

The Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy 2026-2030



July 2025

Consultation closes on 6 October 2025

Visit: kent.gov.uk/suicideprevention

“Hope is not a lottery ticket you sit on the sofa and clutch. It is an axe you break down doors with.”

Rebecca Solnit

Any discussion of suicide is distressing. Please look after yourself. Help is available 24hours a day by calling 0800 107 0160 or texting SHOUT to 85258

Executive summary

Current context

As we come to the end of our current 2021-25 Suicide Prevention Strategy, the Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Programme:

- Has contributed to a situation where suicide rates locally are falling slightly, while national rates increase.
- Is made up of three Networks with over 250 engaged Members who meet regularly to discuss major issues and shape local responses.
- Is nationally recognised as good practice.

However, there is much work still to be done:

- Every death is one death too many.
- Kent and Medway suicide rates still appear to be higher than the national average.

Vision

Our vision is that Kent and Medway becomes a place where the number of people dying by suicide is reduced as much as possible and our specific aim is for the Kent and Medway suicide rate to be below the national average by 2030 (if not sooner).

Mission

We will work to make Kent and Medway a place where hope is always available to anyone, no matter what they are facing.

By 2030 we would like:

- Children and young people in Kent and Medway to be resilient enough to cope with life's normal ups and downs, but knowledgeable enough and confident enough to reach out for more support when they need it
- Adults in Kent and Medway to know how to look after their own emotional wellbeing but to feel comfortable and able to seek more help when necessary
- All agencies (statutory, voluntary, community) to work collectively to ensure support and help is available to those who need it
- All agencies to share knowledge and support each other to learn what works in helping people get the support they need.

Values

1. **Collaboration.** The power of the Suicide Prevention Programme comes from the hundreds of Members who all work towards the Vision.
2. **Hope.** Hope is extraordinarily powerful, yet without it, everything is extremely difficult. We will embed hope into everything that we do.
3. **Determination.** Suicide prevention is not an easy task, particularly in a population of nearly two million. We will undertake every action with fierce determination.
4. **Sensitivity.** We will work sensitively with everyone impacted by suicide to ensure we don't add to their trauma.

Strategic priorities – we will:

1. Make suicide everybody's business so that we can maximise our collective impact and support to prevent suicides.
2. Address common risk factors linked to suicide at a population level to provide early intervention and tailored support.
3. Tailor and target support to priority groups, including those at higher risk, to ensure there is bespoke action and that interventions are effective and accessible for everyone.
4. Provide effective crisis support across sectors for those who reach crisis point.
5. Improve data and evidence to ensure that effective, evidence-informed and timely interventions continue to be developed and adapted.
6. Reduce access to means and methods of suicide where this is appropriate and necessary as an intervention to prevent suicides.
7. Promote online safety and responsible media content to reduce harms, improve support and signposting, and provide helpful messages about suicide and self-harm.
8. Provide effective bereavement support to those affected by suicide.

Success measures – we will:

1. Monitor local and national suicide data.
2. Ensure every programme or project we deliver or invest in has tailored performance targets.
3. Publish an annual impact report.
4. Undertake regular engagement activities with Network Members to ensure there is collective agreement on our 5 year strategy and annual action plans.

Introduction

Every suicide is a heartbreaking tragedy that profoundly affects the victim's loved ones and reverberates throughout the entire community.

Every death is one too many, so this strategy sets our plan to reduce the numbers of people taking their own lives as much as possible.

But no single organisation, agency or individual can reduce suicide on their own. It needs to be everyone's business, everyone working together to harness our collective power.

We want this strategy to be a rallying cry, and a call to action to every organisation, agency and individual to join together and help prevent the needless deaths we see too often.

Above everything, we want the actions contained within this strategy to provide hope to those individuals who find themselves now, or maybe in the future, in a dark place. We want Kent and Medway to become a place where hope is always available to anyone, no matter what they are facing.

And finally, we know that for people who have already lost loved ones to suicide, no strategy, no collection of words, can ever bring their loved one back. For that we are truly sorry, but through these actions, we will do all we can to reduce the risk of other families experiencing the same pain.

