

## Postvention Community Working Group (PCWG) General Practice Guidelines

(v3.01 2015)

A suicide Postvention Community Working Group (PCWG) is formed by a community in response to concerns about suicide(s) or other suicidal behaviour within its population.

- The primary task of a PCWG is to develop a cohesive set of effective, coordinated and collaborative community suicide postvention activities and to implement these activities in a safe, culturally appropriate and timely manner.
- One of the most important activities of community suicide postvention is to ensure that appropriate, sufficient and timely supports and services are available to impacted family, whānau, friends and other vulnerable community members to prevent further suicides and other suicidal behaviour.
- The Ministry of Health funded Community Postvention Response Service (CPRS) can provide support, expertise and clinical guidance to a PCWG in the development and implementation of its community's suicide postvention activities.

### Who makes up a Postvention Community Working Group?

- A PCWG is typically comprised of key community stakeholders and leaders with a contribution to make to suicide postvention and prevention for that community. For example, those who represent:
  - Whānau, hapu, iwi,
  - Local non-governmental organizations providing health and social services,
  - Victim Support,
  - Primary Health Organisations,
  - Agencies such as the New Zealand Police, District Health Boards (DHBs), Ministry of Social Development, Oranga Tamariki, Ministry of Education.
- Ideally all sectors of the community are represented on a PCWG; this ensures that there is a coordinated and collaborative community postvention response.
- Each organisation determines whether the individual they nominate to participate in the PCWG is at the managerial or front-line level. Any participant nominated must be able to commit time and have the necessary support from their management to attend meetings and participate in any of their designated PCWG tasks.

### What are the functions of a Postvention Community Working Group?

- A PCWG develops and implements its community's suicide postvention activities based on the specific needs of its unique community.
- A PCWG will determine and prioritise key postvention activities, establish timelines for accomplishing these, and determine what resources, information and training is needed to accomplish them.

- It is best practise for a PCWG to document accurately all actions it undertakes so that there is a reliable record of the PCWG's postvention planning and implementation.

### What are the tasks of a Postvention Community Working Group?

The specific tasks of a PCWG will depend on a range of factors but especially on the level of suicidal behaviour present in a community. PCWG tasks will also depend on a community's resources, and the type of activities designed to meet a community's suicide postvention needs. In all communities, shock, anxiety and distress are common and understandable. An initial priority is to achieve the delicate balance between acknowledging that grief in the community is normal and understandable, and taking steps to contain the situation and de-escalate any extreme anxiety or distress in the community which might contribute to suicide contagion and impede the postvention process. The following tasks are examples of how this might be achieved.

- Gather accurate details about the suspected suicide(s) and suicidal behaviour in the community. Accurate sources of this information include the NZ Police, Victim Support, DHB and CPRS. It is useful and legitimate for a PCWG to gather the following details:
  - Name(s) of the deceased or individuals engaging in suicidal behaviour.
  - Date(s) and location(s) of the death(s) and other suicidal behaviour.
  - Age(s) and gender(s) of the deceased and those engaging in suicidal behaviour.
  - Means used to suicide or engage in other suicidal behaviour.
  - The circumstances surrounding the suspected suicide(s) (e.g., triggering event(s), substance use involvement, suicide note(s), witnesses, any other relevant details).
- Consider activities which might highlight to the community the importance of controlling access to means of suicide and suicidal behaviour being used (e.g., methods of self-asphyxiation, fire arms, medications or specific locations like cliffs, bridges or hanging sites).
- Assign specific suicide postvention roles and responsibilities to various PCWG members including (but not limited to):
  - A **media spokesperson** who will prepare information for the media as required and be the sole individual to whom all media enquiries are directed. It is recommended that the PCWG consider using one of the member organisations (e.g. DHB) existing media spokespeople and refer all enquiries to that office.
  - A **family liaison person** whose role it is to ensure bereaved whanau/family (or their nominated support people) are aware of the community response and can have input (e.g., regarding memorials or the removal of means such as a tree). The family liaison person may also assist the family with their responses to media enquiries.
  - A **social media liaison person** who coordinates monitoring of social networking sites for signs of contagion and identification of vulnerable individuals (see CP).
  - A **suicide risk screening coordinator** who is responsible for recording information on identified individuals of concern from amongst the impacted community and keeping securely the community's Vulnerable Persons Register (See CPRS PCWG Vulnerable Persons Register Template). This ensures that comprehensive mapping of vulnerable persons is undertaken, appropriate follow-up of these individuals is actioned and noted, and that duplication of actions is avoided.

