

Suicide 
Prevention
Scotland.

Introduction

Local Suicide Prevention Planning and Implementation Toolkit

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What will this document support you to do?

- ♥ Provide an overview of the wider policy context relating to suicide prevention
- ♥ Provide a history of suicide prevention work in Scotland
- ♥ Highlight the current approach to suicide prevention in Scotland
- ♥ Highlight key messages around suicide prevention

When might this document be most helpful?

- ♥ If you are new to suicide prevention work
- ♥ If you would like to understand the wider policy context around suicide prevention in Scotland
- ♥ If you would like to understand how the Local Suicide Prevention Planning and Implementation Toolkit can support your work

Acknowledgements:

This Local Suicide Prevention Planning and Implementation Toolkit has been developed by Public Health Scotland, with some sections based on previous guidance written by COSLA.

Suicide Prevention Scotland would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this toolkit, either by sharing their expertise, supplying content, providing case studies and examples of work or by giving feedback on content.



Introduction

Welcome to the Local Suicide Prevention Planning and Implementation **Toolkit**. The toolkit consists of a number of sections, which together aim to support local areas in their work around suicide prevention; particularly in developing robust, effective and sustainable local suicide prevention action plans. It's recognised that areas across Scotland are at different stages of their action plan development and delivery.

The Suicide Prevention Local Area Planning and Implementation Toolkit supports areas in developing, implementing, reviewing and evaluating a local action plan. Relevant sections of the toolkit are referred to throughout the induction pack.

The toolkit covers:

- Governance and Collaboration
- Action Plan Development
- Outcomes, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Data and Information Sharing
- Involving People with Lived and Living Experience
- Children and Young People: Participation Practice
- Postvention & Incident Response
- Induction Pack for Suicide Prevention Coordinators



This introduction section provides guidance to help local areas deliver activity which achieves the following:

- ♥ **Aligns with the national strategy and action plan** – local activity contributes to the achievement of the aims and objectives of a national strategy and/or action plan
- ♥ **Is able to meet local needs** – is informed by evidence about what works, for whom, in what circumstances
- ♥ **Is evidence informed** – is developed using what is known through both experiential and research evidence
- ♥ **Is outcome focused and can be evaluated** – to enable us to build the evidence for what works

The resources in the **Toolkit** are broken down into different sections, to support you with some of the key stages in the development and implementation of a local suicide prevention action plan.

It contains key information relating to each stage that is based on current practice and insight around useful approaches. The toolkit is not intended to be a detailed 'how to' guide but instead provides ideas, reflective questions and prompts for you to consider. Other resources such as podcasts and case studies are also available to inform your approach.

If you wish to discuss any of the content in the Toolkit or have an example of work that you are doing that you would like to share you can contact your local Suicide Prevention Implementation Lead by emailing:

phs.suicidepreventionteam@phs.scot



National Context

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing are key priority areas for Scottish Government and CoSLA. Suicide prevention supports the delivery of the following:

National Performance Framework

Suicide prevention work supports of the [National Performance Framework](#) which aims to support everyone to work together to create a more successful country, give opportunities to all people in Scotland, increase wellbeing, create sustainable and inclusive growth and reduce inequalities.

Scotland's National Outcomes

[The National Outcomes](#) describe the kind of Scotland we want to see, and are spread across 11 domains.

Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025-2035

The [Population Health Framework](#) sets out Scottish Government's and COSLA's long-term collective approach to improving Scotland's health and reducing health inequalities for the next decade. One of the initial framework priorities is to embed prevention in our systems.

Blueprint for Local Government

Themes in the [Blueprint](#) address many of the wider determinants of risk for suicidal behaviour. Work to implement the Blueprint will also contribute to suicide prevention efforts particularly in relation to Wellbeing, Education & Children & Young People, Economy & the Environment and Supporting Vulnerable Communities.

Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy

Lays out the long-term vision and approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing of everyone in Scotland. The vision is of a Scotland, free from stigma and inequality, where everyone fulfils their right to achieve the best mental health and wellbeing possible. [The strategy](#) sets out nine summary outcomes, some of which connect to areas in the Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Joint Strategy Board for Children and Family Mental Health

In March 2023 the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board (JDB) concluded, with its work and recommendations for the future summarised in the [JDB final report](#). In 2024 the Joint Strategic Board for Children and Family Mental Health was established to progress the work both of the JDB, and the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board which has also draw to a close. This new Board will seek to build on the work of its predecessors in the context of the new national Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy.



