

Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport
Maree Todd MSP
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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Convener
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

28 November 2023

Dear Convener,

PUBLICATION OF SCOTLAND'S SELF- HARM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

I am delighted to let you know that, the Scottish Government and COSLA will today publish a dedicated Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan. We are the first country in the world to publish a dedicated self-harm strategy, and believe this will be warmly welcomed, both by people affected by self-harm and services that support them. It is now available via the [Scottish Government website](#).

This strategy has been developed in recognition that self-harm is highly stigmatised and many people feel unable to seek support, fearing a unhelpful or dismissive response. Our ambition is to ensure people affected by self-harm feel able to reach out for support knowing that compassionate responses will be given.

We also know that self-harm is a risk factor for suicide, and therefore by prioritising and tackling stigma and discrimination and improving support for people who have self-harmed, this strategy will also help prevent suicide.

As you will see, the strategy sets out our vision, which is for people who have self-harmed or are thinking of self-harming, to receive compassionate, recovery-focused support, without fear of stigma or discrimination. Our intention is that compassionate support should be available to anyone affected by self-harm, however they themselves define it. By taking a broad approach but with a specific focus on people at higher risk, including children and young people and marginalised groups we believe we can have the biggest impact.

The strategy, which includes a three year action plan, has been shaped and guided by people with lived experience of self-harm, insights from services that support them, and available research and data. We are confident that by adopting this co-production and evidence-based approach over the last 18 months, the strategy and action plan sets out a clear plan for changes that are needed to improve outcomes for people affected by self-harm. Of course we will continue to learn more as we deliver the action plan, and make any adjustments that are needed to achieve our vision.

Through this careful and sensitive work, we have identified the following priority areas, which we will work to deliver over the next three years. These are to:

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- continue to expand and deepen knowledge and embed compassionate understanding of self-harm and tackle stigma and discrimination;
- continue to build person-centred, support and services across Scotland to meet the needs of people affected by self-harm; and
- review, improve, and share data and evidence to drive improvements in support and service responses for people who have self-harmed, or are at increased risk of doing so.

The strategy includes a set of draft outcomes which will be used to understand the impact our actions are making on achieving the strategy's vision. We will work with partners to agree these outcomes by Spring 2024, as well as how we will measure progress towards them. As this is our first strategy, and the data and evidence about self-harm has limitations, it has been developed carefully, building our understanding along the way. We will continue to use this approach through delivery of the action plan, which will ensure we make any necessary adjustments to our plan to achieve most impact.

We also will continue to ensure alignment between the Self-Harm Action Plan and a wide range of other national and local policies and priorities, such as the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Delivery Plan, the Suicide Prevention Strategy, the National Trauma Transformation Programme, and The Promise. We will work closely and actively with a wide range of partners to realise these connections.

We recognise the importance of improving support for people affected by self-harm quickly. For that reason Scottish Government have already invested £1.5m in new services to provide direct support through [Self Harm Network Scotland](#), which is managed by Penumbra and is already evaluating positively. This resource offers up-to-date, reliable and accessible advice for anyone affected by self-harm, one-to-one support from peer practitioners, and a webchat facility. The latter has been running since October and is available across Scotland to anyone over 12 years old.

We also know that upskilling organisations who provide direct support to people who self-harm is vital, as many people who self-harm do not seek support from healthcare services. As part of the funding to Penumbra they are now able to offer free training sessions – either in-person or online, to a range of services, organisations and parents and carers. We will continue to invest in this service - which is already showing excellent results - as we work to deliver the action plan.

I wholeheartedly believe that this Strategy and Action plan offers a real opportunity to show Scotland's ambition to improve responses to people who self-harm and to support future generations.

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I have been pleased to say that this strategy has benefitted already from supportive cross-party engagement and I would welcome the support of members of the Committee as we work to implement this important programme of work.

I hope you have found this update useful, I am happy to provide further updates, or respond to any specific questions the Committee may have.

Yours sincerely,



Maree Todd MSP

Copied to:

Convenor - Criminal Justice Committee

Convenor - Social Justice & Social Security Committee

Convenor - Education Children and Young People Committee

Convenor - Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Convenor - Local Government - Housing and Planning Committee

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