



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

**Brain and Mind
Centre**

Lives saved by supporting jobs in 2020 and beyond.

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A BRIEFING NOTE

The economic supports put in place in the wake of the pandemic in Australia (including JobKeeper to stem job loss, mortgage deferrals, and moratoriums on rental evictions) and a delay or initial decline in suicide deaths known as the ‘pulling-together’ effect^{1,2} have likely provided effective protections against the significant adverse suicide outcomes projected under the ‘do nothing’ / baseline scenarios originally projected in the [Road to Recovery](#) modelling report and which are usually experienced to a greater degree by men during recessions. Given that the majority of suicide deaths occur in men (i.e. [in 2019, males accounted for 75.4% of the 3318 suicide deaths in Australia](#)) and given that the temporary economic protections put in place benefitted men to a greater extent,³ Australia has been successful to date in preventing an overall increase in suicides in 2020.

Building on the program of systems modelling undertaken by the Brain and Mind Centre, University of Sydney (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/brain-mind/our-research/youth-mental-health-and-technology.html>) an age and gender stratified system dynamics model of the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on population mental health outcomes in Australia has been developed. This model is an extension of the national model developed in 2020, which has been refined on the basis of empirical data on unemployment, underemployment and workforce participation over 2020⁴ (we previously relied on RBA and Treasury forecasts) and updated data on psychological distress from the Australian Bureau of Statistics,⁵ resolving previous uncertainty around the duration of economic protections and providing a clearer picture of the mental health trajectory Australia is likely to experience.

This revised model estimates that Government action in 2020, primarily JobKeeper, will likely contribute to the prevention of 469 suicide deaths, 4,226 self-harm hospitalisations and 51,490 mental health-related ED presentations over the period 2020-2025. However, more needs to be done. Estimates of the peak prevalence of psychological distress provided in the [Road to Recovery Revised Report in August 2020](#) were closely aligned with that seen in the real-time data collected in 2020. Despite a more rapid economic recovery than projected by the Reserve Bank of Australia in mid-2020, revision of model inputs with new empirical data continue to forecast negative population mental health outcomes associated with the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 (as outlined in our latest April 2021 report ‘*Simulating the trajectory of the ‘shadow pandemic’ of mental ill-health in Australia: An age and gender lens*’).

References:

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- 3 Wood, D., Griffiths, K. & Crowley, T. Women's work: The impact of the COVID crisis on Australian women. (Grattan Institute: <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Womens-work-Grattan-Institute-report.pdf>, 2021).
- 4 Australian Bureau of Statistics. Labour Force, Australia, March 2021. (ABS, Canberra, Australia, 2021).
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