

The right support, at the right time, in the right way: working together to reduce suicide and self harm

The Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan suicide and self harm prevention strategy, 2021-24



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Foreword

Statistics tell us that 32 people took their own lives in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in 2020: more than twice as many as lost their lives in road accidents. But we know that statistics alone cannot describe the impact of suicide and self harm. Every suicide is a tragedy. Every instance of self harm can have a long lasting emotional and psychological effect on individuals, those who care for them and everyone around them.

Suicide and self harm are preventable. Every instance of suicide and self harm may be linked to a wide range of personal, community and social factors. There are also large inequalities in suicide and self harm. All of these issues make suicide and self harm a public health priority.

This strategy sets out how organisations across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan will work together to reduce suicide and self harm over the next three years. We have followed the national suicide and self harm strategy for Wales, Talk to Me 2, in committing to a collaborative and cross-sectoral approach, and this strategy for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan builds on well-established national priorities and evidence of 'what works'.

However, we have also taken care to listen to those in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan who have been affected by suicide and self harm, including family members, carers, and the services that support them. The Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Steering Group for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan has worked hard to deliver the previous strategy. This refreshed strategy will support the Steering Group to continue to reflect evidence and best practice, to remain focused on the specific needs of our population and to deliver the outcomes we all wish to see.

I would like to recognise the work of the Steering Group over the past three years, and in particular the leadership of Chair Dr Miranda Barber and Public Health Consultant Dr Suzanne Wood. I would also like to thank Specialty Registrar Chris Emmerson for his work in developing this strategy and our Health Promotion Students Ciára Collins and Megan Kydd-Coutts for their support in stakeholder engagement work.

In this strategy we recognise the terrible impact that suicide and self harm can have on people and communities in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. But we also recognise that, by working together with real focus and commitment, we can deliver better outcomes now and in the future.



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Consistent Language meeting statement:

When discussing issues of suicide language reflects our attitudes and influences the attitudes of others. For the purpose of this meeting and ongoing work to prevent suicide and self harm members agree to using appropriate and consistent language recognising that suicide is a tragedy for all concerned and is a cause of distress for many people. There is no single reason why someone may die by suicide or harm themselves. It is usually in response to a complex series of factors that are both personal and related to wider social and community factors.

The phrase 'committed suicide' pays attention to era when suicide was considered a sin or a crime. When considering how the term committed is used in other settings for example committing a crime. Members agree to replace committed suicide with died by suicide or death by suicide.

Successful or unsuccessful attempts are considered poor choices of language as they imply an achievement or something positive despite the tragic outcomes. Members agree to replace successful attempt with death by suicide and unsuccessful attempt with suicide attempt.

While it may appear that those who die by suicide are not taking into consideration the impact that their death will have on others there is much evidence to the contrary. The mind of a suicidal person often holds the belief that they will lessen the burden by no longer being around. To help to break the stigma around suicide individuals living with suicidal ideation will be known as a person living with suicidal thoughts or behaviours.

Suicide prevention in Wales is everyone's business and requires effective, integrated community approaches to address the diversity of populations, places and individuals as well as ongoing work to address the inequalities that contribute to the burden of suicide and self harm.

1. Executive Summary

This strategy sets out how suicide and self harm will be addressed across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan over the next three years. It refreshes and develops the previous suicide and self harm strategy for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, which ran from 2017 to 2020 and also builds on Talk to Me 2, the national suicide and self harm strategy for Wales.

We developed this strategy by gathering evidence from a number of sources. We reviewed epidemiological data on suicide and self harm risks as they relate to the diverse population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. We spoke to statutory and non-statutory organisations with particular knowledge of our population and the issues around suicide and self harm they face. We reviewed current activity and frameworks, including strategies, guidelines and legislation that provides context and resources for addressing suicide and self harm. We also worked with those who have lived experience related to suicide and self harm – adults, young people and carers, and the professionals who work with them to understand their needs and priorities.

A number of themes consistently emerged from this work. Age-adjusted rates of suicide do not differ from those in Wales as a whole but age-adjusted rates of emergency admissions for self harm have fallen in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan over recent years, which suggests efforts to address suicide and self harm are having a positive impact.

