
Embedding a Trauma-Informed Approach, Suicide Prevention and Self-Harm: Joining the Dots

Webinar, February 2025

Background and overview of the event

Scottish Government and COSLA's Suicide Prevention Strategy and Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan both highlight the importance of trauma-informed and responsive services, systems and workforces, in preventing suicide and supporting people affected by suicidality and self-harm.

Through the National Trauma Transformation Programme, Scotland has paved the way in creating a vision for a trauma-informed and responsive workforce and services that can recognise where people are affected by trauma and adversity, that respond in ways that prevent further harm, support recovery, address inequalities and improve life chances.

In February 2025, The Scottish Government, COSLA, Suicide Prevention Scotland and the Improvement Service hosted an online event to:



Reflect on how trauma, suicidality and self-harm shows up in people's lives and their experience of seeking help



Share learning and inspiration from practice




Bring together colleagues working within suicide prevention, self-harm and those working to embed a trauma-informed approach to **join the dots across these policy agendas**



Identify **opportunities to strengthen the links** across these and other key policy agendas locally, regionally and nationally across Scotland, and **identify what further support might be needed to do so.**

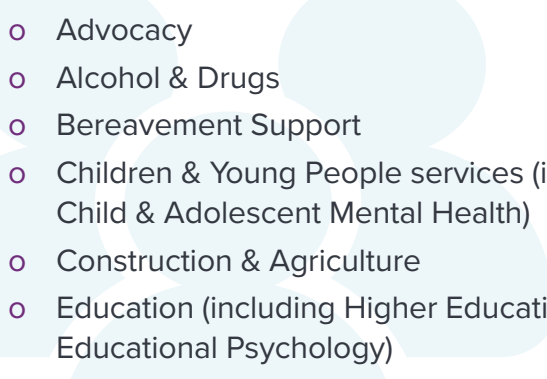
We heard from a range of speakers, including:

- o **Myra Ross, Health Improvement Specialist, Public Health NHS Highland** shared a [spoken word poem](#) which illustrated the impact of embedding trauma-informed and responsive approaches and the importance of implementing time, space and compassion across all of our systems, services and workforces.

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- **Councillor Paul Kelly, COSLA Health and Social Care Spokesperson**, spoke of COSLA's continued commitment to work alongside partners to embed a trauma-informed and responsive approach, suicide prevention and self-harm across COSLA's key activities and different areas of policy.
 - **Stephen Gallagher, Director for Mental Health, Scottish Government** highlighted the key principles of Time Space Compassion and how they can be embedded across a wide range of services, policies and practices to reduce the impact of suicide and self-harm, improve life chances and save lives.
 - **Haylis Smith, National Delivery Lead for Suicide Prevention Scotland** and **Laura James, National Improvement Lead for Trauma, Improvement Service** both spoke of the importance of joining the dots between suicide prevention and trauma-informed and responsive organisations, systems and workforces, and highlighted how the National Trauma Transformation Programme and the Creating Hope Together strategy work to support communities, organisations, systems and workforces helping people impacted by trauma, suicide and self-harm.
 - **Ross Reilly, SAMH's Sams Café** and **Dr Jane Grassie, Consultant in Emergency Medicine, NHS Fife** shared learning on the impact of having peer support workers operating within the Emergency Department in NHS Fife to support people who are presenting in crisis with suicidality and/ or self-harm.
 - **Angi Pinkerton, Trauma-Informed Practice Officer, South Ayrshire Council** spoke of the approach taken in South Ayrshire to join the dots between trauma-informed and responsive practice, suicide prevention, and a range of other cross-cutting policy agendas that support people, communities and staff who are affected by trauma, suicidality, mental health, self-harm and adversity.
 - **Tara French, Scottish Government Digital Health and Care Division** and **Shannon McNee, Carr Gomm** highlighted the importance of digital inclusion in supporting people to engage in wellbeing activities and accessing different types of support to meet their needs, rights and goals in a person centred and trauma-informed way.

Engagement

There were **615 attendees** on the day. This included a broad range of public, private and third sector organisations, and policy areas, including representation from 25 local authorities, as well as senior leaders, managers, policymakers, practitioners and Elected Officials. Services/policy areas represented included:

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- Advocacy
 - Alcohol & Drugs
 - Bereavement Support
 - Children & Young People services (including Child & Adolescent Mental Health)
 - Construction & Agriculture
 - Education (including Higher Education and Educational Psychology)
 - Emergency Services (NHS 24, Scottish Ambulance Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue, British Transport Police and Police Scotland)
 - Employability and Welfare Advice (including Citizen's Advice Scotland)
 - Equality Groups (including Learning Disabilities & Additional Support Needs, LGBTQI+ and BME and Minority Ethnic specialist services)

