

## **SAMH briefing: Scottish Government Debate Suicide Prevention Action Plan: Every Life Matters**

**Wednesday 12 September 2018**

### **Introduction**

SAMH welcomes the publication of Scotland's Suicide Prevention Action Plan – Every Life Matters. The plan shows ambition and commitment to make suicide prevention a national priority. We warmly welcome the formation of a national leadership group, accompanied by an additional £3 million funding to support the plan over the next three years. We have consistently called for action to ensure funding for suicide prevention is issued in a more transparent and effective manner. In particular we believe the national target to reduce deaths by suicide by 20% by 2022, as called for by SAMH, will provide the ambition and urgency to suicide prevention activities.

### **Key Points<sup>1</sup>**

- 680 people died by suicide in 2017 down from 728 in 2016
- The decrease in deaths consisted entirely of a reduction in female deaths: the number of men who died by suicide actually increased over the last year. In 2017 the rate of suicide among men was over three times higher than that for women.
- Deprivation is strongly linked to suicide with the rate of suicide in Scotland's most deprived communities more than two and a half times higher than the rate in our most affluent communities.
- SAMH warmly welcomes the publication of Scotland's Suicide Prevention Action Plan, including the creation of a National Leadership Group (NSPLG), additional £3 million investment and the national target to reduce suicides by 201% by 2022.
- SAMH believes Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) should be retained.
- SAMH welcomes the creation of a Crisis Care Agreement. Local suicide prevention plans must include reference and be informed by the Crisis Care Agreement.
- SAMH calls for the national roll of Community Triage.

### **National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group (NSPLG)**

SAMH welcomes the formation of the NSPLG. We believe this is the right approach to provide national drive and leadership to suicide prevention activities, and will help ensure consistency and the sharing of good practice. It is particularly encouraging

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<sup>1</sup> ISD [Suicide Statistics for Scotland Update of trends to 2017](#) 2018

that the group will include people with direct experience of suicide both through bereavement and having had thoughts of suicide.

Appropriate governance arrangements will be critical to the group's success so we are encouraged that the NSPLG will report to Ministers and COSLA while also producing a public annual report.

Clarity is required about where responsibility for local suicide prevention activities will sit SAMH believes this should be within the reformed local public health realm.<sup>2</sup> This is due to public health's central role in tackling health inequalities and improving population health on a population wide and targeted basis. The NSPLG should also outline how it will support local areas to evaluate their activities and share good practice.

- Where will future responsibility and leadership of local suicide prevention activities be?

## Training

During the consultation for the Action Plan SAMH called for the retention of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). ASIST is currently licenced by the Scottish Government and provides participants the skills to intervene and support someone with thoughts of suicide. Since 2014 SAMH staff have undertaken at least 500 ASIST interventions, both with members of the public and people using our services. Academic evaluation of ASIST, including from the Scottish Government, has shown it is value for money and leads to significantly improved outcomes for people receiving an intervention, including a reduction in suicide ideation<sup>3,4</sup>

We strongly believe that the Government should consider retaining ASIST. Any refresh of Scottish mental health and suicide prevention training must include the provision of skills to directly intervene where someone is experiencing thoughts or has plans for suicide. This must go beyond awareness training about suicide, and should be available widely both to key groups such as GPs as well as wider members of the community.

- Can the Government confirm that the new Scottish mental health and suicide prevention training program includes provision of skills to actively intervene where someone is experience thoughts of suicide?
- Will the training be made available to people out with the key groups identified in the Action Plan?

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<sup>2</sup> SAMH Engagement Process of the Draft Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2018 – [SAMH Response 2018](#)

<sup>3</sup> Gouls, M, S et al. [Impact of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\) on National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Counselor](#) Suicide Life Threat Behav. 2013 Dec; 43(6): 10.1111/sltb.12049. 2013

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government [The Use and Impact of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\) in Scotland: An Evaluation](#) 2008

- Will Scottish Government consider retaining ASIST training, given its strong record and reach across Scotland?

SAMH has been campaigning for the development of a mental health training programme for all school staff, recognising that health and wellbeing is the responsibility of all adults working in Scotland's schools.<sup>5</sup> Our survey of 3,366 school staff found that two-thirds of teachers had not received sufficient training in mental health to do their job properly and the majority of non-teaching staff had not received mental health training and did not have confidence to respond to a pupil raising concerns about their mental health.<sup>6</sup> We are encouraged that the Suicide Prevention Action Plan includes a commitment to ensure that by the academic year 2019/20 local authorities will be offered mental health training, but seek assurances about how this will be delivered to all schools.

- Will the Scottish Government ensure that all teachers in Scotland receive training in mental health? Will Scottish Government extend this training to all staff working in schools?

## Crisis Care

It is clear the response to people in crisis needs to improve. The Scottish Government's commissioned report on people's lived experiences of suicide, found people with lived experience of suicide, self-harm and crisis too often receive a stigmatising or inappropriate response from services when seeking help.<sup>7</sup> SAMH strongly welcomes that the NSPLG will develop a Scottish Crisis Care Agreement. SAMH have campaigned for this for a number of years.<sup>8</sup> It is positive that the Crisis Care Agreement will include pathways to trauma informed support for people bereaved by suicide. Local suicide prevention plans must include reference and be informed by the Crisis Care Agreement. SAMH also welcomes the ongoing development of the Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) project and are encouraged at its extension to people under 18 as outlined in the Programme for Government 2018.

SAMH believes that an early action for the NSPLG should be the facilitation of a national roll out of Community triage. Community triage provides police officers with direct access to mental health professionals to support decision making and reduce inappropriate detentions of people in psychiatric distress or crisis. It has been successfully piloted in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the Lothians.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> SAMH [SAMH's view: Mental Health Training For All School Staff](#) 2018

<sup>6</sup> SAMH [Going to Be... Well Trained](#) 2018

<sup>7</sup> Alliance, NHS Health Scotland, Samaritans and Scottish Government [Suicide Prevention Strategy Report](#) 2018

<sup>8</sup> SAMH [Ask Once Get Help Fast](#) 2016

<sup>9</sup> Police Scotland & NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde [Community Triage - NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Crisis Out of Hours CPN\(Community Psychiatric Nurse\) Service Pilot Evaluation Report](#) (2015)

- To ask the Government if they will commit to a national roll out of Community Triage.



### **Further Information**

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