Background

This Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Strategy 2026-30 is the continuation of the work undertaken as a result of the 2021-2025 Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Strategy.

This strategy combines local data about who is dying by suicide in Kent and Medway with national research and policy direction.

It has been developed by the Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-harm Networks (separate Networks focused on adults, and children & young people), which consist of over 250 partners working together.

Before coming into effect, this strategy will go out to public consultation, (featuring discussions with existing partnerships and a survey) to ensure that the widest number of individuals, people with lived experience and organisations have their chance to input into the plans.

To ensure that this strategy does not discriminate unfairly against any particular group within Kent and Medway, an equality impact assessment has also been undertaken is available on the Lets Talk Kent website.

Strategy development

Members of both the Adult Suicide Prevention Network, and the Children and Young People's Suicide Prevention Network have already feed into the draft strategy, including discussions at both recent Network meetings, the 2023 and 2024 annual conferences and a special workshop to review the new national suicide prevention strategy in 2024.

The public consultation will run from 16 July to 6 October 2025. The consultation has been extended to allow additional time for responses after the school holidays and to give people the chance to take part after the Baton of Hope event on 22 September.

Have your say

We are seeking your views on the draft Kent and Medway Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Strategies 2026-2030. Your feedback is important in helping us to make sure that we have taken on board feedback from anybody who is interested in having their say around suicide and self-harm prevention.

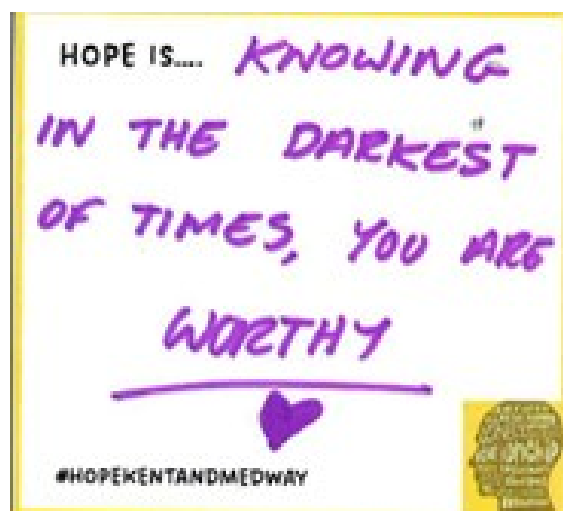
Please visit www.kent.gov.uk/suicideprevention to complete the online questionnaire before 6 October 2025.

What happens next?

Following the end of the consultation we will produce a consultation report, summarising the feedback we have received. This feedback will be used to help finalise the Strategy, which alongside the consultation report will be presented to Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee and the Medway Health and Wellbeing board in early 2026 before it is agreed and adopted.

Alternative formats

If you require any of the consultation documents in an alternative format or language, please email alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk or call 03000 42 15 53 (text relay service number: 18001 03000 42 15 53). This number goes to an answering machine, which is monitored during office hours.'



Statistical snapshot

The latest data published by the [Office of National Statistics](#) (August 2024) shows that both Kent and Medway appear to have higher suicide rates than the national average. However rates in Kent are falling at a time when national rates are increasing.

Table 1 Suicide rate comparison, 3 year suicide rolling rates per 100,000

	2020 to 2022	2021 to 2023
England	10.3	10.7
Kent	12.1	11.7
Medway	10.6	12

Source - [Office for National Statistics, 2024](#)

By analysing the 721 records of people who have died in Kent and Medway between 2020 and 2024 (contained within the Real Time Suicide Surveillance system, delivered in partnership with Kent Police) we have uncovered more detail about the situation in Kent and Medway which then drives our programme's work.

