

mieact

A safe space for
mental health education



Mental Illness Education ACT

2025 - 2026

Pre-Budget Submission





MIEACT acknowledges Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples continuing connection to Country and their ongoing contribution to our community.



02 6257 1195
admin@mieact.org.au
www.mieact.org.au

Level 1, Room 10
The Griffin Centre
20 Genge Street
Canberra, ACT 2601

ABOUT MIEACT

Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) is a not-for-profit organisation working to reduce stigma and increase literacy around mental health in the Canberra community. In any one year, 21.5 per cent of Australians aged 16-85 will experience a mental illness.¹

Young people have the highest prevalence of mental illness than any other age group in Australia, with recent data showing that 38.8% of people aged 16-24 had a 12-month disorder.²

As the primary local mental health and well-being education provider in the ACT, MIEACT provides mental health education for primary and secondary schools, workplaces and community groups across Canberra and the surrounding region. For more than two decades, MIEACT has delivered evidence-informed programs. Through partnering with people with lived experience of mental illness, we share stories that increase mental health literacy, promote early intervention, reduce stigma, and emphasise recovery across the community.

Submission by:

Prudence Slaughter (CEO), Sheryle Moon (MIEACT Board President).

Contact: prudence.slaughter@mieact.org.au, (02) 6257 1195.

¹ National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Accessed online on 24 January 2024 via:

<<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release>>

².Ibid

CONTENTS

Recommendations 5

Introduction..... 5

Youth Awareness of Mental Health (YAM) Program..... 6

 MIEACT’s delivery of YAM in the ACT 7

 Youth mental health trends 8

 Youth mental health costs 8

The DoNOHarm framework and training – sharing lived experience safely 9

Multiyear Funding the Continuation of the YAM Program in the ACT 10

DoNOHarm Communication training for ACTPS Executive staff..... 10

Key Recommendations 11

RECOMMENDATIONS

<p><i>Invest multi-year sustainable funding for evidence-based early intervention suicide prevention programs for at-risk teens.</i></p>	<p>That the ACT Government commit to multi-year funding of \$1.78 million over three years to extend the delivery of the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program in the ACT. As the sole supplier and trusted partner of the ACT Government in delivering YAM, this funding will support suicide prevention efforts, sustain a decline in depression severity, and enhance help-seeking intentions among young people.</p>
<p><i>Invest in an evidence-informed, safe, and consistent approach when engaging lived experience expertise.</i></p>	<p>That the ACT Government invest in a framework and training for government departments that supports the safe and effective engagement of lived experience of trauma in policy and program development and all contexts where lived experience is drawn on to learn, understand and achieve meaningful change.</p>

INTRODUCTION

MIEACT welcomes the opportunity to provide this pre-budget submission for the 2025-26 ACT Budget, reinforcing the ACT Government’s commitment to youth suicide prevention and the safe, effective integration of lived experience in mental health policy and service delivery. To achieve these goals, MIEACT presents two key recommendations:

1. MIEACT requests the ACT Government honour its pre-election commitment to Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program. As the sole provider, continued multi-year funding will ensure the delivery of this evidence-based suicide prevention program to over 11,000 Year 9 students annually, providing certainty for schools, maintaining program fidelity, and supporting experienced facilitators for long-term impact.
2. Embed the DoNOHarm framework and training across ACT Government and public service sectors to ensure the safe and effective engagement of people with lived experience. This aligns with the ACT Government’s Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2023-33, improving mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and strengthening trauma-informed practice.

As the ACT Government is aware, the Territory faces growing mental health challenges, with rising demand for preventative programs and trauma-informed approaches. Nationally, nearly one in two Australians will experience mental ill-health in their lifetime, and more than 3,000 Australians die by suicide each year¹. The economic and social cost of mental illness underscores the need for strategic, proactive investment in mental health education and suicide prevention.

By securing multi-year funding for YAM and embedding DoNOHarm training, the ACT Government has the opportunity to lead the way in youth mental health promotion and lived experience inclusion. MIEACT looks forward to working in partnership to deliver these critical initiatives, ensuring a mentally healthier and more resilient ACT community.

