



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

# Talk to me

A National  
Action Plan to  
Reduce Suicide  
and Self Harm  
in Wales  
**2008-2013**

## **Working Together to Save Lives –**

Welsh Assembly Government, NHS Wales, local authorities, justice agencies, voluntary organisations, employers, education and community groups.

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## Introduction

Suicide and self harm are important issues in Wales that affect people of all ages, young and old, male and female. It affects their families, friends and the communities in which they live.

Every suicide is a tragedy, a life and family member lost. For those left behind suicide leaves a wound that does not easily heal.

It is one of the highest causes of death among young people, so preventing suicide and reducing the number of people who harm themselves is an important issue which needs a Wales wide approach.

To ensure action is taken, the Welsh Assembly Government is launching a national plan to reduce suicide and self harm. It will also aim to help people of all ages to feel good about themselves.

The Welsh Assembly Government's vision is to promote the mental health and wellbeing of the people of Wales; to encourage people to talk

more about their personal difficulties and to make sure people get help quickly when they need it.

The five year action plan will raise awareness of suicide and self harm and help people understand that it is often preventable. The plan is aimed mainly at people who are at highest risk. It looks at seven key commitments;

- Helping people to feel good about themselves.
- Providing help early to those in need.
- Responding to crises in people's lives.
- Dealing with the effects of suicide and self harm.
- Increasing research and improving information on suicide.
- Working with the media to make sure reporting on mental health and suicide is sensitive.
- Making sure that, where possible, people at risk do not have access to things which could be used for suicide.

The national action plan outlines the challenges and priorities and how organisations, working together, will deal with them. It also looks at the

causes of emotional distress and tackles many of the issues which people, particularly young people, may face.

But it is your views that will make the biggest impact on any of the plans that we make. That is why we are asking for your opinions. We want to know what you think about the actions suggested in the plan and the improvements that need to be made.

Talking about suicide and self harm to people responsibly does not create or increase risk, it reduces it. The best way to help people considering suicide or harming themselves is to talk to them. We need to encourage people to talk openly and to ask for help. We also need to ensure that we offer that help.

By working together, this 'Talk to Me' action plan can make a real difference. It will help people, particularly young people, to cope with difficult experiences in life.

Preventing suicide and reducing the number of people who harm themselves is everyone's business. Please be part of it.

## **Suicide and Self Harm in Wales – the Facts**

The most up-to-date statistics show that between 1996 and 2006, around 300 people in Wales died each year as a result of suicide. Within this figure, rates vary between ages, men and women and local areas.

Suicide is one of the highest causes of death among young people in Wales. There are roughly twice as many deaths in people of all ages each year as a result of suicide than due to road traffic accidents.

Around 21 in 100,000 men die as a result of suicide in Wales. The rate for women is around six for every 100,000. Suicide rates in Wales are higher than in England but lower than in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

At least 6,000 people are taken into hospital each year because they have harmed themselves. In reality, the number of people who harm themselves is probably much higher than this figure, as many people who harm themselves are treated as outpatients or do not ask for help. Self harm is common in young people. It can be a way of coping with difficult emotional problems.

While few people who harm themselves will die from suicide, there is evidence to show that in many suicide cases the person will have a history of self harm.

## National Action Plan

In February, the Minister for Health and Social Services said that a national action plan would be developed. The plan would build on work already happening to tackle poverty, homelessness and inequality. It would look at ways to help people feel part of their community.

The plan would also build on improvements in mental health services and support for people with alcohol and drug problems.

The plan looks at things that make people consider suicide or harming themselves. These include:

- relationship problems
- losing their job
- difficulties at work or school
- being bullied or feeling like an outsider
- problems with alcohol and or drugs
- having a serious physical or mental illness.

There is a real need to provide more help to people who show signs of suicidal thoughts or harming themselves. This support needs to be non judgemental and readily available. The stigma linked with emotional distress and unhappiness, particularly in young men, must be removed. People must be encouraged to talk openly about their problems and feelings.

This national plan draws together a number of actions which will help those most in need to feel better about themselves. It will have a particular focus on children and young people.

The plan lists actions to deliver the following seven commitments:

## **1 Our Commitment...** **To help people feel good about themselves by:**

- encouraging people, particularly young people, to talk openly about their problems and feelings
- removing the shame linked with emotional problems and mental illness
- developing healthier school, college and work places
- reducing poverty and social inequality
- improving awareness and understanding among the public and professionals
- developing healthier and safer prison and secure environments
- making sure children and young people feel safe and looked after.