However, the evidence also suggests there are areas in which further improvement is possible. In particular, we need to better understand and respond to the needs of groups in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan who may have specific risks; to ensure training for professionals who are not mental health specialists is consistent and supports those at risk to stay safe; to work with individuals to improve their capacity to work effectively with services to address their needs; to support effectively those bereaved by suicide and to ensure we learn from incidents of suicide and act to prevent further occurrences where we can.

The vision in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan is:

We will work together to give the right support at the right time in the right way to everyone at risk of and affected by suicide and self harm.

The overarching goals of the strategy are:

“To reduce suicide and self-harm and their associated impacts in the population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan”

- Reduce the number of people who take their own lives, or attempt to do so
- Reduce the number of people who self harm and the severity of injury in those who do
- Reduce the impact of suicide and self harm on those who care for individuals directly affected by these issues

The strategic aims that underpin the vision and goals are:

Strategic aims:

- Every service across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan works equitably, inclusively and compassionately with everyone at risk of and affected by suicide and self harm
- Every service in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan works collaboratively with other services, particularly at points of transition between services
- Those who work with and support people who may be at risk of suicide and self harm can identify those at risk, engage with them constructively and signpost or refer to the right service at the right time
- Relevant local intelligence and learning from specific incidents is collated, shared and acted on rapidly and effectively
- Those at risk or affected by suicide and self harm and those who care for them are engaged and empowered to work towards their own safety and recovery
- Risks associated with frequently used sites are eliminated or reduced as far as possible
- Issues around suicide and self harm are highlighted across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in ways that are constructive and de-stigmatising

The vision, goals and strategic aims are supported by strategic objectives, a logic model and an action plan that describes how the strategy will be delivered over the course of the next three years and who will be responsible for that delivery. All of these elements map on to the national strategy, Talk to Me 2.

Suicide and self harm can have an enormous impact on individuals, those who love them and our wider communities. In developing this strategy we have been struck by the experience, insight and commitment that services, those who use them and those who work in them bring to the challenge of addressing suicide and self harm. We trust this strategy respects and reflects those efforts and we believe it will help us all work together even more effectively to reduce suicide and self harm in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

2. Introduction

Context for the strategy

This suicide and self harm strategy for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan refreshes and develops the previous local strategy, which ran from 2017 to 2020. As part of that development, we have reviewed evidence on incidence and risk factors related to suicide and self harm in Cardiff and the Vale (Appendix A) and understood the local and national context within which this strategy must be effective (Appendix B). We have also consulted extensively with individuals who evidence suggests may be at higher risk; organisations which support and advocate for them and those who commission, manage and work within statutory mental health services to understand their needs, and the opportunities and barriers they see to reducing suicide and self harm and their associated harms (Appendices C to G). These Appendices are included a separate document of Supplementary Material. The vision and strategic objectives that we have developed and tested with those groups are articulated and organised in a logic model in Sections 3 to 6. To deliver the strategy, we have developed an Action Plan that is set out in an accompanying document. An Equality and Health Impact Assessment has been completed for this Strategy and is also available.

Central to putting the strategy into practice is the Cardiff and Vale Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Steering Group, which includes representatives from a wide range of local services and meets four times per year. The Steering Group leads on delivering the action plan and will monitor the strategy over the three years for which it runs and also provides a forum to share knowledge across all services in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. The Steering Group also works with the National and Regional Advisory Groups to ensure that policy and activity related to suicide and self harm are aligned at all levels.

This strategy has been developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people who live in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan¹ and on the services that support that wellbeing. Although the trajectory of the pandemic is difficult to predict and the specific impact of COVID-19 on suicide and self harm is not yet clear², we anticipate that over 2021 a recovery phase will begin across the Health Board area³, and we have developed the strategy to reflect that expectation.

