



BRISTOL SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY 2026 to 2030

We want Bristol to be a zero suicide city. To do this, we will work together with partners to build resilience, offer support, and provide timely help to everyone who needs it—especially those who are most vulnerable.

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1. Foreword – Marty’s story

In this foreword, Marty shares his experience of losing loved ones to suicide and why talking about suicide matters. His story contains references to suicide and bereavement.

“During the pandemic, I lost two friends to suicide, both Gay men in their mid-fifties. As well as dealing with my own grief, I saw firsthand the devastation that these avoidable deaths caused to friends and family. The feelings of helplessness and regret were like ripples in a pond, spreading out, affecting everyone who knew them. Although I’d experienced loss of loved ones before, these deaths affected me (and still do) like no others.

At first, I put it down to the tragic consequences of lockdown and the sense of isolation that some people, including my friends, felt as they were parted from their support network, by circumstances beyond their control. I started talking about this to friends and colleagues which led to me doing some basic research. As I learned more about suicide trends, I discovered to my horror that men in their fifties are statistically one of the highest risk groups and that suicide risk is nearly twice as high in the LGBT+ community. These trends are happening now, the pandemic, albeit a factor in the deaths of my friends, was only a factor. People in the LGBT+ community are still turning to suicide as a solution to problems I honestly believe are fixable.

Statistics are very useful and clean, yet people are complex and instinctive. Every situation is going to be unique to the individual, but we know that talking about one’s problems does help in so many ways. There is support around to assist people, be it through workplace initiatives such as Employee Assistance Programmes, professional help from healthcare services, local community initiatives and places of faith and charitable organisations such as The Samaritans who are there 24/7 to listen.

Talking works and we need to start talking to our loved ones more. Only recently I arranged to meet a good friend for lunch and as we spoke, he mentioned that he was struggling, he felt that he had no real future and that his best days were behind him. He is, I assure you, kind, witty, charming and has everything to live for, but he just saw it differently. We speak regularly now and he’s getting help and we’re starting to turn a corner. Never underestimate the power of cake and a chat, I say.

The one thing I think would have helped my friends, and the people around them, was a better understanding of the risks. The good news is that everyone can get free suicide awareness training from the Zero Suicide Alliance (ZSA), giving them confidence to have a potentially life-saving conversation. And if you are reading this thinking, “that’s great but I could never talk to someone about suicide” I understand. That’s how I felt at first, but I gave it a go and it wasn’t scary, it didn’t go badly, and I feel much closer to the people who have allowed me the privilege of listening to them as they open up. I wish sometimes that I’d been better aware of these things back in the pandemic and what I could have changed. One thing I can change is to help raise awareness and so if you are still reading this, whatever your circumstances, please reach out to someone who can help.”

2. Introduction

Bristol's ambition is to be a zero suicide city, because every life lost to suicide is one too many. Each death by suicide has devastating and long-lasting effects on families, friends, colleagues and communities.

Suicide is complex. Every person who dies by suicide is different and there is rarely a single underlying cause. However, we know there are factors that increase risk of suicide and others that protect against it. Our risk of suicide is shaped by our identities, experiences and environments and for some people these factors overlap in ways that increase their risk. We believe suicide is not inevitable - it is preventable. Our goal is to make Bristol a city where fewer people are exposed to the predisposing factors such as gambling, domestic abuse, sexual violence, substance use, poverty and loneliness, and more people benefit from protective ones such as access to education and employment, strong social networks and feeling part of their community.

Suicide prevention is also complex. Bristol has a well-established suicide prevention alliance and a network of services and organisations that support people with mental health needs and those at risk of suicide. Over the past few years, our partners have worked to improve our offer for the residents of Bristol, but there is still more work to do.

We want to make suicide prevention everyone's business. Everyone – organisations, businesses and individuals – has a role to play in suicide prevention, starting with talking openly about suicide. Together, we can reduce the stigma around suicide and break down the barriers which prevent people from seeking help. Together, we can reduce lives lost to suicide.

