

Appendix 1

Professor Sir Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer

BY EMAIL

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Dear Colleagues,

NISRA Suicide Statistics 2024

Members will wish to note the NISRA publication today of the 2024 suicide statistics. The statistics show an increase from 221 deaths recorded in 2023 to 290 deaths recorded in 2024. I am acutely aware of the devastating impact of each and every tragic suicide death, not only in terms of lives lost but also the impact on loved ones, communities and those working in this area.

We will be striving to ensure that reporting reflects that suicide deaths in Northern Ireland are recorded by year of registration. Delays in the coronial process can therefore result in

deaths that occurred in previous years being included in a different year to when the death occurred. As such many of the 2024 deaths will have occurred in years prior to 2024.

While media coverage will inevitably focus on the 1 year increase of 30%, I would urge everyone to focus more closely on the 3 year average. This average is much more accurate than looking at single year differences which can have bigger fluctuations from year to year. The 3 year average has remained relatively stable for a long time. However, any increase in that is concerning and highlights we must redouble our efforts to provide support to those most in need.

The NISRA release also notes continued high rates in young men and in line with other recent evidence from NISRA particular issues for those who are single and may not benefit from the same protective factors as those with more family support.

Of particular concern is the increase in rates for those aged over 60. The report notes that 1 in 5 deaths recorded in 2024 are in those aged over 60. It is very clear that further support is required for those in older age groups and research undertaken to establish what is driving this increase. We will work with NISRA on this in the near future.

Rates continue to be highest in our most deprived communities which are disproportionately affected by suicide. This underscores the importance of continued focus of Protect Life 2 on the more deprived areas.

In light of current suicide rates and to raise awareness of support available the Minister has recently lifted the embargo on awareness raising for the Lifeline service. A 'Talking Really Helps' campaign will run from 17 November to March 2026 to highlight the service and will seek to increase uptake for males and those in lower socioeconomic groups.

It will be important in the coming days and weeks that collectively we continue to raise awareness of the support available for those most vulnerable in our communities and provide hope and reassurance that services are available and promote a message of positivity and that things can improve.

The NISRA statistics underline the fundamental need for continued delivery and investment in the recommendations and actions within Protect Life 2 and the Mental Health Strategy.



Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR SIR MICHAEL McBRIDE

Chief Medical Officer