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PQ Ref 24228/22

To ask the Minister for Health the community response plan that is in place by county or other geographic breakdown in each of the years from 2010 to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter. Clarification received that this question relates to suicide.

Dear Deputy,

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

Background

In order to improve health-led readiness and planning to appropriately respond to incidents of suspected suicide, the HSE NOSP published new national operational guidance 'Developing a Community Response to Suicide' in 2021. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/developing-a-community-response-to-suicide.html>.

This new operational guidance is intended to support the development of a Community Response Plan (CRP) - for incidents of suspected suicide, particularly where there is a risk of clusters and/or contagion - in each HSE CHO. While other related plans (for example, psychosocial responses) may already be in place, this resource supports the development of a CRP specifically for cases of suspected suicide(s). It particularly emphasises the importance of multi-agency and collaborative working in this area, and is a practical resource for those involved in the preparation, writing, implementation and review of a new or existing plan. The guidance provides information on how appropriate teams, roles, responsibilities and systems should be established. It gives clear criteria for how and when a CRP should be activated and deactivated, and guidance on how it can be evaluated and reviewed.

The main aims of this guidance are to ensure:

- Preparedness - which is key to ensuring a successful response to incidents of suspected suicide
- Foremost involvement and engagement with individuals or communities who have been bereaved by suspected suicide
- Early detection of potential related suicides
- A timely and coordinated response amongst a number of agencies
- Commitment to serving the expressed needs of the community and building on the community's own strengths
- Robust links to existing appropriate services, supports and information sources
- Commitment to ongoing learning and the review and improvement of all practices.

The HSE NOSP worked with multiple partners to develop this guidance, and is now committed to supporting areas in developing their own community response plans together with improving systems for collecting more timely data on suspected suicides (which will support the monitoring and potential activation of a CRP).

The number of Community Response Plans to Suspected Suicide in place nationwide

Prior to the publication of the 2021 operational guidance referenced above, the HSE NOSP has not collated the number of times that responses – formal or informal - have been put in place nationwide.

The HSE NOSP can confirm that since the publication of the 2021 operational guidance, Mental Health Services in each CHO nationally, are planning or have commenced work to produce and formalise a specific Community Response Plan for their area, in line with the guidance. During this time and under the new guidance, there have been three formal activations of a local CRP (two in Cork, and one in Louth Meath).

This number does not capture the entirety of this work. Aside from these formal CRP activations since the 2021 operational guidance, mental health services across the HSE have delivered, and continue to deliver a wide variety of responses, in collaboration with multiple agencies in local communities. It should be noted that not every case of suspected suicide will have required a formal mobilised response from health services, and in many cases, the ongoing supports provided by front line services, including community and NGO partners, are very effective.

Mental Health Services in each HSE CHO, the national network of HSE Resource Officers for Suicide Prevention, and each local Connecting for Life Implementation Group, have always worked on an inter-agency basis whenever required, to effectively support individuals and communities who have been impacted by suspected suicide, in a coordinated and targeted manner.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Meehan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

Mr John Meehan

HSE Assistant National Director, Mental Health Planning
& Head of National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP)

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