

# Northern Beaches Suicide Response Progress Report

April 2020



northern  
beaches  
council



NSW Police Force



NORTHERN SYDNEY  
An Australian Government Initiative



**SYDNEY NORTH**  
Health Network



community care + wellbeing



Lifeline  
Northern Beaches

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***If you feel at any point you or someone you know might need some support, there is always help available. You can call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or refer to the list at the end of this document.***

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Northern Beaches and the Northern Sydney region. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging, and honour the continuing connection to land, water and culture. We also acknowledge the impact of suicide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who are more than twice as likely to die by suicide as the national average.

### **Acknowledgement of lived experience of suicide**

We would like to acknowledge all those members of our community with lived experience of suicidal thoughts, behaviours or bereavement. We would also like to specifically acknowledge the wisdom and guidance of all those with lived experience of suicide who have participated in and contributed to the Northern Beaches Suicide Response. Your expertise has been invaluable, and we would like to thank you for making your voice heard.

## Introduction

In May 2018, in response to growing community concern about suicide and suicidal behaviours on the Northern Beaches, Council's Community Safety Committee convened a Suicide Prevention Working Group to improve safety in key locations, deliver targeted suicide intervention training and host a Suicide Prevention Roundtable for service providers and key government agencies.

The Working Group was succeeded by the Northern Beaches Suicide Response Steering Group in April 2019, after it was identified that a long-term, coordinated approach was essential to address suicide across the Northern Beaches. The Steering Group is comprised of key agencies and services and, until his retirement in February 2020, was chaired by the Commander of Northern Beaches Police Area Command, Superintendent Dave Darcy.

The Steering Group plays a leadership role in the suicide prevention space, with a focus on coordination, communication, advocacy, intervention and postvention. An Action Plan has been developed in consultation with key stakeholders and people with lived experience of suicide, and the Steering Group shares responsibility for its implementation and evaluation.

This document is an overview of the achievements of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response since work began in 2018. Together, we have made enormous progress towards improved service delivery and better coordinating the local response, with the ultimate goal of reducing suicide in our community.

We have only been able to achieve what we have through the hard work and dedication of many people working together in a coordinated and concerted effort. We would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who have contributed to the Northern Beaches Suicide Response, as well as the many community-led groups and initiatives working to reduce suicide in our area.

We would especially like to acknowledge the other members of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response Steering Group:

- Community Care Northern Beaches (CCNB)
- Lifeline Northern Beaches
- Northern Beaches Hospital
- Northern Beaches Lived Experience Group
- Northern Beaches Police Area Command
- Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD)
- Sydney North Health Network (SNHN)



**Photo:** Northern Beaches Suicide Response Steering Group

## Message from Superintendent Dave Darcy

In 2018, 30 people took their lives on the Northern Beaches.

In 2019, that number was down to 21 - a reduction of close to one third.

Every one of these lives is someone's loved one so while we are pleased to see a reduction in lives lost, we acknowledge the impact of every death and will work tirelessly to continue to see those numbers go down.

Welcome to the first report of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response Steering Group.

Suicide and attempted suicide on the Northern Beaches were leaving few of us untouched. Families, friends, work colleagues, emergency service crews, those living close to locations where people were taking their lives all were affected.

The problem wasn't the availability of resources and agencies able to respond, there were plenty of those. It was a lack of effective cohesion amongst all these groups; the ability to work together as one, so efforts for some weren't duplicated while others were being missed.

To its credit, Northern Beaches Council, with the support and drive of Mayor Michael Regan, the Community Development Team, in particular Sue Johansson, joined us in the push for change: the need to get everyone in the same room, connected and responding in a structured and co-ordinated way.

Through its Suicide Response Steering Group, ideas evolved into the effective reality that's producing tangible and lasting success.

### What we've done

We acknowledged as a group that plans are worthless without involvement and active participation by all.

We have that with our Northern Beaches Coalition of Care: government and non-government agencies all playing their part in building a multi-faceted framework for suicide prevention.

### A framework designed to:

- Stop and help those thinking about or moving to take their lives
- Identify and support those who find themselves in desperate emotional trouble
- Ensure they know there are people and groups just a phone call or conversation away, ready to help
- Create the sense of trust people might need to pause and ask for that help.

### How we've done it

- All high risk locations on the Beaches have been assessed
- Contact details for Lifeline have been placed prominently at key sites
- We've given people more time to reconsider self harm by putting strategically placed and specially designed barriers at one of our high risk locations
- We've mobilised support services for both adults and young people
- We've been to schools with the message that confidential help is readily and easily available to all who need it
- We've tackled head-on the contagion that has been copy-cat suicide, particularly among the young.

