

Briefing Paper

Welsh Government's Understanding Suicide Prevention and Self Harm Reduction Strategy



Published in April 2025, the understanding Suicide Prevention and Self-harm Reduction Strategy sets out the Welsh Government's ambition to create a more compassionate, holistic, and person-centred approach to supporting people who self-harm, and to those affected by self-harm and suicide. The strategy aims to reduce suicide and self-harm rates among children and young people by addressing the underlying causes and risk factors, enhancing support systems, and promoting early intervention.

The overarching vision for the strategy is to create communities in Wales free from the stigma associated with suicide and self-harm, enabling individuals to feel empowered and supported to seek help when needed and ensure people who self-harm, have suicide ideation or have attempted suicide feel understood and safe. With those who need it the most, having access to support and services which meet their needs, where and when they need it.

Understanding is the principle upon which the strategy is built and its success in achieving the vision for Wales set out by the Welsh Government. To realise this vision, the strategy notes that suicide prevention and self-harm reduction is everybody's business. There is a focus on at-risk groups and prevention, where there is a no wrong door approach to seeking support. Policy and service delivery will reflect the voices of those with lived experience and promote a person-centred approach.

The strategy encompasses six key objectives which set out to ensure there is a robust evidence base, co-ordinated cross-government and cross-sectoral actions, rapid and impactful prevention, intervention, and support, enhancing skills, awareness and understanding, appropriate and compassionate responses and responsible communication. These objectives set out to: -

- **Listen & Learn**

Ensure there is a robust evidence base to understand prevalence, causes, impacts and effective interventions. Policies, procedures and interventions will be monitored to evaluate effectiveness, and systematic structures will be strengthened to continue the analysis and sharing of data to inform policy and practice. Lived experiences will be integral to informing policy and service development.

- **Prevent**

Supporting people working with those who need help to develop a better understanding of self-harm and suicide. It aims to develop holistic, collaborative and cross-sectoral working to prevent suicide and self-harm. Addressing risk factors and restricting access and exposure to harmful information online.

- **Empower**

Ensuring people are empowered with the knowledge and awareness to recognise those in need of support. Offering kind and compassionate services that enable access to support. Providing opportunities to raise awareness in communities and providing universally accessible training and support.

- **Support**

Ensuring those in need have access to timely and person-centred support, receiving interventions and treatment from all relevant services. Providing national guidelines, which offer timely, evidence-based, person-centred interventions. Developing a workforce training plan to increase understanding and identifying gaps in services and support.

- **Equip**

Services are equipped to identify people at risk and provide holistic, person-centred, compassionate support. Embedding training as part of school curricula, higher education and relevant university courses, such as initial teacher training. Developing resources to raise awareness, knowledge and understanding to dispel myths, increase compassion, offer support and remove stigma.

- **Respond**

Ensuring timely responses to suicides, providing compassionate, person-centred support to all who are affected. Enabling rapid responses, nationally and locally, to suspected suicides, which are compassionate and person-centred.

The strategy provides a framework for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people with a focus on early intervention and prevention. Focusing on targeted support and professional development, the strategy aims to create compassionate and supportive environments that enable children and young people to thrive and seek the support they need.

Understanding: The Suicide Prevention and Self-harm Delivery Plan for Wales 2025-2028

Accompanying the strategy is a delivery plan, which sets out what the Welsh Government plans to achieve over the first three years of the life cycle of the strategy. Key activities include mapping of data, existing services and resources. This will enable the scoping of current activity and explore opportunities to establish and develop protocols to consistently identify and record self-harm incidents, identify needs of service users and workforce, and enhance accessibility to services.

Further to mapping current trends and activities across Wales, the development of robust training programmes is a key activity within this delivery plan cycle, to ensure the needs of service users and the workforce are met. Actions within the delivery plan aim to ensure services for children and young people feel equipped to support those with self-harm and suicidal ideation and behaviours. With specific actions to ensure the inclusion of suicide and self-harm awareness raising, safeguarding and escalation procedures are included in the CAMHS toolkit and resources are available through Hwb for education practitioners.

Children's Rights and Understanding suicide prevention and self-harm reduction strategy

Article 6, ***Right to Life, Survival and Development***, supporting all children and young people, where they grow up in environments that promote mental wellbeing and protect them from harm. The strategy needs to consider the unique risk factors that affect children and young people, such as bullying, academic pressure and online harms, and explore how these can be addressed so young people feel supported and safe to seek the support they need to thrive.

Article 24, ***Right to Health***, with mental health being a critical part of a young person's overall health there should be guaranteed access to mental health support and services which are young person friendly, accessible and non-stigmatising. Intervention and prevention services must be available in schools, communities and health settings. Funding for CAMHS should be prioritised to reduce waiting times and prevent crisis, with support systems developed to support those who do not meet CAMHS criteria.

Article 12, ***Right to be Heard***, children and young people should actively be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of services and resources. Mechanisms should be in place to ensure youth voice, and their lived experiences inform policies and services. There should be ongoing and meaningful engagement of children and young people in the development and evaluation of policy and services, with clear channels for them to express their views and experiences.

Article 19, ***Right to Protection from Harm***, children and young people should be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, all factors that can contribute to poor mental health and suicidal ideation and self-harm. Safeguarding measures and trauma-informed approaches should be central to the development of policies and service provision. Ensuring robust co-ordination between services to provide seamless support and enhancing universal training programmes to ensure those working alongside children and young people can recognise and respond to signs of mental distress effectively.

Article 29, ***Right to Education***, schools play a key role in promoting mental health literacy, emotional resilience, and reducing stigma. A whole school approach should support mental health and wellbeing and provide clear pathways for seeking support. Clear guidelines and resources should be provided to implement mental health education effectively. Robust training of teaching and non-teaching staff is essential, starting with initial teacher training and continuing through high quality continuing professional development courses.

The ***Understanding Suicide Prevention and Self-harm Reduction Strategy*** recognises that early intervention is crucial to reducing long term harm and improving life outcomes for children and young people. Recognised as a priority group to the risk of self-harm and suicidal thoughts the Welsh

Government, has recognised the need for a co-ordinated and cross-sectoral approach to tackle and address factors that can increase risk and create safe, supportive, and compassionate environments so those in need can feel empowered to seek help and support.

What next

The focus on early intervention and prevention within the strategy work to ensure children and young people get the help they need before reaching crisis point. The whole school approach frameworks, such as NEST/NYTH and the whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing, aim to ensure a consistent approach to emotional and mental health for all children and young people seeking support. The development of holistic, collaborative and cross-sectoral working will aim to ensure children and young people do not fall through the gaps and receive the support they need for their emotional and mental health concerns. Co-production and listening to lived experiences can help to ensure the needs of children and young people are placed at the forefront of policy and service development. The delivery plan accompanying the strategy outlines the importance of reporting and monitoring with aims pertaining to the development of a reporting framework linked to the Strategy Board and Ministerial Assurance Board as embedding identified leadership within the public sector.

The six key objectives of the strategy, with the focus on early intervention and prevention, holistic and cross-sectoral collaboration, and the active participation of children and young people with lived experience in policy and service development can ensure children and young people feel seen, heard and supported. Providing services and support networks which aim to meet their complex needs at the point at which they seek support.

