replication of our concept for high-risk groups and for CALD populations.

These features together offer a **user-friendly, continuous-contact approach** for suicide prevention, leveraging personal connections and easily accessible technology to reach people whenever and wherever they need support .

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