

# Response to the Suicide Prevention Strategy Consultation

## Submission from the Scottish Youth Parliament

### December 2021



The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government and COSLA's consultation on a New Suicide Prevention Strategy for Scotland. As we have not had an opportunity to consult young people on the specific questions in this consultation, this paper outlines SYP policy which is relevant to the consultation topics. Our policy is made by young people, following consultation with young people.

There is more information about SYP and our work on young people's mental health on page three.

#### Theme: Prevention

**"The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that the Scottish Government, local authorities and NHS should ensure mental health support is a priority during COVID-19 pandemic and the following recovering period." 96% agree, Committee Motion, passed July 2020.**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on young people's mental health. We have heard through all of our consultation activities that many young people are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and unsure where to go for help. Concerns about education, exams, and future prospects has further exacerbated Scotland's existing mental health epidemic. Failure to support young people's mental health will be a failure to deliver their right to the best possible health.

In April 2020, SYP, Young Scot, and YouthLink Scotland published *Lockdown Lowdown* - a report showing what young people in Scotland were thinking about COVID-19 during the first lockdown. This report contains the results of a survey carried out at the start of lockdown which received 2,421 completed responses.

- Nearly two-fifths (39%) stated that they were extremely or moderately concerned about their mental wellbeing.

A further consultation was carried out in November 2020 to find out young people's experiences as lockdown restrictions change. This consultation included a survey of over 6,000 young people from across Scotland, and a number of focus groups with young people from seldom heard groups.

- Nearly two-fifths (38%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I feel good about my mental health and wellbeing'.

The majority of respondents noted that their mental health had experienced some form of decline during the coronavirus outbreak. This included those who had never experienced mental health problems before. Others were concerned about the impact of another lockdown or the longer-term impact of the outbreak on their mental health. Some described a general increase in fear, disrupting their normal lives. Others expressed a wish to return to normality.

Several respondents highlighted the need for mental health issues to be prioritised, noting a decrease in access to support. This also included the inability to see or contact their usual support networks.

The following statements are current SYP policy, sorted into themes, which has been created through consultation with young people in Scotland:

*Mental health support in education settings:*

**“There should be more investment in college and university welfare services, such as mental health support, pastoral care, advice services, and housing support.” 86% agree, [From Scotland’s Young People](#) - SYP’s 2021-26 youth manifesto commitment, November 2020**

*Mental health support for young people in rural communities:*

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that the mental health problems facing the rural youth communities, including young farmers, have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic and calls on decision makers to provide additional support to tackle this.” 88% agree, Committee Motion, passed July 2020.**

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that local and national governments should invest more in infrastructure and opportunities for young people in rural communities, to help tackle rural isolation and improve mental health outcomes.” 91% agree, Members’ Motion, passed March 2020.**

*Loneliness:*

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament acknowledges that loneliness in young people is a serious issue which can negatively impact mental health, and calls on the Scottish Government to tackle this by urgently implementing the actions outlined in their Social Isolation and Loneliness Strategy.” 94% agree, Members’ Motion, passed March 2020.**

*Mental health support for young carers and care experienced young people:*

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to recognise and ensure support for the mental health of young carers through providing a toolkit or online resource for young carers in Scotland.” 96% agree, Members’ Motion, passed October 2019.**

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there should be a greater awareness that children and young people growing up in Scotland’s care system are at a greater risk of poor mental health outcomes than the wider population. The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland should work with relevant organisations to ensure that the needs of these young people are being met with accessible, sustainable and high quality mental health services.” 99% agree, Members’ Motion, passed April 2018, extended August 2021.**

*Mental health support for LGBT young people:*

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament recognises that there is an increased risk of poor mental health among LGBT young people, and therefore calls for more support to be made available by the private and public sector to ensure that all LGBT young people in Scotland are supported.” 91% agree, Members’ Motions, passed October 2019.**

*Mental health support for young males:*

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that more effort and resources should be put into preventing male suicide.” 95% agree, Members’ Motion, passed March 2016, extended January 2021.**

## Theme: Early Intervention

**“There should be mandatory training for those working in education and health care settings on how to identify mental health problems and provide support for all young people, especially those most at risk.” - 89% agree, [From Scotland’s Young People](#) - SYP’s 2021-26 youth manifesto commitment, November 2020**

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament is concerned that many NHS Boards are still failing to meet CAMHS waiting time targets, and believes a focus on achieving shorter waiting times must be a priority.” 96% agree, Members’ Motion, passed October 2020.**

**Theme: Crisis Intervention**

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that, as well as the right to life, everyone should have the right to die, and as a result calls on the Scottish Government to legalise assisted suicide for those with terminal and life-limiting illnesses to relieve patients of terminal suffering and pain.” 67% agree, Members’ Motion, passed October 2018.**

**Theme: Tackling Stigma / Raising Awareness**

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there is a need for suicide awareness training in Scottish high schools.” 99% agree, Members’ Motion, passed October 2019.**

**“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes that there should be a greater awareness of ‘invisible disabilities’ (debilitating illnesses and conditions with no visible symptoms), and that more support should be provided in schools for those who have them.” 97% agree, Members’ Motion, passed October 2017, extended November 2020.**

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## The Scottish Youth Parliament

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis for the Scottish Youth Parliament's (SYP's) vision, mission and values. In particular, SYP embodies Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that young people have the right to express their views freely and have their opinions listened to in all matters affecting them. As a completely youth-led charity, the words and sentiment of Article 12 have profound importance for our work.

