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To ask the Minister for Health in recognition of Travellers as a priority group as being at an increased risk of suicidal behaviour when he will instruct the Connecting for Life Advisory Group established in 2020 to meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has been requested to respond to your question above. Your reference to a 'Connecting for Life Advisory Group' (2020) may relate to various groups involved in the implementation of the strategy, and the following information may provide you with an answer in the broad context. You are very welcome to revert with any more specific questions or for clarification.

Background, Connecting for Life

Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide was published in 2015 - and since extended to 2024. The strategy presents an outcomes focus, with a vision that measurable improvements can be made in relation to the incidence of suicide and self-harm, against which the impact of the strategy and its component parts can be evaluated in the future.

The strategy specifically states one of its' goals is to target approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and improve mental health amongst particular high risk or **priority groups**, i.e. groups that have consistently been shown by both national and international research to have increased risk of suicidal behaviour. The national strategy (and 10 additional local plans closely aligned to the national strategy) include actions that are targeted population-wide and others that are targeted to

these priority groups. Additional groups (for whom there is limited /less consistent evidence of increased vulnerability to suicide) are also considered in the strategy.

Members of the Traveller community are considered as a priority group in the strategy and primarily feature in objectives and actions related to;

- Provision of suicide prevention and self-harm training within the community and amongst frontline staff working with people vulnerable to suicide and self-harm.
- Awareness raising and stigma reduction campaigns.
- Guidelines and protocols to assist organisations to work collaboratively in relation to suicide prevention and the management of critical incidents.
- Support to the development and delivery of targeted initiatives and services at primary care level for priority groups and evaluation as appropriate.

Connecting for Life meetings and governance structure

As a whole-of government strategy, Connecting for Life requires the HSE NOSP to provide a strategic view of implementation progress, and within an implementation structure established at the beginning of the strategy. The Office fulfils a central role in this implementation structure and reports to the **National Cross-Sectoral Steering and Implementation Group** (chaired by the Department of Health) on a quarterly basis. This group meets quarterly and comprises various government departments and agencies, who have made commitments to lead, support or contribute to the specific actions outlined in the strategy.

- More information on implementation, and quarterly progress reports presented to the National Cross-Sectoral Steering and Implementation Group, are available here:
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/strategy-implementation/implementation-progress-reports/>.

Locally, there are also 10 local Connecting for Life Actions Plans in place across the country. HSE Resource Officers for Suicide Prevention (ROSPs) work across a range of Community Health Services, Community Health Organisations (CHOs) and areas nationwide. Reporting within local healthcare structures, the ROSPs coordinate the development, and support implementation of these regional Connecting for Life action plans which are aligned to the national strategy.

Additional information

- With a suicide prevention focus - and in partnership with others across the HSE and Government - the HSE NOSP is committed to and involved in the delivery on related actions in the [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy](#) (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth) and the [National Traveller Health Action Plan](#) (Department of Health).
- The HSE NOSP actively supports collaborative research and improving understanding in Traveller mental health and suicide prevention. Presently, three projects are underway:
 - *Exploring digital storytelling as a therapeutic intervention for Traveller men affected by suicide* (funded by HSE NOSP)
 - *Traveller Mental Wellness Continuum Framework: A cultural intervention model of mental wellbeing and suicide prevention for members of the Travelling community in Ireland* (funded by Sláintecare).
 - *Closing the Gap: Exploring the co-variates of Suicidality among Irish Travellers Project* (funded by Sláintecare).
- The HSE NOSP provides funding to the NGO sector and over 20 organisations have Service Level Agreements at present. These partners offer a diverse range of training in the suicide prevention space, with online workshops and supports offered to target groups, professionals, volunteers and adults and children. Supports are offered across the spectrum of need, ranging from meditation and wellness supports, to peer supports and evidence-informed therapeutic interventions for those with more acute needs. Approximately 50% of HSE NOSP expenditure each year is for grants to national organisations. Additional grants are allocated to more local agencies, via CHOs.
 - One such agency is Exchange House National Travellers Service. With the support of the HSE NOSP, Exchange House provides a range of Traveller-specific mental health and suicide prevention services to the community. Their aim is to improve the overall wellbeing of Travellers and reduce the likelihood of suicide or self-harm within the community. They do this by working with Traveller groups (such as community and resident groups) and Traveller organisations and services (including Primary Healthcare Projects and Traveller Action Groups). They also provide direct

mental health support to Travellers experiencing mental health issues including psychotherapy and CBT.

- For more information on the HSE NOSP, NOSP Annual Reports, and details of funded agencies (in Annual Reports), visit <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/nosp/about/annualreports/>

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

Yours sincerely,



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