

Development of the National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework

An overview

September 2024



Australian Government



**National
Suicide
Prevention
Office**

Acknowledgement of Country

The National Suicide Prevention Office (NSPO) acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present, and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of country throughout Australia. We acknowledge their connection to land, sea and community and the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recognition of Lived Experience

The NSPO recognises the individual and collective contributions of those with a lived and living experience of suicide. People who have survived suicide attempts, cared for a person in suicidal crisis or have lost a loved one to suicide demonstrate tremendous generosity through providing their expertise and insights. Every person's journey is unique and a valued contribution to Australia's commitment to suicide prevention system reform.

Recognition of Contributions

The NSPO is working closely with stakeholders on the development of the National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework. This includes members of the Lived Experience Partnership Group, NSPO Advisory Board, Jurisdictional Collaborative Forum and many Australian and international academics, service providers, people with lived and living experience and members of the general public. We would like to thank all of those who gave so generously of their time and expertise.

Introduction

In Australia, measuring progress in suicide prevention is currently focused on tracking trends in population-wide suicide rates and monitoring the implementation of suicide prevention activities (such as services, policies, or programs). While important, monitoring changes in the rates of suicide and suicide attempts does not provide any insight into how factors that are known to contribute to suicide (such as health, mental health and socio-economic circumstances) are influencing those rates and whether progress is being made in reducing their impact. This hinders efforts to proactively target and address the upstream factors that lead to suicidal distress and suicide. Additionally, simply monitoring the implementation of suicide prevention activities does not indicate whether the supports being delivered are effective and are actually influencing rates of suicidal distress, deaths and attempts. This limits the ability of governments to understand what is working and to make informed policy and funding decisions to improve prevention efforts.

To effectively measure progress in suicide prevention, it is necessary to monitor whether individuals and communities are experiencing improvements in the health, mental health and socio-economic outcomes that are important in preventing suicidal distress in the first place. In addition, it is necessary to understand the outcomes that people who experience suicidal thoughts and behaviours experience from accessing different support services, and how these influence rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviours. Monitoring progress in this way would provide a clearer understanding of what is working and what is not, inform more proactive and timely improvements in approaches, and enable better decisions about resource allocation to maximise impact.

For these reasons, the Final Advice of the National Suicide Prevention Adviser recommended that the National Suicide Prevention Office (NSPO) develop a National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework.

Outcomes are clear and unambiguous statements that define what long-term success looks like for people and communities. An outcomes framework focuses effort on the factors that matter now and into the future, sets a unified direction for increased collaboration, and enables meaningful measurement of progress to monitor whether efforts remain on track or require adjustment (see Figure. 1). An outcomes framework aims to drive collective effort from diverse stakeholders towards a common goal.

The National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework (Outcomes Framework) will draw on qualitative and quantitative data to identify and measure progress against outcomes that we know contribute to the emergence of suicidal distress (such as personal safety, housing security, employment, and social connection); the accessibility and effectiveness of supports for people who do experience suicidal distress; and the key system reforms required to enable these improvements. It will also increase our understanding of the impact that activities and broader external factors (like changes in global socio-economic circumstances) have on those outcomes. It is a key mechanism for tracking progress towards achieving best-practice in suicide prevention in Australia.

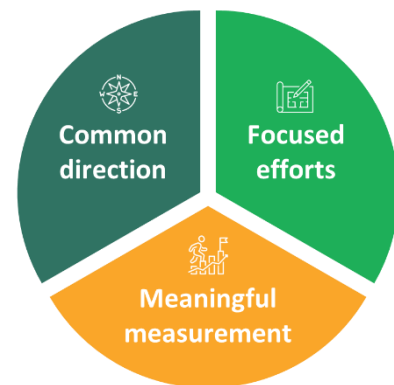


Figure 1: The importance of having an Outcomes Framework

In doing so, the Outcomes Framework will ultimately contribute to reducing suicidal distress and suicides by:

- enabling meaningful and transparent reporting of progress to drive collective accountability,
- increasing understanding of the effectiveness of different suicide prevention efforts, and
- informing planning and policy decisions to improve impact.

