



BREAK THE CYCLE

2nd August 2022.

**Ms. Mary Butler TD,
Minister for Mental Health and Older People
Department of Health,
Miesian Plaza,
50-58 Lower Baggot Street,
Dublin D02 XW14.**

Dear Minister Butler,

Suicide disproportionately affects men: three quarters of victims in Ireland are male. Cycle Against Suicide, a national charity for suicide awareness, is urging you to begin targeting Mental Health campaigns and services at males.

Our White Paper, ***'Male Suicide in Ireland, factors and high-risk groups'***, copy enclosed, highlights how since 2010, middle aged men have been the highest age demographic for suicide in Ireland. Between 2010 and 2015 suicide numbers were highest among 45-54 year olds. In 2021, provisional data shows the highest suicide numbers in men aged 35-44 years old, followed by men aged 45-54.

A rising population of older men, and a rise in single occupancies in homes, has led to a risk of loneliness, therefore we need more services specific to older males. With Ireland's population over 60 set to double before 2050, suicide in older men is a pressing issue.

Furthermore, concepts of masculinity may influence a man's mental health literacy and their inclination towards seeking help. Men with lower personal association with norms of masculinity have more favourable attitudes towards help-seeking, both formal and informal, a study found. Many young Irish men are unfamiliar with the concept of seeking help because doing so may jeopardise their in-group membership, personal image, public image, or financial obligations, research suggests. As a result, slower diagnosis rates for mental health issues and a lack of support could contribute to the high rate of male suicide.

With suicide involving complex, interrelated factors, a gendered prevention strategy must also target diverse groups of society. While 'Connecting for Life', Ireland's national strategy to prevent suicide, 2015-2020, identified priority groups, this did not pinpoint men, which is a vital missed opportunity. Especially in men, unemployment, stress at work, financial difficulties and suicide may coincide, which significantly increases the risk of suicide, research shows. Prevention strategies should consider multiple risk factors within the context of masculinity.

While we welcome the 'Sharing the Vision —A mental health policy for everyone 2020 – 2030' initiative, we are concerned by the lack of specialised services for men, crucial support that could save lives.

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The Women's Mental Health Promotion Plan, which addresses the prevalence of mental health issues among females, is a positive move. Yet a Men's Mental Health Plan, with a focus on preventing suicide, is almost entirely absent. Such an approach to mental health means that suicidal men are being forgotten. This contravenes the ***Sharing the Vision*** policy, which aims to '*focus on the requirements of the individual*' and to '*intervene when problems develop.*'

The latest official data shows that 300 men died by means of suicide in 2019. It is time for Ireland to act now — with targeted mental health services and prevention campaigns. We await your response to tackling Ireland's suicide rates in males, especially older and middle-aged men, the demographics at greatest risk.

Sincerely yours,

Caroline Lafferty
CEO

Copied: Stephen Donnelly TD,
Minister for Health.

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