Other tasks which might be undertaken by a Postvention Community Working Group are to:

- Ensure the accuracy of information about recent suspected suicide(s) or suicidal behaviour being released to the community.

- Engage community leaders in the creation of a community event to acknowledge and validate the losses a community has experienced (candlelight vigil for example) such that particularly young people don't feel the need to carry out unsupervised or secretive memorials and to avoid prolonged or unsafe memorialising which can lead to contagion.
- Coordinate a safe community meeting / hui about the recent suspected suicide(s) and suicidal behaviour in the community, if it is considered that such an activity is necessary and would be beneficial to the community (See CPRS PCWG Guidelines for Community Meetings).
- Compile, distribute and promote throughout the community a comprehensive list of contact details and hours of availability for local health and mental health supports and services, especially those available to assist with suicide risk screening, assessment and treatment.
- Monitor and support the wellbeing and safety of PCWG individual members (See CPRS PCWG Self-Care and Safety).
- Plan for ongoing sustainable postvention activities by the community after active CPRS involvement ends. Once acute suicide risks are sufficiently contained and managed, the focus of a PCWG often shifts to community development where community suicide risk factors, training or resource gaps are identified. More detailed suicide prevention and postvention plans may be developed to remedy these via the PCWG or from wider community, regional or national services (see also the Suicide Prevention Toolkit and Plan Template for DHBs – links below).

#### **What can CPRS offer to a Postvention Community Working Group?**

- CPRS is available for consultation for any PCWG where there is any concern about a possible suicide cluster or suicide contagion. Where there is high risk of additional suicidal behaviours for a community experiencing a suicide cluster or suicide contagion, CPRS staff are also available for onsite consultation and are able to visit the impacted community for face-to-face meetings to assist with postvention planning.
- CPRS can help guide PCWG members' postvention planning and activities, and draw attention to legal constraints within which a PCWG must operate.
- CPRS can provide support, training as necessary, consultation and advice about all aspects of suicide postvention.
- CPRS can assist the PCWG in determining suicide postvention roles and responsibilities. CPRS will not take any official role within a PCWG, acting in an advisory capacity only. As CPRS works from a community development model, and has a finite involvement with any community, the PCWG is best led and facilitated by a community member.
- CPRS is available for follow-up support to a PCWG for up to four months following the last death in the community associated with the cluster or contagion (but will remain engaged and supporting a community if there are concerns about suicide risk remaining). This support will most likely be phone based but this is dependent on the level of ongoing suicide risk in the community which in some instances will warrant further face to face

meetings. Communities who have experienced a previous suicide cluster carry long term risk for the occurrence of another cluster or the re-emergence of the original cluster (an echo cluster), and hence ongoing suicide postvention activities will be needed by the PCWG and these can be guided and supported by CPRS.

- CPRS provides a PCWG with recommendations and advice about suicide clusters, suicide contagion and suicide postvention. It is for the PCWG to determine what, if any, of the recommendations and advice provided by CPRS are adopted.

#### Links:

- View the Suicide Prevention Toolkit for DHBs at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/suicide-prevention-toolkit-district-health-boards>
- View the Suicide Prevention and postvention plan template for DHBs at: <http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/suicide-prevention-and-postvention-plan.docx>
- Preventing and responding to suicide: Resource kit for schools available at: <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/MOE-Suicide-Prevention-Publication-Updated-2019.pdf>
- Reporting Suicide: A resource for the media available at: <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/reporting-suicide-resource-media>
- Waka Hourua (Te Rau Matatini & Le Va) <http://wakahourua.co.nz/resources>
- Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand <http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/>
- [www.casa.org.nz](http://www.casa.org.nz)

#### See also:

- CPRS PCWG Privacy Guidelines
- CPRS PCWG Guidelines for Keeping a Vulnerable Person Register
- CPRS PCWG Vulnerable Persons Register Template
- CPRS Circles of Vulnerability Model
- CPRS PCWG Guidelines for Open Invitation Suicide Postvention Community Meetings
- CPRS PCWG Guidelines for Media Liaison
- CPRS PCWG Guidelines for Family Liaison
- CPRS PCWG Self-Care and Safety