



**ConNetica Consulting**

Creating a better future

**Report from the Evaluation of the  
2005-8 Strategic Plan and  
Organisational Review of Suicide  
Prevention Australia Inc.**

*“what is needed is a credible, independent, evidence-based body ... to  
advocate effectively & blow away the cover-up of suicide”*

22 May 2008

COMMERCIAL-IN-CONFIDENCE

## Synopsis and Acknowledgements

ConNetica Consulting was engaged in February 2008 to undertake a comprehensive review of Suicide Prevention Australia Inc (SPA). The review involved an evaluation of the performance of SPA against its 2005-8 Strategic Plan, the governance and management systems and an assessment of the operating environment.

The review incorporated a number of qualitative and quantitative evaluation elements and a 2-day planning workshop with the Board and stakeholders.

This report provides a complete record of the Review, a discussion, findings and recommendations. A Draft Strategic Plan and Business Plan for 2008-9 have also been prepared for SPA's consideration.

ConNetica Consulting would like to acknowledge the contributions and support provided by a number of individuals involved in this Review. Most particularly the staff of SPA, Ryan McGlaughlin, Executive Officer, Tony Phillips (Events and Projects Coordinator) and Iurie Draganov (Finance and Admin) who answered every request promptly and fully during the course of the Review. This was on top of the usual high demands on their time.

The support of the Board, particularly the Chair, Dr Michael Dudley, was also critical to the project. Again despite the many demands on his time, Dr Dudley gave full attention and support to the Review.

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## Glossary of Abbreviations

<b>ASX</b>	Australian Stock Exchange
<b>AISRAP</b>	Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention
<b>APS</b>	Australian Public Service
<b>DOHA</b>	Department of Health and Ageing
<b>HREOC</b>	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
<b>LiFE Framework</b>	<i>Living is for Everyone (LiFE): a framework for prevention of suicide and self-harm in Australia.</i>
<b>MHCA</b>	Mental Health Council of Australia
<b>NACSP</b>	National Suicide Prevention Advisory Committee
<b>NSPS</b>	National Suicide Prevention Strategy
<b>SPA</b>	Suicide Prevention Australia Inc
<b>WSPD</b>	World Suicide Prevention Day

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## Executive Summary

Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) was established in 1992 as a community organisation made up of a relatively small group of individuals and organisations committed to suicide prevention and bereavement support.

SPA is a non-profit, non-government organisation working as a public health advocate in suicide prevention. SPA is the only national umbrella body active in suicide prevention throughout Australia. SPA is a broad-based organisation, which brings together diverse interests across disciplines, practitioners, researchers, the community and the public affected by suicide. As a national organisation, SPA supports and assists individuals and organisations throughout Australia, promoting collaboration and partnerships in suicide prevention, intervention and postvention.

SPA engaged Adjunct Professor John Mendoza, a Director of ConNetica Consulting Pty Ltd, to undertake a comprehensive organisational review in January 2008. The Review focused on SPA's performance against its current three-year Strategic Plan (due to conclude on 30 June 2008), assessing the internal and external environments and reviewing the organisational structures, governance arrangements and systems. The Review included a two-day workshop with members of the SPA Board and other stakeholders.

Prior to the workshop, a series of document reviews, stakeholder interviews and data collection exercises were undertaken to gather together a broad and comprehensive understanding of SPA's performance and operating environment. This data was presented to the workshop and used to stimulate debate and inform decision-making about SPA's future.

The approach taken throughout the Review was to fully engage the leadership of SPA in the Review. It was important that they formed a common and clear view about the organisation and its future.

This Report (and the 2 Volumes of Appendices) provides a comprehensive record of the Review. It includes summaries of all data collected and all outputs from the workshop. It includes input from the consultant on corporate governance for NGOs, designed to build greater understanding of the need for change, and analysis by the consultant. Finally the Report proposes a way forward for SPA that endeavours to meet the challenges of the operating environment and the requirements of contemporary governance practice.