## **2 Our Commitment...** **To ensure early action is taken by:**

- encouraging people to ask for help as soon as they are feeling stressed, considering harming themselves or having suicidal thoughts

- providing more support services
- making it easy to get information about people who can help
- improving the way we diagnose and help people suffering from depression and other mental illnesses
- providing more help and better treatment for people with drug and alcohol problems
- providing support to those in prisons and custody so they do not harm themselves
- making sure specialist services respond more quickly to those most in need.

### **3 Our Commitment...**

#### **To respond to crises in people's lives by:**

- making sure people know about mental health services and how to contact them
- improving professionals' understanding and response to people who harm themselves
- monitoring services received by people to ensure they are meeting their needs.

## **4 Our Commitment...**

**To deal with the effects of suicide and self harm by:**

- improving the care and support offered to people who have lost someone to suicide
- improving the care and support offered to families who are coping with the distress of someone harming themselves
- improving the support offered to professionals dealing with suicide
- making sure support services are available to help communities cope with the fall out of suicide.

## **5 Our Commitment...**

**To increase research and improve information by:**

- encouraging research and making sure information about suicide and self harm is available
- learning lessons that inform future prevention plans
- monitoring rates of self harm and suicide to ensure organisations can meet the needs of the communities they serve

- establishing a national group to look at the needs of people who harm themselves.

## **6 Our Commitment...**

**To work with the media to ensure sensitive reporting on mental health and suicide by:**

- discussing mental health issues with the Welsh media
- encouraging the media to improve how suicide is reported
- promoting national media guidance by working with the Samaritans and other government departments in the UK
- using the media to deliver positive mental health messages and raise awareness of suicide and self harm in a sensitive manner.

## **7 Our Commitment...**

**To restrict access to things which could be used for suicide by:**

- ensuring that where possible, access to things that could be used for suicide is made difficult for those at risk
- ensuring all prison, custody and mental health settings are safe.

## Achieving Success

Organisations and communities across Wales will need to work together to put the national action plan into practice. This includes local authorities, health and social care services, voluntary organisations, community groups, employers, schools, colleges, housing agencies, police, prison services, families and friends.

The Welsh Assembly Government will provide leadership to support the plan. It will also raise public and professional awareness of the need to move forward and make improvements.

Working with children and young people, and those who are most vulnerable, will be a vital part in delivering the plan.

The plan will be regularly reviewed and reported to Ministers to make sure improvements are being made.

## Questionnaire

Now you have read ‘Talk to Me’, the draft national action plan, it is your chance to join in a Wales wide discussion.

We want to hear your views on whether the plan could help to reduce the number of people who harm themselves or who die by suicide because of the problems they have. We want your thoughts on whether the plan is the best way to improve services.

Your opinion is very important to us, so please fill in this questionnaire by the **30 January 2009** and send it to ‘Talk To Me’ Consultation, Freepost NAT 8910, NHS Communications, 4th Floor BO4 South Wing, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ.

If you want to email your comments please send them to: **[TalkToMeMailbox@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:TalkToMeMailbox@wales.gsi.gov.uk)**

If you want to read more about “Talk to Me” or facts and figures about suicide and self harm in Wales, a longer version is available on-line at **[www.wales.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.wales.gov.uk/consultations)**

A report on suicide rates in Wales and other countries is available at

**[www.wales.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.wales.gov.uk/consultations)**

# Feedback Questionnaire

## Question 1

Yes No

Do you agree with the overall aim of the national action plan?

If you have answered 'No', how do you think it could be improved?

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## Question 2

Yes No

Do you agree with the seven key commitments?

If you have answered 'No', how could they be improved?

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## Question 3

Yes No

Is the plan written in a way people can easily understand?

If you have answered 'No', tell us how it could be improved?

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## Question 4

Yes No

Will the plan meet people's needs?

If you have answered 'No', what do you think could be added to the plan?

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## Question 5

How can local organisations, communities and people help to make the action plan work?

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## Question 6

How can we keep you informed of the action plan's progress?

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*Any other comments?*

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We intend to publish the responses on the Welsh Assembly Government's website after the consultation closes on **30 January 2009**.

**If you would like your response to remain anonymous, please do not complete the following section.**

Name: .....

Organisation: .....

Age: .....

Gender: .....

Post code: .....

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. Your views are important to us and will help shape the final version of the national action plan.