This strategy sets out our five-year vision for suicide prevention in Bristol. It provides a framework to guide our system-wide alliance and inform coordinated action. It also introduces the Zero Suicide Bristol Pledge. **By taking the Zero Suicide Bristol Pledge, you can make suicide prevention your business and help save lives in Bristol.**

3. Acknowledgements

Bristol City Council are required to produce and deliver a suicide prevention strategy. We are grateful to the Bristol Suicide Prevention Group for their continued commitment to preventing deaths by suicide in Bristol and for contributing their valuable expertise to the development of this strategy. This includes representatives from:

- Avon and Somerset Police
- Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
- Beside Project – Second Step
- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire ICB
- Bristol Samaritans
- HM Prison and Probation Service
- Hope Against Suicide
- Missing Link
- Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership
- NHS England
- University of Bristol
- University of the West of England
- The Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust

We also thank Marty for openly sharing his personal experience of being affected by suicide and for writing the blog that appears as the foreword to this strategy.

4. Advice when reading this strategy

This strategy discusses content that may be distressing including suicide, bereavement and self-harm.

If you have concerns about your own or someone else's mental health or suicidal thoughts, we advise that you seek support from a healthcare professional such as your GP. If you need urgent help with your mental health, dial 111 and select the mental health option (option 2). The Samaritans also offer a 24/7 helpline on 116 123.

If you have lost a loved one to suicide, The Beside Project provides emotional and practical support: [Beside Project | Second Step](#)

For broader list of resources for mental health and wellbeing please visit: [Thrive Bristol](#)

5. What this strategy covers

This document contains the new vision and ambitions for suicide prevention in Bristol. We believe suicide prevention is everyone's business. This strategy is intended to be read by a wide range of professionals in health and care, voluntary and community organisations, and by members of the public.

The focus of this strategy is the prevention of suicide rather than the prevention of self-harm. Although self-harm can be a sign of emotional distress and is linked with a higher risk of suicide, self-harm and suicide are different. They affect people in different ways, and the patterns we see in each are not the same. However, we anticipate that many of our ambitions will also benefit people who self-harm or who are at risk of doing so.

Suicide prevention is important for the whole population of Bristol. This strategy seeks to align rather than replace the existing dedicated partnership work across the system that holds responsibilities for the prevention of, and response to, suicide in children and established partnerships and programmes to promote mental wellbeing.

6. The Bristol vision: A zero suicide city

We want Bristol to be a zero suicide city. To do this, we will work together with partners to build resilience, offer support, and provide timely help to everyone who needs it—especially those who are most vulnerable.

Bristol aims to be a city that:

1. Recognises suicide prevention as everyone’s business.

We want to be a city that talks openly about suicide, making it safe for people to share how they are feeling and seek support.

2. Supports residents’ mental wellbeing.

We want to tackle the risk factors for suicide so that Bristol residents have the support and resources they need to cope with life’s challenges.

3. Is progressing towards being a zero-suicide city.

We want to work with partners across our city to take co-ordinated action to reduce and prevent deaths by suicide.

7. Guiding principles

1. Suicide is preventable but complex. It has multiple causes and requires a range of solutions.
2. Suicide prevention is everyone's business.
3. To prevent suicide, we need strong partnerships between health services, local organisations and communities.
4. Our approach to suicide prevention will be guided by local data, insight and evidence.
5. Mental health matters. We will treat mental health with the same priority as physical health.
6. To reduce suicide, we need to tackle the experiences and environments that have a negative effect on people's mental health.
7. For people in crisis, our offer of support must be accessible and compassionate.
8. Support must be available for everyone, but person-centred, trauma informed and tailored to meet individual needs.
9. We should communicate about suicide safely and responsibly, following Samaritans' guidance.

8. National context

In 2023, the Department of Health and Social Care published [Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross-sector strategy](#). Although there has been significant progress in the collective effort to prevent suicide, the suicide rate in England has remained stable. This strategy sets out eight priority areas for action and provides the foundation for our Bristol Suicide Prevention Strategy. The Department of Health and Social Care also published a supporting [action plan](#). This sets out over 100 actions for national government, the NHS, voluntary organisations and other partners such as the police.

