



WA Country Health Service
Government of Western Australia
Wheatbelt region

Wheatbelt Public Health Unit

*Nurturing Positive and Protective
Mental Health in Addressing Suicide
Prevention in the Wheatbelt*

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Background/Introduction

- The Coastal and Wheatbelt Public Health Unit was established in 1995
- A Coordinator position of Mental Health Promotion (MHP) was established soon after and was the first dedicated position for MHP in WA.
- One aspect of the role involves the improvement and protection of mental health with a focus on suicide prevention.

Aim/Objective

- To demonstrate the history and processes by which a Health Unit has built capacity and worked in partnership with a range of agencies in developing and nurturing sustainable suicide prevention approaches in the Wheatbelt.

Coordinator Mental Health Promotion

- Coordinates all the Mental Health Promotion in the Wheatbelt Region
- Promotes Mental Health through community development and education programs
- Training and Workforce Development
- Liaison with health, welfare and educational professionals in the promotion of mental health in the community

Method and Discussion

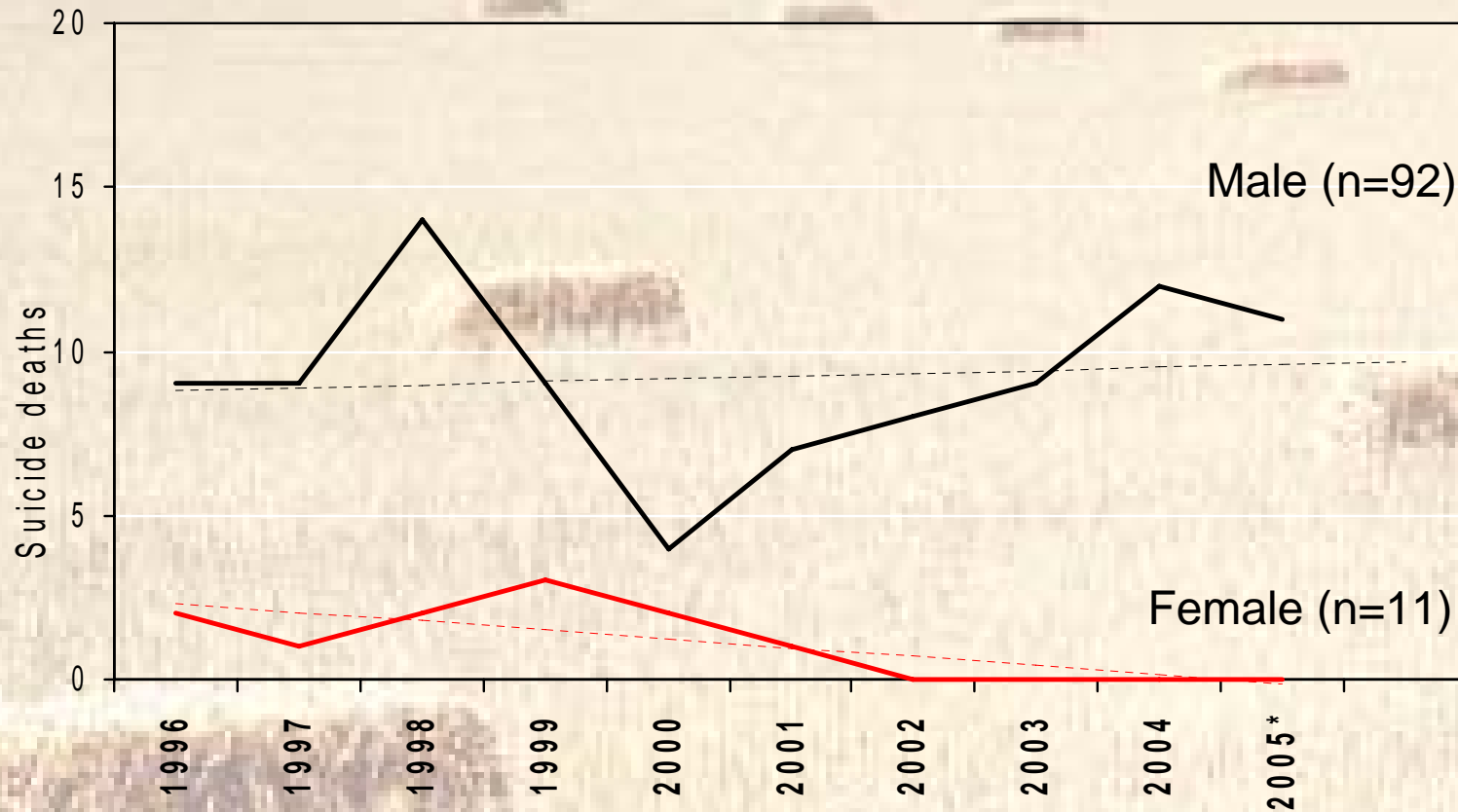
- Avon Suicide Prevention Group Inc.
- Progressed into the Wheatbelt Alive and Well Inc. addressing positive mental health and not just the 'pointy' end of the spectrum.
- This early work has also initiated Wheatbelt Men's Health Inc. which also addresses and reinforces strategies targeting men.

