



# WORKING TOGETHER > TO REDUCE SUICIDE

Samaritans strategy 2015 > 2021

**SAMARITANS**

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One of Samaritans' biggest strengths is that we have a joined up way of providing services and are here for people round the clock, every single day of the year.

# Foreword

The world has changed.

In the past six years, we have seen one of the most dramatic social and economic periods in living memory unfold across the UK and ROI. As financial institutions collapsed and governments wrestled with unprecedented debts, the social effects are being felt in our communities. People are being placed under ever mounting pressure as uncertainty, stress and fear take a toll on relationships, wellbeing and people's ability to cope with the problems life throws at them. The social impacts of recession are well documented and understood to last well beyond the economic recovery period.

Since our previous strategy was published in 2009 we have delivered on our promise to be there for people during difficult times. We have established a UK wide partnership with Network Rail to reduce suicides on the railways; developed our Step By Step service to help schools recover from a suicide; set up and co-chair the National Suicide Prevention Alliance in England; developed a new telephony platform which makes sure callers get through to a volunteer whenever there is one available; rolled out a free to caller number in the ROI; produced a new version of our globally-recognised media guidelines; and delivered an influential report, *Men, Suicide and Society*, which sparked a debate on gender and suicide across the UK and ROI.

**But we are most proud that we did all this whilst answering millions of calls for help by phone, email, SMS, letter and face to face every year during a period of economic recession.**

Our new strategy recognises that Samaritans services are about connecting with people who are struggling to cope. It also reflects the fact that we can only provide the services we do because our supporters, donors and advocates continue to stand with us. Finally, despite being made up of 201 branches and 21,200 volunteers we

**“I’m still here, many years after my first email to Samaritans!”**

Samaritans caller

know that one of our big strengths is that we have a joined up way of providing our services and making sure we are here for people round the clock, every single day of the year.

As we look ahead to 2021, we know that we need to continue to provide and improve our vital services. We also know that we must continue to expand access to our services and that is why, by the end of this strategy we will have made sure that access to all our services is free to everyone. We will focus our efforts where we are needed most and not inadvertently turn our back on any groups, but make sure we try harder to reach people in socio-economically deprived communities, particularly men in middle years and those affected by a suicide. And we will continue to research, learn and debate how society can better support people struggling to cope.

To do all of this we will go through a period of change which is unprecedented for Samaritans. **We are prepared to adapt and change the way we work to better help people who need us.** We know that we will be stronger when we plan, act and speak together, and so it is important that we build on our great foundations and create a charity which whilst rich in diversity and local identity, is also more resilient, effective and responsive. We want to do this so that we can continue being there for our callers when they need us.

The world has changed but it is possible to limit some of the negative effects this has on people. We can choose to stand together in the face of a society which may often feel like a lonely and disconnected place, and we can choose to make a difference by making lives more liveable for those who struggle to cope. We believe we can do this because we know that people and organisations are stronger together.



# What we stand for

Samaritans' **vision** is that fewer people die by suicide.

To bring this about, we make a big impact on the world around us by:

- 🕒 reducing the feelings of distress and crisis that can lead to suicide
- 🕒 increasing access to support for people in distress and crisis
- 🕒 reducing the risk of suicide in specific settings and vulnerable groups
- 🕒 influencing governments and other agencies to take action to reduce suicide.

**“Samaritans always treat you with respect and understanding. They don’t tell you what to do. Their jaw doesn’t drop when you tell them how bad you feel.”**

Samaritans caller

**Our values are important to us.**

### **Listening**

Exploring feelings alleviates distress and helps people to reach a better understanding of their situation and the options open to them.

### **Confidentiality**

If people feel safe, they are more likely to be open about their feelings.

### **Non-judgemental**

We want people to be able to talk to us without fear of prejudice or rejection.

### **People making their own decisions wherever possible**

We believe that people have the right to find their own solution and telling people what to do takes responsibility away from them.

### **Human contact**

Giving people time, undivided attention and empathy meets a fundamental emotional need and reduces distress and despair.

