



Mark Ward TD

Dáil Éireann

Kildare Street

Dublin 2

[mark.ward@oireachtas.ie](mailto:mark.ward@oireachtas.ie)

4<sup>th</sup> April 2024

**PQ ref 13041/24**

**To ask the Minister for Health to comment on the aims of goal seven in the Connecting for Life Implementation Plan 2023-2024 in relation to better quality data on suicide mortality across the entire population; for an update on what data is to be collected; 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.

The [Connecting for Life Implementation Plan 2023-2024 \(July 2023\)](#) sets out the agreed milestones for each of the 69 actions in Connecting for Life. These milestones – developed in close consultation with action lead agencies – describe the strategic and operational agenda required to drive the implementation of the strategy, and followed previous implementation plans, for the periods 2017 to 2020, and 2020 to 2022.

To effectively track the implementation of the strategy, the HSE NOSP uses a monitoring system to collate quarterly updates from lead agencies assigned to actions in the strategy, on milestones as set out in the Implementation Plans. Issues arising are brought to the attention of members of the [Connecting for Life Cross Sectoral Steering Group](#) (chaired by the Department of Health) for discussion and resolution, if possible. For your information, publicly available summaries of quarterly implementation progress from both statutory lead agencies and NGO (non-governmental

organisation) partners are available here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/strategy-implementation/implementation-progress-reports/>.

### Quality data on suicide mortality

The following are selected highlights of implementation developments under Connecting for Life Strategic Goal 7 (To improve surveillance, evaluation, and high-quality research relating to suicidal, behaviour).

- Collaborative working between the HSE NOSP, the Mental Health Commission (MHC), HSE Mental Health Services and National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF), to conduct a retrospective review of the completeness of two different sets of data relating to probable suicide deaths in Mental Health Services, from 2015 to 2020. This project has established a strong proof of concept for the potential development of a specific national data capturing system and linked safety programme on probable suicide deaths among Mental Health service users.
- The introduction of the first [grant scheme for collaborative research projects on Connecting for Life 'priority groups' in Ireland](#). The purpose of the scheme was to improve understanding of the groups that are at increased risk for self-harm and suicide, and to promote and support collaborative research projects between researchers and services working in the area of suicide prevention in Ireland. This scheme provided funding to 11 discrete project. Two projects focused specifically on better quality data on suicidality amongst particular priority groups: the '[Dying to Farm](#)' project was a national survey investigating risk factors for mental health and suicide among farmers in Ireland; and the '[AfterWords Study](#)' was a national survey of people bereaved by suicide in Ireland.
- The development and publication of the [Irish Probable Suicide Deaths Study \(IPSDS\)](#) presenting comprehensive information on 'probable' suicide deaths in Ireland, for a four-year period from 2015 to 2018. This first-of-its-kind study outlines the numbers and characteristics of people who have died by probable suicide in Ireland and identifies associated risk factors. While the Central Statistics Office is the main source of official information of suicide mortality in Ireland, the IPSDS has provided unique data on probable suicide rates amongst the general population and amongst sub-population groups.

- Continued HSE investment in the [National Suicide Research Foundation \(NSRF\)](#) – an independent, multi-disciplinary research unit that investigates the causes of suicide and self-harm in Ireland. The NSRF is designated as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Surveillance and Research in Suicide Prevention. The work of the NSRF is detailed in their most recent [2022 Annual Report](#). Three examples from their current programme of work are:
  - The [National Self-Harm Registry Ireland](#) (a system that records and reports information about self-harm presentations to hospital Emergency Departments across the country).
  - The Self-Harm Assessment and Data Analysis (SADA) Project (a system that records episodes of self-harm by individuals in the custody of the Irish Prison Services).
  - The C-SSHRI initiative (Connecting Suicide and Self-Harm Researchers on the island of Ireland) established in 2020 to contribute to the co-ordination and streamlining of research completed by third-level institutions.
- The [HSE National Clinical Programme for Self-Harm and Suicide-related Ideation](#) (NCPSHI) is a national health system programme currently placed in 26 acute (24/7) emergency departments (EDs), and capturing presentation data for those referred with self-harm acts or/and thoughts of suicide. The NCPSHI established a national ED database in 2020, including data from 2018 onwards. The NCPSHI provides ED presentation rates for those referred for self-harm and suicide-related ideation. The NCPSHI is expanding to include self-harm and suicidal ideation data from Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse (SCAN) Services placed in primary care.

An action in Goal 1 of Connecting for Life (1.1.1) further addresses better quality data on suicide mortality across the whole population. To support this action, the HSE NOSP secured a module on suicide in three waves of the [Healthy Ireland Survey](#) (in 2021, 2022 and 2023). This has provided (for the first time) a population estimate for lifetime suicide attempt (range from 6% -7%) in the general population. The HSE NOSP and the NSRF have secured access to data from the all three waves of this module, which combined provide a total sample of 6,302 respondents. Analysis of this data is a key component of our work in 2024.

To date the Department of Health has included suicide as an opt-in modules in Healthy Ireland Surveys, and the HSE NOSP will continue to work towards ensuring questions on suicidal

behaviour (including recent attempt and ideation) are included in subsequent surveys, as a core part of the questionnaire rather than as an opt in. This will remove any potential bias from the data.

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'.

Mr John Meehan

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

[johnf.meehan@hse.ie](mailto:johnf.meehan@hse.ie)

