



# The Alliance for Suicide Prevention program

University of the Sunshine Coast



The Alliance for Suicide Prevention was established by the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) Thompson Institute (TI) in 2019 as a strategic framework to address the Sunshine Coast region's alarming suicide rate, which is 9.1 per cent higher than the national average.

Developed from the European Alliance Against Depression model, an evidence-based program targeting depressive disorders and suicidal behaviour, the Alliance for Suicide Prevention strives to create a connected community to

improve mental health and resiliency to suicidality and its precursors through an integrated network of community-based partners. USC is the first to adapt this European model to an Australian context, with further adaptations to suit the unique needs of First Nations People.

The fundamental strength of the Alliance derives from its collective impact framework which sees its members (currently 121 regional organisations) working with the USC to create meaningful change. Partnerships were formed through a process based on genuine communication, understanding of regional issues, mission and value alignment, and established capacity to influence change.

The collaboration process commenced with community-based focus groups (including people with lived experience, business leaders, First Nations people) to identify region-specific needs and service gaps. Input was also sought from key stakeholders in the suicide response sector (Hospital and Health Service, Queensland Police Service and Primary Health Network), to understand what work had been undertaken 'upstream' to reduce the burden and increase reactivity.

With Indigenous suicide rates double that of the non-Indigenous population, the Alliance also established a First Nations Advisory Group of community leaders, Elders and community organisations to develop a suicide prevention strategy specific to Indigenous people.

Alliance partnerships were then built through an engagement model centred on:

- » Head: Connecting on local issues and the opportunity to participate in an innovative response to a complex social issue.
- » Heart: Connecting through emotion, with honesty and authenticity, focused on aligning the program with the partners' ability to make change.
- » Hand: Providing tangible tools through which partners could contribute to the overall mission, through training and resources, with opportunities for input and collaboration.

Where other suicide prevention programs focus on one activity such as generating awareness, the Alliance model is built on the implementation of translational research, novel treatments and digital tools while building the capacity of the community from a bottom-up and top-down approach by working with regional leaders while concurrently working with the general population.

The Alliance model demonstrates that universities can be integrated and responsive to local community needs, extending beyond 'places in

community' to become 'anchors-in-place' - understanding and working with local communities to generate place-based impacts, with the potential to significantly promote and elevate community engagement in the Higher Education sector as a whole.



University of the  
Sunshine Coast  
**USC's The Alliance for Suicide  
Prevention – Sunshine Coast program  
was the winner of the 2021 EA  
Excellence Award for Excellence in  
Community Engagement.**

