

# A need to talk about suicide

By Naomi Fallon

MIKE Zissler wants people to start talking about suicide.

It is not because Mr Zissler is a morbid man but, as the CEO of Lifeline Canberra, he wants people to know that most suicide deaths are preventable.

"One of the big issues around Lifeline - and it's not just Lifeline, it's the whole mental health sector - is that there's a failure to recognise the problem in the first place," he said. "Every year we get very profound reporting upon the road traffic toll, yet there's a significant failure to understand that while the road toll is tragic and we should do something about it, suicide is a greater problem for Australia than the road traffic toll."

Mr Zissler said there were about 40 suicides in the ACT last year, compared to a road toll of 12. "If that were the road toll, quite literally we would probably look at doing things like putting air bags on lamp posts." he said. Mr Zissler blamed a lack of ACT and federal budget funding on the absence of media coverage on the issue. "It's grossly under reported because the media won't report on suicides," he said. "A lot of people believe it's because of copycatting. But we can report on it without glorifying it."

Mr Zissler feared even ABS statistics could be incorrect because people did not like to identify deaths as being suicidal. "Often coroners, GPs and whoever certified the death put it down to things like 'misadventure' because they don't want to attach the stigma to the family," he said. Last year Lifeline ACT took about 20,000 phone calls, of which more than 2000 were suicidal in their nature.

"That's a telling statistic, but the fact they're ringing Lifeline at all is really good," Mr Zissler said. "We know that nearly all suicides are preventable because they don't actually want to go through with the act." Mr Zissler said if he had one message for the community, it was to start talking about suicide. "We really need people to come out and say enough is enough," he said.

"I want people to be courageous enough to talk about suicide - leaders in our community, not just political leaders, but opinion leaders, social leaders talking about suicide saying enough is enough, we've got to do something."

If Lifeline ACT was able to obtain more funding, Mr Zissler said the money would be used to train more community members in how to deal with people thinking about suicide. "It introduces people to the notion of stress and crisis and more importantly what it is to see someone in crisis and indeed to pluck up the courage to ask, 'are you thinking about suicide'. Because it's actually a really hard question," he said. "Most suicides are preventable. The real thing is actually getting into the community and preventing those suicides before they occur. "So we need to create strong communities that look after each other."

CEO of Lifeline Canberra Mike Zissler is disappointed the organisation did not get any funding in the budget.