



Department of Justice and Community Safety

Secretary

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Our ref: 24122719

Ms Janet Lee
Coroners Registrar
Coroners Support Service
Coroners Court of Victoria
Email: cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Lee

STATEMENT OF ACTION – CORONERS COURT RECOMMENDATION – DEATH OF EK – COR 2019 002791

Thank you for your letter of 24 October 2024 enclosing Coroner Ingrid Giles' finding without inquest into the death of EK.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) notes Coroner Giles' findings, including that a health-led program would complement Victoria Police's existing processes to support suspect welfare and prevent suspect suicide before the completion of the criminal law process.

The recommendation of Coroner Giles' findings states:

That the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, in tandem with the Secretary of the Department of Health, explore the development of a program in contact with relevant health experts, to support mental health and coping mechanisms with the view to reduce suicidality among Victorian persons who are under investigation for alleged sexual offences.

Pursuant to sections 72(3) and 72(4) of the *Coroners Act 2008* (Vic), DJCS advises that the Coroner's recommendation is under consideration. DJCS's response to the recommendation is set out below.

DJCS recognises that Victoria Police will often be present when an individual learns that they are under investigation for committing sexual offences. As a result, Victoria Police play a role in the initial identification of any potential welfare concerns and, in circumstances where welfare concerns are identified and the individual consents to a referral, coordinating appropriate referrals to mental health professionals. Victoria Police are unable to make referrals where the suspect does not consent.

DJCS agrees with the assessment of Coroner Giles that Victoria Police members are not mental health professionals and cannot provide the clinical support necessary to assess and reduce an individual's suicide risk. The Department of Health are best suited to lead on the development of programs relating to mental health.

DJCS is aware that the Department of Health is implementing the *Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy 2024-34* (the Strategy) which builds a systems-based, evidence-informed, whole-of-government and community-wide approach to suicide prevention and response. The Strategy and corresponding *First implementation plan 2024-26* (the Implementation Plan) can be found at www.health.vic.gov.au/prevention-and-promotion/suicide-prevention-in-victoria.

Initiative 1.7 under the Implementation Plan requires Department of Health, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and Victoria Police to *build an understanding of connections between family violence, sexual offending and suicide to identify key intervention points to support coordinated prevention and response efforts, including opportunities to strengthen referral pathways and service responses*.

DJCS is engaging with the Department of Health and Victoria Police to understand the feasibility of the recommendation, including whether it would be appropriate to incorporate the intent of the recommendation within initiative 1.7.

The relevant contact for DJCS is Ms Sandra Kiem, Director, Policy Reform and Programs within the Police, Racing, Victims and Coordination group, and can be contacted via email at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Kate Houghton PSM
Secretary

15/01/2025