## Results of the Review

### ***Performance of SPA***

The 2005-8 Strategic Plan sets out three core objectives:

1. Develop partnerships across and between sectors, organisations and individuals to promote continuing improvement in suicide prevention
2. Continue to develop the quality of the national conference and a range of complementary opportunities for bringing people together to share and learn
3. Ensure that SPA implements quality standards of organisational practices within a framework of financial sustainability

Throughout the 2005-8 Strategic Plan, funding has been secured from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (DOHA). SPA was required to report quarterly on progress

against defined outputs. These reports and those to the Board show that all the objectives and requirements set out in the contracts have been met. The final outstanding initiative, a members website, will be launched on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

In general terms, DOHA has supported SPA for the purpose of “providing national leadership in the development and implementation of strategic policies aimed at mental health promotion and prevention of suicide and self-harm in Australia.” SPA has been required to manage its activities within the goals and objectives of the national suicide prevention policy and strategic framework known as the *Living is for Everyone (LIFE): a framework for prevention of suicide and self-harm in Australia*.

The vast majority of stakeholders believed that SPA had made a noteworthy contribution to the national suicide prevention agenda. The organisation’s achievements against core objectives 1 and 2 were more highly rated than objective 3 by stakeholders. Importantly, respondents to both interviews and online surveys report that their dealings with the organisation demonstrate the values of SPA in action.

### **Review of Governance Structures**

Since 2005 SPA has undertaken a significant number of reforms to its governance. Changes to the Constitution, new forms of strategic and business plans, new sub-ordinate plans including the Communications Plan, annual Board reviews and planning workshops, the development of a comprehensive Policy and Procedures Manual, implementation of independent financial auditing and the development of improved employment documentation have all been completed.

The Review, using recognised governance frameworks, found few deficiencies in the governance arrangements of SPA. Over fifty documents were reviewed and a limited number of gaps and issues for the Board to address were identified. However a number of improvements to reflect good practice have been recommended.

The reporting requirements on SPA are burdensome. There is an urgent need to rationalise the reporting requirements to DOHA. Further, continual uncertainty over funding diverts Board and management time from the business of suicide prevention. It is clear that significant anxiety and the resultant focus on ‘surviving’ is a drag on the organisation’s effectiveness. The delays in confirming future funding also place all Board members at risk in terms of their legal and fiduciary responsibilities.

### **Determine SPA’s role under the LiFE Framework**

A number of points emerged from the Review in terms of SPA’s relationship to the new or revised LiFE Framework. First, it is important to note there was significant confusion as to the status of the LiFE Framework document released on 19 October 2007 by the then responsible Parliamentary Secretary, The Hon. Senator Brett Mason. [Note: during the course of the Review the document released by Senator Mason was removed from the relevant website. No explanation was provided and it did not appear to be related to any change in (Rudd) government policy].

Second a number of respondents saw an urgent need for SPA to have the document withdrawn and rewritten or to advocate for a broader approach to suicide prevention. While many respondents indicated they had not seen the evaluation of the LiFE Framework completed by Urbis Keys in 2006, the majority were aware of its conclusions and that these were not reflected in the revised document. SPA requested, in a letter to DoHA for the

launched LIFE Framework to be removed from the government website until the editing was completed. The revised LIFE Framework remains at [www.livingforeveryone.com.au](http://www.livingforeveryone.com.au)

The third point was that SPA, while not mentioned in the revised LIFE Framework, was seen as the body best placed to perform as the national coordinator and national advocate and, to a lesser extent, lead community awareness building efforts. The need to build a robust baseline of suicide data and evidence based policy and programs were seen as part of the national advocate role.

### ***Assessing the Internal Operating Environment***

In the absence of any suggestion or evidence of fraud or misappropriation, there is a level of redundancy in undertaking a systematic review of an organisation with fewer than 3 full-time equivalent staff. Nonetheless, the Review examined these issues in detail and found that SPA is meeting all statutory requirements (state and federal) and has in recent years implemented financial management, human resource, resource planning and reporting systems not found in many much larger organisations. Indeed, there is a case that SPA is over-functioning in these aspects at the expense of delivering on its core mission.

