

## Supporting family and friends of people with mental illness who have died by suicide

Professional development resource

Research tells us that people bereaved by suicide may be at higher risk of taking their own lives, so intervention at this stage is an important, but sometimes overlooked, suicide prevention strategy.

SANE Australia has a new resource to help services better support family and friends of people with mental illness who die by suicide. Supporting people who are bereaved is essential because grief around suicide can be particularly traumatic and confusing.

SANE Australia's Executive Director, Barbara Hocking, says people who are bereaved often do not receive adequate support from the service that had been looking after their relative. 'Services themselves recognise this and have requested resources and training to help them improve their response, for families and friends, and for relevant staff,' Ms Hocking explains.

The *SANE Mental Illness and Bereavement Kit* provides the information needed to facilitate a short (1 ½ hour) professional development session where staff can learn about and discuss these important issues. The Kit includes a DVD that tells the stories of four bereaved families, exploring how they coped and what they feel would have helped them more effectively. It also includes the *SANE Bereavement Guidelines* that outline best practice for services, with a suggested Action Plan for implementation.

The guidelines cover such topics as: what types of support can services offer; support for family and friends who are also clients; who should make contact; possible barriers to providing support and how to support staff during this time.

The materials have been endorsed by the Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists. President, Maria Tomasic, says the guideline 'provides a thoughtful overview of the issues that face friends and family of those who have died by suicide.'

The project content has been widely trialled with mental health, bereavement and helpline services around Australia. The kit is suitable to use with staff from government and non-government organisations that support people with mental illness, their friends and families.

'By encouraging services to offer appropriate and timely support, we aim to improve bereaved family and friends' ability to cope and in turn to help reduce their risk of suicide,' explains Ms Hocking.

The Kit costs \$48 and can be ordered at the [SANE website](#). For further details, please contact Sarah Coker on 03 9682 5933, or [sarah.coker@sane.org](mailto:sarah.coker@sane.org)

The *SANE Mental Illness and Bereavement* project is funded by the Australian Government's Suicide Prevention Strategy

A national charity  
working for a better life  
for people affected by mental illness

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