



Connecting for Life

4 Supporting staff 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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Supporting staff – 6 key messages

1

Staff need access to a wide range of flexible training and organisational supports.

Useful examples of supports included formal training, line management, peer learning, clinical supervision, clinical/research networks and opportunities for reflective practice. The importance of regular continuous professional development was highlighted.

2

New training needs are emerging as services grow and develop.

Reports suggest the need for ongoing training and capacity building in gathering and using data. Existing resources such as the National Self Harm Registry could be better utilised through appropriate training and signposting. While most of the interventions were implemented and evaluated before the Covid-19 pandemic, emerging virtual or hybrid models of service delivery will require new skills and ways of working.

3

Working with high-risk groups requires specialist training and support.

This includes training in cultural and gender sensitivities as well as how to assess risk. There were good examples of specialist training programmes for healthcare providers, including programmes given by the National Traveller Suicide Prevention Service. Continuous supports appear particularly important for those working with high-risk groups, and can include reflective practice, regular clinical and peer group supervision or participation in service management meetings. Mentorship or peer learning may be useful in the early stages of programme implementation with high-risk groups.

4

Staff need time and support to work collaboratively and develop good referral pathways.

Having good local knowledge and relationships within the community were highlighted as important aspects of interagency working. Approaches such as social prescribing rely on good relationships across a range of sectors. Multidisciplinary working can benefit both staff and service users. These activities take time and it may be challenging to measure their impact. Reports noted the value of working collaboratively with service users and their families to build confidence and agency.

5

Training activities should align with the needs of service users, organisational purpose and sustainability.

Examples included gatekeeper training (GKT) programmes, which train individuals in how to identify and refer those at risk of suicide. There was good evidence to support the use of gatekeeper training across different age groups and settings. Train-the-trainer approaches also featured, which may offer benefits in cost-effectiveness, widen access to specialist knowledge and contribute to a culture of learning within organisations. Training programmes should be properly adapted for the local context and take regional partnerships, infrastructure and risk factors into account. National or multi-service organisations may consider coordinating training within a national centre and offering locally adapted versions of programmes.

6

Suicide prevention training should be practical, focused and flexible.

Evidence from this review suggest attendees engage better when trainers focus on specific topics at a time, and when they balance theoretical material with examples of real-world suicide prevention. This is particularly important when training staff how to engage with at risk groups, who may have highly specific support needs. Network meetings with community partners can provide a useful source of support and may help attendees ground their learning from the sessions. Suicide prevention training should also be flexible enough to allow trainers to adapt it to different audiences or localities.

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 series 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**.

Supporting staff in suicide prevention work

Supporting staff involved in delivering suicide prevention services emerged as a common theme in the synthesis and features in approximately a third of the reports.

Staff turnover is an issue for many services, along with high workloads and competing demands. The complexity of suicide prevention work may be challenging for staff, both professionally and personally. The reports demonstrate that supporting staff can have a positive impact in improving the quality of services, helping organisations to attract and retain staff, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for service users.

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