



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,
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Deputy Mark Ward
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

8th March 2024

PQ Number: 1407/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health for an update on Traveller specific mental health awareness campaigns; the level of engagement his Department has had with local Traveller groups for these campaigns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Mark Ward

Dear Deputy Ward,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Nationally, The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) continues to support the work of Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service, which provides a range of Traveller-specific mental health and suicide prevention services to and with the Traveller community through local partnership. This work and funding is aligned with Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide (2015-2024). Their aim is to improve the overall wellbeing of Travellers and reduce the likelihood of suicide or self-harm within the community. Their services include:

- Individual supports such as counselling, social work, family support and peer support. Their main areas of focus include homelessness, accommodation advocacy, depression, suicidal crisis, addiction, financial pressure, child protection issues, discrimination, legal/justice issues, sexual abuse, family relationships, bereavement and physical health.
- Delivery of 16-week college preparation courses for members of the Traveller community.
- The promotion of education and training programmes including Mental Health First Aid Ireland training.
- General mental health promotion and suicide prevention information activities for the community.

Funding is also provided (through CHO8) to the Travelling to Wellbeing Programme, delivered on an ongoing basis by Offaly Traveller Movement.



Additional investment from the HSE NOSP has supported the completion of innovative research recently, including:

- “What’s your story?” Exploring the acceptability of a digital storytelling intervention to promote mental health and wellbeing among Traveller men affected by suicide.
- Closing the gap: Exploring the co-variates of suicidality among Irish Travellers Project.
- Traveller Mental Wellness Continuum: A qualitative peer research study of Travellers’ views.

Mental Health Operations also fund the Traveller Counselling Service, which is a culturally sensitive service providing in person, online and telephone counselling to the Travelling Community.

Within each CHO there are Mental health Service Coordinators, work collectively for/with Travellers in promoting positive mental health outcomes/experiences for Travellers in the form of a national strategic approach, working with Travellers and Services Providers and all relevant stakeholders. Other HSE regional campaigns which are run with local Traveller groups are:

Mid West:

Social Inclusion and a range of Voluntary Agencies are working with Traveller Groups and the Traveller Primary Healthcare Projects in the Mid West Area on an ongoing basis to develop and implement Traveller Mental Health Awareness Initiatives and Campaigns. Including:

- Initiative in progress in partnership with GOSHH organisation (Gender Orientation, Sexual Health and HIV) and the five Primary Healthcare Projects for Travellers in the region to develop a regional response to the findings of Unveiling Inequality – The Experiences of LGBTI+ Traveller and Roma research report that was commissioned by the National Action Group for LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Rights.
- Mental Health Service Traveller Engagement initiative in progress in partnership with the five Primary Healthcare Projects for Travellers in the Mid West region with the aim of improving access and engagement with the HSE adult community Mental Health Service by Travellers who need the service.
- Initiative in progress for a pilot Traveller Counselling project to inform service development in North Tipperary in partnership with local development company, local Primary Healthcare Project for Travellers and the National Traveller Counselling Service.
- All mental health recovery education resources and workshops prepared/facilitated by the Mid West ARIES (Advancing Recovery in Ireland Education Services) team are shared with Traveller groups in the region.
<https://midwestaries.eventbrite.ie>
- Mid West ARIES is currently working with North Tipperary Traveller Primary Healthcare Project to potentially identify a member(s) of the Traveller community to train as facilitator(s) of recovery education workshops.
- Mid West Office for Suicide Prevention have delivered and continue to deliver specialist training as requested to the 5 Traveller Primary Healthcare Projects and 2 Traveller Community Development Projects in the region.
- Mid West Office for Suicide Prevention supported the bereavement support group for Travellers in Clare in 2023 in partnership with local Traveller Primary Healthcare Project.



Mid West Office for Suicide Prevention currently working with the National Traveller Mental Health Service, Exchange House Ireland, to support delivery of SafeTALK training for the Traveller community in the region.

<https://bookwhen.com/suicidepreventiontrainingmw>

- Mid West Office for Suicide Prevention currently working with Traveller representatives and Traveller groups in the region to identify a member(s) of the Traveller community to train as a suicide awareness trainer(s) and deliver this training in the community.
- Mid West Office for Suicide Prevention supports community responses in the aftermath of suicide in the Traveller community in the Mid West.

Midlands:

Current projects built with and for Travellers include:

- 'Minding my mind' Coproduced Mental Health Promotion Training and resources for Traveller Health Worker Teams.
- 'Minding Mums' Perinatal Mental Health Pilot with Traveller Mums in Kilkenny.
- Collaborative Creative Art Projects in each county with Wellness key messaging incorporated in collaboration with MHS.
- 'Sailing into Wellness' programmes rolled out with Traveller groups with option of further training to be instructors.
- Traveller Wellbeing Awareness Workers funded by HSE employed by THP through Section 39 Agreements.
- Traveller Mental Health Liaison Nurse posts across three counties.
- New Regional LGBT+ Steering Group set up in collaboration with Traveller Projects to raise awareness and education on LGBT+.

