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**PIETA
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CfL – Connecting for Life

StV – Sharing the Vision

IRG Report – Independent Review Group

NSHRI – National Self-Harm Registry Ireland

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

NOSP – National Office for Suicide Prevention

Pieta is calling on the government to prioritise the urgent issues of suicide and self-harm by investing **€3.5 million in Budget 2025** into Pieta's lifesaving national prevention, treatment and postvention services.

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Make Suicide Prevention a Priority

Foreword Summary

The government should invest €3.5 million into Pieta's services to maintain and develop lifesaving services.

No children or young people should be waiting for suicide and self-harm prevention services. An investment of €1.4 million would significantly strengthen Pieta's crisis services for children and young people.

Show the government's focus on suicide prevention by naming a Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

An urgent national conversation is needed on the issues of suicide and self-harm.

Pieta is calling for a transformation across government, media and society to meaningfully tackle and seriously reduce the number of people whose lives are lost or forever changed by these issues. Pieta is calling on the government to ensure that suicide prevention is given equal attention and importance as the Vision Zero ambitions of the Road Safety Authority. We need to see significant investment and coordination across health and social services so that people can get the life-saving supports they need when they need them.

Suicide is the leading cause of death for all those aged 15-34 years in Ireland¹.

Approximately 500 people die by suicide in Ireland each year -nearly triple the number of people who die on our roads.

The conversation about preventing suicide and self-harm can no longer be silent. Pieta is calling on the government to have this conversation and to prioritise suicide and self-harm prevention. The next government should appoint a Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to give much needed attention to this issue.

The impact of suicide and self-harm on individuals, families and communities across Ireland is devastating.

Tens of thousands of people struggle daily with thoughts of suicide and self-harm and many thousands more are supporting friends, family members or colleagues encountering these enormous challenges.

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Foreword summary continued

Suicide and self-harm come with a cost. The personal and emotional cost, as Pieta hear all-too-often, is immense.

Feelings of loss, grief, confusion, anger, fear and deep sadness are a feature of daily living for many people affected by suicide and self-harm.

But there is a financial cost too. It is estimated that the economic cost of suicide in the UK in 2022 was £9.58 billion – approximately £1.46 million for every one death. Thus, spending on suicide prevention supports and services should not be viewed as an expense but an investment.

Suicide and self-harm prevention is among the best value-for-money investments that can be made in any health service. Yet many charities, Pieta included, continue to rely heavily on the generosity of the Irish public to keep our doors open.

Pieta is the national organisation providing supports to people experiencing issues of suicide and self-harm across Ireland.

In 2023, almost 7,000 people attended free counselling with Pieta – 60% of these people were under the age of 25 and 40% were under 18 years.

Our 24/7 crisis helpline received more than 115,000 calls and texts. We supported more than 600 families who were bereaved by suicide.

No one should have to wait for suicide and self-harm prevention services, particularly children and young people.

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Recommendation 1

Secure, sustainable, multi-annual funding

1.

Budget Ask

Pieta is calling on the government to implement both the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Review Group (IRG Report) and Action 14 of Sharing the Vision (StV) by providing secure and sustainable, multi-annual funding to non-statutory services working towards the goals and actions of StV, Connecting for life (CfL) and other important national policies.

An immediate investment of €3.5 million is required to ensure Pieta’s services are secure and sustainable in 2025 and beyond.

Context

The IRG Report, established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in publicly funded health and personal social services, recognised that in most cases for voluntary organisations delivering health and social care services in Ireland, the majority of income is provided by the State².

Pieta is unusual in this regard, relying instead on public donations and fundraising for approximately 86% of our income.

Urgent need for sustainable funding

The government has accepted the need for sustainable funding for community and voluntary sector organisations clearly delivering against policy goals set out in CfL and StV. The IRG Report noted that the mental health sector urgently needs “a new [funding] relationship between the State and the voluntary sector”³ with funding relationships based on multi-annual arrangements.

This basic principle is also reflected in Action 14 of StV, which commits to secure and sustainable operational governance and funding models for non-statutory organisations providing services aligned to the outcomes of the policy.

Existing services are at risk

Existing services provided by Pieta, which support thousands of people affected by suicide and self-harm each year, are at significant risk without a sustainable funding model.

This was made more precarious by challenges in public fundraising that have arisen because of the cost-of-living crisis and changes in donation behaviour towards international emergencies.

Commit to supporting high quality service delivery

The government and the HSE must urgently deliver on their commitment to supporting high quality service delivery in the community and voluntary sector by providing multi-annual and sustainable funding that supports thousands of people across Ireland each year.

86%
of Pieta’s income comes from public donations and fundraising.

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Why Invest in Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Services?

The current programme for government made a commitment to supporting the implementation of Ireland's national strategy to reduce suicide, *Connecting for Life (CfL)*.