¹ Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care website: *Mental health and suicide prevention*, viewed 25 Jan 2024, accessed via: < <https://health.gov.au/topics/mental-health-and-suicide-prevention> >

YOUTH AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH (YAM) PROGRAM

***RECOMMENDATION:* Invest 1.78m over three years to continue the Youth Aware of Mental Health program in the ACT to support suicide prevention, sustain a decline in depression severity, and increase help-seeking intentions.**

Suicide was the main cause of death for Australians aged 15 to 49 years in 2024.² Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) is an evidence-based program for young people aged 13 –17, in which they learn about and explore the topic of mental health where students actively engage with important mental health themes through roleplay and student-led discussions.³

Since 2020, MIEACT has been the sole provider and trusted partner of the ACT Government in delivering the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program. As the only organisation delivering this internationally recognised, evidence-based suicide prevention program in the ACT, securing multi-year funding is essential to ensure its continued reach to over 11,000 Year 9 students annually. Sustainable investment will provide schools with certainty, maintain program fidelity, and support the retention of experienced facilitators, safeguarding the long-term impact of this vital initiative.

YAM is a free, school-based mental health program designed to equip young people with essential life skills in a safe and supportive classroom setting. It fosters open discussions on mental health topics, including stress, crises, depression, suicide warning signs, and effective help-seeking strategies, empowering students to build resilience and seek support when needed.

As the ACT Government's trusted partner, MIEACT has delivered YAM for five years under annual funding renewals, with the current agreement set to end on 30 July 2025. To ensure ongoing impact, program fidelity, and meet school demand, MIEACT is seeking a multi-year funding agreement to support long-term sustainability while actively engaging in the commissioning process for future funding.

In Australia, research examining YAM delivery to Year 9 students in New South Wales found the program led to a decline in depression severity, and help seeking intentions increased,⁴ and observed that, "the YAM program is a promising preventive intervention for Australian schools, particularly for reducing suicidal ideation, depression, and increasing help-seeking".⁵

YAM has also been evaluated in the EU-wide Randomized Controlled Trial of more than 11,000 participants. The results found YAM effective in reducing new cases of suicide attempts and severe suicidal ideation by approximately 50 per cent of participants. New cases of depression were reduced by approximately 30 per cent in the youth participating in YAM.⁶ Similar results have been reported in the United States.

² Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care website: *Suicide in Australia*, viewed 20 Jan 2024, accessed via: <[Suicide in Australia | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)>

³ Youth Aware of Mental Health, *About Yam*, viewed 19 January 2023, accessed via: <<https://www.y-a-m.org/>>

⁴ 4 International Journal of Mental Health Systems 2021: *The Youth Aware of Mental Health program in Australian Secondary Schools: 3- and 6-month outcomes*, accessed online via: <<https://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13033-021-00503-w>>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

MIEACT'S DELIVERY OF YAM IN THE ACT

MIEACT is proud to be the trusted partner of the ACT Government in delivering YAM to Year 9 students across 65 schools, impacting over 11,000 students and creating more than 65,000 touchpoints for five years.

MIEACT goes beyond the Mental Health in Mind YAM training to actively support and enhance the delivery of the program, ensuring its success as part of our broader commitment to mental health education. As the sole provider of YAM in the ACT, we invest in building the capacity of our instructors and helpers, equipping them with additional skills and support tailored to the needs of ACT students and schools which includes:

- **DoNOHarm** Communication Framework Training
- Facilitator training
- Classroom Management Training
- Induction, unpacking and ongoing support including performance management.

This includes specialized training, ongoing professional development, and integration with MIEACT's wider programs to strengthen program impact, fidelity, and engagement. Through this dedicated approach, MIEACT ensures that YAM instructors and helpers are well-prepared, confident, and supported in delivering this critical, evidence-based program to Year 9 students across the ACT.

Throughout the duration of MIEACT 's delivery of the YAM program (Semester 1 2020 – end of Semester 2 2024, inclusive) schools from Government, Catholic and Independent sectors have implemented the program. In total, 428 classes and approximately 11,000 students from these schools will have taken part in the YAM program. In semester 1 2025 alone, MIEACT will be delivering YAM programs to Telopea Park School, Wanniasa School- Senior Campus, Gold Creek High School, Radford College, Evelyn Scott School, Canberra High School, St Edmund's College, and CCCares. Ahead of the extension of MIEACT's YAM Program extension, MIEACT is looking to confirm bookings with Communities at Work's Galilee School, Melba Copland Secondary School, Galilee School, St John Paul II College, St Mary Mackillop College, St Francis Xavier College into semester 2, all of which are schools that have YAM delivered successfully in 2024.