Avon Suicide Prevention Group Inc.

- Comprising MHP, Health & Welfare Professionals, Community Representatives
- Monthly Meetings
- Updating & Improving Knowledge & Skills
- Arranging for Pool of Regional Presenters
- Lobbying Function
- Debriefing Function for Practitioners

Completed Suicide 1996-2005

Wheatbelt (N=103)

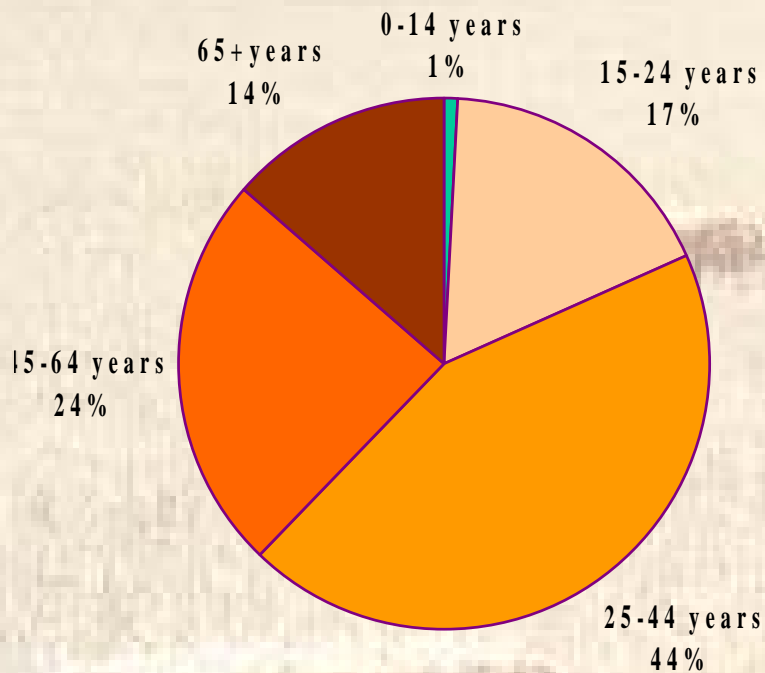


*2005 data is provisional)

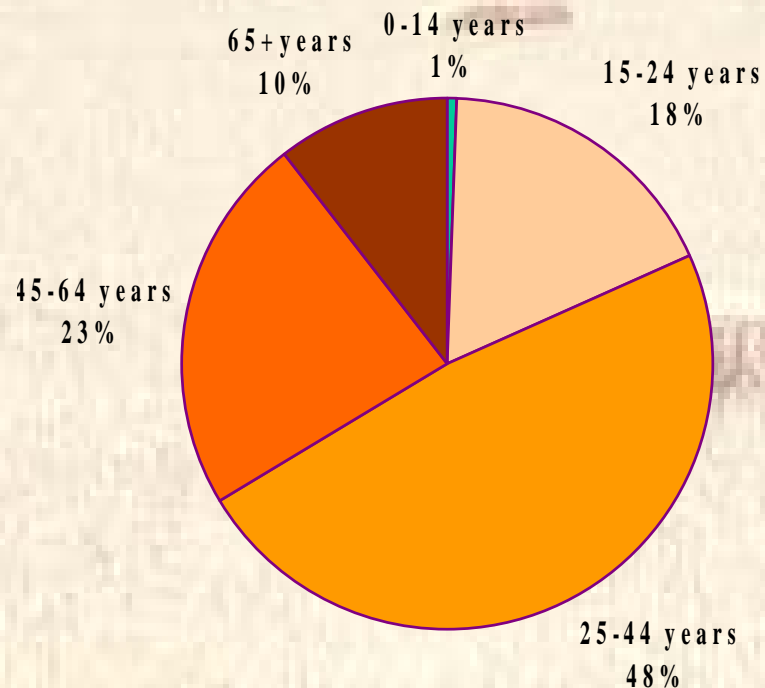
(Source: Epidemiology Branch, Dept of Health, June, 2007)

