

TELEPHONE COUNSELLING

**SERVICE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND
PROGRAM GUIDELINES 2001-2002**

JULY 2001

TELEPHONE COUNSELLING PROGRAM GUIDELINES

1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Telephone Counselling Program provides funding towards the provision of telephone counselling, information and referral services throughout Victoria. The Program also funds the statewide Suicide Helpline which is jointly delivered by two agencies. Details regarding the Suicide Helpline are outlined in the document *Suicide Helpline – Service Plan Implementation and Program Guidelines 2001-2002*.

Telephone counselling, information and referral services respond to callers with a wide range of concerns and personal emergencies. They are accessible to all members of the community and support and enhance their health and well being. The use of the telephone medium for service delivery allows for an immediate, accessible, anonymous and confidential response to the caller's situation.

Telephone counselling services play an important role in the continuum of health and welfare services, providing immediate counselling, support, information or referral in crisis and non-crisis situations. Early intervention, crisis intervention and prevention of re-occurrence of a problem are situations requiring diverse responses from telephone counselling services. Telephone counselling services also respond to potentially suicidal callers and callers experiencing bereavement following suicide.

Telephone counselling services also play an important role in the provision of information to individuals that enables them to access other services. These services contribute to the linkage and access of people to other agencies and services and facilitate a more effective delivery of community services.

Telephone counselling services are predominantly provided by trained volunteers and managed by professional staff. The role of these professional staff includes the management of the service, co-ordination of training and supervision.

2. PROGRAM AIMS

The Telephone Counselling Program aims to facilitate the provision of telephone counselling, information and referral services which provide:

- crisis counselling, information and referral to callers in a manner which allows them to manage their own situation and assess their needs for other services
- support for callers whose regular support services are unavailable, or until appropriate regular services can be accessed during business hours
- a service linkage between people in crisis or need and other services.

3. STANDARDS

Telephone counselling services funded through the Telephone Counselling Program must comply with the *Telephone Counselling Services Program Standards* (June 2001).

The Suicide Helpline must comply with the *Suicide Helpline Standards* (June 2001). These standards should also guide the suicide intervention activities of all telephone counselling services funded through the Telephone Counselling Program.

It is also expected that telephone counselling services will comply with relevant professional standards such as *Professional Standards for Telephone Counselling, Information and Support Services* (Victorian Association of Telephone Support Services 1997).

4. PROGRAM MONITORING, ACCOUNTABILITY AND REVIEW

Each telephone counselling service is funded in accordance with a Service Agreement, which includes a service plan and financial accountability requirements.

Regional offices of the Department of Human Services will monitor the achievements of the service evaluation information required through the service plan. Quarterly client data collection reports are to be submitted to the regional office.

5. PROGRAM FUNDING

Funding is provided as a contribution to the costs of the provision of the telephone counselling, information and referral service.

Funding of regional Lifeline services is based on a core allocation per service plus an allocation based on indicators of relative socio-economic disadvantage between regions.

Agencies funded through the Telephone Counselling Program are required to participate in relevant research initiated by the Department of Human Services.

TELEPHONE COUNSELLING SERVICE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

1. TELEPHONE COUNSELLING – OBJECTIVE

To provide a telephone service which offers confidential counselling, information, advice and referral.

2. SERVICE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

- Telephone Counselling Services Program Standards (June 2001)
- Suicide Helpline Standards (June 2001) [Suicide Helpline only]
- Telephone Counselling Service Plan Implementation and Program Guidelines 2001-2002 (this document)
- Suicide Helpline Service Plan Implementation and Program Guidelines 2001-2002 [Suicide Helpline only]

3. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

| Performance Measures |
|---|
| <p><i>Key Output Measure:</i> Total number of calls answered (MANDATORY) Target to be negotiated with Region</p> |
| <p>Percentage of callers sampled who are satisfied with the service provided (MANDATORY) Target: 85%</p> |
| <p>Percentage of callers provided with a service (Suicide Helpline only) Target: 90%</p> |
| <p>Percentage of calls responded to within five minutes (Suicide Helpline only) Target: 90%</p> |

Definitions of Terms in Performance Measures

Service

For telephone counselling services, *service* is defined as:

- response to callers with a range of concerns or personal emergencies, including potentially suicidal callers
- counselling
- provision of information (including dissemination, mailout or handout of information resources such as brochures, videos, tapes, etc)
- referral to other agencies.

Caller Satisfaction Measures

The agency and region will negotiate an agreement on a methodology appropriate to the size and resources of the agency.

4. DATA COLLECTION - INFORMATION REQUIRED

| Data Collection - Information Required |
|---|
| Quarterly data reports detailing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• number of calls answered• age and gender of caller• reason for call• whether the caller is receiving support from other professional/s• calls relating to suicide issues• length of call |
| Report detailing results of caller satisfaction measures |

5. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the Telephone Counselling Program can be obtained from the Telephone Counselling Program Advisor at Regional Offices of the Department of Human Services.