

# Lived Experience of Suicide Summit 2023

## Report back

### Background

The Suicide Prevention and Response Office was invited by Roses in the Ocean (RITO) to deliver a workshop at the Lived Experience of Suicide Summit 2023, which was held in nipaluna (Hobart) in March. The Summit is an annual event which provides an interactive workshop-style forum that connects people with lived experience of suicide with key sector organisations, clinicians, researchers, government departments and non-governments organisations to explore innovative ways to strengthen the role of lived experience of suicide nationally.

A key priority of the Victorian Department of Health's Suicide Prevention and Response Office (SPARO) is the development of a new strategy for suicide prevention and response.

In line with the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommendation, the strategy will be co-produced, monitored and evaluated with people with lived and living experience of suicide (Royal Commission recommendation 26.2b).

The strategy will articulate a 10-year vision for suicide prevention and response in Victoria. It will be accompanied by rolling implementation plans that are responsive to advances in data collection, linkage and analysis, emerging evidence and changes in national direction. It will also be accompanied by an accountability framework.

An extensive codesign and engagement process is taking place to develop the strategy. The focus of the Summit workshop was to gather further insights and advice on how SPARO can ensure lived and living experience perspectives continue to be embedded throughout the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

The following report contains a high-level overview of the views and opinions shared with SPARO during the workshop.

### *From co-design to co-implementation – opportunities with government-wide reform*

The workshop offered an opportunity for SPARO to explain their role in the design of Victoria's new suicide prevention and response strategy. Following a brief presentation on the background and development of the strategy, workshop participants were asked to provide their views on a series of questions exploring three themes relating to lived and living experience engagement and government policy.

As the codesign process for the strategy was already in progress, SPARO were specifically interested in exploring with participants how best to continue meaningful engagement and collaboration with lived and living experience voices as the strategy works towards implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The questions aligned to the foundational processes of co-production – co-design, co-implementation, co-monitoring, and co-evaluation. Participants were further asked to reflect on what

they thought the future of lived and living experience engagement and participation could look like in government reform.

### *Co-design and co-implementation*

#### **Exploratory questions**

- What does good co-design look like?
- What are the best forms of engagement?
- Where can we improve?
- What needs to be different about strategy implementation?
- What does good co-implementation look and feel like?
- What has worked well in the past?

#### **Themes that emerged**

- Early and thorough engagement is required
- Must ensure there is a diversity of lived and living experience voices and perspectives
- Consideration needs to be given to the accessibility of engagement processes
- Sector collaboration to minimise consultation fatigue
  - Especially important for areas in which multiple engagements are running simultaneously between government and community/health-services
- Recognition of lived and living experience expertise through fair remuneration and regulatory mechanisms
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities for lived and living experience/peer workers – in both government/policy roles, as well as in clinical and community health and mental health promotion spaces.

#### **Discussion**

Participants were very keen to highlight the importance that early engagement with lived and living experience perspectives had on the development of government policy – both in terms of achieving “buy-in” as well as conceptualising and understanding the problem from a community level. It was important to participants that this felt meaningful and deliberate, and that participants were remunerated for their time.

Multiple participants expressed that accessibility had been a concern during past government engagements. While this has improved with the expanded use of online meetings, restrictions such as engaging only during working hours, or communicating only in English, was seen as a barrier to those with lived and living experience of suicide.

### *Co-evaluation and Co-monitoring*

#### **Exploratory questions**

- What does good co-monitoring and co-evaluation look and feel like?
- What are the key enablers?

- How do we include a diversity of voices?
- What are the opportunities within a whole-of-government approach?

### Themes that emerged

- Inclusion of a diversity of lived and living experience voices and perspectives is an absolute must
- Training and capacity building for individuals interested in being involved in the process and who bring a lived and living experience perspective
- Adequate and sustainable funding
- Diversity of data-sources/types
- Leadership from lived and living experience
- Cross-functional and inter-departmental monitoring
- Shared outcome definitions
- Deep and continual engagement with iterative evaluation mechanisms
- Evaluation methodologies to be community designed and owned

### Discussion

As with the discussion on co-design, participants were keen to express the requirement for government to broaden their scope of engagement and involve diverse members and sectors of the community in the process of co-evaluation and co-monitoring. Ensuring this deep and continual engagement was seen as fundamental to producing policies, programs and initiatives that remained relevant to contextual considerations and emerging trends.

Some lived and living experience participants highlighted the role that qualitative, or “narrative based data” could have in helping government and sector understand the needs of the communities, especially as it relates to suicide prevention and response. Given the difficulties in academic publishing, and the requirements for peer-reviewed data and literature, participants thought that government could play a role in creating evaluation models that better incorporated and valued lived experience expertise.

### *Future of Lived and Living Experience partnerships within government*

#### Exploratory questions

- How do we support lived experience partnerships across government?
- What new opportunities need to be created?
- How do we support lived experience leadership in policy development?
- How do we continue to build understanding that all have a role to play in suicide prevention and response?

#### Themes that emerged

- Remuneration scales determined by Commonwealth
- Continued accessibility developments

- Equal opportunity of funding – where groups or organisations are not privileged over others due to past experience
- Further capacity building for lived and living experience sector
- Visibility for lived and living experience sector
- Embedding lived and living experience partnerships through statutory mechanisms
- Shared learnings between jurisdictions and governments
- Establishing “living libraries” – accessible by the public
- Clarity of roles for lived and living experience involvement – and a regulatory framework that confirms their participation

## Discussion

All participants in attendance agreed that there was a requirement that government incorporate and meaningfully embed the expertise of people with lived and living experience of suicide into policies, programs and initiatives. However, they were also quick to note that the involvement of lived and living experience voices tended to be seen as an after-thought. In order to create a meaningful culture of collaboration and co-production, participants saw value in upskilling the sector, and believed that government had a role to play in “training the workforce” so that they could better contribute. They also saw value in expanded leadership roles for people with lived and living experience, as well as formal recognition and visibility in documentation and policies that they help author and produce.

## Next steps

SPARO is currently working towards the final draft of the new Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy, which is due for release in late 2023. The strategy’s first implementation plan and the accountability framework are also currently in development and are being drafted in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, including lived and living experience representatives on SPARO’s Suicide Prevention and Response Expert Advisory Committee.

The opinions and expertise shared by participants at the Lived Experience of Suicide Summit are informing the work of SPARO and, where appropriate, are being incorporated into relevant documentation. SPARO is also sharing these insights with other Victorian Government departments and agencies to support the incorporation of lived and living experience of suicide perspectives into their policies and programs.

SPARO would like to acknowledge the participation of all of those present at the workshop who generously shared their knowledge, expertise, stories and time. We truly value the important contributions of people with lived and living experience of suicide in what we do and feel privileged to be able to work collaboratively to deliver meaningful prevention and response policies, programs and initiatives.