

Community Coalition on Corrections

C/- ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)

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Leading authority addressing forum on understanding and preventing prison Suicide and Self-harm

“The ACT needs to seize the opportunity to develop suitable approaches and programs in its new prison to deal with the high risk of suicide among prisoners,” said Professor James Ogloff, Director of Psychological Services at Victoria’s Thomas Embling Hospital and Director of the Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science at Monash University.

“Despite reductions in the number of completed suicides in custody in Australia over the past decade, the suicide rate among prisoners still exceeds that in the general population by up to 7.5 times.”

Professor Ogloff is speaking at a forum on Tuesday 2nd December at the Legislative Assembly Reception Room on the vital question of suicide and self-harm among prisoners.

The ACT Community Coalition on Corrections is organizing the forum in conjunction with its member, VYNE @ OZHELP Foundation, which is involved in suicide prevention.

Professor Ogloff stressed that only by understanding why prisoners are so vulnerable to suicide and self-harm can we move to prevention.

“I believe that a public health-like approach must be taken to continue to manage and reduce suicide levels similarly to how we reduce risk of other illnesses.”

He said that this approach requires humane management of offenders involving comprehensive health and mental health screening and care and providing an environment that helps reduce the general risk factors for suicide in prisons. Thus there needs to be:

- screening, triage, monitoring, treatment, and support;
- presence of health and mental health professionals in appropriate numbers;
- creating a prison environment that instils hope by measures such as providing access to families and other supports and engages people in meaningful activities.

Irmgard Reid of VYNE @ OZHELP recalled that the Corrections Coalition’s own study, *“Healthy or Harmful? Mental Health and the Operational Regime of the New ACT Prison”*, also identified the importance of environment factors in reducing suicide and self-harm.

She added that it is not just a question of preventing suicide in prison but of reducing a high rate of suicide after people leave. She said that the initial adjustment period after release is a time of extreme vulnerability, particularly for men.

Forum location & time: Tuesday 2nd December 12.30 – 1:30 pm in the Reception Room of the ACT Legislative Assembly, Civic Square, London Circuit, Canberra City.

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