Of those who have died by suspected suicide in Kent and Medway...	Implication for our work
75% were male	When designing our services and campaigns we try to ensure that men know they exist, and are confident and comfortable accessing them.
69% were not known to secondary mental health services	We focus heavily on support for communities and individuals not known to secondary mental health services (as well as working with partners to improve the quality and safety of secondary mental health services).
33% had been impacted by domestic abuse (either as victim or perpetrator)	We are leading the way nationally in researching this relationship and establishing ways to reduce the risk of domestic abuse victims taking their own lives.
21% were known to misuse alcohol or drugs	We support our substance misuse providers to recognise and respond to suicide risk.
14% were 25 or under	The number of years of life lost by each individual, and the fact that young people face many different issues mean that we have developed an additional Children and Young People Suicide Prevention Network and action plan

Source – Kent and Medway Real Time Suicide Surveillance 2020-2024

For an in-depth statistical analysis, please see the corresponding Data and Evidence Pack which has been produced to support the public consultation and the development of the strategy.

National context

In 2023, the Government published the “[Suicide Prevention Strategy for England](#)”. It contains eight priorities which we propose to follow in Kent and Medway. We will adapt each one to ensure local concerns and priorities are reflected.

Kent and Medway local context

This strategy fully aligns to the [Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy](#) which sets up how partners across the county will work together to tackle the full range of health determinants, improve health and address inequalities. This strategy’s Vision (to reduce the Kent and Medway suicide rate to below the national average) is also within the Integrated Care Strategy ensuring cross-system support for our work.

Our suicide prevention programme is nationally recognised as best practice and we are often invited to present what we do to national and even international partners.

The core suicide prevention team is made up of four committed and passionate professionals, but the power of our programme is generated by the hundreds of individuals and organisations across the county who make up our Suicide Prevention Networks, who play a major part in the design and delivery of the programme.

Just some of the partners who make up the Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Networks



Illustration – Kent and Medway Suicide Prevention Network Members

Alongside our Networks, the Suicide Prevention Strategic Oversight Board consists of senior Public Health colleagues from Kent County Council and Medway Council, Kent and Medway NHS Partnership Trust and NHS Kent and Medway. The Strategic Oversight Board takes financial decisions and provides the formal pathway into KCC, Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway governance structures.

Review of the 2021-25 strategy

As we reach the end of the period covered by our previous strategy, local suicide rates have fallen by a small amount, at the same time as national rates increased. We believe that the funded projects we have supported, and the system leadership that we have provided over the last five years, have contributed to that decline.

To reduce the risk of suicide in key high-risk groups we...

- Promoted the Release the Pressure social marketing campaign and 24 hour services in a wide range of creative and effective ways. The helpline and text service supports tens of thousands of conversations every year.



“If it hadn’t been for this helpline I wouldn’t have coped one bit... I can’t thank you enough.”

“Without the service, I would not be here today. I wouldn’t be talking to you now, I’d be six foot under.”

- Supported Citizens Advice to support people with mental health and financial difficulties. An independent academic evaluation has found this service makes over £1 million of financial gain for clients every year and is directly responsible for saving people’s lives.

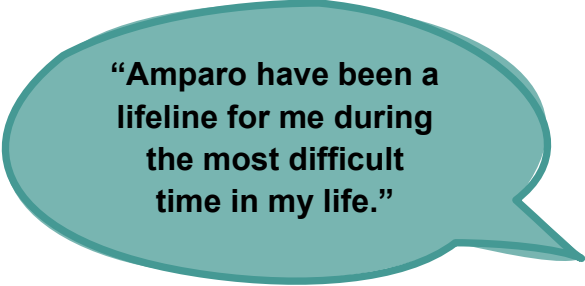
To tailor approaches to improve mental health and wellbeing Kent we...

- Provided over 100 community grants to local grassroots projects who directly supported individuals who were suicidal or self-harming.
- Supported Mid Kent Mind to deliver over 8,000 places on Suicide Prevention, or Everyday Mental Health Training.

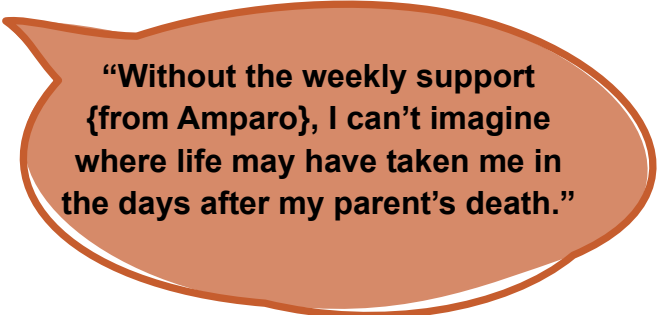
“The training came in useful on Friday evening when I spent an hour at xxx train station persuading a young man not to kill himself.”

