

Hon. Clayton Barr,
State Member for Cessnock,

ne,

16/12/2019.

Hi Clayton Re Depression and Suicide

When I was young I had a life insurance policy and I knew that it would not be paid in the event of suicide. Since then I have had a lot of experience with depression and anxiety. I am now 80.

When I was 60 I fell into depression and was treated with medication and therapy. I had three admissions to a suitable hospital from 4 weeks to 10 days and it was in this state that I had suicidal impulses and was engaged in planning what to do. It was therapy that saved me. I was under treatment for about 2 years. Anxiety does not produce the same impulses. It has different symptoms. The reason for the depression was finally found and effective action taken. This caused the end of my marriage at the time.

Again at 70 and in a new marriage I fell into depression and spent about 14 weeks in a hospital in Newcastle. The depression this time was treated not only with medication and therapy but with ECT for about 6 weeks. This then bought me out of the depression and I could then go home.

At 78 years of age I had a third episode with depression and was admitted to a hospital in Toronto for 6 weeks again with the same suicidal impulses. With the experiences that I had and good treatment with medication, therapy and ECT I was able to better resist the impulses this time. After being discharged I had the misfortune to develop an anxiety disorder but that is a separate story.

With this experience I am able to express the opinion that nearly all suicides are caused by depression with many of them being undiagnosed. There is now a need for a social and economic review of suicides and any insurance policies. Most if not all would have an exclusion clause typically 2 years.

I can suggest that life insurance should be paid for a victim of depression without an exclusion clause. This would be a review of suicide similar to euthanasia and homosexuality. I can see no reason for suicide with depression to be different from say heart disease or cancer. Victims of depression should not be discriminated against. The first action is for people to contact resources like Beyond Blue or the Black Dog institute.

I can also suggest that the payment be viewed as compensation by the person committing suicide to his or her family. Suicide would have a severe effect on family members.

I would be pleased to receive your support and advice.

Yours truly

Michael Gane



Mr Michael Gane

Dear Mr Gane

Thank you for your correspondence of 17 January 2020, originally directed to the Premier of New South Wales, concerning insurance payment on suicide. Your correspondence has been referred to the Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology and she has asked me to respond to you.

I am sorry to hear that you have been dealing with experiences of depression and anxiety during your lifetime. The regulatory framework that applies to insurance in Australia recognises that insurance policies are essentially private commercial arrangements between insurance companies and their customers. Under this framework, the process of determining whether to accept or refuse an application for insurance is a commercial decision for the management of each insurance company subject to compliance with legal requirements.

The *Insurance Contracts Act 1984* (the Act) provides the legislative framework within which insurance contracts are made. It ensures that the provisions included in certain insurance contracts, and the practices of insurers in relation to such contracts, operate fairly.

I acknowledge your suggestion that the government should undertake a review into suicides and insurance policies. The Productivity Commission is currently undertaking an inquiry into mental health with the final inquiry report to be handed to the Australian Government by 23 May 2020. You are welcome to make a submission to the inquiry <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/mental-health#report>.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely

Division Head

Financial System Division

29/3/2020