As many stakeholders expressed, 'SPA has done so much with so little for so long'. The range and the complexity of issues addressed by SPA means that with its current resources, it is unsustainable.

Operating systems must be matched to the capacity and needs of the organisation and not a theoretical 'best practice model'. Simplified formats for planning, reporting and organisational policies need to be adopted to reduce pressures on staff as a matter of priority.

### ***Review Summary***

An objective assessment of the organisation's achievements against its 2005-8 Strategic Plan would reveal that it has largely accomplished what it set out to do. What are apparent from the Review are four things:

- SPA has not consistently communicated these achievements to stakeholders as effectively as well as it might – this is particularly the case in relation to the reforms to governance and management;
- SPA is seen as raising some of the difficult issues in suicide and suicide prevention (like men and suicide, coroner's reporting, indigenous suicide) but is unable to follow these through to a material outcome;
- SPA has established a number of relationships or at least linkages with a wide variety of organizations, but has not been in a position to leverage these for the sector or its own objectives; and
- Some stakeholders see many of SPA's achievements as somewhat irrelevant to the needs of the sector as they now present.

The organisation set a course in 2005 and largely stayed with that over the three years. A problem would appear to be that the sector and stakeholders views of what was required from SPA has moved on.

As a consequence, stakeholders see the organisation as "lacking focus" or "lacking discipline" or more positively as "attempting to be all things to everyone".

Over the course of the 3 years, and possibly as a result of the evaluation and revision of the LiFE Framework and a general malaise with the policy settings for suicide prevention, there has been a growing view that SPA should be performing a more assertive national advocacy role. SPA members and stakeholders see an urgent need for SPA to be an independent voice for the sector that has as its *raison d'être* to end the marginalisation of suicide, suicide prevention and those affected by suicide and self-harm.

While a larger and better resourced organisation may have been able to continually monitor these perceptions and aspirations, this presented a significant difficulty for the SPA Board.

## The Broader Policy Context

Widespread, and at times sharp, criticism of the policy settings for national suicide prevention were heard and recorded during this Review. It was clear that there existed a growing level of frustration regarding the lack of progress and the controlling style of DOHA in recent years. DOHA was seen as “controlling the entire agenda”, acting unilaterally, arbitrarily taking decisions while disregarding the informed advice of experts, the evidence and/or the views of the sector, and generally continually marginalising the issue of suicide prevention. DOHA was also seen as treating expert groups like the National Advisory Committee on Suicide Prevention (NACSP) with an almost palpable disdain. For example, the Department’s refusal to provide the NACSP with the independent evaluation report on the National Suicide Prevention Strategy and the LiFE Framework (completed by Urbis Keys Consulting in 2006), while expecting the NACSP members to be able to provide advice on the directions for policy and program interventions, was seen as dismissive and disrespectful.

Since 2000, the policy of funding numerous small scale and unsustainable community projects and failing to build a sound body of evidence through research and baseline data were commonly expressed concerns and frustrations. As one key informant pointed out, that ‘despite more investment on a per capita basis in suicide prevention than any other nation, we have little or nothing to show’.

This frustration with the policy, funding and approach of DOHA has, in part at least, fuelled the frustration with SPA. To change the national policy and funding approach SPA must radically change its priorities and methods. Defining SPA’s role in the sector, and sticking to this, and moving beyond survival mode, were the key issues to be addressed urgently. While it was apparent from the conversations a great deal of goodwill toward SPA has existed from stakeholders, that goodwill is in danger of been exhausted.

## The Future of SPA

As the Review progressed and by the time of the Hobart workshop, two issues have become central:

1. That despite doing what it set out to do in the past few years, SPA could no longer expect to retain the support of key stakeholders in the future if it continued to do what it has recently done.
2. That a new national enterprise to effectively tackle suicide was required. The new enterprise must be a credible, independent, evidence-based body that can implement sustainable programs to address stigma, suicide awareness, prevention, intervention and post-vention.