Operationalising such an approach will require consideration of how existing health, social, economic, and other data can be used to its greatest potential, as well as efforts to link relevant data to improve insights, and address gaps in what we are measuring through new or improved data gathering.

This paper sets out the NSPO's intended approach to the development of the National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework. It describes the principles, components, utility and planned development and release timeframes.

“Suicide is a complex issue that affects nearly everyone, directly or indirectly.

To make real progress in suicide prevention in Australia, we must move towards focusing on more than the lives sadly lost and address the broader issues that cause distress.

It is crucial to understand the diverse attitudes and needs of different communities, as social issues intersect and impact suicide prevention and mental health.

Long-term success should foster a compassionate, accessible culture with tailored support for people and communities.

An Outcomes Framework will guide efforts to measure what works for each group, prioritising investment in empowering and effective community led solutions.”

Benjamin Brien, Lived Experience Partnership Group member

Design Principles

The following design principles have been identified as critical to guiding the development of the Outcomes Framework to ensure it can achieve its intended purpose.

1 - Reflect current evidence and approach

The Outcomes Framework will align with the direction of national efforts as set out in the draft Advice on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (the Strategy).

The Strategy draws on extensive research and significant consultation to ensure it aligns with the latest evidence, and what matters to communities.

The Strategy operationalises our maturing understanding of suicide to drive an approach that prevents the emergence of suicidal distress in the first place. It does so by outlining evidence-based actions to address the social determinants of suicide (prevention), pursue a more holistic approach to support for people who do experience suicidal distress (support), and establish the system structures and processes required to provide a foundation for effective suicide prevention efforts going forward (critical enablers), as depicted in Figure 2.

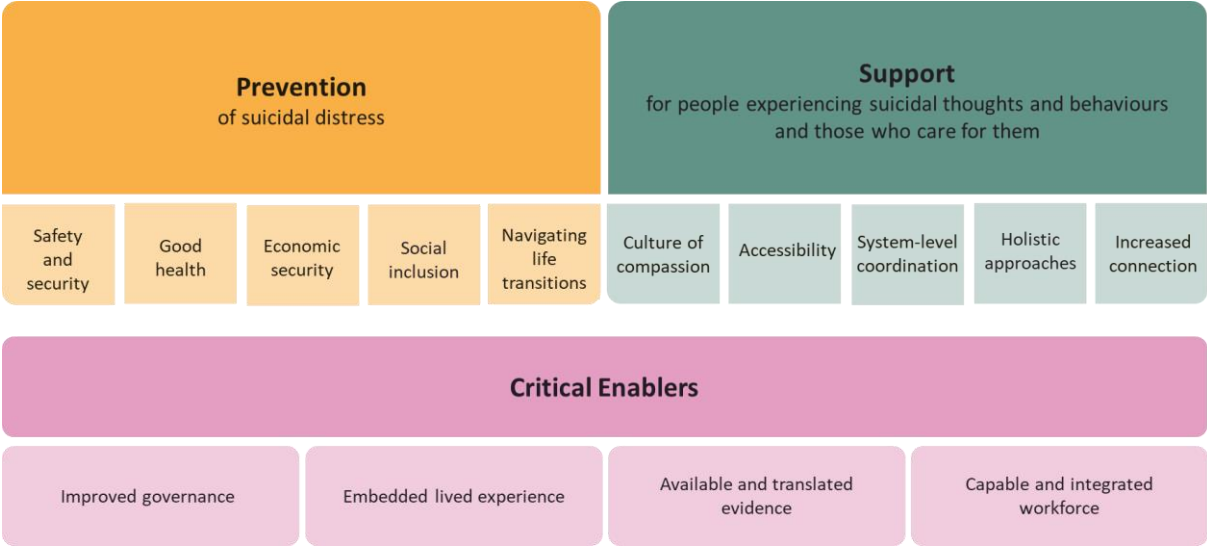


Figure 2: The National Suicide Prevention Strategy Model

The model provides the scope within which outcomes will be developed.