### Our results

We've encouraged and empowered members of the broader community, whether on their own or with local groups, to educate themselves on the issue of suicide; how to recognise the signs, the best ways to respond and the organisations to contact. We now have among the wider Beaches' community the strong capacity and capability we need to recognise and respond effectively to the signs of people contemplating taking their lives.

While exposure to suicide is a traumatic occupational reality for our first responders, we've implemented strategies to help and support them. They're being trained both to recognise the signs of those at high risk and to engage with them and hopefully de-escalate suicidal situations and bring people to a place of safety. Dealing regularly with those in trouble is emotionally challenging, so it's also critical that we equally look after those who work to look after us all. We've done this through the creation of strong and effective internal networks designed to build empathy and resilience among us all. In short, to ensure we all have each other's backs.

### Outcomes

When it comes to the prevention of suicide, our work and results have meant we are now recognised as highly credible advocates and lobbyists for change, particularly in the areas of systems and technical advances that can improve response times and, importantly, outcomes.

We're also proud to have been awarded \$340,000 by the NSW Ministry of Health to train more than 1,000 'community gatekeepers' including our first responders, youth, middle aged men, seniors, and those who live close to high-risk locations.

The ultimate dividend for our work, people's lives - many we'll never even know about - not only saved but giving people hope and the support they need to live well. That really is what it's all about.

**Superintendent Dave Darcy**

**Commander, Northern Beaches Police Area Command**

### Message from Northern Beaches Mayor Michael Regan

On 27 February 2020, Superintendent Darcy retired as Commander of Northern Beaches Police, and stepped down as Chair of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response Steering Group. I want to thank Superintendent Darcy for his dedication and commitment to the people of the Northern Beaches over his long and distinguished career. He has been a tireless advocate in the fight to reduce suicide in our area and on behalf of Northern Beaches Council, and the Northern Beaches community, I wish him all the very best in retirement.

## Embracing lived experience

People with a lived experience of suicide have the potential, when supported to draw on their insights, to facilitate impactful local suicide prevention solutions that drive positive change in culture and services, contributing to healthy and sustainable communities.

- Roses in the Ocean

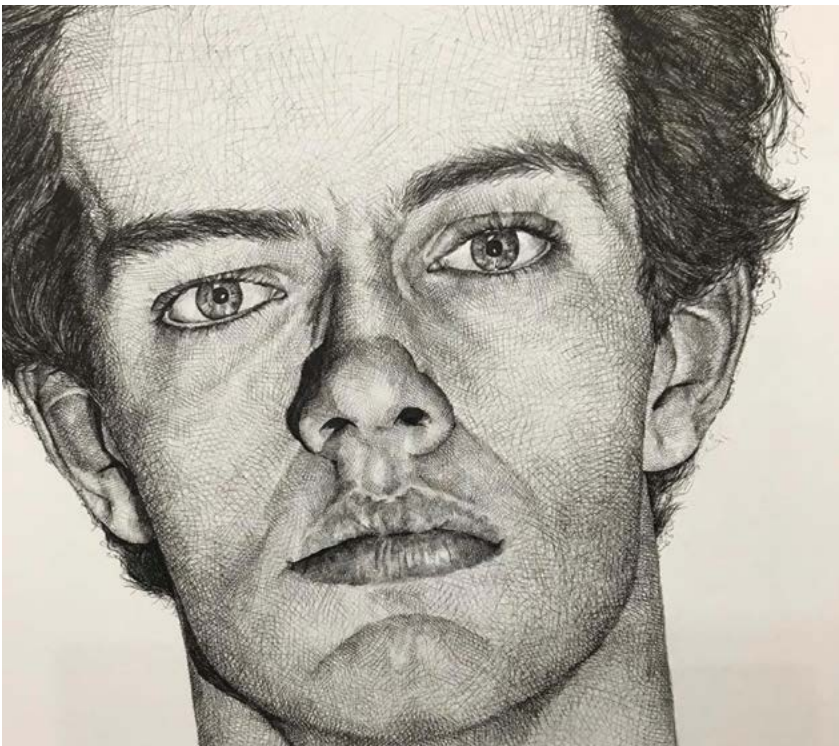
### Kyla

The Lived Experience Group has allowed me to openly share, in a caring and kind space, my experiences of loss and the impact this has had on my life. Knowing that together we have a group of wonderful and empowered people who have all been personally touched by the impact of suicide coming together as change agents has brought me huge hope and I am looking forward to seeing and supporting our projects in the local community in 2020.