“The training has helped me support a family member whose child was feeling suicidal to get the right support.”

To provide better information and support to those bereaved by suicide we...



“Amparo have been a lifeline for me during the most difficult time in my life.”



“Without the weekly support {from Amparo}, I can’t imagine where life may have taken me in the days after my parent’s death.”

- Commissioned the Amparo bereavement support service to support families and individuals who have been bereaved by suicide.

To support research, data collection and monitoring we...

- Established a Real Time Suicide Surveillance system to identify local trends, patterns and the details of what was happening in the lives of people in Kent and Medway before they died by suicide.
- Conducted nationally influential research into the links between domestic abuse and suicide, as well as separate research projects into the impact of debt on suicidality and the links between autism and suicide.



To reduce access to the means of suicide we...

- Analysed Real Time Suicide Surveillance data to identify high risk sites
- Worked closely with Network Rail, Highways England and other major landowners regarding those sites.

To support the media in delivering sensitive approaches to suicide we...

- Worked with local media outlets to promote positive stories about mental health and help-seeking behaviour.
- Promoted the Samaritans Media Guidelines to local journalists.

We will continue to fund many projects as well as driving change through system leadership during 2026-2030.

Population groups of concern for the 2026-2030 strategy

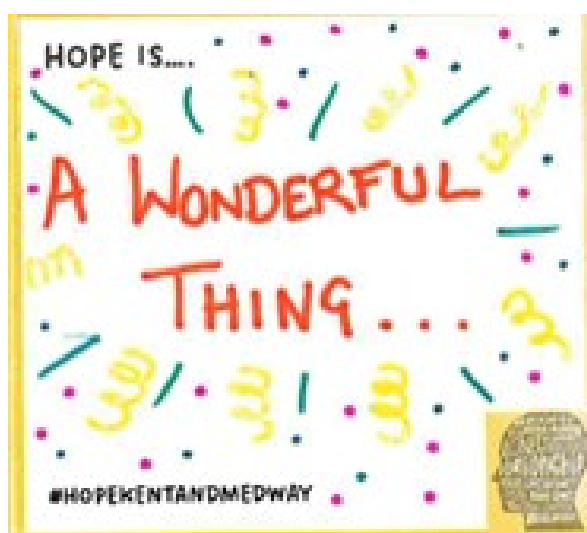
One sad truth about suicide is that it doesn't discriminate. Over the course of the last five year strategy we have seen tragic deaths among virtually every population group imaginable. So over the course of the next strategy, we will ensure that we try to reduce the risk of suicide for everyone in Kent and Medway.

However when you look at population level statistics, there are some population groups which seem to be at greater risk than others. There are also some groups which may not have had historically high suicide rates but they are a concern because national evidence suggest that their rates are increasing.

The national strategy identifies the following high-risk groups as priorities for actions:

Middle aged men	People who are impacted by domestic abuse
Children and young people	Pregnant women and new mothers
People with a history of self-harm	People affected by physical illness
People known to secondary mental health services	People affected by financial difficulty and economic adversity
People in contact with the justice system	People affected by gambling harms
Autistic people	People affected by drug and alcohol misuse
People affected by social isolation and loneliness	

We have conducted deep dives into each of these groups in the Data and Evidence Pack that is published alongside this strategy, but rest assured that in addition to working to reduce the suicide risk in these groups, we will continue to work to reduce the suicide risk for everyone in Kent and Medway.



Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy 2026 – 2030

Our vision – that the Kent and Medway suicide rate falls below the national average by 2030.

Our mission – we will work to make Kent and Medway a place where hope is always available to anyone, no matter what they are facing.

Our values – Collaboration, Hope, Determination and Sensitivity.

Our strategic priorities - we will...

