Evaluation supports StandBy impact on community wellbeing

A recent economic evaluation of the national bereavement program has revealed the StandBy Response Service measurably improves the health and wellbeing of people bereaved by suicide, which in turn reduces the economic burden on the Australian health system.

The StandBy Response Service is a community-based postvention program that provides a 24-hour coordinated crisis response to assist people bereaved by suicide. It is delivered in nine sites across Australia through partnerships with locally based community organisations. StandBy is run by Lifeline Hobart in Southern Tasmania and managed nationally by United Synergies, a not-for-profit organisation based in Queensland which has been operating the StandBy Response Service on the Sunshine Coast since 2002.

The Science of Knowing and Griffith University were commissioned by United Synergies and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing to undertake an economic evaluation of StandBy, to identify the costs and benefits of operating the program and to determine its overall cost effectiveness.

StandBy National Manager Libby Wherrett said the results overwhelmingly confirmed StandBy was a cost-effective way to support people bereaved by suicide and actually provided a direct cost saving to society of approximately a $800 per person per year net return – taking into consideration the costs of operating the program.

"The program also has several other important benefits including improved quality of life, improved physical and mental health, increased community capacity and awareness and, perhaps most importantly, a potential reduction in the number of future suicides," Ms Wherrett said.

"Suicide is a major cause of mortality in Australia, with approximately 2,000 deaths across the country each year. For every death through suicide, there are many people who are significantly affected, including immediate and extended family members, close friends, colleagues and communities. This amounts to at least tens of thousands of people who are bereaved by suicide each year.

"As well as the potential negative emotional and psychological outcomes for individuals and communities that may stem from suicide and suicide bereavement, there are also large economic costs, due to reduced quality of life, lost productivity and increased health care usage. Research shows that there is also an increased risk of suicidality amongst people bereaved by suicide.

"This program really is making a significant difference to how we as a community respond and recover from a suicide tragedy," Ms Wherrett said.
Christopher John, CEO of Lifeline Hobart says “In Southern Tasmania we have supported approximately 200 people over the past few years through StandBy. Beyond the economic impacts the emotional support of knowing help is available has meant a great deal to those affected in such a dramatic way through the loss of someone they love to suicide.”

“As a community we are recognising that people experiencing the loss of someone to suicide are impacted significantly and this affects all areas of their lives, often for years after the initial event. StandBy shows us that effective and timely support can minimise this impact both emotionally and economically”.

“This is the first known research investigating the cost effectiveness of a suicide postvention service and one of only a few economic evaluations of bereavement interventions generally. The results support the provision of postvention care for people bereaved by suicide, and specifically, the StandBy Response Service.”

The Service is currently offered in the following locations: Sunshine and Coolum Coasts, Brisbane, Far North Queensland, Canberra, North/North West Tasmania, Southern Tasmania, Pilbara, East Kimberley and West Kimberley, Western Australia.

A presentation of this report will be made at Lifeline Hobart, 5 Battery Square, Battery Point, today at 3pm.

Libby and Christopher will be available for interview from 12noon today.

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For further information contact:

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