



Deputy Mary Butler

Dáil Éireann

Kildare Street

Dublin 2

01/11/19

**PQ Ref: 38227/19**

**“To ask the Minister for Health if he will conduct a national audit of Traveller suicide and consider resourcing a national targeted suicide prevention campaign for Travellers as a priority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Mary Butler”**

Dear Deputy,

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has been requested to respond to you with regard to your Parliamentary Question above.

**A national audit of Traveller suicide**

It remains difficult to ascertain the levels of suicide among the Traveller Community. Unfortunately, the data provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) does not capture a wide range of information, including ethnicities. This gap is just one of the barriers that exist, to improving our real-time visibility of suicide incidents, among many different cohorts in society.

It should be noted that in Ireland, the decision as to whether someone has died by suicide, is a legal decision made by Coroners, *not* a medical decision made by doctors or the HSE.

Following the Coronial investigation, inquest and registration processes, the CSO publishes national mortality data, including data on deaths by suicide. The purpose of the CSO (mandated under the Statistics Act 1993) is to impartially collect, analyse and make available statistics about Ireland’s people, society and economy.

- All CSO data on suicide deaths is publically available on their website [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie).
- For an overview, you can read our own briefing document on the most recent CSO data, here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/nosp-briefing-on-suicide-figures.html>.

Nevertheless we can still look to qualitative studies – for example, while it is somewhat dated, the 2010 *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*<sup>1</sup> concluded that the rate of suicide among male Travellers was 6.6 higher than the general population. The female suicide rate was less pronounced.

### **Improving our visibility of suicide data**

The NOSP, Irish Coroners and the Health Research Board (HRB) are currently engaged in a 4-year partnership project to collect improved national data on suicidal behaviour through expanded health surveillance. This project supports objectives 7.2 and 7.3 and more specifically, action 7.2.2 of *Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020*<sup>2</sup>.

The NOSP entered in to a contract with the HRB to undertake additional annual censuses of closed Coroners files (for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018) across all (40+) Coronial districts in Ireland - collecting information on suicide and suspected suicide (i.e. more likely than not).

Findings from this project will provide rich national data on demographics, socio economics, history and behaviour, that we currently do not have visibility of. Data collection, cleaning and analysis is still underway, and we intend that findings for initial years (2015 and 2016) will be published by Q1\_2020.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b9c48a-all-ireland-traveller-health-study/?referrer=/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/aiths2010\\_technicalreport2\\_hr\\_partb.pdf/](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b9c48a-all-ireland-traveller-health-study/?referrer=/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/aiths2010_technicalreport2_hr_partb.pdf/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/connecting-for-life-ireland-s-national-strategy-to-reduce-suicide.html>

## National targeted suicide prevention campaign for Travellers

Strategic Context:

4 key strategic drivers that inform and assist the HSE, in improving the mental health of, and reducing suicide among, the Traveller Community.

1. Members of the Traveller community are considered as a priority group in *Connecting for Life*, and feature across many objectives and actions in the strategy. They are strongly represented in 17 localised versions of *Connecting for Life* which are now in place across the country – many of which involve local Traveller groups and representatives on their implementation or oversight groups.
2. *A Vision for Change* reminds us that mental health services should be inclusive of all the people in Irish society and should be delivered in a culturally appropriate way. A “refresh” of *A Vision for Change* is due to be completed later this year and will propose an expansion of existing recommendations and also look at developing a framework for the implementation of cultural, diversity and gender competency that is required to respond to the needs of these particular groups.
3. The *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy*<sup>3</sup> (Department of Justice) also details HSE-specific actions which inform this work. Of particular note, is the commitment to develop a National Traveller Health Action Plan (recommendation 73). The consultation process to inform the development of the Plan, led by HSE National Social Inclusion Office, commenced in 2018. Along with HSE Community Strategy and Planning and Mental Health, they have proposed an integrated approach to deliver key mental health and social inclusion actions under the *National Intercultural Health Strategy*, *Connecting for Life*, *A Vision for Change* and *Healthy Ireland*, alongside wider government initiatives. It is anticipated that the new plan will be finalised in 2019 and will be supported by an accompanying Implementation Plan.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf>

4. The *Second National Intercultural Health Strategy 2018-2023*<sup>4</sup> provides a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing the many unique, health and support needs experienced by the increasing numbers of HSE service users from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and who live in Ireland.

Key Initiatives and Developments across the HSE, nationally and locally:

- In 2017 the HSE committed to the recruitment of nine Mental Health Coordinators for Travellers, eight of whom are currently in post. The focus of these roles is to work within the CHOs to support improved access, consistency and integration of mental health services to meet the mental health needs of Travellers.
- The HSE NOSP provides suicide prevention-specific funding to Exchange House, Ireland National Traveller Mental Health Service (€307,000 in 2019). Their Service has now established working groups in Dublin, Limerick, Sligo, Meath, Waterford, Kildare and the Midlands.
- The NOSP also continues to fund the Offaly Traveller Movement (€71,539 in 2019) and the local CHO, to provide the local *Travelling to Wellbeing Mental Health Service*. This has resulted in the production of a guide to “Developing a Local Co-ordinated multi-agency Crisis Response Plan for the Traveller Community” to ensure more support for individuals and families when suicide incidences or crisis situations occur.
- The HSE National Social Inclusion Office funds a wide range of Traveller mental health initiatives that are focused on both improving the mental health and reducing death by suicide by travellers through training and education programmes but also through providing a community development approach to service access and delivery. Many of these initiatives are based in CHOs and a number are funded directly through Dormant Accounts.

It is important to note that campaigns or resources provided by the HSE (such as Little Things, and yourmentalhealth.ie) are provided for our entire population but also reach specific groups such as the Traveller community, through networks and partnerships at local level. For example - through

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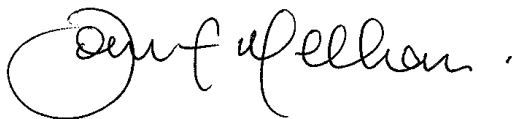
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/intercultural-health/intercultural-health-strategy.pdf>

the network of 20+ Resource Officers for Suicide Prevention<sup>5</sup> nationwide. You can read information on some mental health and suicide prevention activities from across this network, in our Annual Report for 2018<sup>6</sup>.

Equally, our Mental Health services, whether provided by community-based mental health teams (CAMHs, general adult, rehabilitation and recovery, and psychiatry of later life) or within acute inpatient services, day hospitals, outpatient clinics or forensic services, are for our entire population, including the Traveller Community.

I trust this information is helpful for you.

Yours sincerely,



Mr John Meehan

HSE Assistant National Director, Mental Health Strategy and Planning

Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/nosp/resourceofficers/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/national-office-for-suicide-prevention-annual-report-2018.html>