**For immediate release**

**MEDIA ALERT**

**With more than 21,000 impacted, ACT holds inaugural Suicide Memorial Service & Sunflower Ceremony**

Over the past three years in the ACT 156 people have died by suicide, with up to 135 people directly affected by each of those deaths - that is **more than 21,000 people impacted**. Given that astonishing figure, one does not have to go far in Canberra or the ACT to find someone touched by suicide.

**For the first time the ACT will hold the Wesley LifeForce Suicide Memorial Service and Sunflower ceremony to remember lives lost to suicide.**

**MEDIA CALL – 8.45am, Thursday 21 November 2024,**

**Canberra Southern Cross Yacht Club, 1 Mariner Place, Yarralumla**

7.30 – 8.30am

**Wesley LifeForce Suicide Memorial Service**

The service, inclusive for people of all faiths and none, incorporates prayer, musical and ceremonial components as well as Dr Karen Bird and Leesa Mountford as lived experience speakers sharing their stories around grief and suicide.

8.30-8.40am

**Sunflower Ceremony**

Immediately following the Service, Rev Stu Cameron, Dr Karen Bird, Leesa Mountford, and MPs will lead those gathered in laying sunflowers to honour those lives lost to suicide. Sunflowers have long been considered a symbol of hope, strength and resilience as the vibrant yellow flower, supported by a strong stem, turns its face towards the sun.

8.45am

**Interview and photo opportunity**

**Rev Stu Cameron**

Wesley Mission CEO

Will highlight that half of all people who die by suicide have not connected with the health system and have a level of psychosocial disconnection, making suicide prevention a shared responsibility across the community, including families and friends, professional groups, government and non-government agencies.

**Dr Karen Bird**

Deputy Chair, National Advisory Committee for Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling and Board Member, Australian War Memorial, whose son, Jesse, took his life in 2017, will share her lived experience. Dr Bird also gave testimony at the Royal Commission in to Defence and Veteran Suicide. In addition, Dr Bird is an integral team member of Open Door Flinders University doing world leading work in researching, recognising and facilitating the well-being of current serving, veterans and their families.

**Leesa Mountford**

Lived experience, Founder - *I Got You*, Canberra resident and MC for the Memorial Service

**Andrew Moore**

General Manager Wesley Mission LifeForce Suicide Prevention

Can speak about the unique community led Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Networks that are demonstrating their effectiveness in reducing the suicide rate by seven percent on average.

**Politicians in attendance:**

* Senator Hollie Hughes – Shadow Assistant Minister for Mental and the Shadow Assistant Minister for the NDIS
* Ms Susan Templeman MP – Federal Member for Macquarie
* Ms Marian Scrymgour MP – Federal Member for Lingiari

ENDS

**Media contact Anne Holt on 0418 628 342 or** **anne.holt@wesleymission.org.au**

**About Wesley Mission’s Suicide Prevention work**

Wesley LifeForce is a national suicide prevention program run by Wesley Mission that educates, empowers and resources local communities, supporting people most at risk. More than 40,000 people have been trained through the program during the past 15 years.

With a presence in every state, focusing on areas where the problem of suicide hits the hardest, Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Networks are community-led action groups addressing suicide at a local level. So far, there are 130 groups across Australia representing a membership of more than 2,500 people. New networks are being established every year through the support of the Commonwealth Government and Primary Health Networks.

For further information click [here](https://www.wesleymission.org.au/find-a-service/mental-health-and-hospitals/suicide-prevention/wesley-lifeforce/).

**MEDIA PLEASE NOTE:** Most people – including media professionals – have been touched by suicide. For many people, the service will be one of mixed emotions. We ask that you respect the privacy of people who are attending and those participating in the service.

For safe reporting guidelines on suicide go to:

<https://everymind.org.au/resources/mindframe-for-media-professionals>

People who are experiencing distress can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.