

Greens to press for twice-yearly publication of suicide statistics

By Peter Jean
Health Reporter

Suicide statistics would be published twice a year and a target for the reduction of suicide would be set, under a proposal by the ACT Greens.

ACT Greens health spokeswoman Amanda Bresnan will today propose in the Legislative Assembly that figures on the territory's suicide toll be released to the public.

The proposal follows calls by leading national mental health experts for more data to be made available publicly on the number of Australians who commit suicide.

Ms Bresnan said the regular release of statistics would promote public awareness and discussion about suicide and help to ease the suffering of people confronting the issue.

"For men under 44, for women under 34, suicide is the highest cause of death," Ms Bresnan said.

"We've been able to have that discussion

about the road toll in an open way. But we have to start having it about suicide."

Ms Bresnan said setting targets for reducing the rate of suicides would help to measure the effectiveness of strategies.

"There are sensitivities in discussing suicide publicly, such as the need to avoid details about locations and methods, but we must not be so scared as to avoid public discussion of the matter altogether, which only adds to the stigma and does not help to address suicide rates," she said.

Lifeline Canberra chief executive Mike Zissler said there were about 40 reported suicides in the ACT in 2010 but this was probably an underestimate.

He said Ms Bresnan's proposal would help promote community and government discussion about suicide prevention.

■ Support is available for anyone who may be distressed by calling SANE Helpline 1800 187 263; Lifeline 131 114; Salvo Crisis Line - 9331 2000; beyondblue 1300 224 636.