Suicide prevention in Scotland

Choose Life

Suicide prevention has been a key policy area in Scotland since 2002. In response to the increasing rise in suicide rates, particularly for young men, the ten year suicide prevention strategy and action plan Choose Life was launched, detailing 7 objectives which contributed to achieving a reduction in the number of people dying by suicide by 19% by 2013. Funding was provided to local councils with a requirement to have an identified Choose Life co-ordinator to drive forward the work.

Every Life Matters

The work Choose Life started continued with a further strategy 'refresh' in 2013. In 2017, the [Mental Health Strategy for Scotland 2017-2027](#) committed to developing a new suicide prevention strategy or action plan and in 2018, Scotland published the suicide prevention action plan [Every Life Matters](#). This detailed ten actions, and some further focus on these priorities were established during the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside this action plan a new leadership structure was developed, including a National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group, an Academic Advisory Group, a Lived Experience Panel and a Youth Advisory Group. Elements of the work started under Every Life Matters continues with Creating Hope Together.

Creating Hope Together

The vision of [Creating Hope Together](#), Scotland's suicide prevention strategy for 2022-2032 is to reduce the number of suicide deaths in Scotland, whilst tackling the inequalities which contribute to suicide.

To achieve this, all sectors must come together in partnership, and communities must be supported to become safe, compassionate, inclusive, and free of stigma.

The aim is for any child, young person or adult who has thoughts of taking their own life, or are affected by suicide, to get the help they need and feel a sense of hope.

The strategy document covers:

- ♥ An overview of suicide in Scotland and history of suicide prevention
- ♥ Vision and outcomes for suicide prevention in Scotland
- ♥ Summary of risk and protective factors for suicide
- ♥ Latest insight around suicidal behaviour through the IMV model
- ♥ Overview of prevention, early intervention, intervention, postvention and recovery
- ♥ Direct and indirect suicide prevention funding



Accompanying the strategy is an action plan which has more information about activity that will take place to achieve these outcomes. The strategy and action plan are focused around the following four outcomes, each of which have a key organisation that is co-ordinating the work around the outcome.



Outcome 1:

The environment we live in promotes conditions which protect against suicide risk – this includes our psychological, social, cultural, economic and physical environment.



Outcome 2:

Our communities have a clear understanding of suicide, risk factors and its prevention – so that people and organisations are more able to respond in helpful and informed ways when they, or others, need support.



Outcome 3:

Everyone affected by suicide is able to access high quality, compassionate, appropriate and timely support – which promotes wellbeing and recovery. This applies to all children, young people and adults who experience suicidal thoughts and behaviour, anyone who cares for them, and anyone affected by suicide in other ways.



Outcome 4:

Our approach to suicide prevention is well planned and delivered, through close collaboration between national, local and sectoral partners. Our work is designed with lived experience insight, practice, data, research and intelligence. We improve our approach through regular monitoring, evaluation and review.

The **outcomes framework** which accompanies the strategy, sets out how actions will build over the next ten years to achieve the vision of reducing suicide, whilst tackling the inequalities which contribute to suicide. It will support how we plan, measure and report the difference we are making.



Suicide prevention in Scotland

Suicide Prevention Scotland is the name of the community of people working to deliver Creating Hope Together. This includes people working in public, private, and third sector as well as community groups. Importantly, it includes many people with lived experience of suicide.

Suicide Prevention Scotland includes:

- ♥ A National Delivery Lead to lead delivery of the action plan on behalf of the Scottish Government and COSLA
- ♥ Outcome Lead Organisations to lead on collaborative delivery for the four long term outcomes in the action plan
- ♥ Delivery Leads and Implementation Leads
- ♥ Lived and Living Experience Panel (LLEP)
- ♥ Local Suicide Prevention Leads and steering groups
- ♥ Youth Advisory Group (YAG)
- ♥ Academic Advisory Group (AAG)
- ♥ The wide range of organisations, groups and individuals working to prevent suicide across Scotland
- ♥ The National Suicide Prevention Advisory Group (NSPAG) provides independent, impartial advice and constructive challenge to the Scottish Government, COSLA, and Suicide Prevention Scotland.

Watch: These videos from the [Scottish Borders](#), [Highlands](#) and [Glasgow](#) show how their local work links to some of the ambitions in the national strategy and action plan.