2 – Guided by lived and living experience

Insights from people with a lived and living experience of suicide are critical to ensure that:

- the Framework is built around the outcomes that matter,
- the information gained from tracking progress is accurately interpreted, and
- the insights are communicated in a way that is accessible and informs continued improvements in suicide prevention.

3 - Focus on outcomes over activities

Most current monitoring efforts in suicide prevention concentrate on activities, such as the implementation of programs and services, and the number of individuals they reach. While important, this approach leaves a gap in understanding whether these activities are achieving the desired outcomes. The Outcomes Framework will focus on monitoring progress against outcomes to address this gap. It will provide critical information to improve our understanding of the impacts of different types of activities and help inform the allocation of resources in a way that maximises impact.

4 – Measure what matters, not just what is available

The Outcomes Framework must clearly identify the outcomes by which progress in suicide prevention can be most meaningfully measured. It is essential to use a mixed methods approach, incorporating both robust qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. This will enhance the frameworks comprehensiveness and the meaningfulness of reporting that is generated.

In addition to a mixed methods approach, data analysis should not be limited by what data is currently available. Given current limitations in data collection, initial reporting will have gaps. This will require consideration of the minimum viable product to ensure initial reporting is useful, and practical data improvement plans with clear priorities so that gaps in data can be addressed over time.

5 – Comprehensive and coherent

There are many factors that are relevant to suicide prevention that could be measured in the Outcomes Framework. Including too many measures will result in a Framework which is too complex to inform coherent conclusions. Conversely, including too few measures will weaken the ability of the Outcomes Framework to provide a comprehensive understanding of the progress being made.

The Outcomes Framework should strive for a balance between being comprehensive, while also being coherent.

6 – Provide clear insights to drive action

The value of the Outcomes Framework lies in its ability to increase understanding of progress in suicide prevention and drive improved action. It must therefore utilise a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide clear insights and communicate them to a range of audiences in a way that meaningfully informs their efforts.

7 – Complement other sources of suicide prevention knowledge

There are many sources of evidence in the suicide prevention landscape, such as research about best practice, evaluations of programs, and monitoring of suicide trends. Each of these types of evidence are useful by themselves and vital to understanding the bigger picture of suicide prevention in Australia.

The Outcomes Framework is intended to complement rather than duplicate these existing forms of evidence and insights.

The Outcomes Framework will leverage, complement, and build on related work that contributes to our understanding of suicide prevention, including:

- Relevant Australian Government reporting on related factors such as the Measuring What Matters framework, which tracks broader progress towards improved wellbeing, focused on a range of outcome measures for socioeconomic factors, or the Report on Government Services, which examines the equity, effectiveness and efficiency of government services.
- Mental health reporting, such as the National Mental Health Commission's National Report Card.
- Surveillance of suicide trends provided by the Suicide and Self-Harm Monitoring System.
- Activity based progress reporting, such as on the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement and bilateral agreements between states and territories and the Commonwealth.
- Jurisdictional suicide prevention frameworks and reporting on a range of population-wide initiatives, such as housing, disability, incarceration, and others.

- Evaluations of individual services and programs through published research or initiatives like the Suicide Prevention Accreditation Program.

Components

The National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework (Outcomes Framework) will provide a collective approach to the reduction of suicidal distress and suicide in Australia by outlining the key priority outcomes related to suicide prevention, what is required to achieve these outcomes, and how to measure whether progress against these is being made. To effectively do this the framework will comprise of several key components, including:

