

The anxiety pandemic

COVID LINKED TO EXPLOSION IN YOUTH DEPRESSION

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HIGH anxiety is fuelling childhood depression and teenage suicides, with schools reporting a rise in bullying and truancy since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australian Primary Principals Association president Malcolm Elliott said distressed children were already starting to self-harm as early as primary school.

“There just isn’t enough psychological support for students in schools. They’re nervous, they lack personal confidence and they are not able to go with the flow – they perceive a threat at every turn,” Mr Elliott said.

“That can lead to conflict both in the playground and in the classroom.”

Mr Elliott said parents’ worries were rubbing off on children, creating toxic stress. “Children are picking up on the reaction of their parents to the TV news, and with COVID-19 people are worried about losing their jobs.”

One in seven school-aged children has been diagnosed with a mental illness, an alarming Productivity Commission report has revealed.

Suicide is the leading cause of death for young Australians aged 15 to 24.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and

Welfare, 2312 children aged under four were dispensed one or more mental health-related prescriptions in 2018-19. Another 87,781 children aged between five and 11 were also on mental health medication, while almost 135,000 12 to 17-year-olds were medicated.

Kids Helpline has been flooded with a record number of calls for help from children cooped up with violent or mentally ill parents since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The hotline received 433,600 calls from children and teenagers this year, yet shockingly only 158,308 calls were taken by counsellors.

The federal government has now given Yourtown, which operates the hotline, extra funding to hire 50 more counsellors to cope with the soaring demand.

Yourtown chief executive and Mental Health 360 panel expert Tracy Adams said domestic violence and problems at school were among the reasons why children were anxious and depressed.

Federal Education Minister Dan Tehan told Mental Health 360 the Education Council of state and territory ministers would consider a report on the best way to measure student wellbeing.

He said a National Child Mental Health Strategy was being developed, and the government was spending \$133m on youth mental health. Lifeline 131 114