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Briefing for Member Champions

Preventing Suicides: Facts and Figures

In 2016 in England, 4,575 people tragically lost their lives as a result of suicide (ONS, 2017a). The rate has fallen each year since 2013. Official statistics also show that:

- Three quarters of people who die by suicide are men

- By region, suicide rate are consistently higher in the South West, North West and North East of England and lower in London

- Among men, the age group with the highest risk of suicide is 40-44 years; for women it is 50-54

- Suicide is the commonest cause of death among men under the age of 50

Suicide risk is higher for some groups of people than for others. As well as differences in gender and age, some occupations (including low-skilled manual occupations among men, nursing among women and care work among both sexes) carry a higher risk of suicide (ONS, 2017b).

Poverty and inequality also increase suicide risk: being unemployed more than doubles a person's risk of dying from suicide (Samaritans, 2017).

Rates of suicide are higher among people using mental health services (especially those who have spent time in hospital) and among people in the criminal justice system. Last year, a record 116 people lost their lives to suicide in prison in England and Wales.

Nearly three quarters of people who die by suicide were not in contact with mental health services at the time of their death (National Confidential Inquiry, 2017). Some will have seen GPs or other health professionals previously; others will have had no contact with statutory services at all.

The Public Health England Atlas of Variation gives data on suicide rates in each local authority area of the country https://healthierlives.phe.org.uk/topic/suicide-prevention.

Suicide Prevention Strategies

Every top tier (county or unitary) local authority in England has been asked to produce and implement a local suicide prevention plan. Guidance to support this important work has been published by Public Health England (2015) in partnership with the National Suicide Prevention Alliance https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/suicide-prevention-resources-and-guidance.

What helps to prevent suicides?

Local authorities have a key role in preventing suicides in their communities. Working with local partners, they can:

- Understand the needs of their local population by assessing the causes of suicide and high-risk demographic groups in their local area (working closely with coroners), identifying any 'high-frequency locations' where large numbers of suicides occur, and being aware of trends over time

- Tackle the risk factors for suicide through Health and Wellbeing Strategies: for example to prevent poor mental health among those facing the highest risks

- Offer training in suicide prevention to people in a position to save a live: for example GPs, railway workers and housing officers

- Seek to reduce the risk of suicide in high-frequency locations, such as bridges (for example by using Samaritans posters and contact details)

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- Provide emotional support and referral to other relevant public or local voluntary sector services to people who have attempted suicide and the families and friends of those who have died by suicide

What can elected members do?

1. Ask your public health team about your local suicide prevention plan: what are the key deliverables; what would success look like; and how will it be monitored?

2. Find out about trends in local suicide rates and causes: are there any particular risk factors that need specific action, and what is being done to address these?

3. Support partnership working across agencies to prevent suicides: for example encourage close working with coroners to identify trends quickly

4. Get behind local campaigns that aim to build public awareness and train front line workers in preventing deaths by suicide

5. Seek suicide prevention training for yourself and other council members

Sources of help

- In an emergency, dial 999

- For confidential help or support, contact Samaritans on:

  ☎ 116 123 (in the UK)

  ✉ jo@samaritans.org

Written in partnership with Samaritans

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Spot the Signs, Save a Life

Local organisations in Hertfordshire initiated a training programme to help more people to know how to respond to a person at risk of losing their life. Spot the Signs, Save a Life provided suicide prevention training to a range of people including GPs, local businesses, schools, police officers and Jobcentre staff. It also engaged with the wider public to encourage people to talk about mental health and challenge stigma. For more information, visit http://www.hpft.nhs.uk/information-and-resources/spot-the-signs/.

References and useful links

National Confidential Inquiry into Homicide and Suicide by people with a mental illness Annual Report 2017 http://research.bmh.manchester.ac.uk/cmhs/research/centreforsuicideprevention/nci/reports/2017-report.pdf

Office for National Statistics 2017a Suicides in Great Britain: 2016 Registrations https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2016registration

Office for National Statistics 2017b Suicide by occupation, England: 2011 to 2015 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/suicidebyoccupation/england2011to2015

Public Health England 2015 Local suicide prevention planning: a practice resource https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/suicide-prevention-resources-and-guidance

Samaritans 2017 Dying from Inequality https://www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/Samaritans%20Dying%20from%20inequality%20report%20-%20summary.pdf

To find out more about the Mental Health Challenge:

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