- An **Outcomes Map** that will translate the goals of reducing suicidal distress and suicides into a quantifiable set of outcomes, indicators, and measures. It will explain the underlying logic that clarifies the evidence and insights we have about the relationship between these elements, and it will identify gaps in what we can currently measure.
- A **Data Improvement Plan** that will identify priority gaps to be addressed, document related data gaps, and propose mechanisms for gathering the required data. This may include developing new data, or better sharing or linkage of existing data sets. This plan will enable iterative improvements to the Outcomes Framework over time as new or improved data is made available over time.
- A **Monitoring and Reporting Plan** that will define the purpose, scope, and responsibilities for reporting against the Outcomes Framework, as well as how it will be evaluated. It will detail how to best meet the needs of intended audiences through public and audience-specific reporting, with the aim of maximising the impact the Outcomes Framework has in driving improved suicide prevention efforts. In addition to audience specific reporting, the monitoring and reporting plan will draw on expert stakeholder insight to explore and identify the need for supporting resources and tools. These tools can be leveraged by government to support them in implementing programs and policy aligned to the outcomes framework or in identifying gaps.

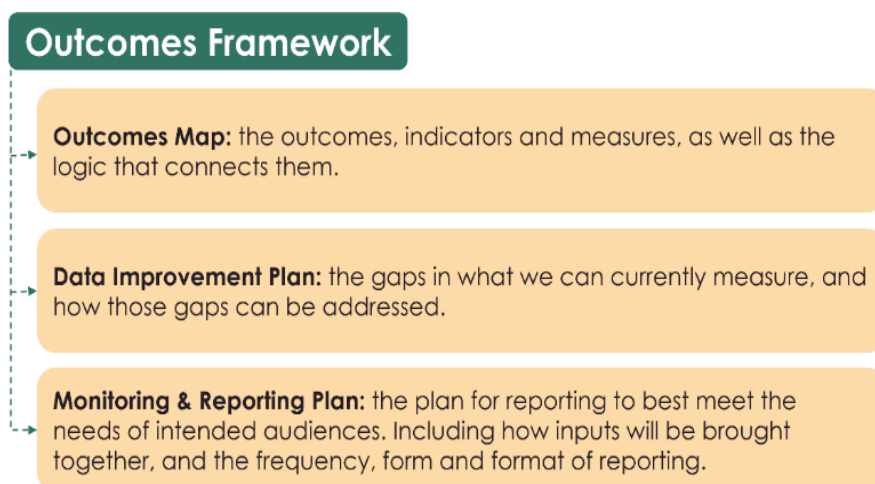


Figure 3: Components of the Outcomes Framework

Intended users of the Outcomes Framework

The Outcomes Framework is intended to be used by:

- **All levels of government** to help gauge the impact of their activities, improve coordination, guide investment towards activities that are most impactful, and track progress against outcomes;
- **The suicide prevention sector** to link activities to population wide outcomes and to utilise data in their own planning and evaluation of suicide prevention programs and services;
- **Researchers** to identify areas of suicide prevention where evidence needs to be strengthened;
- **Data custodians** to better understand what data is needed, identify gaps in data collection and integration, and to guide prioritisation of efforts to address these gaps; and
- **Communities and workforces** with an interest in suicide prevention to deepen their understanding of the suicide prevention system, and of the ways in which they can contribute to suicide prevention efforts.

Development

The development of the Outcomes Framework will occur through close collaboration with key stakeholders, and broad consultation.

