

# **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Training Framework**

## **Sinn Féin Consultation Response**

**January 2020**

## **Sinn Féin Response – Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Training Framework**

### **Introduction**

Sinn Féin welcomes this opportunity to respond to this consultation on the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Training Framework. The Training Framework is an important part of the Protect Life 2 – Suicide Prevention Strategy and is an opportunity to develop greater capacity in recognising mental ill-health, supporting good mental health and for preventing suicide.

Across the Island of Ireland in 2017, there were 697 suicides (305 in the north and 392 in the south). In 2018 across the Island of Ireland, there were 659 suicides (307 in the north and 352 in the south). The north of Ireland continues to have the highest rate of mental ill-health and suicide in Ireland and Britain and Sinn Féin are committed to finding and supporting actions that address this crisis.

There are many contributing factors to suicide rates and each needs to be addressed in turn including the legacy of the conflict since the Good Friday Agreement, more people have died from suicide than those who died during the conflict.

Suicide is preventable and we know the devastation it has within communities, families and for individuals, in particular on deprived areas where suicide rates are over 3.5 times higher than those in the least deprived areas.

Sustained funding is needed to successfully implement the Suicide Prevention Strategy – Protect Life 2 – to tackle the mental health and suicide crisis.

The stated aims, principles and themes are appropriate for the Training Framework.

### **Stepped Learning Model**

Sinn Féin support the stepped approach model of learning as outlined within the Training Framework. The need for different roles requiring appropriate levels of training and knowledge about mental ill health and suicide prevention, will help maximise the capacity to effectively tackle the crisis.

In reference to the Public Health Agency's Quality standards for Services Promoting Mental and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention (May 2019), we note that the standards mentioned on three different occasions (standards C3.2, C3.3 and C5.3) reference the former title of the Department of Health (DHSSPS - Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety) as being responsible for, or the author of, current strategies and guidelines. We are concerned that this may indicate that the standards may

not have been adequately reviewed but merely copied over from the PHA. The PHA must provide clarification on this.

Sinn Féin would suggest an addition to steps 3 and 4. Under the heading 'Participants' we suggest the inclusion, for both steps, 'Front facing public services' & 'Transport staff (Public and Private hire). The suggested outcomes for these levels would be of benefit to all public sector workers and the likes of taxi drivers and call handlers and public transport staff in their engagements with the public as well as supporting schemes such as *Taxi Watch*. PHA should give consideration to developing a '*Training Course Directory*' so that organisations and community groups can check what step a particular training course, such as SafeTALK or an adapted bespoke training course match across to the learning model, is most suitable. This could help provide reassurance that the training being offered meets the necessary standard.

### **Demand Analysis**

Sinn Féin argues that the Training Framework needs to include a regional demand analysis on the levels of demand for each level of training. This should include the broad sectors that the training is covering to ensure that the capacity being developed is meeting real need on the ground.

In March 2018, the Department of Health (DoH) consulted on the Service Framework for Mental Health and Wellbeing. Sinn Féin submitted a detailed response to this consultation and highlighted that there needed to be an ongoing regional demand analysis to ensure that capacity meets the actual need for services. This can then help inform the level of need for training and give an accurate reflection on the wider level of need for all mental health and suicide prevention services. This will help ensure better budgetary planning.

### **Funding**

Sinn Féin notes that two of the recommendations following the stakeholder engagements aimed to, "Meet budgetary constraints" and "Being needs led". Information on the current funding provided for suicide prevention training, and how future budgets would be set, should have been included in the consultation document and must be considered in delivering a Training Framework.

### **Stakeholder engagement and partnership working**

Sinn Féin note the six recommendations following the stakeholder engagement, as presented on page 3 of the Training Framework consultation document.

Point 4 regarding meeting budgetary constraints needs to be developed to take account of the actual need. A meaningful budget cannot be determined without understanding the need for, and demand on, services.

Sinn Féin recognises the level of engagement so far with the stakeholders identified in the engagement report and would urge for a continuation of this engagement. However, we urge PHA to engage more broadly with the community sector, in particular sporting and cultural bodies, which do not feature in the Stakeholder Engagement report. This is consistent with the Protect Life 2 action plan, which aims to “*Deliver a multi-sectoral training framework in suicide intervention for people working in the community. (new action)*”.

Schools, Sporting organisations, youth and arts groups all have a particular role and interest in addressing mental ill health and suicide prevention. Although they would not be the primary areas for delivering training, Sinn Féin calls on the PHA to engage directly with the likes of the Education authority, Arts Council, GAA, IFA and Ulster Rugby for input into the framework.

For example, the Education Authority is named as an interested party under the actions 1.4 and 4.5 actions of the Protect Life 2 - Suicide Prevention Strategy.

Partnership working and co-design involving the community and voluntary sector and the public will be an essential element to developing and implementing the Training Framework.

### **Conclusion**

Sinn Féin believe delivering a Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Training Framework is an important part of dealing with the crisis in mental ill-health and suicide in the north of Ireland. A Training Framework must in the first instance be based on need and the demand for mental health and suicide prevention training. The Framework requires sufficient funding and must be developed in partnership with key stakeholders, including all government departments, the public and community and voluntary sector-if it is to be effective.