To support this national suicide prevention strategy, NHS England published new best practice guidance [Staying safe from suicide](#) in April 2025. This guidance applies to all public, private and voluntary sector providers providing mental health care in community and inpatient settings. It strongly advocates a cultural shift from assessing risk to promoting safety.

Suicide prevention is inherently complex and there is no one simple solution. However, there is strong evidence to show that interventions to prevent suicide are effective. Most effective are “multilevel” interventions which combine multiple actions across different providers and different domains of suicide prevention. ([Hostra et al. 2020](#))

9. Local partnerships

The Bristol Suicide Prevention Strategy is developed and steered by the Bristol Suicide Prevention Group – a multiagency partnership administered by Bristol City Council (Public Health & Communities Division). The group brings together representatives from statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations that play a role in suicide prevention.

The group is responsible for developing and approving this strategy and for producing an annual action plan. It meets quarterly to review the data and intelligence on suicide in Bristol and to monitor progress across the city towards delivering the agreed actions. It is accountable to Bristol’s Health & Wellbeing Board and contributes to the Avon-wide Suicide Prevention Partnership.

This strategy aligns with [Bristol City Council's corporate priority](#) of “supporting children’s families’ and adults’ health and wellbeing” and the [Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care System Joint Forward Plan 2025 to 2030](#). It also supports the [One City](#) vision of Bristol as a “fair, healthy and sustainable city, a city of hope and aspiration, where everyone can share in its success”, particularly the

Health and Wellbeing sub-themes of making mental health as important as physical health and reducing health inequalities.

10. Progress made over previous strategy

Our previous strategy, which ran from 2022 to 2025, provided a strong foundation for our work. Below, we outline the progress made against each of the priorities in the previous strategy, recognising the achievements that have been made. However, we acknowledge that there is more to be done and many of the same challenges persist; as a result, several priorities in our new strategy closely align with those of the previous one.

Maintain high quality local research, data and monitoring of suicide

We have improved our monitoring of the data and evidence relating to suicide. Our Avon real-time surveillance system includes deaths that are suspected suicides, which we thematically review quarterly with our neighbouring local authorities. We identify appropriate local actions and feed into the Avon-wide Suicide Prevention Partnership. Each year we undertake a suicide audit and produce a suicide prevention report for Bristol.

Take action to reduce access to means of suicide

We have worked to reduce access to means of suicide. The Avon Gorge Working Group has implemented improvements including provision of emergency phone numbers at certain locations. Frontline staff including bridge workers, network rail staff, car park attendants and prison workers have received training to identify and engage people who may be considering suicide, and they are supported after traumatic events.

Work with communities and partners to improve mental health and reduce risk in specific groups

We have supported groups at increased risk of suicide through establishing the Community Mental Health Framework and developing community-based Mental Health Integrated Network Teams (MINT). We promoted men's mental health by delivering mental health improvement and suicide prevention awareness programmes at places frequented by men: e.g. a range of community organisations, taxi drivers and the night-time economy.

We have made progress protecting our children and young people. We embedded the new Mental Health badge within the Healthy School scheme and rolled out mental health training to staff in early years settings. Vice chancellors at University of Bristol and University of the West of England (UWE) established the student Mental Health

liaison programme with NHS partners. We delivered a Zero Suicide Alliance rolling programme of suicide prevention and mental health awareness training for staff and students at University of Bristol and UWE.

Build knowledge, motivation and confidence to prevent and respond to suicide

We have helped people who are experiencing poverty or housing insecurity by rolling out mental health and wellbeing training for frontline housing and homelessness workers and implemented the 'One City Many Communities' Cost of Living Programme to address the impact of food and fuel poverty and debt.

Work with our local media in delivering sensitive reporting of suicide

We have worked to influence local media's adherence to the Samaritans Guidance for media reporting of suicide. The Samaritans monitor suicide coverage in the media and discuss issues with the partnership.

Provide support for those bereaved by suicide

We evaluated the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire bereavement support service to improve support for people bereaved by suicide. Through the real-time surveillance system, we have increased the opportunity to provide this support swiftly upon notification of a suspected suicide. We now ensure that information is provided to bereaved families about the processes involved and support available when going through a Coroner Inquiry.

