

Mental Health and Wellbeing Leadership Board: self-harm strategy and action plan mid-term report - September 2025

February 2026



Mental Health and Wellbeing Leadership Board**Date: 2 September 2025****Time: 12:00 – 13:30****Venue: MS Teams****Title of item: Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan Mid-Term Report****Purpose**

Over the last 18 months a Scottish Government policy team have been implementing the actions within Scotland's [Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan](#) (believed to be the first of its kind in the world) in partnership with COSLA and in close collaboration with Self-Harm Network Scotland.

This paper, and the associated presentation, covers key learning from the last 18 months ahead of publication of the mid-term report. The views of the board are sought on the proposed content of the mid-term report. This item also seeks to continue to raise awareness and build support of this work at a leadership level.

What decisions are required?

The Leadership Board is invited to:

- Reflect on the key messages and likely next steps in the mid-term report.
- Discuss any emerging issues or wider context which may impact upon self-harm awareness, stigma or service responses, identifying how they might support the removal of these barriers.

Lead

Harri Waugh, Self-Harm Policy and Distress Interventions, Scottish Government

1. Background

Self-harm is a sensitive and complex issue. It is often used by people as way to cope with difficult, traumatic or distressing feelings and experiences, yet in the long-term, self-harm does not address the underlying cause of distress. We share the vision that compassionate support should be available to anyone affected by self-harm, however they themselves define it.

Over the last four years, Scottish Government have invested £2.2m in the development of bespoke self-harm support services through [Self-Harm Network Scotland](#), run by Penumbra. Through the Fairer Funding award, we have committed a further £1.5m for the delivery of the action plan, including the continuation of these vital services for 2025-2027.

Scotland's first dedicated Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan was published on 28 November 2023, jointly by Scottish Government and COSLA. The Strategy is about making sure that anyone affected by self-harm gets the compassionate, recovery-focused support they need, without fear of stigma or discrimination. The Strategy and Action Plan were shaped by people with lived and living experience (LLE) of self-harm.

We know that some groups are at higher risk of self-harm, such as young people, LGBT+ people, and neurodivergent people – and our Action Plan prioritises support for people from marginalised communities.

Our Action Plan focuses on three priorities;

1. Deepening knowledge and embedding compassionate understanding of self-tackling stigma and discrimination.
2. Building person-centred support and services across Scotland, to meet the needs of people affected by self-harm.
3. Reviewing, improving and sharing data and evidence to drive improvements in support and service responses for people who have self-harmed, or at increased risk of doing so.

We are now halfway through the Strategy and Action Plan period, so are developing a mid-term report to reflect on progress (highlights and challenges) and next steps. A draft executive summary of this is provided at **Annex A**. Subject to political agreement it is anticipated that the report will be published in Autumn.

Its key messages are likely to include;

- Demonstrable progress has been made towards each of the strategy priority areas, short-term outcomes and overall vision.
- The key achievements across the outcome areas are a reflection of this progress and demonstrate good collaborative working with a range of key partners.
- As this is the first strategy of its kind, the past 18 months have also been an opportunity for us to learn more about self-harm and how best to support people affected.
- We will use this learning to help guide our next steps towards achieving our medium-term outcomes and overall vision.

Further detail will also be provided within a presentation to the Board.

2. Impact (including measurement of impact)

Over the past 18 months, the implementation team (comprised of Scottish Government, COSLA and Self-Harm Network Scotland (SHNS) has collaborated closely with key partners to drive forward our priorities and make meaningful progress across the Action Plan. The mid-term report will showcase a range of key achievements that reflect the impact of our collective efforts. These include:

- 276 Awareness Training sessions held and delivered to 3,380 people to help reduce stigma and supported compassionate responses. Attendees have included a range of professional groups. Work has also been undertaken with the Scottish Prison Service, the British Deaf Association and Hope for Autism and the National Autistic Society to tailor training resources for diverse groups. (Priority 1)
- Self-Harm Network Scotland have provided peer support to 369 people with 91% of people reporting stopping or reducing self-harm. The SHNS Live Chat has also supported 1790 people with access to immediate out of hours support and advice. (Priority 2)
- We have commissioned a number of reports which have helped us to gain better understanding into the unique characteristics of self-harm, see what clinical data is available and gain insight into the barriers across service use. (Priority 3)

However, in working towards the aims of our strategy, we also recognise that there is still much more to do in relation to tackling challenges around stigma, improving data and supporting services to provide compassionate responses.

