

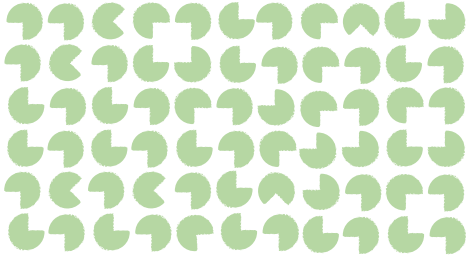


**SAMARITANS
Scotland**

Five priorities to save lives

Samaritans Scotland's
2026 Scottish Parliament
election manifesto





Life can be wonderful. Life can be tough. Relationships. Work. Money. Loneliness. Mental health. Self-harm. We can all struggle. Any place. Any time. One in four of us have had suicidal thoughts.

We're pushing for change: within government, in services, and in society to help people not only in their moment of need, but before they reach crisis point. Our aim is to make suicide prevention a priority for all political parties ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election.

Our five priorities to save lives

- 1 Increase funding for frontline mental health services**
- 2 Deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland**
- 3 End harmful stigma through workforce training**
- 4 Increase support for people in prison**
- 5 Increase resourcing for community services**

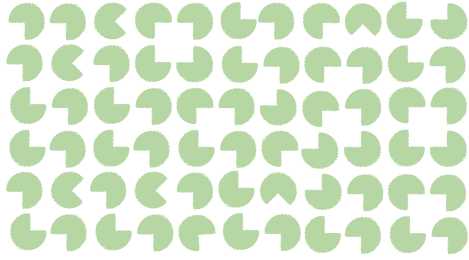
Suicide is complex and touches every part of society. It is vital that politicians recognise the devastating impact that suicide has on people's lives and make clear commitments to address the factors that contribute to suicide risk.

Suicide is an issue of inequality, with the rate of suicide mortality in the most deprived areas in Scotland being 2.5 times higher than the least deprived area. We must tackle these inequalities to reduce the number of lives lost by suicide.

Services in Scotland are working tirelessly to improve the lives of the people that access support. Statutory mental health services need investment to enable them to keep up with growing demand. The Scottish Government must trust in community-grown services and resource them properly to allow the provision of vital prevention and intervention support.

Our vision is that fewer people die by suicide, that people feel able to ask for help when they are struggling, and where the right support is available at the right time.





1. Increase funding for frontline mental health services

At present, too many people in Scotland do not have access to the mental health support and services they need. The threshold for receiving support is often too high, and people need to reach a crisis point before receiving help. People across Scotland require accessible and high-quality services at a community level.

The current Scottish Government has made a commitment to increase mental health spend to 10 per cent of the NHS budget. At the last election, all major parties committed to this spend of at least 10 per cent on mental health services, but this has not been delivered. The current mental health spending figure sits at around nine per cent in new reporting that includes clinical psychology. However, without this addition, the most recent figure sits at 8.55 per cent.

The new Scottish Government will need to make significant investment in our mental health services to meet the growing need. Additional spend must be tracked, with clear reporting and accountability mechanisms so that there is accountability and transparency, not only of spending but also of the outcomes achieved by this increased investment.

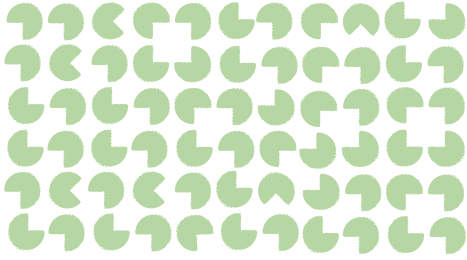
With increased and properly allocated funding for frontline mental health services, we would like to see a system in Scotland where appropriate support is available for people when they need it, before they reach crisis point.



Photo: Beth Chalmers

This investment should result in reduced waiting times and a workforce that is well-resourced and trained to meet rising demand. Samaritans Scotland see a society with improved mental health outcomes across the population, reduced pressure on services, and a focus on early intervention and long-term recovery.





2. Deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland

Samaritans research 'Dying from Inequality' found that people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or who live in areas of socioeconomic deprivation have an increased risk of suicidal behaviour.

The 2024 National Records of Scotland data on deaths by suicide, the most recent statistics, confirmed this link. It revealed that people living in Scotland's most deprived areas were 2.5 times more likely to die by suicide than those living in the least deprived areas. This is higher than the deprivation gap of 1.8 times for all causes of death.

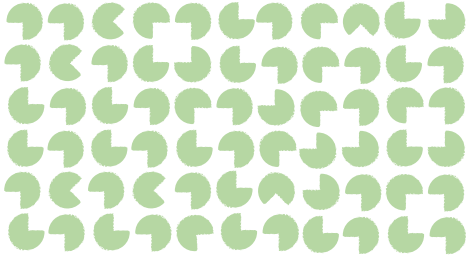
Our research released in 2024, 'Paid Yesterday, Broke Today', looked at the link between financial insecurity and suicidal behaviour and action. The research findings showed that, for the participants in this study, insufficient income was linked to suicidal thoughts and suicidal behaviour. Where people have incomes that are not sufficient to meet their basic needs, support is necessary to ensure that they can eat meals, pay household bills, and heat their homes.

The implementation of a Minimum Income Guarantee in Scotland would protect those at greatest risk, helping to provide a dignified quality of life, deliver financial security and unlock opportunities for everyone.

Samaritans Scotland welcomes the commitment of the current Scottish Parliament, including the roadmap for 2026-31, setting out the long-term vision and near-term steps to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee for Scotland. The roadmap, published by the Minimum Income Guarantee Expert group, sets out a clear route with first steps that should happen within the next Parliament. This roadmap includes scrapping the two-child limit on Universal Credit and stopping public bodies, like local authorities, from taking money to pay off debts from people's social security payments if it means they wouldn't have money for food or bills.

But we know that people in Scotland are dying from inequality now. If the new Scottish Parliament is dedicated to reducing the number of people who die by suicide in Scotland, it will commit to prioritise progressing with the first steps of the roadmap, to reduce the inequalities that contribute to suicide risk.





3. End harmful stigma through workforce training

As part of our research, 'Paid Yesterday, Broke Today' participants shared the impact of the internal and external stigma that can come with not having an adequate income.

Participants shared that the way others, including government agencies, responded to and treated them led to feelings of disconnect and, in turn, negatively impacted how they viewed themselves and their feelings of worth.

“ I think the attitudes and the stigma at times are a disgrace... there's this narrative around if you're not working, you're not really of any value to society. ”

Research participant, 'Paid Yesterday, Broke Today'

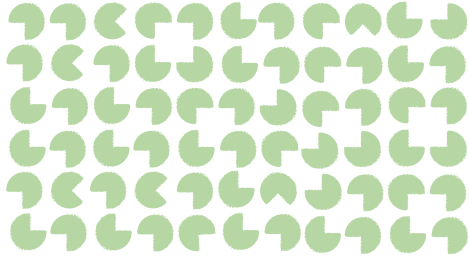
In research by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, participants shared that in their experience, transition from the social security system is a key stage in someone's contemplation of suicide. Stigma when accessing social security has led participants to believe that trying to obtain support for mental health issues is difficult and makes the situation worse.

Time, Space, Compassion is a person-centred approach to suicide prevention, developed as part of the national suicide prevention strategy, to support compassionate responses to people in distress.

The programme includes guidance and training for those working on the frontline, encouraging giving people the time they need to talk without pressure, creating space that feels safe and non-judgmental, and approaching them with compassion through empathy, kindness, and human connection—especially during moments of suicidal crisis. The guide aims to address inconsistencies in people's experiences with services in Scotland and embed the principles of time, space, and compassion in frontline support. These principles should be used for those working in public services where people access economic, social and employment support, to reduce stigma and distress.

Everybody should feel safe and confident to access the services that they need when they need it, free from stigma and fear. Individuals should not be negatively impacted by their experiences when trying to access financial support. Staff working in financial and employment support services must have access to training and support, to better understand the impact of frontline services on the people accessing them.





