

New suicide strategy and £1.5 million into prevention research

Monday 10 September, 2012

A new Suicide Prevention Strategy will focus on supporting bereaved families and preventing suicide amongst at risk groups and is backed by a call to action led by the Samaritans and up to £1.5 million for new research.

The strategy, launched today, World Suicide Prevention Day, by Care Services Minister Norman Lamb, is the first in more than 10 years and aims to reduce the suicide rate in England and better support those who have been bereaved or affected by suicide.

To do this the Government has identified six key areas for action, these are:

A better understanding of why people take their own life and how it can be prevented – supported by new suicide prevention research funding.

Working with the media, and with the internet industry through members of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) to help parents ensure their children are not accessing harmful suicide-related websites, and to increase the availability and take-up of effective parental controls to reduce access to harmful websites.

Reducing opportunities for suicide, by making sure prisons and mental health facilities keep people safer – for example by redesigning buildings to take away ligature – and by safer prescribing of potentially lethal drugs.

Better support for high-risk groups – such as those with mental health problems and people who self-harm – by making sure the health service effectively manages the mental health aspects as well as any physical injuries when people who have self-harmed present themselves.

Improving services for groups like children and young people or ensuring the mental health needs of those with long-term conditions are being met through the Government's mental health strategy.

Providing better information and support to those bereaved or affected by suicide – making sure families are included in the recovery and treatment of a patient and giving support to families affected by suicide.

Care Services Minister, Norman Lamb said:

“One death to suicide is one too many – we want to make suicide prevention everyone's business. Over the last 10 years there has been real progress in reducing the suicide rate, but it is still the case that someone takes their own life every two hours in England.

“We want to reduce suicides by better supporting those most at risk and providing information for those affected by a loved one's suicide.

“Effective suicide prevention requires combined effort from a wide range of organisations across the voluntary, statutory and private sectors. That is why I'm delighted that almost 50 national organisations have responded to the Call to Action and why we have worked with Samaritans in order to help provide support to those most in need.”

Chair of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group, Professor Louis Appleby said:

“Suicide does not have one cause – many factors combine to produce an individual tragedy. Prevention too must be broad – communities, families and front-line services all have a vital role.

“The new strategy will renew the drive to lower the suicide rate in England. It will highlight and support the crucial preventive work of local services, the voluntary sector, suicide researchers and many others.”

In enabling us to deliver better outcomes for people using health and care services, the Government Policy Research Programme is funding up to £1.5 million for research to help develop the evidence base and improve understanding of:

- how to reduce the risk of suicide for people with a history of self-harm;
- how self-harm can be better managed and suicide reduced in children and young people;
- how interventions can be tailored to improve the mental health in some specific groups such as black

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and minority ethnic groups and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people;

- how and why suicidal people use the internet; and
- how support can be provided effectively to those bereaved or affected by suicide.

Supported by a grant from the Department of Health, the Call to Action consists of national organisations from across England committed to taking action so fewer lives are lost to suicide and people bereaved or affected by suicide receive the right support. This is the first time that organisations have committed to working together to share best practice and deliver real action to tackle suicide.

Catherine Johnstone, Chair of the Call to Action Steering Group and Chief Executive of Samaritans, said:

“Each and every suicide is a tragedy which has a devastating effect on families, friends, colleagues and the wider community. As a group we are encouraged that the Government has taken this step in continuing to acknowledge the importance of suicide prevention, by publishing the new strategy and by supporting the Call to Action.

“We firmly believe that suicide can be prevented by making sure people get support when they need it, how they need it and where they need it. This means we all have to try harder to reach people who may not now be talking to anyone about the problems they face. To do this the partners signed up to the Call to Action will work together, learn from each other and join up the best of what we do.”

Speaking about the strategy, Catherine Johnstone said:

“For the strategy to be a success it requires local agencies to implement the recommendations. We are calling on all local authorities to develop their own plans and initiatives, to make sure less lives are lost to suicide.”

Earlier research has shown that stigma associated with mental health problems can be a key aspect of people not going to their GP for help. That is why the Government is committed to supporting Time to Change, the national anti-stigma campaign for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Notes to Editors

1. The call for research proposals to support the implementation of the national suicide prevention strategy is already underway and can be found on the DH website.
2. In 2010 around 4,200 people died by suicide and it continues to be a public health issue especially now at a time of economic and employment uncertainty. Did you know:

The suicide rate is highest amongst men aged 35-49 years old and overall men are three times more likely than women to take their own life;

By age 16, up to 14% of adolescents will have self-harmed once in their life; and

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are twice as likely as heterosexual people to self harm.

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