It is important to be clear on what this strategy does and does not aim to do:

The strategy will:

- Identify those groups within the population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan who may be at higher risk of suicide and self harm and identify strategic ways to reduce those risks
- Set strategic objectives to prevent and reduce the impact of suicide and self harm across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan
- Provide an action plan to implement those objectives over the period 2021 to 2024
- Provide a resource for professionals, patients, carers, supporters, advocates and all those affected by suicide and self harm to understand and engage with work across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan

The strategy may not directly address, but may influence:

- Issues of professional or clinical training and judgement of those in statutory and non-statutory services, such as counsellors, psychiatrists and nurses
- The wider mental health systems and services within Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and Wales
- Wider social, political and economic issues such as deprivation

Benefits from addressing suicide and self harm

There are a number of ways in which a focus on suicide and self harm can benefit the population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

There were 32 deaths from suicide across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in 2020⁴. To put this figure into context, it is more than twice the number of road traffic fatalities (thirteen) recorded across the health board area by the Police in the same year⁵.

It is not just the number of suicides that cause a substantial burden on the health of the population. The highest rates of suicide across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan are in those aged 45-64 and 30-44⁶: people who might otherwise have expected to have many years of life ahead of them. Whilst suicide is, fortunately, less frequent amongst younger age groups, it is one of the top two causes of death amongst children and adolescents in Wales⁷ with evidence that mental health issues can begin to affect children even prior to starting school. Deaths from suicide, in particular in younger people, can have a devastating effect on the psychological health and wellbeing of friends and family⁷, with one survey suggesting more than a third of those bereaved or affected by suicide consider taking their own life⁸. The impact of suicide and self harm on the mental health of clinical staff treating and supporting patients, including those in Emergency Departments, in primary care and in specialist mental health services was also noted by the stakeholders we engaged with.

Whilst it is difficult to measure people's thoughts of suicide across the population, the 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Study (APMS), a household survey which sampled 7,500 adults in England reported that 20.6% of adults have thoughts of suicide at some point in their life, with 5.4% describing such thoughts in the previous year⁹. Whilst care must be taken to interpret older data reporting only on England, these figures suggest that population-level approaches are needed as well as those targeted at particular risk groups.

Self harm also represents a substantial health issue amongst those who live in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan¹⁰. There were a total of 2,691 emergency admissions related to self harm by a resident of Cardiff or Vale of Glamorgan over 2017/18 and 2019/2011. These admissions are likely to represent only the most serious incidents on a spectrum of harm, with the 2014 APMS estimating that 6.4% of adults had self harmed at some point in their life¹². Self harm is much more prevalent in younger people, in particular adolescent girls: it has been estimated that in a class of 30 older adolescents, 3 will be actively self harming⁷. Although most of those who self harm do not go on to take their own lives, supporting those who self harm may allow us to reduce the number of people dying by suicide: of those under 20 who took their own lives during 2014-15, more than half had a recorded history of self harm¹⁰. These figures reflect preventable deaths and preventable harms¹³. As we describe later, there has been a sustained fall in emergency admissions for self harm across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in recent years, illustrating that these issues, whilst challenging to address, are not intractable.

The health harms of suicide and self harm have an economic cost. The average cost of a suicide for those of working age in England has been estimated at £1.67m in 2009 prices, including loss of life, pain and suffering of relatives and lost output, police time and funerals. Self harm episodes treated in hospital have been estimated to cost an average of £809 for assessment and treatment alone, not including subsequent support or the longer term impact on an individual's health and wellbeing. Based on the most recent figures described above, this translates into a cost in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan of £70.1 million related to suicides in 2019 and £2.2 million in hospital costs related to self harm over 2017/18 to 2019/20.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recognises that interventions to address suicide and self harm should be evaluated to ensure that the most cost effective approaches are identified¹⁴. A wide range of interventions can be put into place to address suicide and self harm, making it difficult to put average figures on the costs and benefits of prevention activity. However, the available evidence suggests that, when measured in quality adjusted life years (QALYs) over a range of timescales, including 1, 5 and 10 years, interventions across a range of domains, including population level suicide awareness and intervention training to bridge safety measures, are likely to be highly cost effective¹⁵.

Overall, the evidence suggests that suicide and self harm represent a major health and economic burden on the population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, but that effective action can reduce that burden.

