

Press release: PM pledges action on suicide to mark World Mental Health Day

The Samaritans' helpline will remain free for the next four years with support from the government, Theresa May announced today as she marked World Mental Health Day.

New government funding – up to £1.8 million – will help ensure the charity can continue to provide immediate and lifesaving support to everyone who needs it, 24 hours a day.

The Prime Minister also announced today that health minister Jackie Doyle-Price will become the UK's first Minister for Suicide Prevention.

Around 4,500 people take their own lives each year in England and suicide remains the leading cause of death for men under 45. In her new role, the minister will lead government efforts to cut the number of suicides and overcome the stigma that stops people seeking help.

The Minister will lead a new national effort on suicide prevention, bringing together a ministerial taskforce and working with national and local government, experts in suicide and self-harm prevention, charities, clinicians and those personally affected by suicide.

She will also ensure every local area has an effective suicide prevention plan in place, and look at how the latest technology can be used to identify those most at risk.

Half of all mental illness begins by the age of 14. The Prime Minister has made a series of further announcements today on children and young people's mental health:

- Recruitment has now begun for new mental health support teams who will work with schools to ensure young people with mental health issues get the help they need – trainees will begin studying in January and join schools across England next year
- Starting in 2019, the government will publish a 'State of the Nation' report every year on World Mental Health Day, highlighting the trends and issues in young people's mental well-being – the first time children's mental health will be reported in this way, alongside their physical health and academic attainment
- The government will provide tools to help schools measure their students' health, including their mental wellbeing – building on the commitment to make education in mental health and resilience a compulsory part of the curriculum

Speaking at a Downing Street reception to mark World Mental Health Day this

afternoon, Theresa May is expected to say:

When I first became Prime Minister, I stood on the steps of Downing Street and pledged to fight the burning injustices in our society.

There are few greater examples than the injustices facing those with mental health conditions. But together we can change that.

We can end the stigma that has forced too many to suffer in silence. We can prevent the tragedy of suicide taking too many lives. And we can give the mental wellbeing of our children the priority it so profoundly deserves.

...I have made parity of care a priority for our long-term plan for the NHS. As a result, our record investment in the NHS will mean record investment in mental health.

...We are not looking after our health if we are not looking after our mental health.

So we need true parity between physical and mental health – and not just in our health systems – but in our classrooms, workplaces and communities too.

The Prime Minister will also announce that the government's new campaign to train a million people in mental health awareness – Every Mind Matters – launches today with a pilot in the West Midlands ahead of a national rollout next Spring.

This week the Health Secretary Matt Hancock is hosting the first ever Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit in London, attended by ministers and representatives from over 50 countries as well as the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

In a landmark agreement, countries at the summit are expected to support a global declaration today to achieve equity for mental health – the first time national governments have come together on this scale to pledge to put mental health on an equal footing with physical health.

Responding to Jackie Doyle-Price's appointment as ministerial lead for suicide prevention, Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We're already making progress when it comes to suicide prevention – the suicide rate is at its lowest for seven years.

But we need to do more to challenge the stigma that people with mental ill-health face and make sure they feel they can reach out for help.

I am delighted we are appointing Jackie Doyle-Price as our

dedicated Minister for Suicide Prevention, and I know she will make a real difference.

Every suicide is a preventable death and we are determined to do everything we can to tackle the tragedy of suicide.

Jackie Doyle-Price, Minister for Mental Health, Inequalities and – now – Suicide Prevention, said:

I understand how tragic, devastating and long-lasting the effect of suicide can be on families and communities.

In my time as health minister I have met many people who have been bereaved by suicide and their stories of pain and loss will stay with me for a long time.

It's these people who need to be at the heart of what we do and I welcome this opportunity to work closely with them, as well as experts, to oversee a cross-government suicide prevention plan, making their sure their views are always heard.

Responding to the new government funding announced today, Samaritans CEO Ruth Sutherland said:

We welcome the government's announcement of funding towards Samaritans' helpline, which will meet around 10 per cent of the total helpline costs for the next four years and help us to continue to provide our service free of charge.

Samaritans' 20,000 volunteers are available at any time for anyone who is struggling to cope. We respond to more than five million requests for help a year.

This is an acknowledgement of the importance of our vital service.