

# Draft Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy for Wales: Integrated Impact Assessment

## Section 1: What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?

Welsh Government is publishing a new draft Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy, which will replace [Talk to me 2: the suicide and self-harm prevention strategy for 2015-2022](#).

The strategy sets out an overarching vision for suicide and self-harm in Wales, alongside six underpinning principles, six high-level objectives and a number of supporting objectives.

In developing the new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy, we have considered and applied the five ways of working underpinning the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (as set out below).

As part of the consultation, and alongside this Integrated Impact Assessment, we have also published a draft Welsh Language Impact Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and a Children's Rights Impact Assessment.

### Long term

The [Independent Review of Talk to Me 2 Strategies \(2012-2022\)](#) showed some improvement in suicide and self-harm, at least pre-COVID, with particular reference to increasing awareness and the Time to Change 'Ask Twice' campaign. However, the impacts of the pandemic are still being felt, alongside the impacts of the current cost of living crisis.

Over the last decade there were, on average, approximately 330 registered deaths by suicide (an average rate of 12.4 registered suicides per 100,000 people each year) in Wales<sup>1</sup>.

We are seeing rising numbers of people seeking support from mental health services, and we are in "the toughest financial situation we have faced since devolution".<sup>2</sup> Wider challenges also exist – for example, inequalities in access to services, experiences and outcomes; the need for a more robust evidence base for suicide and self-harm; and delivering a sustainable workforce.

The Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy looks to address these long-term challenges. The objectives provide a framework for establishing a robust and credible evidence base, working across sectors to tackle the key drivers of suicide and self-harm, targeting support for the most vulnerable, developing a sustainable and

---

<sup>1</sup> [Suicides in England and Wales Statistical bulletins - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Written Statement: Update about Budget 2023-24 \(9 August 2023\) | GOV.WALES](#)

compassionate support network and continuing the good work to raise awareness and de-stigmatise suicide and self-harm in Wales.

## **Prevention**

Tackling the key drivers of suicide and self-harm are a key objective of the new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy – and is also a key component of the complimentary Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. There is a recognition and focus on the importance of cross-sectoral working to address the issues which can lead to people having suicidal thoughts and self-harming. There is a stated reliance on other Government Departments to deliver strategies and policies which contribute to poor mental health and emotional distress and the framework established will allow for the identification of further actions which can deliver the strategies' vision.

## **Integration**

The *strategic context* within the strategy establishes the relationship with other Welsh Government commitments including those which set the strategic objectives for everything we do, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and [A Healthier Wales](#). It also recognises the intersections between the strategy and other policy areas, which the strategy is reliant upon to deliver its objectives – and vice-versa.

Objective 2 continues this theme recognising the key drivers of suicide and self-harm and integrated working through a cross-Government and multi-sectoral approach. This provides the opportunity through both the delivery of the strategy and supporting Delivery Plans to further integrate plans between government departments and external agencies to deliver mutually beneficial objectives.

## **Collaboration**

The introduction to the new strategy recognises the everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide and self-harm. Our partners include the public and those with lived experience, health boards, local authorities, and the third sector. Objectives 3 and 4 recognises that people who are vulnerable to suicide and self-harm could appear anywhere in the system and that support is needed at the place that they present to prevent escalation. And so a whole-system approach is being adopted which recognises that everyone has a role to play – including the media which is delivered through Objective 5. Objective 4 ensures that the support provided is compassionate and stigma free.

## **Involvement (please also see section 8)**

During the summer of 2023, we carried out pre-consultation engagement to get initial stakeholder feedback on the proposed vision statements and supporting principles, for both the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Suicide and Self-Harm

Prevention Strategy. This included an online survey, completed by over 250 individuals and organisations.

The ongoing development of the strategy was led by the National Advisory Group for suicide and self-harm, which is jointly chaired by the Welsh Government and Ann John, Clinical Associate Professor, Swansea University, Consultant in Public Health Medicine.

Also represented on the National Advisory Group for suicide and self-harm is Public Health Wales, members of the NHS (Wales) Executive, the Samaritans Wales, MIND Cymru and Papyrus.

This next stage of public consultation has been designed to provide opportunities for further involvement, ensuring that everyone – including the most under-served groups (who are often the most vulnerable) can contribute.

Further engagement will follow as we develop the supporting Delivery Plans which will set out the shorter-term actions to deliver the objectives in the strategy.

## **Impact**

There is support for the development of the new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy, which we are developing collaboratively with our partners.

The Independent Review of Together for Mental Health and Talk to Me 2 highlighted that further improvements to delivery and support are needed. The strategy recognises that to be impactful, a more robust evidence base is required and cross-Government action is needed, in order to achieve the intended objectives of reducing suicide and self-harm in Wales. Drawing on the main conclusions from the review of the current strategy, which this one will replace, the strategy will be supported by more robust governance arrangements and a monitoring framework which will allow us to more effectively drive and track progress and impact.

## **Costs and savings**

The Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy is being developed in a period of financial constraint and as such we have developed it with the understanding that there will need to be a way of setting priorities, ensuring best use of existing resources, and needing to be clear about what can realistically be delivered.

Final versions of the strategy will be accompanied by a delivery plan, which over the life of the strategy will be renewed and refreshed.