11. Data and intelligence

Each year, Bristol City Council publishes a [Suicide prevention annual report](#). Key data from the [Office for National Statistics](#) and the 2025 report are summarised here.

National suicide rates:

5717 deaths by suicide were registered in England in 2024*

The overall suicide rate for England is **10.9** deaths per 100,000 population**

In 2024, age-specific rates were highest in:



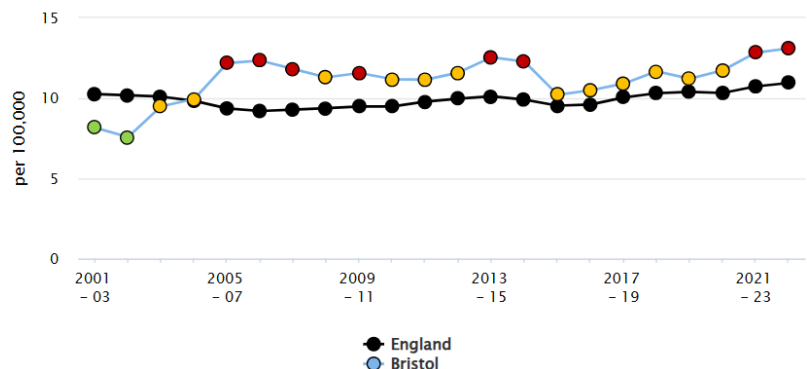
Men aged **50-54**



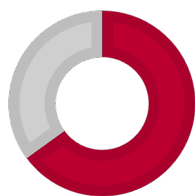
Women aged **45-49**

Suicide in Bristol:

On average **48** Bristol residents die by suicide each year



This corresponds to 13.1 deaths by suicide per 100,000 people in Bristol per year, which is higher than the England average rate



2/3 of people who die by suicide in Bristol are male

However, the suicide rate in women has been rising and is higher than the England average

Men and women aged **35-64** are at the highest risk of suicide

54% of suicides in Bristol take place at home

*Note statistics are based on the date of death registration, this can be up to year after date of death due to inquests.

**Rates presented are the average for 2022 to 2024 and directly standardised for age and sex.

Population groups at higher risk of suicide:

Some population groups are recognised as being at higher risk of suicide. Our list below is not exhaustive, but highlights important inequalities based on national data. What many of these groups have in common is experience of marginalisation, discrimination and stigma. It is also important to recognise that some people may be affected by multiple, intersecting experiences of inequality that can increase their risk.

People who identify as LGBTQ+

People who identify with an LGB+ sexual orientation are more than twice as likely to die by suicide than people who identify as heterosexual. ([Office for National Statistics 2025](#))

People in prison or in contact with the criminal justice system

The suicide rate for men in prison is nearly four times higher than the rate in the general male population. ([Office for National Statistics 2023](#))

People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the highest suicide rate of any ethnic group in England and Wales (data on Roma not available). ([Knipe et al. 2024](#))

People who are neurodivergent

1 in 3 people who have autism report experiencing suicidal thoughts within the last year, compared to 1 in 15 people in the general population. ([Newell et al. 2023](#), [NHS Digital 2025](#))

Pregnant women and new mothers

Suicide is the leading cause of death for women who died between 6 weeks and 1 year after pregnancy. ([MBRRACE-UK 2025](#))

People with a mental health condition

People diagnosed with a common mental health condition (depression or anxiety disorders) are five times more likely to have ever attempted suicide than adults without a mental health condition. ([NHS Digital 2025](#))

12. Our priorities

The Bristol Suicide Prevention Strategy 2026-2030 sets out our priorities over the next 5 years to progress towards achieving our vision.

Our eight priorities are aligned with the 2023 Suicide Prevention Strategy for England: 5-year cross-sector strategy¹. For each priority we have identified The Bristol Ambition that we will work towards as a partnership.

Each year, we will work with the Bristol Suicide Prevention Group to develop an action plan covering these eight priority areas. This will set out the steps that we will take across the system to improve the lives of people in our communities and reduce risk of suicide. The group will monitor progress against these ambitions and provide an annual report. This will be published on the Bristol City Council website and be overseen by Bristol's Health & Wellbeing Board.