It became clear that SPA would struggle to transform to the extent and at the speed required to become that new enterprise. The organisation's history, its accumulated 'baggage' in the eyes of stakeholders, the Board and organisation's capacity for change and the operating environment, all pointed to a need for a different strategy.

The participants at the Hobart Workshop in analysing the data and the other information provided to them came to clear and confronting decisions regarding SPA's future:

- That a national body must focus primarily on coordination, advocacy, policy and building the evidence base and secondarily on community awareness and education
- That effective advocacy on suicide prevention lies beyond the confines of the health bureaucracy. As with the social movements that led the political and policy changes necessary to effectively tackle the epidemics of smoking in the 1970s and '80s, road trauma and later HIV/AIDs, effectively tackling suicide as a social health problem will be advanced more effectively through partnerships and alliances beyond the health bureaucracy and health sector generally.
- That effective advocacy requires strategic partnerships with those organisations and sectors with a vested interest in reducing suicide and the impact of suicide on communities. The potential partners includes such diverse organisations as mining companies, construction, mining and forestry unions, peak business groups, philanthropic organisations, road safety/traffic and transport authorities, the justice system and more.
- That SPA would not have sufficient time or capacity to "morph" into the new enterprise and that a taskforce with organisations and individuals who see this future should be assigned the task to prepare the case for change.
- That SPA should pursue further governance reforms and that these reforms are designed to transition across to the new entity at a future date. This position also represents the contingency plan so that should the plan to establish a new enterprise be unsuccessful, a refocused and revitalised SPA can serve the needs and interests of the sector.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

### 1.1 Primary Plan – the development of a *New Enterprise* for suicide prevention in Australia

Stemming from the Hobart workshop, the Board and other participants unanimously endorsed a strategy to pursue the establishment of new national enterprise to provide effective national leadership to strengthen the capacity of the Australian community to reduce self-harm and suicide risk and prevent self-harm and suicide.

#### 1.1.1 Establish a Taskforce

The Board will seek participation in a small Taskforce that will have responsibility to drive this agenda with secretariat support from SPA for the short-term. Participating parties would be asked to make a contribution to the work of the Taskforce.

#### 1.1.2 Preparation of a Concept Paper

The Taskforce will have as an initial task, the preparation of a 'Concept Paper' to form the basis of initial conversations with stakeholders over coming months.

National leadership is necessary to garner a wider community of interest in suicide prevention in Australia. Many organisations and communities are directly impacted by suicide and to date have little means to be active and effective in reducing the risk of suicide and self harm and lowering incidence. A new enterprise offers a new opportunity to build a coordinated, collaborative and community-based approach to suicide prevention.

##### 1.1.2.1 Functions

It is envisaged that the new enterprise would:

- Help communities increase their capacity to develop, implement and evaluate suicide prevention plans, strategies and interventions;
- Build and enhance suicide prevention partnerships;
- Build a robust national data set and promote evidence based practices; and
- Broaden participation in suicide prevention

##### 1.1.2.2 Stakeholders

The new enterprise would serve funders and donors, health and human service professionals, community leaders, survivors and advocates, coalitions and prevention networks, researchers and policymakers.

##### 1.1.2.3 Services

The new enterprise could undertake or contract other organisations to undertake:

- Community education and information programs

- Develop, collect and disseminate community education and information through an on line library of resources.
- Establishing and support partnerships with key industry groups, peak bodies and providers of suicide prevention services.
- Address structural issues that impact on suicide including urban design, housing, insurance and superannuation.
- Assess, monitor and report on the impact of public policies or social developments which may (or do) impact on suicide rates (i.e. through such mechanisms as Social Impact Assessments).
- Establish and promote national lead indicators on mental and emotional well-being
- Support targeted interventions in communities with high rates of suicide and self-harm in partnership with stakeholders.
- Undertake central coordination of prevention, intervention and post-vention services
- Develop, coordinate and disseminate the NSPS communication strategy
- Develop a national research strategy which includes provision of research funding, mechanisms to leverage research investment and evaluate and disseminate the findings of research.
- Support coordinated capacity building in communities to minimise suicide and self-harm
- Support workforce development through evidence-based practice and knowledge transfer and uptake in the workforce and across the broader community
- Establish national standards and accreditation systems for people and organisations working in suicide prevention and establish a registry of best practice across a spectrum of care
- Provide regional and international leadership on suicide prevention (particularly in the Asia-Pacific)
- Provide strategic advice to government.

### **1.1.3 Consult with stakeholders**

Consultations with the Department of Health and Ageing and key organisations in the suicide prevention and service sector should be undertaken as soon as possible. Briefings for the Federal Minister of Health (or that office) should also be scheduled.

### **1.1.4 Build a Coalition for Change**

Subject to the outcomes of the initial conversations with key players in the sector and government, meetings and consultations with a range of potential interest groups and organisations should be scheduled.

### **1.1.5 A Strategy for Change**

A comprehensive strategy for change should be developed by the Taskforce and presented to the SPA Board and other participating organisations.

## 1.2 Contingence plan – the transformation of SPA

The Recommendations in this section are applicable to the transformation of SPA and should be undertaken in 2008 and 2009. If the establishment of a new enterprise is unsuccessful, then it is critical that a refocussed and revitalised SPA is able to more effectively address the challenges confronting the suicide prevention sector.

### 1.2.1 Constitutional changes

Annual reviews of the Constitution should be undertaken to ensure the document continues to align well to the strategic directions and needs of the association.

### 1.2.2 Board reform

#### *1.2.2.1 Size & balance*

To enhance the cohesion, trust and focus on governance responsibilities, the Board should be made up of 7-9 members with a mix of representation and skills based. A specific project to undertake governance reform should be pursued following this Review to ensure there are effective structures for representation and governance in place.

#### *1.2.2.2 Focus on governance.*

Whilst SPA is a small organisation and may remain so, the role of the Board and the role of management must be distinct and separate. The Board's fundamental duty is to govern and direct the organisation in the interests of members. It is not there to work in the business. The principle of the Board focussing on the ends and management focussing on the means should guide the development of the Board Charter and governance policies.

#### *1.2.2.3 Development of separate and formal structures for effective representation.*

SPA is a member-based organisation. If it is to be an effective peak body then consideration of changes to the forms of membership should be undertaken. Peak sector associations are generally made up of organisational members and then state/territory or charter based groups of individual members. This should form part of the governance reform project outlined in Recommendation 1.2.2.1.

Membership engagement has been difficult to achieve for SPA, as it is for many associations. Small working groups on defined and time-limited projects with tangible deliverables will assist in mobilising members and utilising their expertise. Topics selected for work groups should be relevant to member's expressed needs and priorities.

#### *1.2.2.4 Development of Board Charter and support documentation.*

The Board's Charter, Board policies and the Board's standard operating procedures should be developed and adopted by the Board to provide clarity in terms of roles and functions. Presently these are mixed within the Constitution and the Policy and Procedures manual. A single reference document or series of documents for the Board will assist the Board in discharging its governance responsibilities.

#### *1.2.2.5 Board performance reviews*

Introduction of Board performance reviews on an annual basis. These should be for the Board as a whole and for individual Board members to ensure the Board's capacity for effective stewardship continues to develop

#### *1.2.2.6 Seek Independent Advice*

While the Board will rely upon the expertise of its members to inform decisions on the majority of occasions, independent advice should be sought on strategically important and/or complex matters. Legal, financial, taxation, marketing and public policy/advocacy are just some of the issues on which the Board should remain open to seeking independent and expert advice. A small budget provision for this need should be set aside each year.