# Why what we do matters

## The scale

**In 2013 alone, 6,233 people took their own lives** in the UK<sup>1</sup> and 475 in the ROI.<sup>2</sup> That is 18 suicides a day and for every one of these people, there are friends, partners, children, relatives, carers and colleagues left behind. Around 17% of people say they have had thoughts of suicide at some point in their life, 6% that they have attempted suicide and 5% confirm that they have self-harmed.<sup>3</sup>



## The urgency

**After a decade of declining suicide rates, we are seeing a significant increase in the UK and ROI.<sup>1,2</sup>**

In general, suicide increases in times of recession and economic hardship and worryingly men in mid-life continue to be at excessive risk; men from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds, living in the most deprived areas are approximately 10 times more likely to die by suicide than those in affluent areas.<sup>4</sup> We need to continue making it easy for these men to find help as in 2013 the suicide rate in this group reached a 30 year high. We need greater focus at local and regional levels on the co-ordination and prioritisation of suicide prevention activity.

## The financial impact

**For the family and friends of those who die by suicide,**

the experience is enormously painful, leading to a whole range of complex and difficult emotions. The wider social cost can be estimated in financial terms, and for those of working age has been calculated as £1.67m.<sup>5</sup> This includes monetary value attached to the pain and suffering of relatives and reduced quality of life, lost output (both waged and unwaged) and direct costs to services (NHS, police) and relatives.

**“We have the emergency services on the 999 number and then there is your service. A service that we couldn't do without.”**

Samaritans' partner

Samaritans has to make sure we make the biggest difference we can with the resources we have.



## The big challenges to reduce suicide

**The inequities in suicide, economic downturn and austerity** The UK and ROI are experiencing enduring economic uncertainty, along with cuts to public spending and social welfare systems. There has been an increase in people's material, social and psychological distress and in suicide rates. But as a result of the tough economic climate fewer resources are available to provide help. Samaritans has to make sure we make the biggest difference we can with the resources we have.

**Lack of understanding of suicidal behaviour and how it can be reduced** Suicide reduction requires the action of multiple organisations across sectors working together collaboratively and effectively. But action is hindered by organisations' lack of understanding of suicidal behaviour and how it can be prevented and the widespread perception that responsibility for its reduction rests exclusively with mental health services.

**Disjointed and insufficient services for people who are suicidal** There are gaps in the provision of mental health services for those who are suicidal. Mental health problems play a very important role in suicide, but the wider causes and context of suicidal feelings and behaviour need to be understood and addressed in their own right, rather than treating the mental health problem alone. There is a lack of 24 hour crisis care and people who are suicidal tend to fall into gaps between primary and secondary care and emergency services.

**The opportunities and challenges posed by our 'digital' society** Online and digital forms of communication and interaction have become an integral part of people's lives and are evolving very rapidly. The online environment can be supportive, safe and informative for vulnerable people; however, it can also harbour harmful and dangerous places.

**The need for evidence to inform action** There is a large body of research about suicidal behaviour, but only limited evidence about what works best to prevent or reduce suicide, for different groups. We need to build the evidence base that will help to inform effective action to reduce distress and suicide. We also need to make sure that people with direct experience of being suicidal or of supporting those who are suicidal are encouraged to work together with researchers and policy-makers.





# How we make a difference

A reduction in suicide comes from the actions of many different organisations, working together. Samaritans will focus on making a difference in four main areas, in order to contribute to reducing suicide.

**“Samaritans made me feel  
like I had a chance at life.”**

Samaritans caller



**We believe that through our support people feel calmer, understood and less alone, gain perspective and see new ways of dealing with their situation.**

## **1. We reduce feelings of distress and crisis that can lead to suicide**

Our approach to supporting people has been developed over time specifically for those in distress and experiencing suicidal feelings. We believe that through our support people feel calmer, understood and less alone, gain perspective and see new ways of dealing with their situation.

## **2. We reduce the risk of suicide in specific settings and high risk groups**

Certain groups of people have heightened vulnerability to suicide and certain settings contribute to increased suicide risk; these require a tailored range of interventions. We offer expertise and collaborate with organisations to develop interventions for specific settings and vulnerable groups. Over the coming years we will focus some of our efforts on specific groups including: men in middle years, people in socio-economically deprived areas and distressed people in online settings. We provide training for those in contact with vulnerable people; work with the media to promote the responsible representation and portrayal of suicidal behaviour; run the Listener Scheme, in which prisoners provide peer support to other prisoners; partner with the rail industry to reduce suicide on the railways; and support families and communities affected by suicide.

