

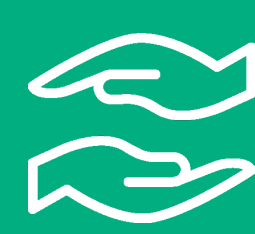
Compassionate connections: Peer support for family and friends supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress

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Key recommendations



- Peer support options for family and friends should be embedded alongside existing services.
- Peer support options for family and friends should be flexible, accessible and not time-limited.
- Lived and living experience should be incorporated in the design, development and implementation of peer support options.

Project background

Factors contributing to suicide are complex and diverse, differing from person to person. Nonetheless, it is recognised that suicidal distress, which includes thoughts and attempts, is the primary precursor to suicide. Preventing suicide requires collective action, with growing evidence highlighting the crucial role of family and friends in supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress or mental health concerns. However, while often fulfilling, this supportive role may come with various physical, psychological, financial and social challenges.

In 2023, Everymind conducted a research initiative through its *Minds Together* program to provide insights, and inform and guide local services in the Hunter region towards integrating evidence-based peer support interventions into existing care models for family and friends supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress. The research project was sponsored by the Hunter Institute of Medical Research (HMRI) Healthy Minds program.

Methods and results

This project focused on three key components.

Roses in the Ocean workshop discussion

Views on peer support options for family and friends providing support for someone experiencing suicidal distress shared by 52 people who attended an Everymind facilitated workshop at the Roses in the Ocean Lived Experience of Suicide Summit in May 2023.

- ✓ Fifty-two delegates in attendance agreed on the value of peer support and provided advice on its implementation and efficacy.

Systematic literature review

A systematic review (currently underway) of the literature detailing the efficacy of peer support for family and friends of people experiencing suicidal distress and mental health concerns.

- ✓ Preliminary findings have identified 10 articles exploring the effectiveness of peer support for family and friends supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress and mental health concerns.

Hunter region consultations

Perspectives on peer support from community members and service providers in the Hunter region with lived and living experience of supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress.

Consultations highlighted:

- ✓ The importance of embedding people with lived experience of supporting someone experiencing suicidal distress or mental health concerns in services to enhance connections for family and friends
- ✓ That peer support for family and friends has the potential to alleviate challenges experienced by those in a support role
- ✓ The need for flexible and accessible peer support options available during and outside of business hours.

Conclusion

The project uncovered a strong need for increased peer support options for family and friends supporting individuals experiencing suicidal distress. Interviewees from the Hunter region highlighted persisting challenges stemming from stigma and the complexities of navigating the mental health service system, which peer support options could help alleviate.

The discussions emphasised the importance of flexible support options with extended operating hours, recognising the time and resource limitations often faced by those in support roles and the frequent need for assistance outside typical business hours.