MIEACT acknowledges the ACT Government's commitment to extending the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) agreement in alignment with the mental health commissioning process, including the anticipated 18-month extension to support this complex transition while ensuring continuity for schools. However, given the proven impact of this evidence-based suicide prevention program for Year 9 students, MIEACT urges the immediate implementation of a multi-year funding agreement.

With ACT Labor's commitment to strengthening youth mental health support through continued investment in community programs, securing long-term funding for YAM is essential. Multi-year funding will:

- Ensure the sustained delivery of YAM to over 11,000 ACT students annually
- Provide certainty for schools engaging with the program
- Support the retention of skilled facilitators to maintain program fidelity

A long-term funding agreement will reinforce the Government's commitment to this critical program, safeguarding its success. MIEACT looks forward to partnering with the ACT Government to further enhance mental health education and support across the Territory.

Youth mental health trends

Young people have the highest prevalence of mental illness than other age groups in Australia, with 2023 ABS data from the National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing showing 38.8% of young people 16-24 had a 12-month mental disorder. Yet, they are also least likely to seek professional help. In the period 2015 to 2022, deaths by suicide have risen among people aged 15-17 from 16.5% to 23.9%¹⁷.

Within the ACT, a 2019 ACT Government Public inquiry into the social and economic benefits of improving mental health in the region found: almost 50 per cent of hospitalisations due to self-harm in 2015-16 were young Canberrans aged 10-24 years¹⁸; and that younger Canberrans were the most likely cohort to experience psychological distress.¹⁹

Youth mental health costs

The most recent Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing in 2013-14 revealed that about 14% of children and adolescents aged 4–17 years were estimated to have experienced mental illness in the previous 12 months, equivalent to about 628,000 people, which, assuming the same prevalence as 2013–14, would be equivalent to about 628,000 people based on the estimated 2022 population²⁰. According to a study undertaken by the Orygen Institute, in 2009 just over 1 million Australians aged 12-25 with a lifetime diagnosis of a mental illness experienced symptoms within the previous 12 months (478,000 males and 526,000 females).²¹

The Orygen Institute study flagged Australia faced substantial costs arising from mental illness in young people. In 2009, the financial cost of mental illness in people aged 12-25 was \$10.6 billion. Of this:

- \$7.5 billion (70.5 per cent) was productivity lost due to lower employment, absenteeism, and premature death of young people with mental illness
- \$1.4 billion (13.4 per cent) was direct health system expenditure
- \$65.5 million (0.6 per cent) was other indirect costs comprising informal carer costs and the bring forward of funeral costs.
- Additionally, the value of the lost wellbeing (disability and premature death) was a further \$20.5 billion. This amounts to a financial cost of \$10,544 per person with mental illness aged 12-25 per year. Including the value of lost wellbeing, the cost is estimated as \$31,014 per person per year.²¹

Current costs figures can be predicted to be substantially greater. For example, in 2023 ABS reported that mental health issues among young people have soared by nearly 50% over the past 15 years with 40% of young people experiencing a mental health illness in the previous year.

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023, suicide and self-harm monitoring, viewed 18 February 2025, accessed via: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/populations-age-groups/intentional-self-harm-hospitalisations-among-young>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023, Australia's Youth: Mental illness, viewed 18 February 2025, accessed via: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/mental-illness>

²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024, Prevalence and impact of mental illness, viewed 18 February 2025, accessed via: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/overview/prevalence-and-impact-of-mental-illness>

²¹ Centre of Excellence, Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, Parkville, Victoria: The economic impact of youth mental illness and the cost effectiveness of early intervention. Viewed 18 February 2025, accessed via: https://www.orygen.org.au/Orygen-Institute/Policy-Reports/Economic-Impact-of-Youth-Mental-Illness/CostYMH_Dec2009?ext=>

²¹ Ibid

THE DONOHARM FRAMEWORK AND TRAINING – SHARING LIVED EXPERIENCE SAFELY

RECOMMENDATION: Invest in a framework and training for ACT government departments and organisations that supports the safe and effective engagement of lived experience in policy and program development and all contexts where lived experience is drawn on to learn, understand and achieve meaningful change.