**Through these four areas, Samaritans is taking action against the multiple causes of suicide and at various levels: providing help for individuals; addressing suicide risk in particular groups and settings; and influencing policymakers and practitioners to bring about change in mental health, social care and other services and in public policy.**

## **3. We increase access to support for people in distress and crisis**

We do everything we can to make it as easy as possible for people to contact us for help. People can talk to us without telling us who they are and be reassured that we won't pass on their information to anyone else or intervene against their wishes. They have everything to gain and nothing to lose by getting in touch with us. People can contact us for support round the clock, every single day of the year and we continue to expand the ways people can get in touch, making our support accessible through commonly used communication channels. We don't rely on people coming to us. Branches reach out and provide information and support in communities. We see our support as one part of a range of help people need and provide information on other sources of help.

## **4. We influence governments and other agencies to take action that reduces suicide**

There are many factors which contribute to suicide, including the conditions of society and communities, public health and the provision of health and social care. We work closely with policy-makers, decision-makers and practitioners to strengthen action which addresses the causes of suicide.

# The 'Building Blocks' to achieve our vision

This diagram explains how our work makes a difference to the world around us in order to realise our vision. It also shows that all our actions need to be based on a foundation of good organisation and strong values to underpin our services and our work.

**“A huge sigh of relief in the middle of the night, when everything feels worse.”**

Samaritans caller

**“I had two options. Suicide or call Samaritans. I opted for the second.”**

Samaritans caller

# Our vision

Fewer people die by suicide in the UK and ROI

# Our impact

We reduce the feelings of distress and crisis that can lead to suicide

We increase access to support for people in distress and crisis

We reduce the risk of suicide in specific settings and vulnerable groups

We influence governments and other agencies to take action to reduce suicide

# Our work

We provide training

We run peer support in prisons

We partner with the rail industry to reduce suicide on the railways

We provide support to families and communities affected by suicide

We work with the media to promote responsible representation of suicide

We lobby national and local policymakers

We form coalitions and campaign

We conduct research and collaborate with experts

We publish policy recommendations

We raise awareness with parliamentarians

We provide expertise on national and local forums

We provide empathic, confidential support for people who are struggling to cope

We are available around the clock, by phone, email and SMS

We provide support in person in our branches

We take our support into communities to reach people where they are

We create partnerships with other organisations to increase access to support for vulnerable groups

We provide people with information about other sources of help

# Let's make it better

In order to enhance the difference we make, by 2021 we will improve our:

1

## Service

Improve the quality and consistency of our services by making sure that:

- all Samaritans users experience a service which is responsive to their needs
- quality assurance processes are consistently implemented across all our services and projects
- Samaritans' training, volunteer management and roles are designed in such a way as to ensure that we have the right people, with the right skills, in the right roles.

**“It's been two years and as I look back on it now, someone who didn't even know me cared enough to listen and saved my life.”**

Samaritans caller

2

## Access

Improve access to Samaritans services by making sure that:

- all helpline services are free to callers
- awareness-raising campaigns are based on evidence of need, targeted at vulnerable groups and delivered at a local and national level
- email, SMS and instant messaging support is provided in an integrated way
- emotional support is provided outside of branch in new targeted settings
- people get through to a volunteer every time they try to contact us
- support is provided in targeted settings for those affected by a suicide.





We understand the interests of our callers and use this knowledge to increase help-seeking and influence public policy and practice.

### 3

## Influence

Have stronger and more effective external influence and connections with partners by making sure that:

- ✔ we have strong referral relationships with partner agencies working with vulnerable groups (especially men in middle years, people in socio-economic deprivation and people with mental health problems)
- ✔ vulnerable people online are recognised, offered support and have less chance of coming into contact with harmful online content
- ✔ we have strong effective relationships locally and nationally in order to influence the content and implementation of local and national suicide prevention policies and plans
- ✔ we understand the interests of our callers and use this knowledge to increase help-seeking and influence public policy and practice.

### 4

## Evidence

Improve collection and application of evidence so that:

- ✔ we are better able to demonstrate our approach to supporting people, the benefits this provides and its contribution to reducing suicide
- ✔ we understand the needs and profile of the different groups of people who use our services and what they get out of those services
- ✔ we apply existing evidence around 'what works' to improve and develop our support services
- ✔ we evaluate the impact of Samaritans' strategy.

# A better way of working together

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Our objectives and aspirations are deliberately challenging and ambitious. Our focus is on the people who use our services and the difference we want to make for them. In order to achieve our strategy we know we need to work more closely together as one organisation.