Key messages about suicidal behaviour

The personal, social and economic costs of suicidal behaviour are substantial

In 2024, the National Records of Scotland recored 704 deaths by probable suicide. The number of people affected by each suicide is difficult to calculate and will vary, recent studies suggest the figure to be around 135 people exposed¹. When the number of people who have had contact with the individual throughout their lives from personal connections and communities are taken account, this number can rise significantly. For every life lost to suicide in Scotland there is an average cost of at least £1.43m².

Anyone can be at risk of suicidal behaviour but some factors can put people at greater risk of dying by suicide

It is important to know that no-one is immune to thoughts of suicide.

However, it is known that in the UK:

- ♥ Men are 3 times more likely than women to die by suicide, with middle aged men being at greatest risk
- ♥ Suicide is the biggest killer of young people aged 16-24
- ♥ There is a significantly higher risk of suicide in people who are unemployed compared to people who are employed but the majority of people who take their own lives are employed
- ♥ People living in areas of deprivation are more likely to die by suicide than those living in more affluent areas
- ♥ Individuals who have previously attempted suicide or self-harmed are at significantly greater risk than people who have never attempted suicide or self-harmed
- ♥ People who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are also at greater risk
- ♥ Between 2012-2022, 26% of all deaths by suicide in the UK were individuals under the care of mental health services³.

Preventing suicide is possible

Between 2003-2013 the rate of suicide in Scotland reduced by 19%. While it is difficult to prove cause and effect, the development of a national strategy implemented in local areas with a focus on suicidal behaviour as a public health issue is believed to be a contributing factor and demonstrated the importance of actions at multi-levels.

Suicide prevention is everyone's business

Suicidal behaviour can happen to anyone in any setting, therefore a whole system approach, where sectors are working together to delivery action on prevention, early intervention, intervention, postvention and recovery is required.

1 [Cerel et al How many people are exposed to suicide? Not six Suicide & Life Threatening Behaviour 49\(2\) April 2019](#)

2 [The economic cost of suicide in the UK \(samaritans.org\)](#)

3 [NCISH | Annual report 2025: UK patient and general population data, 2012-2022](#)



Restricting access to means works

There is strong evidence that restricting access to lethal means works in reducing suicide rates. For example, restricting pack sizes of paracetamol in 1998 led to a 30% reduction in deaths from paracetamol poisoning in UK.

Bereavement support forms a core element of suicide prevention

Losing a close family member or friend to suicide is associated with many negative health and social outcomes, including increased risk of suicidal behaviour. Including actions on postvention help prevent suicide.

Responsible media reporting of suicidal behaviour is critical

An increase in the rates of suicide has been associated with media reporting of deaths by suicide of celebrities and where method has been described or pictured, an associated increase in the use of this method has also been seen. More general reporting of suicide has been shown to also have a negative impact on suicidal behaviour⁴. Conversely, positive stories of hope and recovery along with information on sources of support have been shown to have a positive impact.

Suicide prevention strategies should be evidence-informed

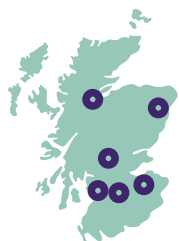
Evidence informed strategies support the best use of available resources, the best practice to support suicidal behaviour and the ability to prioritise work in areas likely to have the greatest impact. This evidence should include the voices of people, including children and young people. Where there is a lack of available evidence, opportunities to develop it should be considered.

4 [Thomas Niederkrotenthaler et al Association between suicide reporting in the media and suicide: systematic review and meta-analysis BMJ 2020;368:m575](#)



Local action plans

In Scotland there are:



32

Local Authority
areas in Scotland



32

Community planning
partnerships



31

Health & Social
Care Partnerships



14

Regional Health
Boards

Every Life Matters Action 1 committed to supporting local areas to develop local suicide prevention action plans. This led to the development of local area guidance and the creation of Implementation Leads to support local action planning.

Improving outcomes around suicide prevention is unlikely to be achieved without the guidance and strategic leadership of a multi-agency local planning group and the delivery of effective multi-sectoral collaborative action plans involving those with lived experience of thoughts of suicide, suicide attempt and those who have been bereaved by suicide.

The information in the other sections of the toolkit will support the development, delivery and evaluation of local plans.

Resources and Support

Access the other resources in the toolkit or contact the Suicide Prevention Implementation Leads on psh.suicidepreventionteam@psh.scot