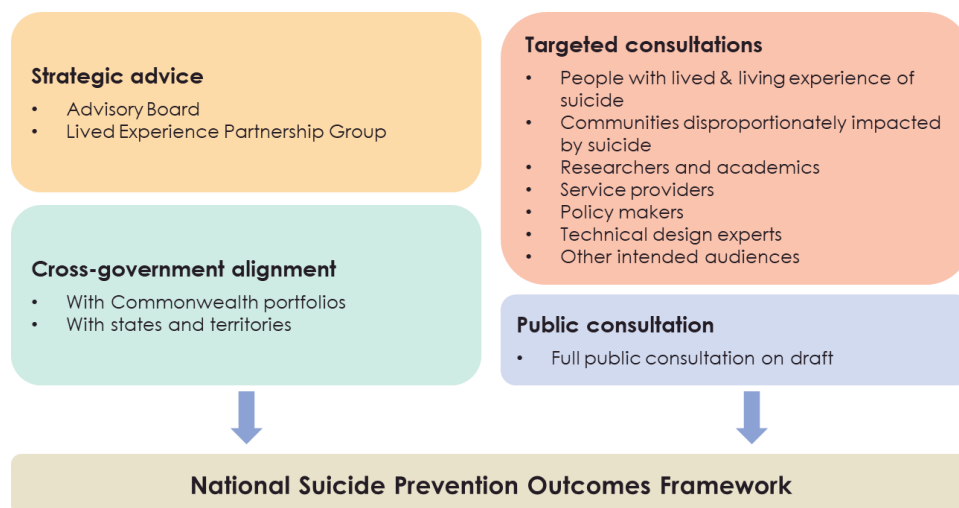


Figure 4: Development inputs

The NSPO's Advisory Board and Lived Experience Partnership Group will provide strategic advice to guide the development of the Outcomes Framework.

Throughout development of the Outcomes Framework, the NSPO will engage with Commonwealth departments and agencies, as well as state and territory governments, to draw input into the development process and ensure an aligned approach across portfolios and jurisdictions.

People with lived and living experience of suicide and groups disproportionately affected by suicide will be at the heart of consultations on the Outcomes Framework. The NSPO will work with the Lived Experience Partnership Group throughout the design process to develop broader consultation efforts, including with communities disproportionately impacted by suicide.

The NSPO will seek input from researchers, academics, policy makers, suicide prevention collectives, service providers and others to ensure the Outcomes Framework is reflective of the latest evidence

and is of value to these key audiences. In addition to these contributions the NSPO will, as required, engage specific technical expertise such as data and policy experts to ensure the framework is practicable while adhering to its principles.

Incorporating First Nations perspectives will be critical in developing an Outcomes Framework that reflects meaningful outcomes across the population. This will be accomplished through a focus on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and expertise through consultation processes. Additionally, the NSPO will work closely with Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia throughout the development process to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is clearly reflected.

Anticipated Development Timeline

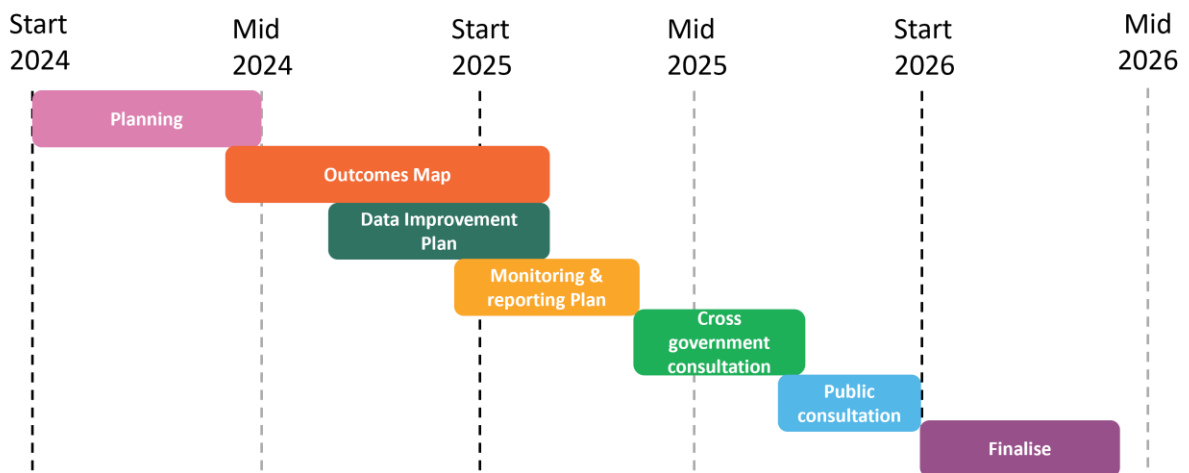


Figure 5: Proposed timeline for the development of the Outcomes Framework.

The NSPO is aiming to have the draft Outcomes Framework ready for public consultation by early 2026, with the final version presented to government for release and implementation by mid-2026.