For decades, MIEACT has supported its lived experience educators to share their individual stories of living with mental illness to schools and the community. MIEACT's DoNOHarm Framework © 2011 and associated training outlines the principles of sharing and hearing stories and descriptions of illness and adversity safely. The Framework is a best practice approach⁹ to communication about mental illness and supports people in the community to share lived experience in a safe and impactful way, drawing on the authenticity and power of the story while not overwhelming the teller or the audience with words or imagery that can be distressing. The framework and training are also an effective duty of care mechanism for organisations that engage with people with lived experience and serve to heighten the effectiveness of lived experience insights.

A University of Canberra study reviewing MIEACT's DoNOHarm Framework showed strong evidence for the principles and practices underpinning DoNOHarm. It was seen to be effective in protecting the safety of both the lived experience sharer and their audience,¹⁰ with the study ultimately finding that MIEACT's DoNOHarm approach is backed by a sound evidence base.¹¹

In the current financial year alone, organisations including the Division of Mental Health, Justice Health, and Alcohol & Drug Services, Volunteering ACT, Stride Mental health, and Ronald McDonald House Charities have undertaken DoNOHarm training to implement the frameworks principles and practices. These and other organisations have embraced DoNOHarm to support groups that include:

- People who share their lived experience in a wide range of settings and for diverse purposes including in the Peer Workforce, advocacy, informing policy and program development and through co-design contributions
- Frontline workers and others who engage with people with lived experience as volunteers or through care and service provision
- Leaders who manage and support direct reports, empowering them to 'create a safe space' (building trust and connection) for their team to bring their whole selves to work and to authentically engage and collaborate.

⁹ Rickwood, D., Thomas, K., Brown, P., Prowse, H. International Journal of Mental Health Promotion 2021: *Mental illness education through stories of lived experience: validation review of the donoharm framework* accessed 25 Jan 2024 via: <https://researchprofiles.canberra.edu.au/en/publications/mental-illness-education-through-stories-of-lived-experience-vali>

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ ibid.

MULTIYEAR FUNDING THE CONTINUATION OF THE YAM PROGRAM IN THE ACT

Activity	Annual cost	Cost for 3 years
Instructor, coordinator and project manager wages	343,625	(+5% p.a)
Instructor recruitment and training	60,041	
Administration and project expenses	113,000	
External evaluation	50,000	
Total	566,666	\$1,786,413

This funding would enable MIEACT to deliver YAM sessions to 450 Year 9 classes in over 45 ACT schools for the 3-year period, providing around 11,250 students with this valuable, proven resource.

DONOHARM COMMUNICATION TRAINING FOR ACTPS EXECUTIVE STAFF

Activity	Annual cost
DoNOHarm training sessions for ACTPS Executive staff	40,000
Administration and project expenses	6000
Total	\$46,000

This funding will enable the DoNOHarm Communication training to be delivered to the Executive staff within the ACTPS as the key leaders ensuring the ACT mental health system is a leader in best practice for the Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2023-33. These workshops will be delivered as three hours training session, either face to face or online, in a highly interactive manner by trained MIEACT facilitators.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To further strengthen the ACT Government's commitment to youth suicide prevention and the safe, effective engagement of lived experience, MIEACT seeks a multi-year funding agreement for the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) program, in line with the pre-election commitment to continue funding. As the key and sole partner of the ACT Government in delivering YAM, MIEACT provides specialised training, ongoing professional development, and integration with our broader mental health education programs. These efforts ensure the continued impact, fidelity, and engagement of the program, which equips over 11,000 Year 9 students annually with essential skills to navigate mental health challenges. Sustainable funding will guarantee that ACT schools can continue accessing this critical, evidence-based program, while maintaining high-quality delivery and supporting facilitator retention.

Additionally, MIEACT recommends embedding DoNOHarm training across ACT Government and public sector workplaces to enhance trauma-informed practice and the safe inclusion of lived experience voices. This aligns with the ACT Government's Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2023-33, strengthening mental health literacy, reducing stigma, and ensuring ethical engagement with those impacted by mental health challenges.

With growing demand for preventative mental health programs and trauma-informed approaches, strategic investment in evidence-based education and lived experience-led initiatives is essential. By committing to long-term funding for YAM and integrating DoNOHarm training, the ACT Government can lead the way in youth mental health promotion and lived experience inclusion.

MIEACT looks forward to collaborating with the ACT Government to implement these critical initiatives and ensure a mentally healthier, more resilient ACT community.