4. Increase support for people in prison

International evidence shows that people in prison are significantly more likely to take their own lives than the general population. In Scotland, this disparity is clearly reflected in recent statistics.

The most recent suicide rate for people in prison in Scotland stands at 18.9 per 100,000 people, significantly higher than the probable suicide rate of 12.7 per 100,000 in the general population. Men in prison are four times more likely to die by suicide than those not in prison, and two in five prisoners have attempted suicide.

Samaritans Scotland has been providing our Prison Listener scheme in Scotland for over 30 years. Our scheme involves Samaritans volunteers working with prison staff to select, train and support prisoners called Listeners. Listeners provide confidential emotional support to their peers who may be struggling to cope, in distress or experiencing thoughts of self-harm and suicide.

In Summer 2025, we worked with some Listeners and our volunteers in the community who support them to shape a response to the Scottish Prison Services' review of Talk To Me – the Prevention of Suicide in Prisons Strategy. The consensus was that, at present, Talk To Me can be effective in preventing suicide in the moment of crisis but doesn't do enough to take an early intervention or whole-prison approach to suicide prevention.

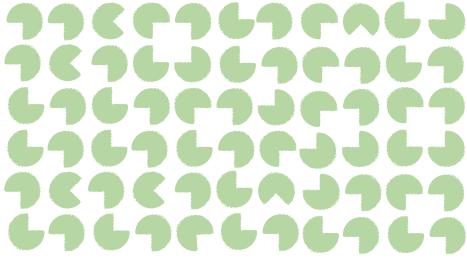


Photo: Beth Chalmers

The new Scottish Government must ensure that suicide prevention in prisons takes a broader approach, taking a suicide prevention lens to all aspects of prison life, rather than the narrow approach of crisis management.

This will require all parties to support the creation of a suicide prevention pathway in the crisis management protocol for prisons, which will broaden the scope of suicide prevention in prisons. The new Government must ensure that the pathway is implemented and based on a trauma-informed compassionate approach. This will require continued support and resource, including training for staff to support the new pathway, and engagement with partners.





5. Increase resourcing for community services

In our research, 'Paid Yesterday, Broke Today' participants highlighted the importance of social connection as a key protective factor against suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Participants highlighted the role of friends, family, community groups and support services in providing them with hope for the future.

We know that community support services are doing excellent work throughout Scotland in engaging with those who may be at the highest risk of suicide. These services, although they may not be specifically suicide prevention services, are doing essential prevention and intervention work in their communities.

Samaritans Scotland has been conducting case studies with these community support services, as part of our work as Outcome Lead for Creating Hope Together, Scotland's suicide prevention strategy. From these case studies, we have gained insight into the vital role third sector services provide in connecting their communities and in creating a safe and comfortable space for those who need it.

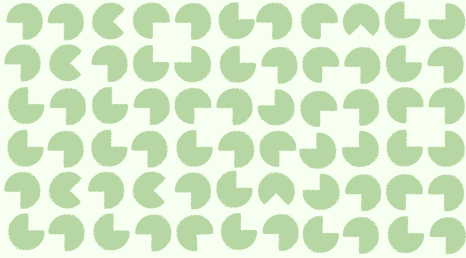
We have heard from staff and service users that these services work because they have grown out of, and remain firmly based in, communities.

They are often a one-stop shop, where you can access or be signposted directly to the support you need, and where you can build a relationship with staff who know and understand the community they work in.

We support the call from the Scottish Mental Health Partnership to establish an Improving Scotland's Mental Health Fund of at least £20 million in each new year of the new Parliament. This will complement the Communities, Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund and provide a strategic focus across the public and voluntary sectors on innovative prevention approaches.

This essential work has a lasting impact on communities, and Samaritans Scotland believe that properly supported and resourced community services are essential to tackle the social isolation and loneliness that contribute to suicidal thoughts and behaviour.





SAMARITANS Scotland

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Cover photo: Beth Chalmers

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