

Peer support can help ease the pressure after suicide attempts

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A previous suicide attempt remains the strongest predictor of future death by suicide, but researchers have discovered that peer support following an attempt can have a remarkable impact on reducing risk.

Griffith University researchers from the Australian Institute for Suicide

Research and Prevention (AISRAP) paired up with Logan Hospital, Brisbane South PHN and lived-experience non-government organization Brook Red to assess whether peer workers could improve outcomes by providing continuity and coordination of care following [suicide](#)-related emergency department admissions.

The PAUSE program incorporates holistic and responsive support, ongoing social connectedness and understanding from peer workers who can relate to a patient's experiences on a personal level, with findings from the pilot sample suggesting it is an effective model for supporting people following hospitalizations.

Researcher Mandy Gibson said it was often people with complex needs or not feeling supported who are most at risk.

"We're not always dealing with only the clinical symptoms of depression," Gibson said.

"Individuals could be facing homelessness or [financial crises](#), maybe there are family crises or they're caregivers, yet unfortunately many emergency health workers can struggle to know how to support people beyond the medical realm.

"That's when we see the benefit of peer workers, who have been trained to support people through rough times but also practice from their own lived experience, who can walk alongside people to help them get back on their feet, problem solve, direct them to relevant services, navigate the post-attempt period and associated stigmas with friends and family... and really just be a fellow human going, I get what you've been through and it sucks."



PAUSE pilot program workflow. Credit: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20043763

The study found that following participation in PAUSE, suicidal ideation scores among participants decreased, and hope scores increased.

Of particular note, the service was no less likely to be accessed by priority communities.

"We know men are three times more likely to die by suicide but are severely underrepresented when it comes to getting help, yet men were no less likely to work with the peer workers which is really good news.

"About a third of people who die by suicide in Queensland have had a previous attempt, with the weeks following presenting the highest risk, so we know we've got this window of opportunity to really connect people with the services they need, to stop offering cookie cutter responses and instead have complex, multifaceted solutions."

The paper is published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

More information: Mandy Gibson et al, Peer Intervention following Suicide-Related Emergency Department Presentation: Evaluation of the PAUSE Pilot Program, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20043763](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043763)

Provided by Griffith University

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