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Discrepancies in suicide reporting

Article in the *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*

“Collection of data on suicide needs to be standardised if governments are to understand the extent of the problem and if we are to be able to make comparisons,” according to Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association.

Mr Moore was commenting on an article by Sue Walker, Linping Chen and Richard Madden that is published in the *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

The researchers raised issues related to the coding of Australian suicide data including:

- Disparity between jurisdictions due to differences in documentation about accidental or undetermined causes of death
- Lack of standardisation in the way that coronial deaths are reported across Australia
- Lack of a standard form for police reports
- Administrative processes that cause delays in reporting the results of coronial investigations, and
- Reluctance on the part of some coroners to report deaths as suicides”

Amongst suggestions for improvement to the system the researchers suggested “standardisation in coronial reporting processes and forms, potentially with use of a tick box to document intent, would facilitate comparability and assist with the ABS’s coding process”.

They concluded that “researchers and policy makers need to be aware of the constraints under which suicide can be reported as such in the official data before interpreting time trends.”

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Article available by contact PHAA 02 6285 2373

Contact: Michael Moore, CEO 0417 249 731(m) 02 6247 2304 (h) mmoore@phaa.net.au

The Public Health Association of Australia is a non-party-political organisation with a membership drawn from more than 40 health-related professions. The Association makes a major contribution to health policy in Australia and has branches in every State and Territory. www.phaa.net.au