

OUR KEY MESSAGES FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION 2017

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress. We exist to reduce the number of people who die by suicide. In Wales, we work locally and nationally to raise awareness of our service and reach out into local communities to support people who are struggling to cope. We seek to use our expertise and experience to improve policy and practice surrounding suicide prevention and are active contributors to the development and implementation of the Wales Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Action Plan 'Talk to Me 2'.

As members of the Wales Alliance for Mental Health (WAMH), we lobby and campaign on national issues surrounding the mental health of individuals and communities and promote the role of the voluntary sector in health and social care.

Samaritans Cymru believes in a public health and community focussed approach to mental health and wellbeing by placing a primary focus on prevention rather than cure alone and believes investment in prevention and early intervention can reduce human, social and economic costs.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- Suicide is the leading cause of death for 20 – 34 year olds and is the single biggest killer of men under the age of 45 in the UK.
- In Wales, between 300 and 350 people die from suicide each year. While causes of suicides are complex, we do know that there are factors which increase the risk for specific groups and individuals. These factors include poor mental health, deprivation, gender and alcohol misuse.
- Men are four times more likely to die by suicide than women in the UK and in Wales; the rate is at its highest since 1981. In 2014, 81% of all suicides in Wales were by men.

HOW CAN WE REDUCE SUICIDE IN WALES?

1) LOCAL ACTION SAVES LIVES

As active contributors to the development of the Wales Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Action Plan, we have welcomed its second phase and believe the existence of such plans is vital for efforts to reduce suicide and self harm in Wales. However, this action plan needs a clear framework for implementation; one which recognizes the importance of acting locally.

Many of the top-level objectives in Talk to Me 2 are reliant on effective local partnership working through a cross-collaborative approach.

For example, one of the main objectives of the plan is to improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide and self harm amongst individuals who frequently come in to contact with people at risk of suicide and self harm and professionals in Wales. This objective is facilitated by frontline training in suicide awareness for public services. However, to achieve this objective, it is vital that local services, agencies and organisations work in a joined up and collaborative way to effectively manage and target their resources.



The most effective means of achieving this local and collaborative approach, is the creation and implementation of local suicide prevention plans and ensuring the engagement of Local Health Boards and local authorities in Regional Multi-Agency Suicide Prevention Fora.

Local suicide prevention plans are developed and implemented by multi-agency groups and are critical to implementing the national suicide prevention strategies published by Welsh Government.

Local councils in Wales have a responsibility to prevent suicide and they need to work with health services, community groups, charities and others to make this happen. Across the United Kingdom, Government has told councils that they should all have plans in place to prevent suicide by 2017, yet the best available information indicates that many councils have no plan in place at all, and those councils who do have plans may not be doing everything they could be to fulfil the potential of a local suicide prevention plan.

Our national campaign, Local Action Saves Lives, calls on all councils in Wales and the United Kingdom to put in place effective suicide prevention plans. Without a local suicide prevention plan, suicide prevention work is much less effective than it could be.

***Please see Appendix 1 for suicide rates in Wales**

2) ADDRESSING SOCIOECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE SAVES LIVES

In 2016, Samaritans commissioned eight leading social scientists to review and extend the existing body of knowledge on the link between suicide and socioeconomic deprivation. In 2017, we launched the findings of this research in the report [‘Dying from Inequality’](#) -

- Areas of higher socioeconomic deprivation tend to have higher rates of suicide.
- Men are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of economic recession, including suicide risk, than women.
- People who are unemployed are two to three times more likely to die by suicide than those in employment.
- Increases in suicide rates are linked to economic recessions.
- The greater the level of deprivation experienced by an individual, the higher their risk of suicidal behaviour.
- The least skilled occupations (e.g. construction workers) have higher rates of suicide.
- A low level of educational attainment and no home ownership increase an individual’s risk of suicide.

In Wales, every local authority has a unique geography, economy, and population; it follows that a profile of deprivation and associated suicide risk will also vary between local populations. At a time when nearly a quarter of the Welsh population lives in poverty, we are committed to policy approaches in suicide prevention that mitigate the devastating effects of socioeconomic disadvantage in Wales.

We need greater recognition that suicide is linked to socioeconomic disadvantage, but we also need to dispel the myth that many deaths by suicide must therefore be inevitable.



There should be effective cross-governmental, coordinated approaches to suicide prevention. Mental health services should be improved and protected, and the prevention of suicidal behaviour should be government priorities in welfare, education, housing and employment policies, in addition to health policy. The development of all welfare, housing and employment policies should include an evaluation of potential unintended impacts on mental health and suicidal behaviour.

3) COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS SAVES LIVES

A lack of community and social connection can make an individual more vulnerable to mental health issues, suicidal thinking and behaviour and therefore, social connection is a protective factor for individual suicide risk. Community and outreach groups and volunteering are interventions which can help to tackle public health issues including loneliness, isolation and mental health.

In order to achieve social connection with its associated protective factors, the nature of community and outreach groups and volunteering can be extensive and wide-ranging. Digital literacy, sports, basic numeracy, arts and crafts, music and coffee mornings are all examples of group activities which achieve the outcome of social connection.

Organisations such as Men's Sheds Cymru, which cite 'social exclusion as a hidden but persistent problem in many communities', aim to address the problem by creating community groups for 'men to pursue their interests, develop new ones, belong to a unique group, feel useful, fulfilled and a sense of belonging'¹. Established in Australia in 2005, Men's Sheds is now established and growing in the United Kingdom. However, organisations such as Men's Sheds are supported and funded by the Third Sector and their sustainability needs to be safeguarded to protect those who are most vulnerable –

"It gives me a reason to get up in the morning and for two days a week I feel I'm gainfully employed. I feel good working with and helping chaps who often feel isolated in the community. I would need a very good reason not to come." Bill, 67

It is vital that these types of community and social outreach groups are recognised for their health benefits; social connectedness tackles mental health issues and loneliness and isolation, and can work to reduce the strain on health and social care services.

With the increase in library and community centre closures in Wales and the ending of Communities First, we are concerned that those communities who are most vulnerable may experience an increase in loneliness, isolation and poor mental health due to the subsequent lack of social connection which these centres and schemes provide.



Community and outreach groups and volunteering should be given more focus as a form of prevention and early intervention for mental health, wellbeing and loneliness and isolation in Wales and policy solutions should be worked up to increase community participation.

¹ 'What is a Men's Shed?' <http://www.mensshedscymru.co.uk/what-is-a-mens-shed/>