

2.0 Background to the project

This project was developed by YACWA in response to the high rate of suicidal behaviours amongst homeless young people (aged 12 to 25 years) and qualitative data collected as part of a youth sector survey in 2012. YACWA's Homeless Youth Suicide Prevention Project is a Community Action Plan (CAP) under the WA Suicide Prevention Strategy (One Life). Key outcomes that YACWA has sought to achieve through this Homeless Youth Suicide Prevention Project are to identify best practice principles and useful sector focused resources and tools, through theory-driven and practice-led approach. The Western Australian Centre for Health Promotion Research (WACHPR) was commissioned by YACWA to identify best practice principles for Youth Service Providers responding to the needs of young homeless people at risk of suicide within the Perth metropolitan area.

This report includes the findings from a literature review and information gained through consultation with a number of Youth Service Providers located in the Perth metropolitan region. The outcomes of the consultations are described in Section 12, Supporting Youth Workers and Section 15, Service provider perspectives. The outcomes of this report will help identify best practice principles for Youth Service Providers who work with homeless young people at risk of suicide in WA.

As part of the literature review, a database search was undertaken for articles published between 2008 and 2013 relating to suicide, young homeless people and service delivery. Electronic databases were searched including Medline, Embase, PsycInfo, Informit, Proquest, Trove, Cochrane Library and Web of Knowledge. Literature was also obtained from government websites, Google scholar, clearing houses, relevant organisational websites and hand searching. Key words used included a combination of ('self-harm' OR suicide OR 'mental health'), ('youth homelessness' OR 'homeless young people' OR 'homeless youth'), ('service delivery' OR 'intervention' OR 'service provision'), (model OR theory OR frameworks OR 'recovery model') and ('Social Worker' or 'Youth Worker').

The findings of this report were constrained by the lack of reported research into suicide prevention in young homeless populations, both internationally and within the Australian context. The majority of evidence identified is from Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. There are limitations resulting from a lack of generalisability of suicide prevention strategies for this demographic as identified in the literature. Homeless young people are a diverse group, and what has proven effective in one population group may not be effective in another. Studies have shown significant differences between young homeless people across countries² and therefore where available, Australian data has been focussed upon.

This report begins by setting the scene on homelessness and suicide amongst young people. It will then present a discussion on the literature relating to suicide prevention and service delivery. Findings from interviews with Perth based Youth Service Providers will be outlined, providing insight into the current responses to suicide prevention efforts with homeless young people within the Perth metropolitan area. Throughout the report, resources that support suicide prevention efforts will be incorporated. Lastly, recommendations will be presented, taking into account the findings from the literature review as well as current practices and initiatives within the sector.