

## **Building Grief-Literate Systems: Grief First Aid Response to SA Statewide Model**

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The paper “A Statewide Model for Integrated Grief and Bereavement Support” represents a significant and much-needed advancement in how grief is understood and supported at a systems level. The authors are to be commended for developing a model that not only recognises grief as a public health issue, but also translates this understanding into a coordinated, operational framework. The support of SA Health and the Hospital Research Foundation Group in commissioning and funding this work reflects important leadership in addressing what has long been an under-recognised area of need.

What makes this model particularly compelling is its clear alignment with contemporary public health approaches to bereavement. It acknowledges that while a small proportion of individuals require specialised support, the majority are best supported through informal, community-based responses. As the paper highlights, grief support is not confined to the health system, but occurs across “families and friends, workplaces, schools, faith-based institutions and every other facet of community.”

The inclusion of grief education, community capacity building, access pathways, and integrated partnerships demonstrates a comprehensive and practical approach. Importantly, the model is not purely theoretical; it is designed to be operationalised, with clear pathways for implementation and coordination across systems. In particular, the emphasis on grief education as a core component signals a recognition that capability must be built across the workforce and broader community to ensure safe, consistent, and compassionate responses.

This is where our work directly aligns:

Through our Delphi study on workplace grief literacy and bereavement training, we sought to establish expert consensus on how organisations can effectively support grief in everyday environments. Drawing on an international, multidisciplinary panel, the study reinforced that grief is a universal human experience that is most often supported through informal, non-clinical care, and that workplaces are uniquely positioned to provide this Level 1 support through acknowledgement, respectful communication, and psychologically safe environments.

Importantly, the study identified that while this level of support is critical, it is often inconsistent or absent due to a lack of shared language, confidence, and guidance. Strong consensus emerged that training should focus on building grief literacy, strengthening everyday responses, and maintaining clear boundaries between informal support and clinical care. In this sense, the findings closely mirror the principles embedded within the South Australian model, particularly its emphasis on community capacity, education, and integrated systems of support.

This research has now been translated into accredited Grief First Aid training, designed to operationalise these principles in real-world settings. The training provides a practical mechanism to build grief literacy across workplaces and communities, equipping individuals with the skills, confidence, and boundaries required to respond safely and appropriately. In doing so, it directly supports the implementation of the model's core components, bridging the gap between evidence and practice.

The alignment between the South Australian model and this emerging body of work is clear. The model provides the framework. Evidence-informed training provides the mechanism to embed it across systems, industries, and communities.

This presents a significant opportunity.

The South Australian Government has demonstrated leadership in recognising grief as a public health priority and investing in an integrated, evidence-based response. The next step is broader adoption. Other state and national governments are now well positioned to build on this work by supporting the implementation of grief literacy initiatives that strengthen community and workplace capability at scale.

Grief does not sit within one system, one profession, or one sector. It is experienced across every workplace, every school, and every community. Without structured, evidence-informed responses, it remains inconsistently supported, often leaving individuals to navigate loss in isolation.

The combination of a coordinated statewide model and accredited, evidence-based training provides a clear and actionable pathway forward. It enables governments to move beyond recognition toward implementation, building grief-literate communities that are better equipped to respond with compassion, clarity, and care.

The work undertaken in South Australia sets an important precedent. The opportunity now exists for other jurisdictions to follow, ensuring that grief is not left to chance, but is supported through systems that are intentional, integrated, and informed by evidence.

## **Reference**

Forsythe, D., Davis, K., Sharplin, G., Swetenham, K., & Eckert, M. (2026). *A statewide model for integrated grief and bereavement support*. Journal of Public Health. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10389-026-02720-4>