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National Suicide Prevention Office
PO Box R1463
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Via email: [REDACTED]

Dear National Suicide Prevention Office

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) commends the National Suicide Prevention Office (NSPO) for the development of the comprehensive National Suicide Prevention Strategy (the Strategy). We know that prevention and early intervention are the key to a system successfully improving life outcomes and the QFCC welcomes the Strategy's effort to encompass a truly preventative approach.

The QFCC maintains the Queensland Child Death Register and works directly with researchers and key stakeholders to raise community awareness of risk factors for children and young people and develop prevention programs and policies, including addressing suicide risk. The QFCC also hosts the Child Death Review Board (the Board), which is responsible for conducting systemic reviews following the death of a child known to the child protection system in the twelve months prior to their death. These reviews identify opportunities to improve the child protection system and provides advice to government to improve system responses and prevent future deaths.

In my time as Principal Commissioner, I have seen the details of more than 1000 child deaths cross my desk and have read many of the case files in depth in my role as the Chair of the Board including, sadly, children who have died by suicide. The death of any child, for any reason, is incredibly tragic and leaves lasting impacts on families and communities. When the death is preventable, it is simply unfathomable.

In response to the recommendation of the Board's 2020–21 Annual Report¹ – to 'develop and deliver youth-friendly messages to raise awareness about mental health services for children and young people, and about their right and ability to access these' – the QFCC partnered with headspace to deliver a campaign about accessing services and the benefits of young people having a Medicare card. Recognising headspace's leadership in youth mental health, and existing rapport with young people, the QFCC funded a four-week campaign that reached one

¹ Child Death Review Board (2022). Annual Report 2021–22. [https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/Child Death Review Board Annual Report 2021-2022.pdf](https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/Child%20Death%20Review%20Board%20Annual%20Report%2021-2022.pdf)



million young people. Through this partnership, we were able to improve visibility, access and support to mental health services for young people, and advocate for ease of navigation for young people when engaging with critical health services.

In the five-year period from 2018–2019 to 2022–2023, suicide was the leading cause of death for Queensland children aged 10–14 years and 15–17 years, with the rate tripled for those children known to Child Safety.² For children involved with statutory systems, these responses were particularly troubling given the responsibility of the State to provide care and assistance to children experiencing significant vulnerabilities. Almost one-in-four Queensland young people living in out-of-home care rated their mental health as poor or very poor, and 27 per cent of a sample of young people under youth justice supervision reported having a mental health disorder.^{3,4} **The QFCC commends the recognition of young people as a cohort disproportionately impacted by suicide and urges the Strategy to keep those experiencing intersecting vulnerabilities front of mind.**

In 2023, the QFCC conducted a review of lessons learned from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children known to the child protection system who had died.⁵ Thirteen of these children died by suicide. Our review found that all school-aged children who died by suicide had disengaged from education and learning; children were either totally absent from school or were attending for administrative supports only. Two-thirds of these children died by suicide within 12 months of disengaging from school. **The QFCC calls for the Strategy to consider how education providers can be better equipped to recognise the early warning signs of suicide risk, particularly when children are first at-risk of school disengagement.**

At our inaugural Youth Summit in April this year, young Queenslanders from across the state were invited to speak directly to government decision-makers and the wider sector about their experiences and the things that mattered most to them. Grace, a QFCC Youth Advocate, and mental health and suicide lived experience advocate, spoke of the need for a holistic, community-based approach for people experiencing suicidal distress that meets the needs and expectations of the community.⁶ She also raised concerns that very little progress has been made over many years. **The QFCC hopes that the Prevention – Support – Critical Enablers model proposed by this Strategy will go a long way to addressing these concerns.**

Collective reach is vital to the success of this Strategy and will require capacity building of existing services, including non-government organisations and Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, not creating new entities. In our work, we support, connect

² QFCC (2024). Annual Report: Deaths of children and young people Queensland 2022-23.

https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/QFCC_Report_Child_Deaths_2022-23_Accessible2.pdf

³ QFCC (2024) Growing Up in Queensland: A story of child and family wellbeing. https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/9022_QFCC_Growing_Up_in_Queensland_WCAG_reading_order_01_COMPRESSED.pdf

⁴ QFCC (2023). Queensland Child Rights Report 2023. https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/QFCC_Child_Rights_Report_2023_%281%29.pdf

⁵ QFCC (2023). Lessons from the life-story timelines of 30 Queensland children who have died: A small sample review of commonalities in child and family trajectories considered at the Child Death Review Board. https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/Lessons_from_the_life-story_timelines_of_30_Queensland_children_who_have_died.pdf

⁶ Grace (2024). Beyond Band-Aid solutions: Challenging the status quo. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/grace>



and collaborate with organisations to build upon trusted foundations to best support the Queensland community. We note that the Strategy calls for nationally consistent wraparound services to support children and young people impacted by adversity. Delivery of such an approach would rely on the coordination of resources across various federal and state government portfolios which serve diverse community, geographical locations and socioeconomic climates. **The QFCC recognises the need for consistency and recommends the Strategy consider how place-based strategies will be incorporated across the diverse communities that exist within Australia.**

In her Youth Summit speech, QFCC Youth Advocate Grace spoke about the need to genuinely embed lived experiences at all levels of the mental health system, a system truly informed by the needs of its consumers.⁷ We applaud the extensive consultation that has taken place in development of the Strategy, particularly to see that young people, including those with lived and living experience, have contributed to the actions and intent of the Strategy. It will be vital to continue these consultations throughout the life of this Strategy, to ensure that the needs of consumers, particularly those with lived and living experience, are met. A robust and consumer-informed evaluation model will be needed to measure and track the systematic implementation of this Strategy and ensure that state and federal portfolios are playing their part. The Strategy will need to flex and adapt throughout its lifecycle, to cater for the needs of the evolving Australian community.

The 'suicide prevention in all policies' approach will require significant capacity building, education and resourcing across multiple sectors, at multiple levels. We are hopeful of what the Strategy can deliver, and the lives it can save. We commend its boldness, its breadth, and its focus on prevention and look forward to monitoring its progress over the years to come.

If you have any queries in relation to this matter, please don't hesitate to contact me directly on [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Luke Twyford
Principal Commissioner
Queensland Family and Child Commission

28 October 2024

⁷ Grace (2024). Beyond Band-Aid solutions: Challenging the status quo. <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/grace>