**“After I ended the call I can honestly say I felt different. It was as though this person who had listened to my grief had helped me lift a burden. I only wished I had contacted them sooner.”**

Samaritans caller

**There are three key areas on which we will focus to make sure that we are able to work together effectively to deliver our strategy.**

## **Support and engage our people more effectively**

- 🟢 Strengthen volunteer leadership and ownership, helping all volunteers to have a greater sense of participation.
- 🟢 Encourage and empower our people to make the best use of their skills and abilities in a range of different roles.
- 🟢 Provide excellent selection processes and high quality skills development training.
- 🟢 Make sure that the demands on volunteers are realistic and manageable.
- 🟢 Make sure that all our people are treated consistently and valued equally.

## Evolve our structure and governance

- Offer our branches a choice about the way that they belong to Samaritans.
- Preserve the diversity, local understanding and innovation of our branches, while building a greater level of cohesion and improving the ability to operate together as a united body.
- Build on and strengthen our existing regional and national infrastructure, to make sure that all parts can contribute to the delivery of an excellent service.
- Implement robust agreements with our branches to guarantee the quality and consistency of our services.
- Direct and enable the Chief Executive (and the staff team) more effectively, to support and coordinate the implementation of all aspects of the strategy and corporate plan.

## Maximise and mobilise our financial resources

- Devise and implement a revenue development plan to make sure we work together to increase revenues to support our services.
- Make better use of our existing financial resources to continue investment in the development and delivery of our services.
- Work together to identify further opportunities for greater cost savings and improved investment returns.
- Address imbalances in our financial strength so that Samaritans is financially secure and sustainable.



**We need to work more closely for  
the people who use our services.**



Samaritans has been here for over 60 years for people with nowhere else to turn. Suicide is indiscriminate so it is important we stay relevant and continue meeting this challenge with our ground breaking work.

## Our priorities 2015-2021



Improved quality  
and consistency

Improved access to  
Samaritans' services

Stronger and more effective  
connections within the sector

Improved collection and  
application of evidence

## What we need to make it all happen



Support and engage our  
people more effectively

Evolve our structure  
and governance

Mobilise and maximise  
our financial resources

**“Having someone there who cared about me and not because they had to but because they wanted to. Someone who listened, and helped me see its okay to hurt sometimes.”**

Samaritans caller

## Our impact



### Society

We influence governments and other agencies to take action to reduce suicide

### Community

We reduce the risk of suicide in specific settings and vulnerable groups

### Individual

- ◉ We reduce the feelings of distress and crisis that can lead to suicide
- ◉ We increase access to support for people in distress and crisis

## What we will have achieved by 2021



- ◉ Free to caller number
- ◉ Instant Messaging
- ◉ New standards for emotional support
- ◉ Bereavement support service
- ◉ Online outreach and support
- ◉ More Face to Face services
- ◉ Partnerships with Health, Police, Probation and Addiction Services
- ◉ Research on socio-economic deprivation, mental health and suicide
- ◉ Immigration Detention and Removal Centres service

# References

- 1 Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS). See *Samaritans Suicide Statistics Report* for most recent figures. [www.samaritans.org/about-us/our-research/facts-and-figures-about-suicide](http://www.samaritans.org/about-us/our-research/facts-and-figures-about-suicide)
- 2 Source: Central Statistics Office (CSO). See *Samaritans Suicide Statistics Report* for most recent figures. [www.samaritans.org/about-us/our-research/facts-and-figures-about-suicide](http://www.samaritans.org/about-us/our-research/facts-and-figures-about-suicide)
- 3 Bebbington et al. (2009) *Adult psychiatric morbidity in England, 2007: Results of a household survey*. The Health & Social Care Information Centre, Social Care Statistics, [www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs)
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WE ARE   
**STRONGER**  
**TOGETHER**

Thank you for all you do





**“There are in this world, people who seem to be ‘ordinary’ but who, turn out to be extraordinary. They give their total attention. They listen and listen and listen, without interrupting. They do not preach. They have nothing to sell. We call them Samaritans.”**

Chad Varah, Founder

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Founded in 1953 by Prebendary Dr Chad Varah CH CBE, Incorporated in England and Wales in 1963, a Company limited by guarantee, Registered Number 757372, and a Registered Charity Number 219432, also a Charity in Scotland Registered Number SC040604.

\* Please see our website for latest call charges.  
To protect our callers' privacy, photos have been posed by models.

**SAMARITANS**