

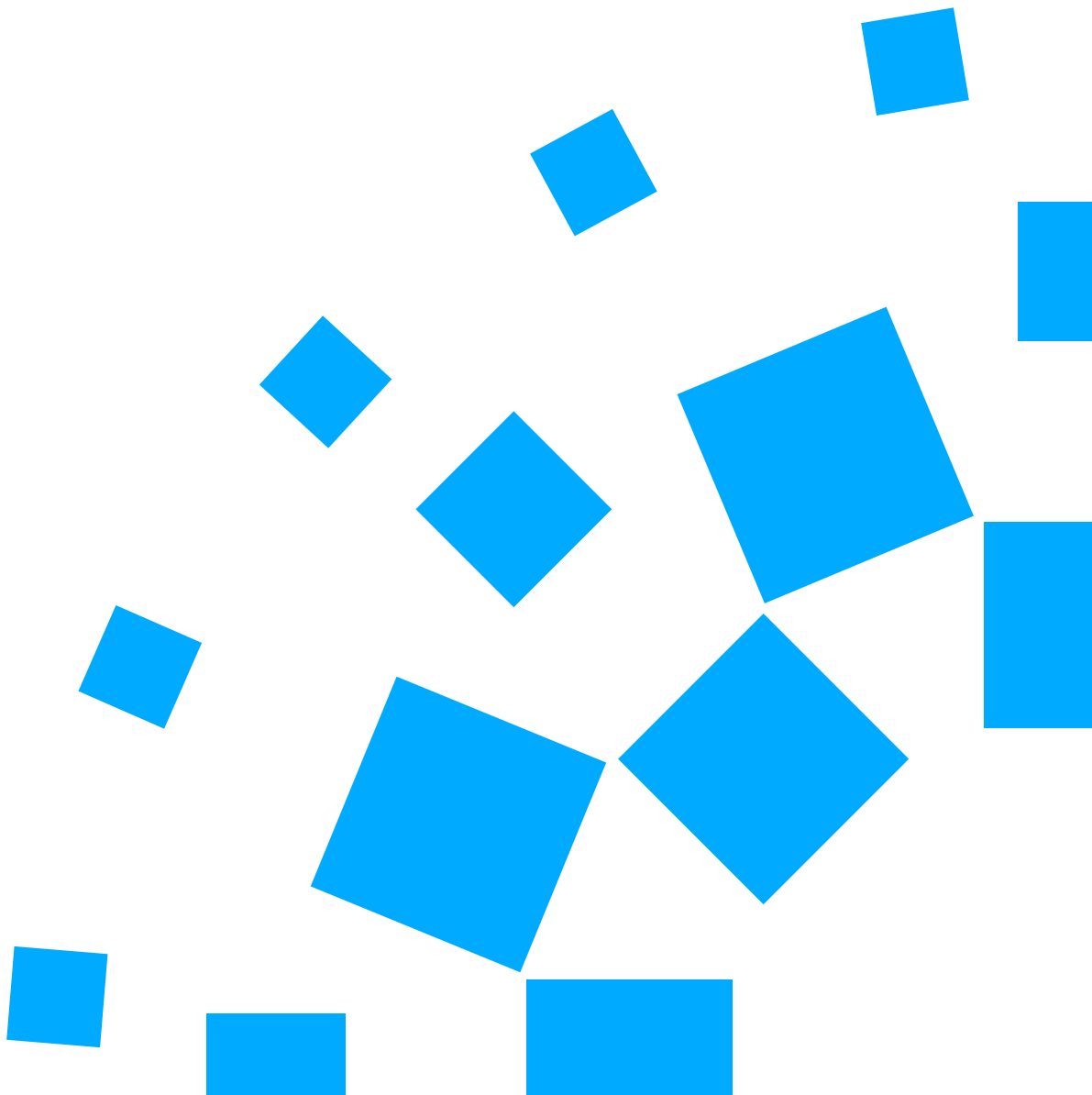
College of
Policing



The National Police
Wellbeing Service

Working together to prevent suicide in the police service

Next steps



“Suicide in the workplace is relatively uncommon, but when it happens, it is not only a tragic loss of life, but also has a profound and lasting impact on colleagues and the organisation.”