Priority 1: Improving data and evidence

Why is this important?

High-quality and timely data helps us understand the factors that drive suicide. Bringing together insight from across the system enables us to identify emerging risks and take informed and co-ordinated action.

The Bristol Ambition

We will continue to strengthen Bristol's real-time surveillance system to facilitate coordinated and swift responses to local incidents, potential suicide clusters and emerging trends.

We will improve multi-agency data sharing across services and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations to enable earlier and more coordinated action where there are concerns about suicide risk.

We will bring together insights from local services, VCSE organisations and people with lived experience, alongside local data and national evidence, to guide our work, with flexibility to adapt our approach as risks and patterns change over time.

Priority 2: Tailored and targeted support

Why is this important?

Our suicide prevention strategy is designed to support everyone in our city. However, some people face higher risks of suicide because of who they are, the stigma they face or the barriers they experience when seeking help. Recognising these groups helps us to ensure that support reflects their specific needs and experiences. These groups include, but are not limited to:

- Young people
- Middle-aged men
- Women experiencing peri-menopause and menopause
- People who have self-harmed
- People in contact with mental health services
- People in contact with the justice system
- Pregnant women and new mothers
- People in contact with adult or children's social care
- People who are neurodivergent
- People from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- People who are LGBTQ+

The Bristol Ambition

We will work collaboratively across the system so that everyone in Bristol is able to access support that is person-centred, trauma-informed and appropriate for them.

We will consider the needs of people who face higher or more complex risks and support the provision of services that are tailored to their circumstances.

We will work to reduce stigma and other barriers that prevent people from seeking or accessing help.

Priority 3: Addressing risk factors

Why is this important?

Every person affected by suicide experiences unique circumstances, but many people are exposed to difficulties in life that increase their risk. These factors often combine and reinforce one another. Taking action on these wider determinants, and understanding how they interact, can reduce the number of people who die by suicide.

Local priorities include:

- Financial difficulty
- Harmful gambling
- Substance use and dependence
- Sexual violence and domestic abuse including coercive control
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Unstable accommodation
- Long-term physical health conditions

The Bristol Ambition

We will prioritise actions to reduce exposure to the factors that increase suicide risk across Bristol.

We will work together across Bristol City Council and the wider system to ensure that programmes addressing the wider determinants of health take an integrated approach that reflects their impact on suicide prevention.

We will make the most of every interaction across services, strengthening the ability of staff and volunteers to recognise the risk of suicide and ensuring people are met with compassion wherever they seek help, recognising that individuals may encounter many services before reaching crisis.

Priority 4: Online safety, media and technology

Why is this important?

The online world can expose people to serious risks. This includes harmful or distressing content, harassment, grooming and abuse. These risks can be especially significant for children and young people and women and girls.

Digital spaces, however, also provide opportunities for connection, information and support and can be a powerful tool in suicide prevention.

The Bristol Ambition

We will be alert to emerging online risks and safeguarding concerns and work with partners to respond quickly as new patterns arise.

We will promote sensitive and responsible portrayal of suicide across our communications, among our organisations and in local media.

We will make the most of the opportunities that digital technology can offer for support and awareness in suicide prevention and promote digital empowerment so people can navigate online spaces safely.

Priority 5: Effective and appropriate crisis support

Why is this important?

Accessible and compassionate support should be available for anyone experiencing a crisis related to suicide. People experiencing a crisis are vulnerable and feeling dismissed can increase their distress. Timely and coordinated crisis response helps to prevent suicide.

The Bristol Ambition

We will ensure that anyone in Bristol experiencing a suicidal crisis can access support quickly, easily and in a way that feels appropriate for them, wherever they first make contact.

We will strengthen our person-centred crisis response by focusing on what matters to individuals, embedding collaborative safety planning, involving families or trusted people where appropriate, and ensuring support is compassionate, trauma-informed and culturally competent.

We will build stronger pathways across sectors so that services can deliver joined-up, consistent support to people in crisis.

We will seek to promote the importance of Mental Health First Aid alongside Physical First Aid across workplaces and services.

