

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01AM 12 FEBRUARY 2020

## **Bushfires put additional strain on already vulnerable young Australians, says Youth Insearch**

The intense bushfire season is putting additional pressure on young people's mental health when youth suicide rates are already disproportionately high, says Youth Insearch CEO Stephen Lewin today on the launch of the organisation's annual End Youth Suicide campaign.

Now in its second year, the End Youth Suicide campaign seeks to highlight suicide as the biggest killer of Australians aged between 15-24 years. End Youth Suicide encourages young people to defy the stigma and openly talk about suicide with their friends, families and communities.

Youth Insearch CEO Stephen Lewin says devastating events such as the bushfires and drought cause serious emotional and mental distress for young people.

"Young people are under increasing amounts of pressure, and are finding things particularly difficult right now," Mr Lewin says.

"We have seen a spike in requests for youth mental health support services in bushfire affected communities like Gippsland in Victoria.

"If you are a young person going through a tough time, you don't have to go through it alone and help is available.

"It's encouraging to see new funding announced by the Federal Government which will go towards mental health services in bushfire affected communities. The funding is a recognition that the pain isn't just felt in the loss of homes and infrastructure, but in people's minds as well."

This week politicians will be wearing blue heart badges in Parliament to raise awareness for the End Youth Suicide campaign. The effort is being led by Member for Berowra Julian Leeser, who in his maiden speech outlined the experience of losing his father to suicide after his struggle with depression.

"I'm encouraging my colleagues to wear the Blue Heart today as part of the End Youth Suicide campaign. I am also pleased to say that in the time since Youth Insearch's last Blue Heart day, our Government has made suicide prevention a national priority.

"This is an important campaign for raising awareness about the help that is available for young people contemplating suicide and ending the scourge of suicide amongst our youth," said Julian Leeser MP.

Youth Insearch has also enlisted Triple J Hottest 100-ranking musician G Flip and several other Australian celebrities to share social media posts about the campaign in a move designed to connect directly with youth.

Youth Insearch runs one of the most successful youth intervention programs in Australia. In 2019, 91 per cent of Youth Insearch participants no longer felt suicidal after attending the organisations sessions, with all receiving ongoing follow-up support. 89 per cent had not attempted suicide since participating if they had made an attempt previously. Designed to empower young people to take control of their lives, the program equips participants with skills and opportunities to develop their self-esteem and play a contributing role in society.



### **Key statistics:**

- Suicide is the biggest killer of Australians aged 15 to 24 years
- The number of deaths by suicide for the age group is the highest it has been in over a decade
- For every one suicide in this age group there are around 100 to 200 suicide attempts
- One in four young people who die by suicide are Indigenous
- In 2018, 458 young Australians died by suicide.

**Website:** [youthinsearch.org.au/endiouthsuicide](http://youthinsearch.org.au/endiouthsuicide) (website will go live at 12.00AM 12 February 2020)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/Youth.Insearch/](https://facebook.com/Youth.Insearch/)

**Instagram:** @youthinsearch

**YouTube:** Youth Insearch

**If you need assistance please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Kids Help Line on 1800 55 1800.**

- Ends -

### **About Youth Insearch**

Youth Insearch is a multi-award-winning charity organisation dedicated to helping young people through peer group support. Founded in 1985, Youth Insearch has helped nearly 32,000 at-risk youth turn their lives around, including thousands at risk of suicide.

Youth suicide is the leading cause of death in young Australians aged between 15 and 24 years of age. The number of deaths by suicide in young Australians is the highest it has been for over a decade, and Youth Insearch aims to change this statistic.

### **About CEO Stephen Lewin**

Stephen Lewin joined Youth Insearch as General Manager in December 2014. Committed to a career creating public value, Stephen previously worked with the NSW Government for nineteen years, including senior roles in accommodation and respite, community support teams and home care. Along with his professional expertise, Stephen also brings his experience as a former Youth Insearch participant.

Stephen is an experienced public-sector manager who throughout his career has delivered services to society's most vulnerable people. Stephen has demonstrated his ability to adapt and exceed in new environments by moving to the non-profit sector. Through extensive practice and executive education, Stephen has built a reputation of implementing lasting change, through organisational culture assessment and transformation.

### **Media contact:**

Larissa Jaffé, Account Executive

Wells Haslem Mayhew Strategic Public Affairs

[ljaffe@whmspa.com.au](mailto:ljaffe@whmspa.com.au)

+ 61 4 51 119 653