

Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
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**A Supplemental Submission to the
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
Inquiry into Suicide in Australia**

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By

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We note the release of submission number 241 to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Suicide in Australia, by Mr Roland Browne. This submission makes direct reference to us, and we therefore feel it appropriate to set upon public record our response to Mr Browne's comments.

It appears that Mr Browne may have misunderstood our submission to this Inquiry (submission number 30). In our submission, we address parts (b) and (g) of the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, which concern the accuracy of suicide reporting in Australia, the adequacy of the current program of research into suicide and suicide prevention, and the manner in which findings are disseminated to practitioners and incorporated into government policy

Attachments B to E of our submission document instances where the academic peer review process has been bypassed, where articles have been fast tracked for publication without adequate scrutiny, and where poor quality research has been passed on to government employees involved in the field of health policy. We highlight that these issues undermine the advancement of quality research about suicide and suicide prevention. We also note that these occurrences demonstrate a series of failings of the current academic system in Australia (and internationally), in the field of suicide prevention research.

It appears, however, that Mr Browne has significantly misinterpreted the content of our submission, and as a consequence attempts to discredit our research into firearm suicide. To support his claims, Mr Browne provides a paper by Hemenway, published in the Journal of Public Health Policy, which criticises our research.

We must inform the Committee that this citation provides another example of the troubling publishing bias that we highlight in our original submission. As shown at **Attachment A** of this document, the Journal of Public Health Policy refused to publish our response to the Hemenway article, despite initially inviting that response and subsequently agreeing that the content of our response was fit for publication.

This contrasts starkly with Committee on Publishing Ethics (COPE) guidelines around "encouraging debate", which state that "cogent criticisms of published work

should be published unless Editors have convincing reasons why they cannot be,” and “authors of criticised material should be given the opportunity to respond.” These guidelines can be accessed at: http://publicationethics.org/files/u2/New_Code.pdf

This reinforces the position, expressed in our original submission, that:

We therefore urge the Committee, when delivering its recommendations, to:

- *Note* the issues raised in this submission;
- *Recognise* the implications of those issues for evidence-based suicide prevention policy in Australia; and
- *Endorse* the need for independent and rigorous peer review of academic work, freedom of research from suppression or censorship, and the importance of using open and transparent policy development processes, in order to promote quality evidence in the field of suicide prevention.