- Evaluation & Research
- Health (including Occupational Health, Midwifery, Primary Care, Nursing and Forensic Nursing)
- Housing & Homelessness
- HR & Organisational Development
- Inspection & Improvement Bodies (Public Health Scotland, Public Health Wales, Education Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland and Healthcare Improvement Scotland)
- Justice (including Scottish Prison Service and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service)
- Psychiatry & Mental Health (including Clinical Psychology and Counselling)
- Religious & Faith groups
- Residential Care
- Social Work (including Children & Families, Adult Support & Protection and Justice)
- Sports, Arts & Heritage
- Violence Against Women and Girls

Key messages

Speakers and attendees identified a number of key messages around the importance of joining the dots between trauma-informed approaches, suicide prevention and self-harm, including:



Relationships are key in supporting people and communities affected by trauma, suicidality and self-harm, and trusting and meaningful connections are instrumental in building confidence and supporting recovery. Specifically, the role of **peer support is transformational** in making a difference to people's lives.



The key principles of **safety, trust, choice, collaboration and empowerment** which underlie trauma-informed practice speak to and complement those of **Time, Space and Compassion**. These are all key principles and values that should underpin interactions and engagements with people, communities and colleagues who are impacted by trauma, suicidality and self-harm.



There is a need to adopt a **cross-cutting, multi-agency approach** to supporting people affected by trauma, suicidality and self-harm, increase awareness, identify areas for **effective collaborative working**, and develop a shared understanding of these issues and how they present for different communities and contexts.



Thinking outside the box to deliver person-centred care and support, and identify opportunities to **meet people where they're at**, such as promoting digital inclusion to improve wellbeing. Ensuring appropriate time and space given to developing creative approaches to meeting people's needs.



Prioritising staff care, support and wellbeing. The current context around resources and capacity are challenging, and it is imperative that there are measures in place to mitigate the risk of staff burnout and overwhelm.



Providing opportunities to share learning, practice and knowledge is key to develop a shared understanding of policy agendas, identify areas for collaboration to mitigate siloed working, and tap into existing networks of support.

Recommendations

Throughout the event, participants and speakers highlighted a number of recommendations to sustainably promote joined up working between the NTTP and the Suicide Prevention and Self-Harm strategies and action plans:

- ✓ **Investment in peer support and engaging those with lived and living experience in service design and delivery, and recovery support.** This includes promoting ongoing work between public and third sector partners to embed peer support within systems and services across Scotland.
- ✓ **Promoting opportunities for knowledge exchange, shared practice and learning, and access to resources and tools** to support collaborative working. Continued support is needed to create and continue valuable spaces for networking, fostering connections and building relationships.
- ✓ **Collective visible leadership across Scotland is needed** to support meaningful and sustainable progress across these agendas. Leadership, at both strategic and operational levels, is a key enabler to successful implementation across policy agendas and service areas.
- ✓ **Taking an intersectional approach to this work and embedding it in practice** is key to supporting those experiencing additional barriers to accessing support. Policies and practice should be tailored to specific settings and adopt a meaningful person-centred approach.
- ✓ **Long-term systems and culture change takes time** and is an ongoing, iterative process. Investment and resources need to reflect the time taken to truly embed this Time, Space and Compassion, and a trauma-informed and responsive approach, across systems and services.

What opportunities for local and national action did attendees identify?

“Continue involving lived and living experience... and refreshing these groups periodically to allow new individuals to contribute”

“Nationally [we need to be] ensuring the principles of trauma-informed care are threaded through all education resources for the health and social care workforce”

“[Local action] in supporting colleagues at risk of vicarious trauma through clinical supervision and support”

“Working together in communities and embedding peer support in all aspect of work”

“Getting away from a ‘fixing mentality’ and focus more on listening”

Feedback from attendees

“ [the event] continued inspiring me to carry on contributing to the culture, system and leadership change needed... as a trainer/ facilitator I will use some of the examples and ways of communicating the messages in my own conversations. ”

“ ...one or two points challenged me to think what I could do differently around sharing power with people with lived experience of trauma and suicide/ self-harm... ”

Useful resources

[National Trauma Transformation Programme \(NTTP\) Website](#)

[NTTP Roadmap for Creating Trauma-Informed and Responsive Change: Guidance for Organisations, Systems and Workforces](#)

[Training Resources](#)

[Embedding Trauma-Informed and Responsive Organisations, Systems and Workforces: National Learning Report 2024](#)

[Creating Hope Together: Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022 to 2032](#)

[Creating Hope Together: Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2022 to 2025](#)

[Time Space Compassion – Supporting People Experiencing Suicidal Crisis](#)

[Time Space Compassion Podcast](#)

Further engagement

NTTP Newsletter: [Subscribe](#) to the NTTP Newsletter.

Collaborative Peer Workshops: for colleagues working in local and national organisations who are leading on/supporting the implementation of a trauma-informed approach in their service/organisation. See [recordings from previous workshops](#) and [sign up for the workshops](#).

