

February 2024

Local suicide prevention funding

Suicide is the leading cause of death in males under 50 years and females under 35 years in the UK, with the latest available figures confirming that 5,284 people in England tragically took their own lives in 2022¹.

Local suicide prevention activity is critical in preventing suicides across England, with NHS England dedicating £57million to local areas for suicide prevention and bereavement support services as part of delivering the NHS Long Term Plan. However, this funding for local suicide prevention will have run out by April 2024, and in many areas has already come to an end, meaning some local suicide prevention activities will have to scale back or stop.

In the new Suicide Prevention Strategy for England 2023, the Government has committed to reducing suicide rates in England within the next five years and identified the crucial role that local areas play in achieving this ambition. However, no new money has been attached to the strategy. Without proper funding, the Government will be unable to fulfil its promise to reduce suicide rates.

Samaritans is calling for ring-fenced suicide prevention funding for local areas to be continued for the lifetime of the five-year strategy, increased in line with inflation.

With the money set to completely run out in April 2024, Government must urgently confirm that this funding will be continued and give communities the certainty they need.

Background

The NHS Long Term Plan 2019 committed £57million for suicide prevention and bereavement services, so that each local STP or ICS² in England received money for a period of three years. The Government estimates that approximately £38 million of this was spent on suicide prevention³. The money for bereavement services is being added to the general pot of funding⁴ for ICSs and this will mean that bereavement services should continue to be commissioned, although this funding will no longer be ringfenced. However, the money supporting suicide prevention activity has already come to an end in most local areas, and all funding will have run out by April 2024. Without this, some local areas are scaling back vital work to reduce suicides and will have to try to find money in their already squeezed budgets.

In recent years local areas have made great progress in suicide prevention, with all areas having developed a local suicide prevention plan catered to their community. This dedicated funding has enabled further progress. Local areas received an allocation of funding and had to submit proposals for how the funding would be used, demonstrating how they would approach key issues including

¹ There were 5,284 suicides registered in England in 2022. Because of the way suicides are recorded, suicide registrations for 2022 will include suicides which occurred in previous years.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/suicidesintheunitedkingdomreferencetables>
Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs), now known as Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), refer to local partnerships between healthcare organisations, NHS and local authorities to provide joined up health and care in the areas they serve.

³ [Written questions and answers - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

⁴ This is also called 'baseline funding'.

community-based prevention for middle-aged men and self-harm, and quality improvement within services such as hospitals and mental health care. This led to the development of a range of suicide prevention activities, including targeted non-clinical support, and community wide suicide awareness raising.

The September 2023 National Suicide Prevention Strategy recognises that the £57 million investment supported all areas in England to have in place local suicide prevention plans⁵, and that these are a vital part of the commitment to reducing suicide rates. Earlier in 2023, the Government announced £10 million funding for suicide prevention charities up until 2025, which is very welcome recognition of the important role of the sector. However, this won't replace the funding that local areas so desperately need.

We are calling for the £38 million spent on local suicide prevention to be continued and increased in line with inflation, for the lifetime of the new five-year suicide prevention strategy for England. We estimate that this would cost around £77.1million⁶, an equivalent of £1.40 per capita⁷.

We can't wait for the money to completely run out in April 2024 before a decision is made on the future of the funding. We are calling for the Government to urgently confirm that this funding will be continued.

The impact of local suicide prevention funding on communities

In April 2022, Samaritans asked people working on suicide prevention at a local level about their experiences. Funding from the NHS Long Term Plan was broadly viewed as having a positive impact on local suicide prevention, often used to develop training or services, and over 60% of respondents expressed concern about funding running out. For 64% of respondents, there was a clear sense of what could be achieved with further funding, including systems development, expanding their training offer and suicide awareness raising.

Local areas have spent the funding on key suicide prevention priorities. This includes:

Delivering suicide prevention training to create suicide safer communities, focused on people who might come into contact with someone who's at risk of suicide through their jobs – for example housing officers, employment officers, or postal workers. The funding was used to train over 1,000 people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough last year and 12,000 people in Cumbria since the start of 2020. From this training in Cumbria, one person said: *"I know hand on heart, that with the knowledge I gained from the training I have prevented suicides."*

Funding suicide prevention coordinator posts, so one person is responsible for coordinating a local approach to suicide prevention, using local data to understand where action needs to take place and building relationships with local organisations, individuals with expertise and people with lived experience, driving effective action through a multi-agency approach.

⁵ [Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross-sector strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/suicide-prevention-in-england-5-year-cross-sector-strategy.pdf)

⁶ Calculated by converting £38million spent on suicide prevention from three years into five years, and increased in line with inflation from 2019 - May 2023 using the Bank of England inflation calculator.

⁷ Calculated by dividing £77,130,870.16 by the ONS' population estimate for England (December 2022), 56,536,000



Setting up, implementing and expanding local real-time suicide surveillance systems, which can track deaths and attempted suicides locally and identify where a response is needed. These systems can quickly identify clusters of suicides in specific demographics, schools, workplaces, or even friend groups, so a response plan can be rolled out immediately to either provide bereavement support or improve and upskill services. We know that multiple areas are having to scramble to find more short-term or reduced funding for these systems as their ringfenced funding comes to an end.

Supporting direct interventions, grassroots or community organisations and innovative projects, where overstretched local authorities have been able to try new suicide prevention projects rooted in local context and needs, to develop new best practice.

“I’ve personally seen the incredible impact this local funding has had. However, these changes take time to embed due to the stigma and complexity of self-harm and suicide prevention. Ending this funding stream now just makes no sense. To have a real impact on reducing suicide rates a long-term commitment is needed so that both services and communities become suicide safer.” Darren Archer, Network Manager (Mental Health), North East North Cumbria Clinical Networks, NHS England

“In West Yorkshire, suicide prevention wave funding has been so positive because it has enabled real change in our communities. The wave-funded West Yorkshire suicide prevention website is a portal for people who work across health and care, as well as people who are feeling suicidal, currently getting over 2000 hits per month – but it takes ongoing investment to sustain such resources. In order to bring the suicide rate down, our strategy says that we need to make prevention everyone’s business, but this can only be achieved through a sustained programme of investment.” Jess Parker, Suicide Prevention Manager, West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership.

Please support Samaritans’ call for ring-fenced suicide prevention funding for local areas to be continued for the lifetime of the five-year strategy, increased in line with inflation.

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