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To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to an increase in the suicide rate here during the Covid-19 pandemic; and if his Department has received representations from organisations, charities or NGOs in which concern was expressed regarding an increase in self-harm or suicide during 2020.

Dear Deputy,

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has been requested to respond to your question above.

Suicide rates during the pandemic

It is not currently possible to determine changes in suicide rates since the onset of the pandemic. In Ireland, the decision as to whether someone has died by suicide is a legal determination made by Coroners, not a medical decision by doctors or the HSE. Therefore, there is a resulting time delay in the availability of data.

Following the Coronial investigation, inquest and registration processes, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) publishes national mortality data, including data on deaths by suicide. All CSO data on suicide deaths is publicly available on their website www.cso.ie.

Annual data from the CSO is delivered in three stages;

1. Provided firstly by year of registration – “provisional”
2. Revised later, by year of occurrence – “official”
3. Revised later again, to include “late registrations”.

At present;

- Provisional data is available for the year 2019. This can be viewed here:
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vs/vitalstatisticsyearlysummary2019/>.
- Provisional data is also available for Q1 2020. This can be viewed here:
<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-vs/vitalstatisticsfirstquarter2020/>

Aside from accessing the CSO site, you can find more information in our accompanying briefing document, [Briefing CSO Data \(2nd June 2020\)](#).

You may also be interested in reading an international review [The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on self-harm and suicidal behaviour: a living systematic review](#) (4th Sept 2020) which concludes “there is thus far no clear evidence of an increase in suicide, self-harm, suicidal behaviour, or suicidal thoughts associated with the pandemic. However, suicide data are challenging to collect in real time and economic effects are evolving.”

Representations from organisations, charities or NGOs

The HSE NOSP and Mental Health Operations work closely with a wide range of organisations providing mental health and suicide prevention services, supports or initiatives. While specific representations (as described in your question) have not been made to us, it should be noted that there remains ongoing regular engagement and consultation with these organisations.

This has included weekly (and now monthly) telecalls with agencies who are funded by the HSE, to share and consult on the challenges posed by the pandemic. The HSE remains supportive of many responsive initiatives from organisations which have resulted in new ways to access services (e.g., online). You can read some of them, [here](#).

The HSE works to ensure these ongoing efforts are aligned with strategic frameworks that pre-date the pandemic (e.g., [Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide](#)) or that have been developed since (e.g., [The COVID-19 Psychosocial Response Project](#)).

I trust this information is useful for you. Please do revert should you require anything further.

Yours sincerely,



Mr John Meehan

HSE Assistant National Director, Mental Health Strategy and Planning

Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)