



MEDIA RELEASE

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Call for government to act on Committee's recommendations on Aboriginal youth suicide

The Aboriginal Health Council of WA and Youth Affairs Council of WA have called on the State Government to accept and immediately begin work on implementing the recommendations from an inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas.

AHCWA and YACWA made a joint submission to the Education and Health Standing Committee inquiry, which was launched following the tragic suicide of a 10-year-old girl in the Kimberley.

The Committee's report, which was tabled in state parliament today, contains 44 recommendations, many of which focus on empowering Aboriginal people to address the issues in their communities.

AHCWA Chairperson Michelle Nelson-Cox said the Kimberley region had one of the highest suicide rates in the world, and she hoped the report would convince the government it was time to make changes.

"We are pleased with the report's acknowledgement that the government has been reluctant to fund culturally-based programs in the past," said Ms Nelson-Cox.

"We fully support the recommendation that the government needs to recognise the importance of cultural knowledge as a protective factor preventing Aboriginal youth suicide.

"We also support the recommendation that Aboriginal communities should be empowered to develop and action all strategies, programs and services.

"Aboriginal people understand the issues in Aboriginal communities, they just need the support to put community-led, culturally appropriate strategies in place."

Ms Nelson-Cox said AHCWA called on the government to acknowledge that Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHS) were the best placed to deliver services.

"The people employed by ACCHS live and work in their communities, and they have a deep understanding of the issues that affect them," she said.

"We need both the State and Federal Governments to engage with them and consult with them, because they are the ones on the ground who know what's going on.

"ACCHSs focus on a preventative model of mental health services, which is in line with the Committee's report, which highlighted the need for early intervention programs."

Ms Nelson-Cox said AHCWA was also pleased to see the recommendation that 24 hour mental health services be implemented in remote areas.



AHCWA
Aboriginal Health Council
of Western Australia

“Aboriginal people do not die by suicide between 9 and 5 when services are open. They need to be able to access support around the clock,” she said.

YACWA CEO Ross Wortham said he agreed with the Committee’s acknowledgement that there had already been enough inquiries and reports into Aboriginal suicide.

“As the report points out, the time for talking is over,” said Mr Wortham. “What we need now is action.

“We call on the government to immediately begin work on implementing some of these recommendations, in the hope that lives can be saved.”

Both organisations also welcomed the report’s finding that the State Government’s Suicide Prevention 2020 Strategy was a generic strategy which did not specifically address the needs of Aboriginal communities.

They supported the recommendation that the state urge the Commonwealth to release funds for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy.

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