

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



January 2026

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 24 hours a day by calling 0800 107 0160.

(<https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/release-the-pressure>)

Foreword

“In 2024, 5717 lives were lost to suicide in England, including 162 in Kent and Medway alone. Every one of these deaths represents a tragedy which would have had heartbreaking effects on those left behind, including families, friends and wider communities.

The mission is simple; we must do whatever we can to reduce the number of individuals in Kent and Medway who feel that suicide is their only option. We must do whatever is in both our individual and collective powers to instil hope across our communities and ensure that the experiences of those we have lost lead to visible actions that bring these statistics down.

The new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy for 2026-2030 is our ongoing commitment to have the oversight on fulfilling this mission, it is not the job of any one agency, it needs to be everybody's business.

We encourage all who read this strategy to think about the valuable role they can play within it, whether that be developing awareness of suicide and feeling more confident in holding conversations that could save somebody's life, knowing which services are available to support or simply thinking about how to promote hope to those around us. It is also about improving services, better access to much needed support, and leadership to create healthy, strong and supportive communities.

Our new strategy builds on the previous strategies, the national strategy and comments from a wide variety of stakeholders and people with lived experience across Kent and Medway. Our new strategy wants a bolder approach to tackle self-harm, better access routes to support, and to empower people with lived experience and local communities to shape the changes needed to improve people's lives and give hope. Together we will support those who are affected by suicide, whether personally or professionally. We will address stigma and fear of blame, through shared responsibility, collective action, listening and learning from each other to achieve suicide safer communities.

We all have an important role to play, and we look forward to working together to save lives and support those impacted by suicide.”

Anjan Ghosh (Director of Public Health) – Kent County Council

David Whiting (Director of Public Health) – Medway Council

Sheila Stenson (CEO) and Andy Cruickshank (Chief Nursing Officer) – Kent and Medway Mental Health NHS Trust

Dr Kate Langford (Chief Medical and Outcomes Officer) - Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board

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 feel empowered and able 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. Complete monthly Action Plans that record progress and deliverables against our strategic priorities.
4. Publish an annual impact report, which will be distributed widely through our suicide prevention network and newsletter and publicly available on our Padlet (<https://padlet.com/SuicidePrevention/suicide-prevention-team-resources-zuu4rhjasoll5b01>) or upon request.
5. 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 went 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 had 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 and is available on the [Let's Talk Kent](#) website.

Strategy Development

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

Public Consultation

The public consultation ran from 16 July to 6 October 2025 and was hosted on the Let's Talk Kent website: www.kent.gov.uk/suicideprevention . The consultation period was 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 which took place on 22 September 2025.

153 responses were received in total of which 149 responses were received through the online questionnaire. There were a further 2 responses received via email, and 2 further comments received via email.

Each of these responses and comments were analysed and used to produce the Consultation Report, which can be found on the Let's Talk Kent website. The findings from this report showed that the majority of respondents supported the draft Strategy: 89% agreed with the vision, 88% agreed with the mission, and 91% agreed with the values.

The key findings from the analysis report informed the production of the 'You Said, We Did' document, which is also available on the Let's Talk Kent website. This document highlighted and explained the changes which were then made to finalise the draft Strategy.



Statistical Snapshot

The latest data published by the [Office of National Statistics](#) (October 2025) shows that Kent appears to have a higher suicide rate than the national average. However rates in Kent and Medway 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	2022 to 2024
England	10.3	10.9
Kent	12.1	11.3
Medway	10.6	10.3

[Source – Office for National Statistics, 2025](#)

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 (available on the [Let's Talk Kent](#) website) which was 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.



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 Mental Health NHS 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.

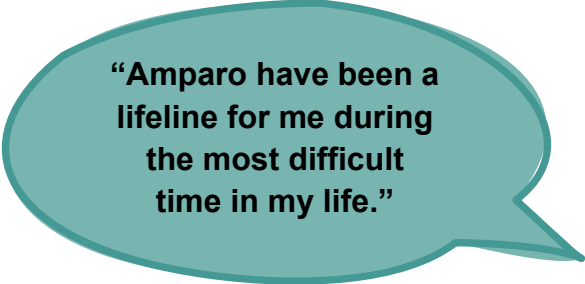
To tailor approaches to improve mental health and wellbeing Kent we...

- 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.

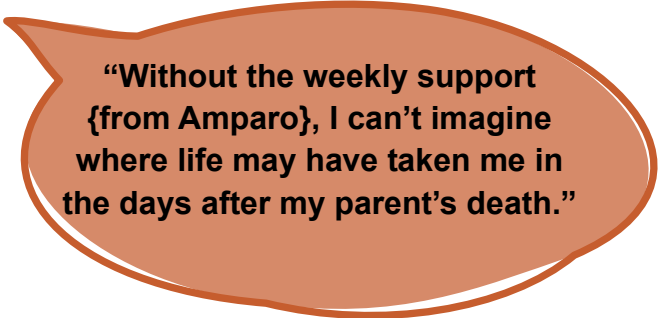
"The training came in useful on Friday evening when I spent an hour at xxx train station persuading a young man not to kill himself."

"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	Neurodivergent people (including those awaiting diagnosis)
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
People affected by physical illness	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, neurodivergent people, people in contact with secondary mental health services, people in financial difficulty, and 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, and respond accordingly
 - 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

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 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, neurodivergent 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, and respond accordingly
 - 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.