Business in the Community and Public Health England, 2020

Introduction

Suicide has wide-ranging effects that can have a devastating, long-lasting impact on families, friends, colleagues and others (Public Health England, 2020). As such, the primary goal is to help police forces in England and Wales to reduce the risk of suicide among officers and staff. The best foundation for suicide prevention is a holistic approach to overall wellbeing and health. This reassures employees of its importance, and encourages openness in relation to worries and concerns (Business in the Community and Public Health England, 2020).

This document highlights the recommendations for action that have been developed in relation to suicide prevention in policing. These recommendations will further progress the commitments made in the suicide prevention consensus statement, relevant to policing within the Home Office police forces in England and Wales.

This document is supported by the additional publications ‘Suicide prevention in policing: Current landscape’ and ‘Working together to prevent suicide in the police service: A national consensus statement for England and Wales’. This series of resources supports senior leaders, line managers and occupational health professionals in providing the best possible support to staff in terms of mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Commit to delivery

Most people spend around one-third of their lives at work, so employers have an important role to play in suicide prevention (Business in the Community and Public Health England, 2020). We know how demanding working in the police service can be, not only for those in frontline roles, but also those within any manner of supporting functions. Prevention of suicide in policing in England and Wales relies upon creating the appropriate culture in order for mental health and wellbeing to thrive. Supporting all staff to look after their mental health and wellbeing is of vital importance and is a key focus of all primary signatories to the consensus.

All signatory partners must commit to protecting the mental health and wellbeing of all staff, by working together to deliver the agreed actions outlined within the consensus document.

Recommendation 2: Record deaths where suicide is suspected

As outlined in the ‘Suicide prevention in policing: Current landscape’ document, there is currently a lack of an established evidence base in relation to suicide or suspected suicide within UK policing. It is recommended that data on suspected suicide incidents involving police officers and staff is recorded by forces. This will provide a meaningful, auditable record of every future workforce death or serious injury.

This was also recommended in the 2020 Officer and Staff Safety Review (OSSR), where it was suggested that a structured reporting system to allow for recording and collation of all future workforce deaths should be created. A project led by the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) is currently ongoing to create a national database, in order to record all death and serious injury incidents involving officers, staff or volunteers in the execution of their duty. This would include suspected suicide incidents. In addition, it is recommended that the current lack of Office for National Statistics data on police staff suicides should be rectified.

Recommendation 3: Evidence the progress of change

Associated with the above, accurate statistical data and information is the foremost way in which to guide useful and accepted means of prevention (ie, evidence-based interventions to improve mental health and wellbeing, as well as reducing the number of attempted and completed suicides).

The primary signatory partners are committed to supporting sustainable improvement to the health and wellbeing of all staff within policing. It is vitally important that employers provide appropriate and timely support to those in need. Individual forces should have interventions in place to support mental health and wellbeing in staff. These should be robustly scrutinised with regard to effectiveness. Employees should be comfortable in approaching line managers and, in turn, those line managers should have the tools and confidence to respond appropriately. In addition, line managers must be able to access support quickly and rely on supporting departments, such as Occupational Health (Business in the Community and Public Health England, 2020).

Evidencing progress is essential. Forces need to demonstrate relevant organisational learning, show that action has been taken and engage with interested parties.

Recommendation 4: Support the supporters

Family and friends of police officers and staff provide invaluable support on a daily basis. It is therefore important that they also have access to adequate support, in order to protect their own mental health and wellbeing. Proposals of the Police Covenant include a focus on protection, health and wellbeing, and support for families (Home Office, 2020). Working hand in hand with existing provision both in-force and via the National Police Wellbeing Service, this seeks to build on and enhance existing services. As such, it is suggested that a mechanism is established to share best-practice approaches to engage with and support family and friends.

Recommendation 5: Commission the provision of a postvention toolkit

A proactive suicide prevention strategy could reduce the risk, yet we still need to be prepared to deal with a suicide if it happens. To demonstrate our commitment further, we are commissioning the production of a postvention toolkit, specifically for policing, in order to help guide staff to manage the impact and to provide further support. 'Postvention' is the word used for activities to assist in the aftermath of a suicide (Business in the Community and Public Health England, 2020). There is no single correct way to respond to a suicide. However, effective postvention guidance can ensure that timely and appropriate care and support is provided. Once this toolkit is completed, it can be incorporated into the Blue Light Wellbeing Framework to further assist forces in benchmarking.

References

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About the College

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

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