Dublin South and Wicklow:

Current projects built with and for Travellers include:

- Fishing Futures; in this peer led project, Traveller men & Settled men volunteer together, supported by the Traveller Mental Health Coordinator and Wicklow Travellers' Group.
- Recovery in Colour with ARCHES Recovery College; this programme is being delivered to the Co Wicklow Traveller PHC workers and an active age group of Traveller women. This initiative is supported by Traveller M.H Coordinator.
- Co Wicklow Travellers Mental Health Steering Group: this group is running a series of "Lunchtime Discussion's", on issues that impact Traveller's mental health as well as looking to progress the recommendations from the Co Wicklow Traveller Mental Health Report 2019.
- The Wagon Project was initiated and led by two Traveller men who passed on the tradition of Wagon building to the younger generation. The aim of the project was to promote positive mental health among Traveller men and young Travellers, through culturally appropriate means. Supported by Traveller M.H Coordinator and R.O.S.P. Launch of wagon build documentary on 4th March in Lexicon Library.
- Access to mainstream sport; Traveller M.H Coordinator is working with a local club to support engagement in mainstream sport's clubs with Traveller men.



Healing Untold Grief Groups - HUGG, replicated this interagency approach in CHO6, with the Traveller Community/Traveller organisations via consultations and information on training opportunities within HUGG for Traveller Peer Bereavement facilitators.

- Connecting For Life; Traveller M.H Coordinator worked closely with R.O.S.P and local Traveller projects to develop specific actions for the Connecting For Life Implementation Plan in CHO6.

Dublin West Wicklow & Kildare:

Current projects built with and for Travellers include:

- Peer facilitator training for HUGG, in collaboration with CHO 6 & 9.
- Traveller Women Health Fair held in Newbridge February 21st in collaboration with KTA (Kildare Traveller Action) which was attended by a number of service providers including numerous HSE information stands.
- Connecting For Life Implementation groups. There are 3 CFL regions in CHO7 Dublin South, Dublin South City and Kildare West Wicklow. Traveller voice and input is a core part of the implementation group to ensure that this identified target group is engaged. Traveller specific Safetalk event is currently being planned for April in the Dublin South area.
- Critical response Plan development in conjunction with CHO 6 & 9 within the ERTU Mental Health Subgroup.
- Expansion of the Traveller Youth Positive Mental Health through Copper Art programme across the Eastern region.
- Representation on the Steering Groups and Mental Health Steering Groups of the Traveller Projects across DSKWW.
- Traveller engagement in the ExWell programme in Tallaght and potentially Kildare area. This programme is for individuals who are experiencing chronic illness which impacts on mental health.

Dublin North City and County:

Current projects built with and for Travellers include:

- Working from an interagency approach with the Traveller Community/Traveller organisations via consultations and information on training opportunities within HUGG for Traveller Peer Bereavement facilitators. HUGG will provide free bereavement training and supports. Three Consultations have taken place within CHO9, CHO7 and CHO6, which was lead out in CHO9 and to date there has been a real interest/uptake by Travellers wishing to become Peer Bereavement facilitators. This is ongoing and is a named action in NTHAP.
- Positive Traveller Mental Health Via Copper Art, working in partnership with HSE, Traveller organisations, the Traveller community and Mental Health Service such as, Pieta, Jigsaw, HUGG, Traveller Counselling Service, Bodywise etc. to provide /facilitate awareness workshops on mental health. community.

A Steering group was established with representation from both Travellers and Services to promote Traveller Mental Health, they aim:



- To have a full Copper Art Exhibition on completion of the six workshops, with young Travellers given an overview on the copper art they did and what it means in terms of mental health.
 - That the Mental health pilot will be rolled out regionally and Nationally.
 - That a working group will be set up with one Traveller rep from each workshop session (six in total) to ensure the identified mental health needs of Travellers is a priority on all mental health fora's. Through the evaluation process Travellers have identified this as an excellent way of engagement and encouragement of open mental health conversations as well as proving relationship and pathways with Service providers.
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- Critical Response Planning, in collaboration with HSE and THU Mental Health Sub Group the development of a CRP is being developed firstly to respond to the needs as they arise with regards suicides, tragedy's, incidents within the Traveller community, also providing care plans and supports for Traveller Primary Health Care Teams who, live and work in the Community and are impacted directly.
 - Traveller Mental Health Discussions/Events, working with Traveller Projects in identifying themes with regards mental health for Travellers and Mental health Services. The aim is to bring awareness of the lived experiences for Travellers of mental health and its impacts, this is done through lunch-time conversation with Services, Travellers and all relevant stakeholders including the Traveller Counselling Services. This was an identified action following research conducted with Travellers via the Traveller Primary health Care and Traveller Projects and continues to grow and takes place in a number of CHOs across the country.
 - National Traveller MAB's. Working in collaboration in identifying the links between mental health and poverty and to develop resources and signposting in addressing same.
 - The Traveller Health Unit, Mental Health Sub Group, are working towards collective actions in addressing Traveller Mental health via awareness, resources, and planning in line with the National Traveller Health Action Plan via the THU structure.
 - Traveller Community Outreach, continue to develop and enhance relationships re mental health one to one and collective supports for and with the Traveller Community.
 - Mental Health Services Engagement, continue to develop/improve the links/resources/communication with Mental Health Services and the Traveller Community.
 - Traveller Engagement Experiences Research, the launch of Research Report and its findings on Traveller lived experience in engagement with the Mental health Services in CHO 9 will take place in the coming months, this research was done in partnership with Dr Brian Keogh Trinity College, HSE, Traveller NGO's and Traveller community to gain the experiences of Travellers engaging within Mental Health Services.

This is not a prescriptive list as engagement is reactive to local settings and issues across the Country.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



Tony Mc Cusker
General Manager
National Mental Health Services