3. Links with Mental Health Policy

The Self-Harm Strategy sits within Mental Health Policy. It closely aligns to both Scotland's Suicide Prevention Strategy Creating Hope Together and the Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

4. Recommendation or Decision/Action Required

The Leadership Board are asked to reflect on the proposed key messages for the mid-term report and the proposed direction for focusing action across the remaining 18 months of the Action Plan. The Board's feedback will be considered in the final stages of report development.

Executive Summary

Background

The Self-Harm Strategy and Action Plan continues to be a vital component of Scotland's ongoing efforts to support people affected by self-harm and commitment to improving mental health and wellbeing across the population. Now at its mid-point, this report reviews progress across the Strategy's three priorities and considers what change has been achieved towards the short-term outcomes since its launched in November 2023.

Purpose of this Report

This mid-term report provides an overview of the activity and achievements made in the first 18 months of implementation ¹. It highlights where progress has been made across the Action Plan. Key learning and next steps are also summarised, helping to shape the approach for the remainder of the Strategy period.

Progress Overview

Progress has been made across all three priorities, building a strong foundation of tools, networks, and collaborative approaches to better support people who self-harm. Key achievements include:

- **Priority 1: Continue to expand and deepen knowledge and compassionate understanding of self-harm and tackle stigma and discrimination**
We have expanded national learning opportunities and strengthened Self-Harm Network Scotland (SHNS) as a central hub for training and support, including through the launch of its dedicated website. Self-harm education has been embedded across key sectors, including health, education, and community settings. Tailored resources have been developed and shared with professionals, parents, and carers.
- **Priority 2: Continue to build person-centred support and services across Scotland to meet the needs of people affected by self-harm**
New peer support and live chat services from SHNS have provided accessible, person-centred support to people who self-harm. National frameworks, such as the Framework for Collaboration to Improve Mental Health Distress and Crisis Response, have been developed to strengthen cross-sector responses to people in crisis. Local and national partners are embedding person-centred approaches by supporting the implementation of NICE AND NCISH guidelines and working alongside Suicide Prevention Scotland. The Provider Network connects third sector and statutory organisations to coordinate community support for people affected by self-harm, particularly those at highest risk. NHS Education for Scotland is developing person-centred risk management training for mental health practitioners.

¹ 28 November 2023 to 28 May 2025 - all evaluation stats are within this timeframe

- **Priority 3: Review, improve and share data and evidence to drive improvements in support and service responses for people who have self-harmed or are at risk of doing so.**

Progress has been made in reviewing and enhancing self-harm data, with Public Health Scotland assessing current self-harm data for quality and completeness. Research led by the University of Edinburgh has deepened understanding of self-harm data, while research from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde highlighted best practices in responding to self-harm. Public Health Scotland has developed a pilot evidence and gap map focused on children and young people, highlighting risks and effective interventions. The Scottish Government explored barriers to accessing support and services for people who self-harm. While these efforts provide an important foundation, further work is needed to strengthen data collection and usage.

Key Learnings and Next Steps

Over the past 18 months, we have made good progress towards our vision of improving support for people affected by self-harm. Persistent challenges include service capacity, ongoing stigma and discrimination, and limitations in data quality. These insights will shape the focus of delivery in the second half of the Strategy period, as we work to embed learning, understand what works, and work towards our mid-term outcomes.



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Edinburgh
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