### Our Vision

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure young people in Scotland grow up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

### Our Mission

SYP is a rights-based charity, with members supported by all of Scotland's 32 local authorities and 11 National Voluntary Organisations.

SYP's mission is to provide a national platform for young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, and campaign for changes to the nation that they live in. We support our members in their work by training them, supporting their personal development, and empowering them, using a youth work ethos.

Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people in every community across the country and ensure that decision-makers listen to their voices.

### Our Values

- **Democracy** - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14 to 25. Our democratic structure and the scale of our engagement across Scotland gives us a mandate that sets us apart from other organisations.
- **Rights** - We are a rights-based organisation. We are passionate about making young people aware of their rights, and ensuring that local and national governments uphold their rights.
- **Inclusion and Diversity** - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure policymakers and politicians hear the voices of young people from every community and background in Scotland.
- **Political Impartiality** - We are independent from all political parties. By working with all stakeholders, groups, and individuals who share our values, we deliver the policies that are most important to young people.

### SYP's work on young people's mental health

[Speak Your Mind](#) - SYP's 2016/17 national campaign, *Speak Your Mind*, focused on raising awareness of mental health, empowering young people to talk positively about mental health, and calling for accessible, high quality mental health services and information for all of Scotland's young people. It addressed three main themes:

- **Prevention:** Working to prevent mental health problems before they arise.
- **Early Intervention:** Recognising early warning signs of mental health problems and knowing how to positively intervene before they reach a critical stage.
- **Services and Support:** Improving the quality of services and support for young people with mental health problems.

The [Our generation's epidemic report](#) was published following consultation with 1,453 young people in spring 2016, making it the biggest consultation of its kind at the time. It makes 11 recommendations relating to mental health information, support, services, and rights.

[Our Minds Our Future](#) - *Our Minds Our Future* is a UK-wide project, supported in Scotland by the Scottish Youth Parliament and SAMH (Scottish Association of Mental Health). This is a 5 year project funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. *Our Minds Our Future* in Scotland calls on decision makers and service providers to take a human rights based approach to the design and delivery of community based mental health services for young people. Through 2020, our delivery group - young people aged 16-25 - carried out a literature review of existing research into young people's mental health services. They used this to develop eight recommendations to ensure community based mental health services best suit the needs of young people in Scotland, and to ensure young people's rights are upheld. Their recommendations were published in February 2021.

[Mind Yer Time](#) - *Mind Yer Time* is a [digital resource](#) which helps children and young people use screens and social media in a healthy way. The Scottish Youth Parliament developed this Scottish Government-funded project in partnership with the Children's Parliament. Scotland is the first country in the world to provide a digital resource to help children and young people learn about healthy use of screens and social media.

[Transition Care Plan](#) - At the invitation of the Scottish Government and CAMHS in Edinburgh, SYP and a group of young volunteers developed the Transition Care Plan (TCP). TCP helps children and young people navigate their transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services. Using a human rights-based approach, TCP puts young people's voices at the heart of this transition by enabling them to have their say and communicate vital information on areas such as their wellbeing, lifestyle, current treatment, and knowledge of the transition. This unique resource aids young people and clinicians in creating a smoother transition in what can be a difficult process and, as a result, improve the quality of treatment they receive.

**Lockdown Lowdown** - during the Covid-19 pandemic, SYP, YouthLink Scotland, and Young Scot collaborated on three phases of research to explore young people's views and experiences during the pandemic. Mental health featured heavily in all three of these reports:

- [Phase 1](#): Our initial survey gathered the views of almost 2,500 young people from across Scotland on their concerns about COVID-19. The survey results give a clear picture of what young people are currently worried about - and the impact it's having on their lives. This report was published in April 2020.
- [Phase 2](#): A second survey received over 6,000 responses from young people. Alongside the survey, phase 2 included a series of focus groups with young people whose voices are seldom heard - to identify if the pandemic has impacted pre-existing inequalities. The '[What young people in Scotland think about their lives as lockdown restrictions change](#)' report was published in February 2021 and included key findings from a demographic breakdown of young people's views.
- [Phase 3](#): For *LockdownLowdown 3* over 2500 young people from across Scotland were surveyed on their thoughts of future job prospects, education, youth work, and more between March 31st and June 1st 2021.

**Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Joint Delivery Board** - SYP is currently represented by three young people on the Joint Delivery Board. They also sit on the Community Task and Finish Group, and the Communications Task and Finish Group.