Priority 6: Tackling means and methods of suicide

Why is this important?

Although our wider aim is to address the circumstances that increase the risk of suicide, we know that some people may still be contemplating suicide. Reducing access to the means and methods that can be used in suicide is a proven way to save lives, particularly by delaying action during moments of acute distress when people may act impulsively.

The Bristol Ambition

We will monitor local trends and act promptly with partners to reduce risk, including responding to high-frequency locations and emerging methods.

We will promote sensitive and responsible reporting of the methods of suicide in the media.

We will ensure frontline staff and volunteers are equipped and supported to respond to suicide attempts and deaths by suicide, with access to psychological support when needed.

Priority 7: Timely and effective bereavement support

Why is this important?

Every suicide affects a network of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. People bereaved by suicide are at increased risk of poor mental health and suicide themselves and benefit from timely and holistic bereavement support.

The Bristol Ambition

We will ensure that people bereaved by suicide are offered timely and compassionate support that reflects their emotional and practical needs.

We will promote bereavement support that is inclusive, culturally competent and tailored to the needs of different groups, including children and young people.

We will strengthen the support for people affected by suicide in schools, universities, workplaces and community settings, ensuring organisations have the guidance and confidence to respond to deaths by suicide.

Priority 8: Making suicide prevention everyone's business

Why is this important?

Every person and every organisation in Bristol can play a role in preventing suicide. Helping people feel confident to talk about suicide can reduce stigma and make it easier to share concerns.

The Bristol Ambition

We will encourage the people of Bristol to undertake suicide prevention training, equipping them with the skills and confidence to recognise when someone is struggling and to initiate a conversation.

We will deliver coordinated communication campaigns across our organisations and contribute to national conversations on suicide and mental health, helping to reduce the stigma around suicide.

We will support organisations to build open, inclusive cultures around mental health in the places where people study, work, live and connect, strengthening their contribution to suicide prevention.

13. Zero Suicide Bristol Pledge

The Bristol ambition is to be a zero suicide city, because every life lost to suicide is one too many. Everyone – organisations, businesses and individuals – has a role to play in suicide prevention, starting with talking openly about suicide. Together, we can reduce the stigma around suicide and break down the barriers which prevent people from seeking help. Together, we can reduce lives lost to suicide.

By taking this pledge, you can make suicide prevention your business and help save lives in Bristol.

Our Commitment

1. Create a city that supports wellbeing by addressing the risk factors for suicide and promoting high-quality support.

2. Make suicide everyone’s business by breaking down the stigma surrounding suicide and making talking about suicide a positive step toward saving lives.

3. Reduce suicide rates by working with partners across the city.

Your Pledge

To make suicide prevention your business by taking action within your organisation and your communities, helping to reduce risk factors associated with suicide.

To strengthen the protective factors in your organisation and communities, including normalising conversations about mental health and enabling people to access support.

To encourage your colleagues, partner organisations, and your communities, family and friends to take the Zero Suicide Alliance training, helping reduce stigma and increasing confidence to engage and support others.

To work together as a system to turn ambition into action, taking coordinated practical steps to reduce and prevent deaths by suicide in Bristol.

Signed: [Name, Position] _____

Organisation: _____

A pledge that you/your organisation will make to support suicide prevention in Bristol:

14. Glossary

Protective factors: personal or environmental conditions or characteristics that help protect a person from suicide.

Real-time surveillance system: a system to ensure timely reporting of deaths by suspected suicide. It acts as an early warning system to inform suicide prevention.

Risk factors: characteristics of a person or their environment that increase the likelihood that they will die by suicide.

Safety planning: a shared plan that helps individuals identify warning signs, coping strategies and how to stay safe in a crisis.

Self-harm: an intentional act of self-poisoning or self-injury, which may occur with or without suicidal intent.

Suicide: a death due to intentional self-harm.

Suicide cluster: a group of deaths that are linked in some way by time, method, geography or demographics.

Suicidal crisis: a situation in which someone is seriously considering, planning or attempting suicide and requires immediate support.

Wider determinants of health: the social, economic and environmental conditions in which people live and work that strongly influence their health outcomes.