## Section 8: Conclusion

### How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

We have developed the draft Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy in collaboration with those with lived experience. We have continued to engage with key groups, including the National Advisory Group for Suicide and Self-Harm, the Mental Health Service User Forum, the Mental Health National Partnership Board, the Wales Alliance for Mental Health, the Mental Health Ethnic Minorities Task and Finish Group, the Welsh Youth Parliament and National Youth Stakeholder Groups. We have also considered the findings of other recent consultations, including the Welsh Government's consultation on the [draft Child Poverty Strategy](#).

In July 2023, the National Youth Stakeholder Group held a focus group to feedback on the draft vision statements. The feedback from the group centred around the requirement to have increased awareness of disordered eating, suicide and self-harm in schools and in improving access to services with dual mental health and neurodevelopment diagnosis. Mind also ran young people engagement work which informed the drafting of the strategy. Additional workshops with children and young people, the Welsh Youth Parliament, and the National Youth Stakeholder Group were held in the lead up to publishing the draft strategy.

We will use the consultation period to build on this previous engagement. This includes further planned engagement with children and young people, people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, Welsh speakers and Welsh language specialist groups, and others who may be affected by the proposals.

### What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

#### Positive Impacts

**Better evidence to inform action** – Delivery of Objective 1 of the strategy will facilitate the collection and analysis of more robust evidence on suicide and self-harm in Wales. This will allow for a better understanding of the drivers for suicide and self-harm, the groups that are most vulnerable – and the most effective ways to support those groups. Having a robust evidence base will also help to better monitor the impact of our collective actions and track progress towards delivering the vision and objectives.

**A more joined up approach** – The strategy makes links with a number of other Welsh Government strategies and policies. Objective 2 provides an opportunity to further strengthen these connections and pool resources to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes and more efficient use of funding.

**A more targeted and person-centred approach** – Objective 3 recognises that there are a number of groups who are potentially vulnerable to suicide and self-harm in

Wales. The work through delivering Objective 1 will allow us to get a more nuanced understanding of those vulnerabilities. We are aware that everyone's experience of suicide and self-harm are different, whether that is because of different drivers, different experiences of accessing support and different responses to different types of support. Objectives 3 is about making sure that we can develop policies and services which recognise this so everyone can get the help that they need in a way that works for them.

**A more rapid response** – The development of the evidence through Objective 1 will allow for more timely access to information as it emerges. We will be able to more quickly identify trends and intervene to prevent escalation. Objective 4 also aims to provide a more system-wide response so there is 'no wrong door' to accessing support and people, organisations and professionals are equipped to offer help when and where a person needs it. Objective 5 also provides more timely support for people affected or bereaved by suicide. Work has already started on this through the ongoing procurement of a national bereavement service for Wales.

**Reducing stigma** – The review of *Talk to me too* spoke positively about the progress that has been made in terms of opening up conversations around suicide and self-harm and reducing the stigma associated with it. However, we recognise that there is still a way to go. Evidence available suggests that stigma still exists, particularly among certain vulnerable groups (e.g. middle aged men) and with certain communities – particularly ethnic minority communities. Stigma acts as a barrier to accessing support and perpetuates the problem. Objective 5 seeks to build on progress to date and de-stigmatise suicide and self-harm in Wales.

#### **Negative Impacts:**

**Cost** – Resolving issues in society like suicide and self-harm requires investment. Suicide and self-harm is one issue the Welsh Government is trying to address alongside improving NHS services more broadly, tackling poverty and responding to climate change to name but a few. In a period of unprecedented financial constraint delivering the changes required is increasingly challenging. However, the strategy has been written with this in mind and will allow for a more joined-up and targeted approach to the provision of support, allowing us to do more with less.

**Raising difficult emotions** – Whilst the strategy hopes to encourage people to talk opening about suicide and self-harm in Wales, we recognise that these topics can raise difficult emotions and the promotion of a national strategy could have unintended negative impact on the mental well-being of some people. This is why any consultations or promotional materials will be treated with great care and will be accompanied by advice on accessing support services.

## **In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals?**

Through its vision and objectives, the Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy directly supports the seven connected wellbeing goals for Wales in the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) including a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, and a more equal Wales. The strategy has been developed in line with the five ways of working set out in the Act, which says that we must:

- take account of the long term
- help to prevent problems occurring or getting worse
- take an integrated approach
- take a collaborative approach
- consider and involve people of all ages and with diverse characteristics and needs

By embedding these principles through the development of the strategy and objectives, the ‘well-being’ context has been established for the development of the accompanying delivery plans which will sets out the more short-term targeted actions which will deliver the overall vision for Wales.

### **Ministerial Advice and decision**

Officials in the Mental Health and Vulnerable Groups Team set out proposals regarding the development of the draft Suicide and Self-Harm Strategy in a submission to the Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing. The Deputy Minister agreed to the overall draft approach and the Welsh Government Cabinet approved the strategy for consultation on 29 January 2024.

## **How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?**

A “theory of change” is being developed for the Strategy which will set out the mechanisms by which the strategy is intended to achieve its objectives. It will be used as the basis for planning an evaluation of the strategy, which will be commissioned in due course.

Throughout the Strategy we have also identified a number of measurable indicators that that we will monitor as part of the implementation of the strategy. These, and further indicators to be identified, will also support the evaluation of the strategy when commissioned.

The implementation of both the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy will be overseen by the Mental Health Joint Ministerial Assurance Board.