### **1.2.3 Systems Review**

All business systems should be rationalised and adjusted to the needs of the business. Simple templates for policies, for planning and reporting should be developed and applied to all aspects of the business to avoid waste, duplication and non-value add work effort.

The revised Strategic Plan provides an example of a simpler form of plan and reporting framework.

### **1.2.4 Performance Reporting**

Excessive narrative reporting to DOHA and the Board is resource intensive and non-value added work. Reporting against a limited set of Key Performance Indicators and clear deliverables should provide ample evidence of progress against the business plans. The revised Strategic Plan contains a framework for a single reporting format on a quarterly basis.

### **1.2.5 Securing the Financial Future**

Funding from DOHA has been short-term and complex. There is a need to address this with the Department and potentially the Minister. There is a clear case for funding for a minimum of three years with annual reviews.

Funding from other sources also needs to be more vigorously pursued. A fund raising strategy must be developed and actively supported by the Board within a clear sponsorship policy to protect the integrity of the organisation. Contributions from current members and new member organisations should also be examined.

### **1.2.6 Human Resource needs**

The staffing level of SPA is significantly lower than what is required to undertake its role as defined in the contracts with DOHA. To continue to undertake the role described by DOHA SPA requires a doubling of human resources. A recommended staffing structure and salary bands for the positions are presented here.

<b>Position</b>	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Salary Range</b>
(Chief) Executive Officer	1.0	\$80,000-100,000
Events & Projects Coordinator	1.0	\$55,000-65,000
Communications Officer	1.0	\$60,000-70,000
Research Officer	1.0	\$50,000-60,000
Administration Officer	1.0	\$45,000-50,000
Finance Officer	0.5	\$60,000-80,000

### 1.2.7 A New *Raison D'être*

SPA focus must be as the independent, national advocate for suicide and self-harm, suicide prevention and post-vention. It must advocate for an effective and relevant national policy framework, a sound baseline of disease and disability caused by suicide and self-harm, and investment in evidence based and sustainable programs. It must advocate on behalf of those affected by suicide and self-harm and those working to prevent and/or respond to suicide and self-harm in the Australian community.

### 1.2.8 Building Bonds and Bridges

SPA's effectiveness as the independent national advocate, will hinge largely on the quality and sustainability of relationships it can form. It must ensure that strong bonds are established and maintained with those entities with a direct interest in suicide prevention services. It must also look to build bridges to those organisations or peak bodies that are impacted by suicide. This is a potentially large group and selection must be based on what the potential partner brings to the task at hand.

## 1.3 General issues

The Recommendations in this section also relate to the task of transforming SPA.

### 1.3.1.1 Communications

The forms of communications used by SPA to reach members and stakeholders are not subject to any testing. Effective communications must be tested to assess appropriateness for the needs of these groups. Testing direct mail outs, SMS messaging, email and other forms of communication should be undertaken every 2 years.

### 1.3.1.2 Brand positioning

SPA must be effectively positioned as the key national advocate for issues relating to suicide and suicide prevention. A media engagement strategy to position SPA as the 'top of mind' reference point for media on matters relating to suicide should be developed. Relationships with key social, political and health reporters must be established and maintained.

#### *1.3.1.3 Key events*

During the time of transformation and potential transition to the new enterprise, SPA must focus on a fewer number of national events. The 2009 National Conference, the National Post-vention Conference, the 2010 regional conference and the annual LIFE Awards with the World Suicide Prevention Day tend to self-select. Beyond these, careful consideration of any additional events should occur and be clearly aligned to the overall strategy.

#### *1.3.1.4 Salary Reviews*

Staff salaries should be benchmarked against those in other national NGOs or align with particular levels within the APS. For example, if using the APS as the benchmark, project staff in SPA should align with APS levels 4-6 depending on experience and task requirements and the Executive Officer role should align with an Executive Level 1 officer in the APS, based on present job complexity and responsibility.

Reviews should be undertaken annually to ensure SPA continues to offer reasonable terms and conditions of employment.