- 1. Make suicide everybody's business so that we can maximise our collective impact and support to prevent suicides.**
 - We will increase knowledge and awareness of suicide prevention techniques and tools by continuing to offer free to attend suicide prevention training for everyone.
 - We will provide system leadership and quality improvement through our suicide prevention networks, annual conferences and relationships with individual services.
- 2. Address common risk factors linked to suicide at a population level to provide early intervention and tailored support.**
 - We will increase public awareness of 24-hour support services through the Release the Pressure social marketing campaign.
 - We will deliver public facing initiatives such as the Baton of Hope to reduce the stigma of talking about suicide and accessing support.
- 3. Provide tailored and targeted support to priority groups, including those at higher risk, to ensure there is bespoke action and that interventions are effective and accessible for everyone.**
 - We will deliver targeted interventions to support people in higher risk groups including (but not limited to) people impacted by domestic abuse, autistic people, people in contact with secondary mental health services, people in financial difficulty, people with substance misuse issues.
- 4. Provide effective crisis support across sectors for those who reach crisis point.**
 - We will support efforts to improve support for those in crisis, including working with secondary mental health services and safe havens across Kent and Medway.
- 5. Improve data and evidence to ensure that effective, evidence-informed and timely interventions continue to be developed and adapted.**
 - We will conduct regular analysis of our Real Time Suicide Surveillance system to identify emerging trends and on-going patterns.
 - We will commission or conduct bespoke research into emerging or high risk topics.
- 6. Reduce access to means and methods of suicide where this is appropriate and necessary as an intervention to prevent suicides.**
 - We will monitor our Real Time Suicide Surveillance and work with partners such as Kent Police, Network Rail and National Highways to identify, intervene and respond to high risk locations or other means.
- 7. Promote online safety and responsible media content to reduce harms, improve and signposting, and provide helpful messages about suicide and self-harm.**
 - We will work with local, national and social media outlets to promote positive stories about mental health, hope and help seeking behaviours.
 - We will monitor media coverage of incidents and promote the Samaritans' guidelines for reporting on suicide to local journalists.
- 8. Provide effective bereavement support to those affected by suicide.**
 - We will continue to commission a support service for people bereaved by suicide.

Children and Young People Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy 2026 – 2030

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Our values – Collaboration, Hope, Determination and Sensitivity.

Our strategic priorities - we will...

- 1. Make suicide everybody's business so that we can maximise our collective impact and support to prevent suicides.**
 - We will increase knowledge and awareness of suicide prevention techniques and tools by continuing to offer suicide prevention training targeted at those who support children and young people.
 - We will provide system leadership through our children and young people suicide prevention network and our informal system leaders group.
- 2. Address common risk factors linked to suicide at a population level to provide early intervention and tailored support.**
 - We will produce versions of our Release the Pressure social marketing campaign specifically aimed at children and young people.
- 3. Provide tailored and targeted support to priority groups, including those at higher risk, to ensure there is bespoke action and that interventions are effective and accessible for everyone.**
 - We will deliver targeted interventions to support children and young in higher risk groups including (but not limited to) those impacted by domestic abuse, autistic people, those in contact with secondary mental health services and those who self-harm.
- 4. Provide effective crisis support across sectors for those who reach crisis point.**
 - We will support efforts to improve support for those in crisis, including working with secondary mental health services.
- 5. Improve data and evidence to ensure that effective, evidence-informed and timely interventions continue to be developed and adapted.**
 - We will conduct regular analysis of our Real Time Suicide Surveillance system to identify emerging trends and on-going patterns.
 - We will commission or conduct bespoke research into emerging or high risk topics.
- 6. Reduce access to means and methods of suicide where this is appropriate and necessary as an intervention to prevent suicides.**
 - We will monitor our Real Time Suicide Surveillance and work with partners such as Kent Police, schools and social services to identify, intervene and respond to high risk locations or other means.
- 7. Promote online safety and responsible media content to reduce harms, improve and signposting, and provide helpful messages about suicide and self-harm.**
 - We will work with local, national and social media outlets to promote positive stories about mental health, hope and help seeking behaviours.
- 8. Provide effective bereavement support to those affected by suicide.**
 - We will ensure that our commissioned suicide bereavement service takes a whole family approach and continues to support children.
 - We will ensure that support is available to schools, colleges and universities if they have a tragic suicide amongst their community.