While significant advances have been made in supporting a whole-of-government approach to tackling the issues of suicide and self-harm, this has not been matched by meaningful funding increases for suicide prevention services in Ireland.

Between 2020 and 2023, funding for the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has increased from €13.3 million to €14.1 million with associated funding to charitable organisations delivering against *CfL* increasing by just €700,000, from €7 million to €7.7 million. This is despite substantial additional cost pressures over this same period coupled with significant and complex demands for services.

Each suicide is a tragedy, with the devastating effects being felt by the person's family and friends, as well as their communities, workplaces, schools and beyond.

Thousands of people each year seek support for issues of suicidal ideation and self-harm.

This also has a significant impact on support networks of families and friends who care deeply about their loved ones.

Last year, Pieta supported nearly 7,000 people affected by issues of suicide and self-harm across Ireland, including those who have been bereaved by suicide.

We provided more than 50,000 free therapy appointments with qualified, accredited and highly experienced therapists who inspire hope for people in dark places. Our crisis phone and textline answered more than 102,000 calls and texts last year.

Our community and home support service helped more than 600 families who had been bereaved by suicide. All of these services are funded predominantly by the Irish public, who support Pieta each year with significant donations that enable us to do our work.

600

families supported by Pieta who were bereaved by suicide in 2023

102,000

calls and texts answered by Pieta's 24/7 Crisis Helpline

7,000

people attended Pieta's counselling services for issues of suicide and self-harm across Ireland in 2023

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Recommendation 2:

Urgent investment in suicide and self-harm prevention services for under 25s

2.

Budget Ask

No child or young person should be required to wait for urgent care and support in a time of crisis.

Pieta is calling on the government to invest in coordinated care for suicide prevention services for the under 25s across Ireland. €1.4 million would support secure and continued Pieta services for this group across Ireland.

Suicide is the leading cause of death for all those aged between 15-34 years of age in Ireland.

Last year, 60% of all of Pieta's clients, or approximately 4,000 young people, were under the age of 25. A further 14%, or just under 1,000 people, were between 26-35 years of age.

Context

Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death for 15-29 year olds globally⁴, however, in Ireland it was the number one cause of death in 2020 for all those aged 15-34 years⁵.

Within the EU in 2021, Ireland had the 9th highest rate of suicide for those aged 15-19 years⁶.

According to the the National Self-Harm Registry Ireland (NSHRI), in 2023, the highest rate of self-harm in females was in the 15-19-year-old age category, where one in every 113 females of this age group presented to an emergency department for self-harm.

The peak rate for males was in the 20-24-year-old age category, where one in 258 males of this age presented to an emergency department for self-harm in 2021⁷.

€1.4m

of Budget 2025 should be invested in Pieta's counselling services to maintain and strengthen these critical supports.

15-34

Suicide is the leading cause of death for all those aged 15-34 years in Ireland.

EU 2021

Ireland had the 9th highest rate of suicide for those aged 15-19 years.

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Our young people need support

Young people are a demographic cohort vulnerable to suicidal ideation and self-harm.

From My World Survey 2⁸, 23% of adolescents, aged 12-19 years reported that they self-harmed; 41% of adolescents had thoughts about taking their own life but reported that they would not do it; and 6% of adolescents reported that they had attempted suicide, with rates similar across genders and school years.

For young adults aged 18-25 years, 63% had thought about taking their own life but they would not do it; 38% reported that they had self-harmed without wanting to die; 12% had self-harmed, wanting to take their own life; and 10% had attempted suicide.

There are ongoing systemic challenges in the provision of timely and coordinated mental healthcare in Ireland. Long waiting lists are a barrier to timely and effective care, particularly for those aged under 18 years.

In February 2023, 21,132 people were waiting for Primary Care Psychology Services, of which 18,588 (88%) were children and young people⁹. Of these 18,588 young people, 7,500 (40%) were waiting for more than a year.

The waiting list to access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has increased from 2,755 in December 2020 to 4,434 at the end of February in 2023¹⁰.

According to the Mental Health Commission's Independent Review of CAMHS in the State,¹¹ the average number of days children waited for a mental health assessment of deliberate self-harm, suicidal intent and suicidal ideation were 65, 23 and 73 days respectively. In comparison, the average wait time for assessment with Pieta in 2023 for clients under 18 years of age was seven days.

An urgent and coordinated response is required in order to ensure effective and timely care is provided to children and young people affected by the issues of suicide and self-harm.

As a national specialist service, Pieta is ideally placed to support this response, with capacity, scale and strong clinical governance. With increasing demand on our service, it is important that Pieta receives increased, sustainable government funding to ensure that all those on our waiting list continue to receive treatment in a timely manner.

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Recommendation 3

Show the government's commitment to suicide prevention by appointing a Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

3.

