



October 5, 2021

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

FROM: Able Minds

SUBJECT: Suicide statistics offer small glimmer of hope

Able Minds Chief Executive Sarah Dowie says new data on the number of suicides in New Zealand paints a concerning picture but there is cause for hope.

The statistics were released by the Chief Coroner and the Ministry of Health on October 4. They reveal that 607 people died by suspected suicide in the year to June 30 2021, compared to 628 the year before.

That's a decrease of 21 deaths and a drop in the suspected suicide rate from 11.8 deaths per 100,000 to 11.6.

The numbers also show a decrease in suspected suicides among Maori from 19.8 per 100,000 people to 15.8, but an increase for Pacific populations from 7.2 to 9.6.

There was a decrease in suspected suicides for females and males in the 15-24 age range, from 12.6 to 11.4 among females and 22.7 to 22.2 in males.

Dowie agrees with Chief Coroner Judge Deborah Marshall that it's "encouraging" for New Zealand's suspected suicide rate and number to have declined, but says more work is required by the Government and the sector to cut these numbers further.

"Each of the people whose deaths are represented by these figures was someone's family member, work colleague, or friend," Dowie says.

"Their tragic loss represents a hole in a family or whanau that will never be filled and our hearts go out to the people who mourn their loss."

"When the Government announced \$1.9 billion of new spending for mental health in its 2019 "Wellbeing Budget", the sector was optimistic this overdue injection of funding would have a positive impact in what has historically been an underfunded area."

"However, the fact the number of suspected suicides has fallen by just 21 is a confronting reminder that much more needs to be done."

"As a society we must do more to encourage people suffering from mental distress to ask for help, as a sector we must make sure that help is available when and where it is needed, and we must ensure it is effective."

Dowie says it is concerning to see continued large disparities in the suspected suicide rate among Maori compared to the general population, and among males of all ethnicities aged 15-24 years compared to females in the same age bracket.

“The Government needs to proactively work with the sector to find solutions to address this disparity,”
Dowie says.

“We cannot allow certain segments of our population to continue to suffer from higher suicide rates than others. It is not good enough and they deserve better.”

Dowie says Able Minds’ staff see every day the impact of suicide. The organisation’s primary purpose is to provide support to family and whānau in the South Island that have a loved one suffering from mental distress and or addiction challenges.

It offers a community-based service with offices in Invercargill, Dunedin, Alexandra, and Oamaru and provides emotional support, information, advocacy and peer-support groups for families.

One of the signature, reputable programmes it offers directly addresses the impact of suicide.

‘Skylight Waves’ is an eight-week course in which Able Minds’ trained facilitators provide support and care for those who have suffered bereavement as a result of the suicide of a loved one.

People who take part learn about bereavement and suicide and are involved in group discussions and support.

The facilitators also support participants in the programme to meet and share with other people who are also experiencing the impact of suicide.

They explore aspects of their grief and reduce isolation and stigma associated with bereavement by suicide in a safe and supportive environment.

Participants receive information and strategies about how to care for themselves and others, including children and young people, after a suicide, and adjust to living with loss and moving forward with positivity and strength.

ENDS

For more information, phone:

Chief Executive Sarah Dowie, 021 126 1805, or email sarah@able.org.nz

www.able.org.nz