

SAMARITANS

Saving lives through suicide prevention

A manifesto

Suicide is the leading cause of death in males under 50 years and females under 35 years in the UK. Every life lost to suicide is a tragedy.

The stark truth is that suicide rates in England are the same now as they were in 2001. This must change.

Samaritans is calling on all political parties to commit to reaching the lowest ever UK suicide rate by the end of the next Parliament. By adopting the following policy recommendations, the next government can bring forward ambitious change to ensure fewer people die by suicide.



A properly-resourced national strategy that is the engine driving cross-government action

The 2023 National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England sets out actions for all government departments to take to drive down suicide rates. This must be fully implemented over the next five years, with accountability to Parliament for progress on reducing rates, supporting at-risk groups and ensuring people are supported at the first opportunity.

Delivery cannot happen without dedicated resources. There are huge demands on the whole system, with record waiting times for clinical support and underinvestment in community provision. We need sufficient resources for public health interventions, mental health services and workforce and the charities who play a vital role in supporting the nation's wellbeing – including through crisis helplines. It is also essential that there is continued ringfenced funding for local areas that are on the frontline of suicide prevention. We estimate that this would cost just £1.40 per person in England for the five years of the suicide prevention strategy.



Mandatory suicide prevention training for all frontline public servants

Two thirds of people who die by suicide are not in touch with mental health services in the year before they die, but they are almost certainly in touch with a statutory service such as the job centre, the education system, social services, a GP, or the criminal justice system

Frontline public services can play a vital role in proactively identifying, supporting and signposting people at risk of suicide.

Mandatory suicide prevention training for all public servants who interact with the public would equip them with the confidence to identify and support people who may be struggling.



A network of community mental health hubs for at-risk groups

The threshold for accessing support is too high. People are not always taken seriously when they reach out for help, or are pushed around the system – often being told they are ‘too high risk’ for one service and ‘not high risk enough’ for another.

A different approach is needed. A network of mental health hubs based in communities would connect at-risk groups, such as young people and middle-aged men, to the support they need earlier. Hubs should be open access and provide on-site talking therapies, referrals into community-based programmes, mental health services, and debt and finance advice.



Everyone with a mental health care plan receives financial support and advice

People among the poorest 10% of society are more than twice as likely to die from suicide compared to the wealthiest 10% of society. Samaritans volunteers currently answer over 400 calls for help a day, on average, from people who are worried about their money or work. In June 2023, almost 1 in 10 first-time calls to Samaritans were about finance or unemployment concerns.

Money and mental health support needs to be much better joined up. Everyone who has a mental health care plan should receive financial support and advice. The Breathing Space scheme, which offers respite from problem debt help for people in mental health crisis treatment in England and Wales, should be extended to more people in touch with mental health services, not just people in crisis.



Protect everyone from harmful online suicide content

The internet can be an invaluable space for individuals experiencing self-harm and suicidal feelings, providing opportunities for users to speak openly and to access support. However, the internet can also provide access to content, such as detailed information about methods, that may act to encourage, maintain or exacerbate self-harm and suicidal behaviours.

The Online Safety Act must deliver a suicide-safer internet. Parliament, government and the regulator need to engage people with lived experience of suicide and self-harm in post-legislative scrutiny to ensure the new laws are making the internet safer for people of all ages and across all platforms.



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SAMARITANS

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