Since [becoming involved] I have really felt the level of deep commitment to change and zero suicide on the beaches by this diverse group and it's so heartwarming to see the positive results and initiatives coming from it. I'd like to make special mention of Superintendent Dave Darcy's leadership in this space and his team, and our paramedics, who as first responders every day without question turn up and positively save lives. I'm looking forward to getting even more involved in the years to come as we continue to create wellness as a major priority for all locals.

### Tania

Being a part of the process has enabled me to share my lived experience through the Roses workshops and has empowered me to establish connections in my own area as well as becoming a member of the Lived Experience Advisory Group to the Ministry of Health. If the Northern Beaches Council hadn't given me that opportunity to begin with I wouldn't find myself currently in the position I'm in today.



*"As a nation, we do not always recognise when someone is struggling and overwhelmed. The shocking reality is that every day across Australia, six males take their own lives. It's time that we reach out to the men of Australia"*

Sarah Jones, HSC Student 2019

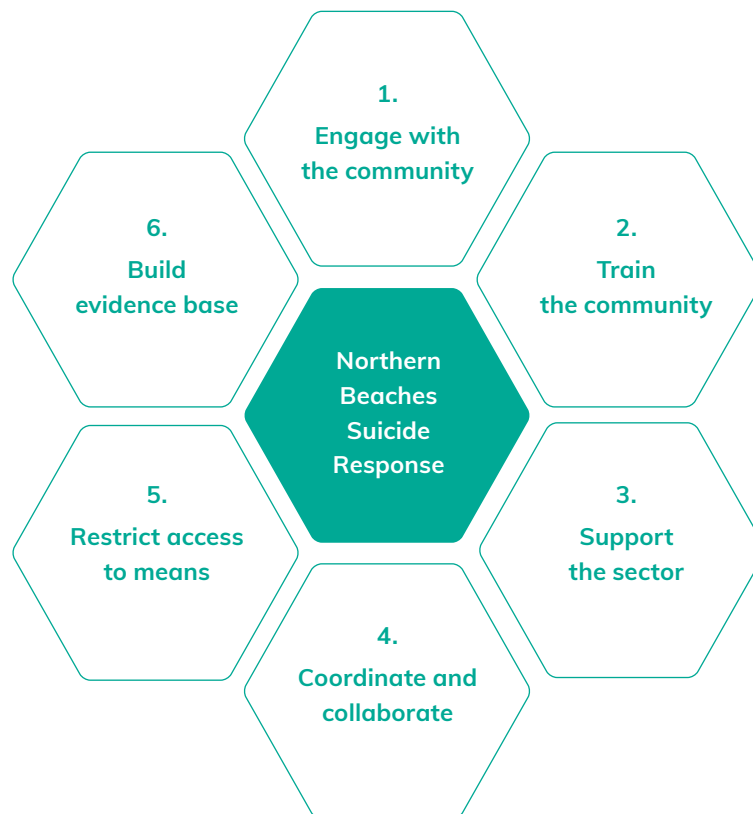


## Northern Beaches Suicide Response Action Plan

The Northern Beaches Suicide Response (NBSR) draws on a wealth of knowledge and experience from comparable responses and trial sites across the country in order to improve the quality, coordination and accessibility of available supports.

These include Black Dog's LifeSpan model, which involves a coordinated response from government, non-government organisations, health agencies, businesses, educational institutions and community groups. In these trial sites, the model is estimated to have reduced suicide deaths by 20% and attempts by 30%.

The Steering Group of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response developed a comprehensive Action Plan to meet six goals identified by key stakeholders as priorities and guided by the five key priority areas from the **NSW Strategic Framework for Suicide Prevention**.



**Figure 1:** Northern Beaches Suicide Response Goals



## 1. Engage with the community

### National Communications Charter

On World Suicide Prevention Day, 10 September 2019, Northern Beaches Council became the first Council in NSW to sign the National Communications Charter. The Charter, developed by Everymind, commits Council to communicating in safe ways that actively encourage help-seeking and help-offering behaviour, in order to reduce the stigma surrounding mental ill-health and suicide.

You can read more about the National Communications Charter at [lifeinmindaustralia.com.au](http://lifeinmindaustralia.com.au).



**Photo:** Signing the National Communications Charter

### Communications Strategy

Council is in the final stages of developing a Communications Strategy to promote safer social and news media messaging, create community conversation and raise awareness about suicide through public campaigns, consistent with our commitments under the National Communications Charter.

