



October 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about Government action to reduce self-harm and suicide.

Every case of suicide is a tragedy many times over: for the person who could see no way out; for their family and friends, often left with an intolerable burden of guilt; and also, for society as a whole in its failure to provide greater support.

I note the campaign being run by Samaritans about local funding for suicide prevention. All future funding commitments are a matter for the Treasury, which will outline its spending plans at the Autumn Statement shortly. However, I hope that the Government's commitment and record in delivering record investment of £15.9 billion in mental health services just in this financial year, which is 28% more funding than in 2018, should give confidence that this Government will continue to deliver on mental health services.

I also recognise that there are also some clear disparities in suicide rates across the country. Someone is twice as likely to die from suicide in the North East compared to London, and men living in more deprived areas are at 10 times more risk of suicide than in the least deprived areas. The Government is committed to spreading wealth and opportunity across the country, as well as tackling deprivation where it exists.

As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, the Government is boosting the suicide reduction programme in England by £57 million of funding by March 2024 which will support local suicide prevention plans and establish suicide bereavement support services. All mental health providers now have 24/7 urgent mental health helplines in place.

The Government has recently published a National Suicide Prevention Strategy which includes a commitment to see the number of suicides in England decrease within two and a half years at the very latest. Over 100 measures have been outlined in the strategy aimed at saving lives, providing early intervention, and supporting anyone going through the trauma of a crisis. This includes a new national alert system to notify relevant authorities – like schools, universities, and charities – of emerging methods of suicides and risks, and any required actions that can reduce access or limit awareness.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan sets out an ambition to grow the mental health workforce by 73% by 2036 to 2037, and the workforce already continues to grow to help cut waiting lists – one of this government's top five priorities. In March 2023, there were almost 9,300 more mental health staff working than the previous year.

Through the Online Safety Bill, companies will be required to proactively remove and limit the spread of illegal content which encourages or incites suicide online.



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Further, the Government has announced its intention to develop and publish a Major Conditions Strategy, which will set out how outcomes in six condition areas, including mental ill-health will be improved.

In August this year, the Government relaunched a £10 million fund so charities can work with the NHS to provide life-saving suicide prevention services. Charities in communities across England can now apply for the latest round of funding from the Suicide Prevention Grant Fund which will ensure as many people as possible can access the support and prevention services they need, when they need it. Funding will also help prevent people reaching crisis point and reduce future demand for these services across both the charity sector and the NHS.

A previous fund of £5.4 million in 2021 to 2022 supported over 100 organisations within the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. The results of the fund were overwhelmingly positive, with virtually every single successful bidder saying it helped meet increased demand after the pandemic, improved access to services for people in need and helped identify those experiencing suicidal thoughts quicker.

The NHS Long Term Plan is also specifically ensuring more support for young people's mental health, including providing NHS funded mental health services and school or college-based Mental Health Support Teams to an additional 345,000 children and young people by 2023/24. The goal is to ensure that 100 per cent of children and young people who need specialist care can access it.

Tens of millions of children in schools across England will have access to a dedicated mental health support team by the end of March 2025, with at least half of school pupils set to receive such support. Mental health support teams intervene where a mild-to-moderate mental health issue is identified and ensure children and young people are both protected and supported.

Just one life lost to suicide is one too many. With the implementation of these policies, the Government hopes to find new ways to prevent suicide.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY