



Connecting for Life

3 Engaging men in suicide prevention practice

Suicide Prevention in Ireland – key messages for practice

Learning from Research and Practice in Suicide Prevention in Ireland during the first five years of Connecting for Life.

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Engaging men – six key messages

1

Building trust and rapport are essential when working with men.

Informal environments can be useful in facilitating feelings of safety and trust, particularly among groups with high levels of health service avoidance (e.g., Traveller men, men in prisons or middle-aged men at risk of marginalisation). The Men's Sheds and programmes such as Mojo and Power used informal approaches with positive engagement and feedback from service users. Mentoring was one of the approaches used successfully to build relationships in an informal way.

2

Interventions should complement or be incorporated within existing initiatives and infrastructure familiar to men.

Examples featured in the reports included sporting organisations, and interventions which used technology to support programme recruitment and retention. Men's Sheds organisations offer opportunities to embed and promote mental health activities and supports.

3

Mental health interventions for men should take a strengths-based approach.

This was a consistent theme across the reports and men were found to engage well with programmes focusing on resilience, strength and positive behaviour change rather than perceived problems or deficits. Tools which can support the use of a strengths-based approach include the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). This was used by Mojo Kildare and identifies each person's strengths and focuses on self-empowerment as part of the recovery process.

4

Outreach and service delivery should recognise the gender-specific barriers men can face when accessing psychological supports.

Organisations should be sensitive to the use of language in outreach and practice and be aware of the broader sociocultural context of men's mental health in Ireland. Other characteristics that may increase vulnerability to suicide include ethnicity, socioeconomic status or gender/sexual identification.

5

Involving men as partners in their own mental health care and recovery helped to foster a sense of agency.

This approach also facilitated good relationships between staff and service users. There was some evidence to support the wider benefits of interventions experienced by families, peer groups and communities. There may be a value to both planning for and measuring outcomes in this context.

6

More research and demographic data is needed about men's participation and outcomes in suicide prevention and mental health.

Some interventions highlighted difficulties in attracting and retaining male participants, and there would be a benefit to investigating levels of engagement in more detail. At the same time, practitioners must strike a balance between formal administrative responsibilities and using informal engagement strategies which work well with this particular target group.

About this brief

Frontline practitioners in statutory and community services play a critical role in identifying, referring and supporting people at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Awareness campaigns, resources, helplines, and evidence informed interventions are some of the activities which feature in suicide prevention work. Research and evaluation of these activities helps us to understand more about how services can respond, and approaches which are effective, particularly for individuals and groups at risk of suicide.

This research brief draws on a synthesis of 31 independent reports based on research and evaluation of suicide prevention services and interventions delivered during the first five years of *Connecting for Life*, Ireland's national suicide prevention strategy.

Background

The National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) in the HSE leads on the co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the *Connecting for Life* strategy. *Connecting for Life* identifies a set of priorities aimed at reducing suicide and self-harm, both among the general population and among specific vulnerable groups. NOSP regularly invests in research, interventions and services aimed at supporting people's mental health and advancing knowledge of the risk factors for self-harm and suicide.

NOSP commissioned the Centre for Effective Services (CES) to synthesise key findings across the reports, and to produce a series of briefs which highlight useful learning to inform policy and practice in the area of suicide prevention.

The series includes an executive summary of the synthesis, and three briefs which focus on key themes emerging from the synthesis, including: **engaging young people, engaging men** and **supporting staff**.

Suicide prevention and men

Men constitute one of the priority groups in *Connecting for Life*. Six reports focused on engaging men, including specific interventions along with training initiatives for practitioners working with men.

Research shows that services may find it challenging to reach and engage with men. Fear of stigma, language sensitivity and isolation are some of the reasons why men may be reluctant to engage with services. This research brief outlines some learning from reports which will be useful to practitioners working directly with men, but also those more widely working within universal settings.

Other reports in this series are available on the [HSE NOSP website](#).