A page has been developed on Council's **website** with information about the Northern Beaches Suicide Response, the Steering Group, events, training and volunteering opportunities. The page contains useful links and resources for the community, including local services guides and links to relevant supports.

A **postcard** has also been developed with information about how you can get involved with the Northern Beaches Suicide Response and information about how to help someone you may be worried about.

### Better Off With You Campaign

With the support of the Steering Group and other key stakeholders, including local people with lived experience, SANE Australia launched the **Better Off With You Campaign** in January 2020. There was a strong sense of community ownership and achievement, with the launch celebrating the culmination of over a year of engagement activities locally. The campaign draws on the power of peer-to-peer storytelling – sharing the experiences of three individuals – John, Phoebe and Mark - who have had suicidal thoughts and survived suicide attempts, to reach people in the community who are contemplating suicide. Attending the launch were members of the Steering Group, several Northern Beaches Councillors, local parliamentarians, Chair of Lifeline Australia, John Brogden and the Chair of the National Mental Health Commission, Lucy Brogden. Overall, the campaign has successfully reached a significant proportion of the target audience on the Northern Beaches through social media, TV, radio, outdoor advertising, press and via the campaign website.



**Photo:** Better Off With You campaign launch

## Public meetings

The Steering Group has also held several public forums and meetings about mental health and suicide. CCNB has also organised and facilitated Community Conversation meetings to provide information, advice and guidance to community members who want to talk about suicide, increase their understanding of what is being done locally to prevent and respond and get involved in solutions.

In June 2019, Council held its second Big Ideas Forum on the topic Mental Health: Conversations We're Not Having, which saw 290 community members come together to discuss how we can take the taboo out of mental health and suicide. Council also held its second Religious and Cultural Leaders forum in October 2019, which focused on improving local knowledge about mental health and wellbeing and strengthening referral pathways for faith and cultural groups on the Northern Beaches.

Suicide bereavement charity WINGS of Hope held an intimate gathering at Balmoral in November 2019 for International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day. The gathering aimed to honour and remember those we have lost to suicide, and to inspire hope by reminding those bereaved by suicide that they are not alone. The gathering was supported by CCNB and Northern Beaches Council.



**Photo:** Big Ideas Forum - June 2019

## 2. Train the community

Since August 2018, Northern Beaches Council has partnered with Lifeline Northern Beaches, Sydney North Health Network, CCNB and Wesley LifeForce to deliver suicide intervention skills training to over 400 participants, including first responders, residents of high-risk areas and other community members.

Northern Beaches Police Area Command have trained dozens of police officers in suicide intervention skills in partnership with both CCNB and Lifeline. Training continues to be rolled out.

Lifeline Northern Beaches is facilitating the Seasons for Growth Grief and Loss program, funded by Council's Community Arts and Culture Grants. This program is an innovative primary prevention initiative that aims to strengthen the emotional and social wellbeing of adults dealing with significant loss and increase their resilience and capacity in supporting their children's grief process.

*"I have gained knowledge and know that I am not afraid to ask questions about suicide. Courses like this and on mental illness are invaluable learning guides.*

*The more courses on offer within the community I know will 'break down the barrier' on how mental illness is perceived"*

A workshop participant, 2019

### 3. Support the sector

#### Northern Beaches Suicide Prevention Roundtable 2018

Northern Beaches Council coordinated a Suicide Prevention Roundtable in November 2018 with 50 participants representing a range of service providers, frontline responders and government agencies. The Roundtable's aim was to better connect local services and the community, and improve the local response to suicide through prevention, intervention and postvention initiatives. Themes identified from the discussion were collated into several key areas, which were developed into the strategies of the NBSR Action Plan.



**Photo:** Northern Beaches Suicide Prevention Roundtable

#### Local Drug Action Team

In May 2019, Council received a grant from the Alcohol and Drug Foundation for \$10,000 to form a Northern Beaches Local Drug Action Team (LDAT) to help to reduce the risk of alcohol and drug-related suicide amongst young adults on the Northern Beaches. The LDAT includes Council, Lifeline Northern Beaches, Sydney Drug Education & Counselling Centre (SDECC) and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation. Almost 700 young people responded to a survey for this project, along with more than fifty local service providers. An event was held in October 2019 to share the data and brief key stakeholders on this project.

The LDAT will investigate developing a resource that outlines the links between alcohol and other drugs and mental ill-health to reinforce referral pathways and better support the community.