Suicide by age-group (1996-2005)

Wheatbelt (N=103)



Western Australia (N=2,378)



(Source: Epidemiology Branch, Dept of Health, June, 2007)

Aligned past work addressing Injury

- The Unit arranged for two of Martin Seligman's team to visit Northam in the mid nineties to provide training on the Pennsylvania Depression Prevention Program, which resulted in the formation of POWA Inc Promoting Optimism WA and close collaboration with Curtin University to produce the evidence based Aussie Optimism School Program.
- The Firearms Injury Prevention Project (FIPP) 1998 was also another past example that demonstrated the Units commitment to Injury Prevention.

Promoting Optimism

WA (POWA Inc.)

- Pennsylvania Depression Prevention Training Workshop conducted at Northam in 1996
- Longer term project between Education, Curtin University and CWPHEU
- One of 12 objects included to undertake research of depression and other precursors to youth suicide in WA. Strong commitment to promote and support implementation of effective school based programs.
- Teaching children optimistic ways of thinking & life skills to cope with future stresses

Firearms Injury Prevention Project (FIPP)

- Access to Means of Suicide with Firearms Project
- Commonwealth Funded Project
- Developed a set of “best practice” materials and procedures for preventing firearm suicide in selected areas of WA known to have high rates of suicide involving firearms
- Coordinating Committee comprised Health, Welfare, Police, Gun Owners, Farmers representatives & Project Officer

Support Funding

- In April 2002 Wheatbelt Alive and Well Inc. in partnership with the Wheatbelt Division of GP's was funded through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) for a two year timeframe
- 3rd Round of Funding – involved expanding the service with the addition of an Education Officer

Strategies and Strengths of Strategies Utilised

- Good cross section of health/welfare/agency personnel and community representatives
- Early growth nurtured by lead agency
- Incorporation early for funding applications and to operate outside Bureaucratic constraints
- Monthly Meetings with sound records
- Ongoing Updating & Improving Knowledge and Skills of Group

Strategies and Strengths of Strategies Utilized

- Arranging for and coordinating a pool of regional trainers
- Lobbying Function – closely worked with Ministerial Council Suicide Prevention (MCSP) and Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) State and National Bodies
- Initially ASPG served a debriefing function for MH Practitioners
- Postvention Support following completed suicides and connection with Counseling Services

Strategies and Strengths of Strategies Utilised

- Flexibility of delivery & program planning
- Addressing Grass Roots Needs – in ways appropriate to the community
- Courage to take chances in balancing bureaucratic and community expectations
- Be prepared to sacrifice partnerships rather than compromise integrity of the program

Ongoing Approach

- Wheatbelt Alive and Well Inc also arrange Gatekeeper Training related to Suicide Prevention and work in closely with the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention (MCSP). The group also has a member on SPA, Suicide Prevention Australia.

Evaluation

- The Wheatbelt Alive and Well Suicide Prevention Program was evaluated by researcher Dr Sally Roach during 2004 with a final report issued February 2005

Conclusion

- From Literature no evidence that projects like WAW actually reduce suicide numbers
- Believed in Wheatbelt numbers have reduced, likely multifactorial
- This Project has aimed to build resilient communities and qualitatively evidence this is happening

Conclusion

- The multidisciplinary and interagency partnerships this project has assisted in forging have resulted in an integrated approach to achieving a sustained reduction in suicide rates in the region

Conclusion

- This project has enhanced community capacity and resilience and many groups and significantly benefited
- People and Towns who are otherwise poorly resourced have become demonstrably reliant on the project
- The Project Components and Strategies are also likely to be highly transferable to other similar areas of Australia

Conclusion – W.A.W. Inc

- Range of strategies
- *Building the capacity* of service providers and organisations
- Demonstrated *a successful model, strong commitment and sustainability* to improving mental health and suicide prevention for over ten years