Methods

Development of this strategy began in January 2020, was suspended during the initial outbreak of COVID-19, with work continuing between November 2020 and March 2021. The strategy was developed with the support of a Planning Group who reviewed progress regularly. Appendix A in the Supplementary Material details membership of the Planning Group.

We have used a number of methods to understand:

- the needs of the population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan and groups within it
- what stakeholders think works well, what could be improved and what gaps may exist
- what vision and strategic objectives the strategy should be based around and what activities would realise that vision and objectives

To do this we have:

- interviewed professionals working in statutory and non-statutory services
- reviewed epidemiological data from a range of sources
- carried out an engagement exercise involving online questionnaires and workshops with professionals, service users and carers

Details of these methods and selected findings are provided in the Appendices in the Supplementary Material.

3. Vision

The vision for the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Suicide and Self Harm Strategy is:

“We will work together to give the right support at the right time in the right way to everyone at risk of and affected by suicide and self harm”



4. Overarching goals

The overarching goals of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan suicide and self harm strategy are:

“To reduce suicide and self-harm and their associated impacts in the population of Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan”

- Reduce the number of people who take their own lives, or attempt to do so
- Reduce the number of people who self harm and the severity of injury in those who do
- Reduce the impact of suicide and self harm on those who care for individuals directly affected by these issues



5. Aims and objectives

The following strategic aims and objectives support the vision:

Every service across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan works equitably, inclusively and compassionately with everyone at risk of and affected by suicide and self harm

- Deliver services that understand and respond to the specific social and cultural needs of the population of the area, in particular those from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and those who identify as LGBTQ+
- Increase awareness of the range of services and training available in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan on suicide and self harm relevant to the needs of those groups
- Support staff in all services to understand the importance of compassion in working with those at risk or affected by suicide and self harm
- Recognise strategic work to support services to become psychologically/trauma informed

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objectives:

- 1) *Further improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide and self harm amongst the public, individuals who frequently come into contact with people at risk of suicide and self harm and professionals in Wales*
- 2) *To deliver appropriate responses to personal crises, early intervention and management of suicide and self harm*

Every service in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan works collaboratively with other services, particularly at points of transition between services

- Work in a joined up way to reduce the risks of suicide and self harm to those at vulnerable points in their lives, especially those moving between children's and adult services
- Share information appropriately and effectively to provide consistently high quality support to those in crisis or at service transfer points known to increase risk
- Encourage appropriate and effective referral and transition between services to ensure those at risk are supported by the most appropriate service in a timely way

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objective:

- 2) *To deliver appropriate responses to personal crises, early intervention and management of suicide and self harm*

Those who work with and support people who may be at risk of suicide and self harm can identify those at risk, engage with them constructively and signpost or refer to the right service at the right time

- Recognise the vital role of consistent and high quality early support across all professionals and agencies who support those at risk of suicide and self harm
- Encourage and support professionals who are not mental health specialists to identify those at risk, engage effectively, including immediate safety planning and to refer appropriately, with a knowledge of local support services
- Enable professionals who are not mental health specialists to support effectively those bereaved by suicide
- Support all services to be aware of the range of options for those needing immediate support
- Make sure services offering the right level of support at the right time are available
- Give the national training framework high visibility and support engagement from organisations and teams working to support good mental health in specialist and non specialist settings
- Align work to support children and young people with wider strategic aims, such as the ‘No Wrong Door’ recommendations from the Children’s Commissioner for Wales¹⁶
- Ensure that measures to address suicide and self harm are integrated within ‘whole school’ approaches to mental health and wellbeing, noting that these approaches are particularly relevant
- Provide support to healthcare staff at risk, especially when working under additional pressures during pandemic response and recovery
- Work with Cardiff and Vale UHB Substance Misuse Area Planning Board to encourage implementation of Welsh Government Service Framework for the Treatment of People with a Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Misuse Problem

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objectives:

- 1) Further improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide and self harm amongst the public, individuals who frequently come into contact with people at risk of suicide and self harm and professionals in Wales*
- 3) Information and support for those bereaved or affected by suicide and self harm*

Relevant local intelligence and learning from specific incidents is collated, shared and acted on rapidly and effectively