#### Postvention Community of Practice

Sharing the experience of community service workers is vital to build collective knowledge and increase collaboration across the service sector. CCNB held a Community of Practice in June 2019 to begin the conversation.

#### Suicide Prevention Services Guide

The Sydney North Health Network published its **Suicide Prevention Services Guide** in June 2019 to improve pathways for community members, GPs and service providers to access information about suicide prevention services in the Northern Sydney area, and to help people navigate which services to contact depending on individual circumstances.

#### Northern Beaches Mental Health Summit

The Northern Beaches Mental Health Summit was hosted by James Griffin MP, Member for Manly, at the Parliament of NSW in August 2019. The Summit aimed to better connect those working in the sector, improve sector collaboration, reduce duplication and improve mechanisms for measurement and evaluation.

#### Vicarious Trauma Training

Sydney North Health Network and Northern Beaches Council partnered to facilitate a training session held in November 2019 by the Blue Knot Foundation. The session aimed to better equip those working as first responders or in front line community services with strategies and resources to prevent, recognise and respond to burn out, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.

#### 4. Coordinate and collaborate

##### Postvention Protocol Pilot

One of the most pressing issues identified by the Northern Beaches Suicide Response Steering Group was the need for a coordinated response following a death by suicide. Police, Lifeline Northern Beaches, Council and CCNB worked closely to investigate other models which could be adapted for a local response to support both families and the broader community.

Funded by CCNB, a critical incident response protocol has been trialled since July 2019 to allow for better coordination of key agencies and services following a death by suicide or a suicide attempt. Ensuring long-term sustainability for the Postvention Protocol is a key priority for the Steering Group. CCNB commissioned an independent evaluation of the pilot which highlighted the importance of the protocol.

##### Lived Experience Group

Recognising the importance of lived experience input to the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of the Action Plan, in June 2019, Northern Beaches Council and the Sydney North Health Network commissioned Roses in the Ocean to facilitate a two day 'Our Voice in Action' Workshop. Expressions of Interest were encouraged from local residents who had experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for loved ones through crisis, or been bereaved through suicide. Since its first meeting in July 2019, the group has met on a regular basis with support from Council, and two representatives have successfully nominated to join the Steering Group. In February 2020, CCNB hosted a 'Voices of Insight' workshop which allowed local participants to reflect on their lived experience and learn skills in how to share their personal story.

##### Suicide Bereavement Support Group

On the third Tuesday of each month, Lifeline Northern Beaches hosts a support group for those bereaved by suicide in our area. The group is open to any adult who has experienced loss through suicide, and includes discussion about coping strategies and self-care.

##### Lounge Chat Support Group

Lifeline, in partnership with CCNB, have developed a six-week program for the families of people who have attempted suicide. This unique group provides a safe space to share and be supported in a confidential environment with others who have also experienced a suicide attempt by a relative. The group covered several essential areas such as self-care, referral pathways and talking about safety. Due to COVID-19, this group is now hosted online and continues to be in great demand.

##### NSW Mental Health Commission's Living Well Review

The Mental Health Commission of NSW have highlighted the Northern Beaches Suicide Response as an example of best practice. The Commission showcased the localised, coordinated approach of the **Response**.

##### Alternatives to emergency departments

The need for an alternative to presenting at an Emergency Department for those experiencing a mental health crisis has been identified as a key issue. Together with those with lived experience, CCNB invited key stakeholders across the Northern Sydney and Northern Beaches region to participate in a co-design workshop in January 2020. This CCNB-funded initiative brought people together to identify preferred models for the future.

*"This is a unique and highly needed support group for relatives in desperate need of support"*

A Lounge Chat participant, 2020

## 5. Restrict access to means

### Safety Audits

Safety audits have been conducted at several local locations, leading to a number of changes aimed at improving safety. Signage containing Lifeline help-seeking information has been installed at targeted clifftop locations. In some locations, innovative use of natural barriers and safer inward-curving fencing have also been installed.

### National Suicide Hotspot Advisory Group

A Council representative has been appointed to the National Suicide Hotspot Advisory Group which will provide educated advice, guidance and support for locations which have been deemed at high risk for death by suicide. Northern Beaches Council is the only local government representative on the Group, recognising the leading role being taking in this space. The Advisory Group met for the first time in February 2020 and is convened by Lifeline Australia. The Group will examine key locations nationally to provide appropriate solutions and guidance.

## 6. Build an evidence base

### Evaluation

Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) students from the Faculty of Human Sciences Department of Macquarie University have developed some rudimentary evaluation tools, which are being developed into an evaluation framework to measure the outcomes of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response.

