

Suicide Prevention in Scotland

Introduction

1. At its [work programme discussion on 19 December](#), the Committee agreed to undertake a short inquiry into suicide prevention.
2. The focus for the inquiry is to:
 - Scrutinise the Scottish Government and COSLA's Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan, its anticipated outcomes and progress to date.
 - Assess to what degree budget allocation to the Strategy and Action Plan are sufficient, and to what degree budget allocations in other areas of Government will assist or hinder its delivery
 - Establish to what degree the unequal distribution of deaths from suicide across different population groups are being accounted for in the Strategy and its implementation
 - Determine to what degree the voices of those with lived experience are being meaningfully heard within the Strategy and how it is implemented
3. [At its meeting on 27 February](#), the Committee considered a high-level approach and approved a [Call for Views](#) (which was issued on 1 March and closed on 29 March). [Responses to the Call for Views have been published and are available here.](#)
4. The Committee took evidence from stakeholders at two meetings on [23 April](#) and [30 April](#) and held an engagement session with people with lived experience of suicide on 7 May. The note from the session with people with lived experience will be published on our webpages shortly.
5. The Committee also agreed to hear from the Scottish Government and COSLA at the conclusion of the inquiry.

Background

6. [A recent SPICe paper](#) defines suicide as death resulting from an intentional, self-inflicted act. Suicidal feelings can vary. They can include thoughts about ending your life, feeling that people would be better off without you, thinking about methods of suicides, or making plans to take your own life. Suicidal feelings may also be referred to as suicidal thoughts, suicidal ideation, or suicidal ideas.
7. The most recent [National Records of Scotland report](#) shows that the age standard mortality rate for Scotland for 2018-2022 had increased to 14.4 suicides per 100,000 population compared to a rate of 13.3 in 2013- 2017.

8. There are also significant inequalities in the suicide statistics. The [NRS Report shows](#):
- The rate of suicide mortality in the most deprived areas in Scotland was 2.6 times as high as in the least deprived areas in Scotland. This is higher than the deprivation gap of 1.8 times for all causes of death.
 - The mortality rate for suicides in 2022 was 2.9 times as high for males as it was for females.
9. In November 2023, the [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Scotland Fairer](#) identified a number of factors that were related to suicide risk. A higher suicide rate/ or reported suicide risk was identified among:
- People living in areas of socio-economic deprivation
 - People in prison
 - Men
 - People aged between 45 and 54 years (NRS figures use the 45 to 64 age range)
 - Trans and non-binary people
 - Lesbian, gay and bisexual groups
10. It also referred to Scottish Government research in which participants reported the effect of racism on exacerbating mental health illnesses and increasing their propensity towards suicide.

Scottish Government and COSLA policy

11. In 2022, The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) published [Scotland's Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022-2032: Creating Hope Together in 2022](#). The Strategy's vision is to reduce the number of suicide deaths in Scotland, whilst tackling the inequalities which contribute to suicide. Published alongside this strategy was an [Action Plan covering the period 2022 to 2025. A Year 1 Delivery Plan \(2023-24\)](#) was published in December 2023.
12. The Strategy also notes that the Scottish Government's [2021-22 Programme for Government](#) committed to double the specific funding available for suicide prevention over the course of the current Parliamentary term, from £1.4 million to £2.8 million.
13. The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport wrote to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee with an [update on the Suicide Prevention Strategy in June 2023](#). This letter informed the Health Committee that an update from this strategy is expected in July 2024.

Evidence sessions

14. At its meeting on 23 April, the Committee held a roundtable session with third sector organisations including those with a national reach. It heard from:

- **Rob Gowans**, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE)
- **Neil Mathers**, Executive Director, Samaritans Scotland
- **John Gibson**, Chief Executive Officer, The Canmore Trust
- **Dan Farthing**, Head of Suicide Prevention, Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH)
- **Jason Schroeder**, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Men's Sheds Association
- **Rebecca Hoffman**, National Policy Lead, LGBT Health and Wellbeing
- **Aidan Mitchell**, Policy and Public Affairs Officer, Change Mental Health
- **Dr Richmond Davies**, Head of Public Health Analytics and Intelligence, Public Health Scotland

15. At its meeting on 30 April, the Committee heard from witnesses about the development and implementation of the strategy firstly, from

- **Professor Rory O'Connor**, a researcher at the University of Glasgow and leader of the University's [Suicidal Behaviour Research Laboratory](#), and
- **Dr Hazel Marzetti**, a researcher at the University of Edinburgh and part of the [Suicide in/as Politics research project](#),

and then from:

- **Dr Amy Knighton**, East Scotland Chair, Royal College of General Practitioners,
- **Dr Murray Smith**, Vice Chair, Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland,
- **Sam Campbell**, Health Improvement Principal, Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership and
- **Dr Jane Bray**, Consultant in Public Health, NHS Tayside

16. At today's meeting, the Committee will conclude its evidence taking and will take evidence from the Scottish Government, COSLA and accompanying officials:

- **Maree Todd MSP**, Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport
- **Morag Williamson**, Head of Suicide Prevention and Distress Intervention, Scottish Government
- **Haylis Smith**, National Delivery Lead for Suicide Prevention on behalf of Scottish Government and COSLA
- **Dr Alastair Cook**, Principal Medical Officer, Scottish Government
- **Councillor Paul Kelly**, Spokesperson for Health and Social Care, COSLA
- **Eddie Follan**, Chief Officer, Health and Social Care, COSLA.

Topics

17. The meeting will give the Committee an opportunity to explore with the Minister and COSLA, issues including:

- The impact of previous suicide prevention initiatives in Scotland, and the Creating Hope Together Strategy and Action Plan.
- The potential impact of the Strategy for groups disproportionately affected by suicide.

- How people with lived experience have been engaged in the development and implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan.
- The degree to which adequate funding has been allocated to the Strategy and Action Plan and the impact that funding decisions in different areas of Government will impact on the Strategy's outcomes.
- How the Strategy and Action Plan are being implemented and monitored.

Next steps

18. The Committee will consider the evidence heard and write a letter with its conclusions and findings to the Scottish Government.

Clerks to the Committee

May 2024