- Share lessons learned from local rapid reviews of incidents involving suicide or attempted suicide with those who can respond to support the local community and who can ensure learning contributes to strategic suicide and self harm prevention, further developing the work of the multi-agency Immediate Response Groups already established to review instances of suicide within Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan
- Gather, review and take action on local data that supports strategic analysis of identified issues around suicide and self harm prevention

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objectives:

- 6) Continue to promote and support learning, information and monitoring systems and research to improve our understanding of suicide and self harm in Wales and guide action*

Those at risk or affected by suicide and self harm and those who care for them are engaged and empowered to work towards their own safety and recovery

- Support service users and those who care for them to contribute constructively to planning for their own care and treatment and to be aware of the rights and resources available to them

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objectives:

- 2) To deliver appropriate responses to personal crises, early intervention and management of suicide and self harm*

Risks associated with frequently used sites are eliminated or reduced as far as possible

- Continue to support effective partnership working with transport providers and ensure this is integrated into plans for rapid review of suicide and attempted suicide
- Work with Regional and National Advisory Groups to ensure strategic approaches to suicide prevention on the current and planned rail network in South Wales

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objective:

- 5) Reduce access to the means of suicide*

Issues around suicide and self harm are highlighted across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan in ways that are constructive and de-stigmatising

- Support work to reduce stigma around discussing suicide and self harm in constructive ways, in particular in school settings and with proactive social marketing in partnership with communications teams
- Work effectively with the National Advisory Group to address stigmatising reporting or other representations in the media

These aims and objectives map onto the following national strategic objectives:

- 1) Further improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of suicide and self harm amongst the public, individuals who frequently come into contact with people at risk of suicide and self harm and professionals in Wales*
- 4) Support the media in responsible reporting and portrayal of suicide and suicidal behaviour*



6. Logic model

| Resources | Strategic objectives | Outcomes (strategic aims) | Overarching goal |
|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cardiff and Vale Suicide and Self Harm Steering Group Talk to Me 2, 2015-22 and the National Advisory Group National Guidelines and standards National legislation Local policy and strategy Cardiff and Vale Crisis Care Concordat Board Regional co-ordination Rapid multiagency reviews National bereavement pathway National training framework Statutory Services Non-statutory services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical spaces and infrastructure training communication materials skills local knowledge Cardiff and Vale Recovery and Wellbeing College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand and respond to specific social and cultural needs of the population in Cardiff and Vale Increase awareness of range of relevant services and training available in Cardiff and Vale Train and support staff in all services to understand the importance of compassion Work in a joined up way, especially to support those moving between children's and adult services Share information on individuals appropriately and effectively as they move between services Direct those accessing emergency or crisis services to additional support specific to their needs | <p>Support is equitable, inclusive and compassionate</p> <p>Services work collaboratively</p> | <p>“To reduce suicide and self-harm and their associated impacts in the population of Cardiff and the Vale”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce the number of people who take their own lives, or attempt to do so Reduce the number of people who self harm and the severity of injury in those who do Reduce the impact of suicide and self harm on those who care individuals directly affected by issues |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support non-specialist professionals to identify those at risk, engage effectively and refer appropriately Support effectively those bereaved by suicide Support services to be aware of range of options for those needing immediate support Make sure services offering the right level of support at the right time are available Give national training framework high visibility and support Support implementation of the Welsh Government Substance Misuse Dual Diagnosis Framework Share information and learning from local rapid reviews of incidents involving suicide or attempted suicide Gather, review and take action on local data | <p>Those at risk identified, engaged and referred or signposted appropriately</p> <p>Information and learning rapidly available and acted on</p> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support service users and those who care for them to contribute constructively to planning for their own care Continue effective partnership and reporting with Network Rail and partners Ensure strategic approaches to suicide prevention on the current and planned rail network in South Wales | <p>Those at risk and recovering are empowered</p> <p>Site-based risks eliminated or mitigated</p> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support work to reduce stigma around discussing suicide and self harm in constructive ways, in particular in school settings and with proactive social marketing Work effectively with the National Advisory Group to address stigmatising reporting or other representations in the media | <p>Suicide and self harm are de-stigmatised</p> | |

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