### Data analysis

Data on death by suicide and suicide attempts from Northern Beaches Police Area Command and the National Coronial Information System is being analysed to guide targeted responses within the Action Plan. The Steering Group continues to seek out and compile data from various sources to inform actions





## Where to from here?

### Community gatekeeper training

Northern Beaches Council has been successful in securing grant funding of \$340,000 from NSW Ministry of Health to implement suicide prevention community gatekeeper training on the Northern Beaches. The funding is for a period of three years to deliver suicide intervention skills training and suicide awareness activities to over one thousand 'community gatekeepers', targeting middle aged men, young people, seniors and emergency services.

Gatekeepers will be trained to identify the signs that someone may be at risk of suicide and to empower them to respond. The gatekeepers will also be equipped with resources and support, and kept up to date with how they can get involved in local suicide prevention activities. Due to COVID-19, scheduled face-to-face training sessions have now been postponed, and in the interim, Council is offering LivingWorks Start Online training. To submit an expression of interest for training please visit Council's [website](#).

Council is also designing a series of mental health and wellbeing webinars to build broader knowledge of key issues affecting those in our community, as well as introducing local services and supports.

### Local suicide prevention network

The future vision of the Action Plan is to establish a local Suicide Prevention Network to continue this coordinated and comprehensive local partnership in a way that is sustainable long-term. The network will be community-led and will encourage the inclusion of those affected by suicide. The Steering Group will work in partnership with Wesley LifeForce, who have been charged with establishing these networks nationally. Due to COVID-19, the first community meeting was postponed, however Wesley LifeForce plan to host a webinar to commence the conversation with the community about developing a local network.

### Suicide Prevention Roundtable 2020

In 2020, the Steering Group plans to hold its second Suicide Prevention Roundtable, to seek feedback on the achievements of the Northern Beaches Suicide Response to date.

### Primary prevention and early intervention

In September 2019, Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) released **Turning Points: Imagine a World Without Suicide**, a white paper that examines emerging social and economic trends in Australia to identify risk factors that could increase the suicide rate. Key members of the Steering Group subsequently attended an SPA Roundtable and focus groups which led to the release of **Turning the Tide: A Six Point Plan for Change**. This report highlights the need to intervene early to reduce the risk of suicide for those affected by debt, less stable employment or relationship breakdown.

The Northern Beaches Suicide Response seeks to increase primary prevention initiatives throughout 2020 and into the future, investigating programs that build the resilience and improve the mental wellbeing of the community, as well as identifying opportunities to intervene early for those at higher risk.

### Community postvention response plan

A Community Postvention (or post suicide) Response Plan will be developed to build the capacity of organisations, individuals, families and communities to respond to suicide and to also ensure those bereaved by suicide are equipped with a range of local support services.

### Northern Sydney mental health, suicide prevention, drug and alcohol regional plan

The Sydney North Health Network and Northern Sydney Local Health District are in the process of developing the Northern Sydney Mental Health, Suicide Prevention, Drug & Alcohol Regional Plan. Due for completion by June 2020, the regional plan will be a key planning document for the region.

### Get involved

To get involved in events and activities, or to learn more about how to equip yourself with the knowledge to support others, visit Council's website:

[northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](http://northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au)

## Where to go for support

### Help with a Crisis

Emergency	000
Lifeline	13 11 14
Lifeline Text (6pm-midnight)	0477 13 11 14
Suicide Call Back Service	1300 65 94 67
NSW Mental Health Line	1800 011 511

### Help with Your Mental Health

MensLine	1300 789 978
Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800
Beyond Blue	1300 22 4636
Beyond Blue online chat	beyondblue.org.au
headspace Brookvale	9937 6500
Community Care Northern Beaches Seasons Program	1300 000 125

### Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling

Sydney Drug Education and Counselling Centre	9977 0711
Lifeline Northern Beaches	9949 5522
National Gambling Hotline	1800 858 858
Northern Beaches Drug, Alcohol and Gambling Service	9388 5333

### Domestic and Family Violence

Northern Beaches Police (non-emergency)	9971 3399
1800 RESPECT	1800 737 732
NSW Domestic Violence Line	1800 656 463
NSW Rape Crisis Line	1800 424 017

### Financial Services

National Debt Hotline	1800 007 007
Lifeline Northern Beaches	9949 5522
CatholicCare Diocese of Broken Bay	8425 8700

**Remember, you can always talk about mental health with your GP**