

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1871](#)

Main Petitioner: Karen McKeown on behalf of Shining lights for change

Subject: Full review of mental health services

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to carry out a full review of mental health services in Scotland to include the referral process; crisis support; risk assessments; safe plans; intergraded services working together; first response support and the support available to families affected by suicide.

Background

Suicides in Scotland

There were [833 probable suicides](#) registered in Scotland in 2019. This is an increase from 784 in 2018 and 680 in 2017. Figures for 2020 will be published on 28 July 2021.

Public Health Scotland notes that there is a known link between deprivation and suicide. The probable suicide rate between the years 2015 and 2019 was three times higher in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas.

It is not yet clear what impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on suicide rates. However, the Scottish Government had commissioned a Scottish sample of the [Tracking the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and wellbeing \(COVID-MH\) study](#). The [wave 2 report](#) found that of the (nationally representative) sample 13.3% of people reported suicidal thoughts in the week prior to the survey.

Mental Health Services

Approximately [1 in 4 people experience a mental health problem](#) at some point in their lifetime and at any one time approximately 1 in 6 people have a mental health problem.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic there was already high and increasing demand for mental health services in Scotland. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19.

COVID-19 resulted in restrictions to in-person appointments and closure of support services. At the start of the pandemic there was a steep drop in the number of referrals to services including [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\)](#) and [psychological therapies](#).

At the end of March 2021, [22,599 people were waiting to start treatment for psychological therapies](#). Of these [47% had been waiting over 18 weeks](#) for an appointment.

Scottish Government Action

Suicide Strategy

The Scottish Government published [Every Life Matters](#), its suicide prevention action plan, in 2018. This set a target to reduce the rate of suicide by 20% by 2022 (from a 2017 baseline) and includes a number of actions. A [review of the action plan](#) was published in March 2021. The [rate of suicide per 100,000](#) population was 12.5 in 2017, 14.4 in 2018 and 15.2 in 2019.

Mental Health Strategy

The Scottish Government has a [10 year mental health strategy](#) which has 40 actions. In March 2021, the Scottish Government published the [third progress report on the mental health strategy](#).

The Scottish Government has also published a [coronavirus \(COVID-19\): mental health - transition and recovery plan](#). This details what the Scottish Government has been doing to try to

address the mental health challenges in Scotland, and also outlines its commitments and planned next steps.

The [third progress report on the mental health strategy](#) notes that the Scottish Government is considering an earlier review of the Mental Health Strategy over the course of 2021 and that:

“this would be an opportunity to formally outline how the Strategy, and the Transition and Recovery Plan, intersect, and to outline our core set of mental health commitments going forward”.

Review

The Scottish Government has commissioned the [Scottish Mental Health Law Review](#). This [independent review aims](#) to:

“Improve the rights and protections of persons who may be subject to the existing provisions of mental health, incapacity or adult support and protection legislation as a consequence of having a mental disorder, and remove barriers to those caring for their health and welfare.”

The [interim report was published in December 2020](#). [Final recommendations are due in 2022](#).

Scottish Parliament Action

There have been a number of recent debates and statements in the Scottish Parliament on mental health.

- 17 February 2021: [Debate on motion S5M-254138 on mental health](#).
- 1 December 2020: [Debate on motion S5M-23498 on an inquiry into mental health support for young people in Scotland](#).
- 8 October 2020: [Statement on Scotland’s response to the mental health challenge of Covid-19](#).

The [Public Petitions Committee has undertaken an inquiry into mental health support available to young people](#).

[The Cross Party Group on Mental Health has also published a report on Priorities for Access to Treatment and Joined Up Accessible Services](#). This included a section on access to mental health services during COVID and highlighted issues around digital and telephone appointments.

In 2018 the then Health and Sport Committee conducted a short inquiry into [suicide prevention in Scotland](#). In evidence the Committee heard from Craig Smith from the Scottish Association for Mental Health that:

“The other very important aspect of the question is crisis care support and continuity of care. It is absolutely unacceptable that someone has to keep asking for help—from different places, from different people—does not get that help and then is pushed further and further into crisis. We need much better crisis care pathways [...]

Getting crisis care right is important. That support for crisis services and crisis pathways will be a key aspect of the suicide prevention strategy. The current approach is unacceptable and we hear about that often from people who use our services. [...] Time and again we hear that the experience of crisis support is not up to standard. It works really well for some people and there are some great crisis services. However, there are other people who continue to face a stigmatised response when they ask for help, either with self-harm or suicidal ideation.”

Following the evidence session, the Convener wrote to the Minister for Mental Health with the [Committee's recommendations](#) and received [a reply on 15 June 2018](#).

Key Organisations

- [Mental Health Foundation Scotland](#)
- [Mental Welfare Commission](#)
- [Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland](#)
- [Samaritans Scotland](#)

- [Scottish Association for Mental Health](#)

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15 June 2021

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Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe),
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

www.scottish.parliament.uk