

To whom it may concern,

La Trobe University's Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review.

Established in 2008, we are Australia's first and largest dedicated Autism research centre. Our vision is to help Autistic people, their families, and carers thrive. Our internationally recognised research influences global perspectives and drives change through public accountability, community engagement, and collaboration with governments and industries. As a leading global research centre, we prioritise working closely with the Autistic community, advocates, and researchers.

Robust scientific research confirms that Autistic people experience significantly heightened and unique risk factors for suicide and face substantial barriers to accessing appropriate prevention supports and services.

RECOMMENDATION

The Autistic population in Australia should be acknowledged by the Federal Government's National Suicide Strategy and by Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreements as a priority population at significantly increased risk of death by suicide.

Robust scientific evidence tells us that Autistic people experience:

- Significantly increased risk of suicidal thoughts, behaviour, and death by suicide compared to non-Autistic populations,
- heightened and unique factors that increase the risk of suicide,
- barriers to accessing available suicide prevention supports and services, and
- under-resourced staff and professionals who are lacking neuro-affirming/autism specific training and knowledge.

While the recently released *National Autism Strategy* and *National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People (2025–2035)* are a promising step

towards more inclusive health policies, the minimal acknowledgment or total omission of the increased suicide rate of autistic people and strategies to address this in current National Suicide Prevention Strategy and associated agreements leaves a critical gap. The failure to explicitly include Autistic Australians in these frameworks perpetuates invisibility and missed opportunities for life-saving intervention.

We urge the Australian Government and all relevant agencies to acknowledge the Autistic population as a priority group in national suicide prevention policy and to commit to targeted actions with attached funding that will reduce suicide deaths and improve mental health outcomes for this community.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Sincerely,

Associate Professor Darren Hedley, PhD