

Media Release
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NEW POSITION PIECE REVEALS THE CONCERNING 'SILENT CHALLENGE' OF OLDER MEN IN AUSTRALIA

A newly published position piece in *The Conversation* reveals how men over 85 have the highest suicide rates of any other age group in Australia. The paper represents the culmination of a partnership between the Lifeline Research Foundation and UNSW Ageing Futures Institute.

The position piece reveals that in the latest national data from 2020, men over 85 had the highest age-specific suicide rate at 36.2 deaths per 100,000. This has increased from 32.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2019. For women in the same age bracket, this rate was much lower at 6.2 deaths per 100,000.

Lead author, Dr Adrienne Withall of the UNSW Ageing Futures Institute and School of Population Health, explained that these statistics have gone relatively unnoticed, either in public discourse or policy directives.

“While younger men have the highest suicide risk when looking at the total number of suicides, when we even the playing field and look at age-standardised rates, it shows that the suicide rate is highest in men aged 85 years and older,” said Dr Adrienne Withall.

The position piece details how there are many factors which can contribute to suicide risk, including frailty, chronic pain, bereavement and financial troubles.

Dr Withall said that the silent challenge amongst men aged 85 and above is a combination of psychological and existential distress.

“Emerging research has shown that older men can feel they are ‘no longer needed’ and perceive themselves as ‘burdensome’ to family and community – these beliefs can often overlap with major life transitions, such as retirement, loss of independence or moving to residential care.

“It is important that we highlight the factors unique to older men and we must work together to design solutions that meet their needs.”

Dr Anna Brooks, National Manager of the Lifeline Research Foundation, said that it was important to consider this cohort as a priority population for suicide prevention.

“The purpose of this position piece is to not only drive the development of more suitable suicide prevention programs and services for this group, but also to examine broader interactions between ageing, isolation and loneliness,” said Dr Brooks.

If you, or someone you know, are feeling overwhelmed, we encourage you to connect with Lifeline in the way you feel most comfortable.

You can phone Lifeline to speak to a Crisis Supporter on **13 11 14** (24 hours/7 days), text 0477 131 114 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or chat to Lifeline online at www.lifeline.org.au (24/7).

For further information or comment, contact media@lifeline.org.au or 0408 407 376.

BACKGROUND

Lifeline Research Foundation

The Lifeline Research Foundation creates new knowledge, as well as engaging in public education, awareness building and advocacy in relation to suicide prevention.

All the Foundation's projects receive input from academic partners and Lifeline's Lived Experience Advisory Group. You can find out more at

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/about/our-research/>

UNSW Ageing Futures Institute

The UNSW Ageing Futures Institute is an umbrella organisation for ageing research that encompasses several leading institutes, centres, facilities and programs. The Institute drives high quality interdisciplinary research and research translation to enable optimal ageing for all. Find out more at research.unsw.edu.au/ageingfutures