Budget Ask

Pieta is calling on the government to show their prioritisation of suicide and self-harm prevention by naming Ireland's first Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

This Minister should lead on actions and initiatives aimed at reducing the rates of suicide and self-harm across Ireland. Among the many responsibilities of this role, the Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention should commit to reducing waiting lists for children and adolescents experiencing suicidal ideation or engaging in self-harm; sustaining the life-saving suicide prevention, treatment and postvention services, supports, activities and actions provided by community and voluntary sector organisations; and supporting better collaboration between statutory and non-statutory agencies.

They should promote efficiency and integration of services. Leadership on suicide prevention at a government level is urgently needed to address this widespread issue, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Context

In 2018, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Theresa May, appointed what is considered to be the world's first Minister for Suicide Prevention.

The establishment of this portfolio was a clear demonstration of the government's intent to reduce rates of suicide and to address barriers to help-seeking. Just over 20 years on from the decriminalisation of suicide in Ireland, much more remains to be achieved in addressing the silence that surrounds suicide and bringing about the type of transformation required to reduce suicide in Ireland. Appointing a Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention would give clear visibility to the issue of suicide in Ireland and signal the government's intention to prioritise the prevention of suicide. It is critical that suicide remains high on the government's agenda.

Aim

- Prioritise the issue of suicide prevention in Ireland.
- Sustain life-saving suicide prevention, treatment and postvention services, supports, activities and actions provided by community and voluntary sector organisations.
- Reduce waiting lists for children and adolescents experiencing suicidal ideation or engaging in self-harm.
- Support better collaboration between suicide support services.
- Improve efficiency for non-statutory service providers by eliminating the need for single year funding application and reporting timelines.
- Promote integration of services by facilitating multi-annual service planning and service level agreements.
- Reduce the rates of suicide and self-harm.

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About Pieta

Our Work

Pieta is Ireland's leading charity providing free and professional services and supports to people affected by the issues of suicide, self-harm and suicide bereavement.

Our services

PREVENTION:

Community education and training programmes including 'Know Suicide. Know the Signs.' and Darkness into Light.

SCHOOL PROGRAMMES:

Resilience Academy and the Amber Flag Programme.

INTERVENTION:

Crisis intervention counselling for people experiencing suicidal ideation and/or self-harm and a 24/7 crisis helpline and textline.

POSTVENTION:

Direct support to families and communities in the immediate aftermath of a death by suicide and suicide bereavement counselling.

While Pieta's national services are open to all, over 60% of our clients are under the age of 25 years and 40% are under the age of 18 years.

All our therapy services are provided by qualified and accredited counsellors and psychotherapists, and they are completely free of charge.

Pieta provides the only 24/7 national crisis helpline that is fully staffed by qualified counsellors. We provide the only nationally coordinated Suicide Bereavement Liaison Service.

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Suicide in Ireland

Tragically, despite the immense efforts of families, friends, supporters, communities, service providers and those battling crisis, 504 people died by suicide in 2020, the most recent complete set of statistics on suicide from the Central Statistics Office¹².

While this number represents a drop of 6% from the 2019 figures, Pieta understands that even one suicide is too many. Suicide is a public health problem that spans all age groups and genders.

While the highest proportion of 2020 suicide deaths were among those aged 40–44 years, it was also the number one cause of death for all those aged 15-34 years. Furthermore, approximately 10% of deaths due to suicide were to those aged 65 or older. Each of the 366 men and 138 women who died by suicide in 2020 was a person with hopes, potential and people who cared deeply for them.

Pieta cautiously welcomes the overall trend of decline in deaths by suicide since the 585 recorded in 2012. However, we remain concerned that almost 20 years on from the publication of Reach Out, Ireland’s first suicide prevention strategy, suicide and self-harm rates remain alarmingly prevalent, particularly among young people and at-risk groups such as members of the Traveller community, the LGBTQI+ community, people experiencing homelessness and others.

Suicide is a complex issue and addressing the myriad of factors that lead to suicide and self-harm means supporting people from all walks of life in many different ways.

Self-harm in Ireland

The NSHRI estimated that a total of 12,661 self-harm presentations were made by 9,533 individuals to 30 hospitals across Ireland in 2021¹³.

Again, Pieta cautiously welcomes the 2% reduction in the age-standardised rate of individuals presenting to hospital following self-harm in 2021 compared to 2020 (196 per 100,000 compared to 200 per 100,000)¹⁴.

However, it should be noted that self-harm data in Ireland is based solely on presentations to hospitals, and therefore, it is likely an underestimate of the true extent of this issue. It is of due concern that the age of onset of self-harm behaviour is decreasing and younger people are particularly at risk. In 2021, one in every 113 females aged 15-19 years presented to a hospital for self-harm.

504

people died by suicide in 2020.

15–19 years

In 2021, one in every 113 females aged 15-19 years presented to a hospital for self-harm.

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