



**Speech by Martin Cullen, TD  
Minister for Social and Family Affairs  
at the launch of Waterford Area Partnership's**

***Reflecting the Challenge: An Integrated Action Plan for the Prevention of  
Suicide and Self-Harm in Waterford City***

**Friday 4 April 2008, 12 noon, The Ramada Hotel**

Mayor of Waterford, **Cllr Mary O'Halloran**; members of **Waterford City Council**; Chairperson of the Suicide Prevention Task Group, **Mr Joseph Mooney**; Director of the National Office for Suicide Prevention **Mr Geoff Day**; WAP Co-Ordinator, **Ms Maria Lindell**; other staff present from **Waterford Area Partnership**, the **HSE** and from **Pobal**; members of the Suicide Prevention **Task Group**; invited **guests; ladies** and **gentlemen**:

I am very pleased to be here this afternoon and I would like to thank Maria Lindell, Community Based Youth Initiative Co-ordinator for inviting me to launch Waterford Area Partnership's ***Integrated Action Plan for the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm in Waterford City.***

Just on the 7 March last I had the pleasure of presenting certificates on behalf of Waterford Area Partnership to its Business Training Network graduates and I am happy to be here with the Partnership once again, to mark another significant initiative – the launch of this important Action Plan.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate all those involved in preparing this ***Action Plan.*** I would particularly like to acknowledge **Waterford Area**



**Partnership** who in association with the **Regional Suicide Resource Office** of the **Health Service Executive** established a **Suicide Prevention Task Group** in November 2005 to raise awareness about suicide and suicide prevention in Waterford City.

I am pleased that the Task Group provided the people of Waterford City with the opportunity to contribute to the development of the **Action Plan**. I am sure that the consultation seminar in June 2006 and an open public meeting in January 2007, together with the distribution of the youth questionnaire in September 2007 has provided valuable input from the local community towards its formation. I understand over two hundred people participated in this preliminary research process.

The **Plan** identifies worthy Action Areas which are designed to:

- build resilience or protection at a community level;
- develop crisis intervention services;
- enhance services and supports for survivors;
- and enhance supports for families, individuals and communities affected by suicide and deliberate self-harm.

As I am sure you will agree, suicide affects all age groups and communities. In fact, few people escape being touched by the devastating effects of suicidal behaviour in their lifetime and the emotional, social and practical repercussions of suicide are felt by family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

Reducing suicide rates requires a collective, concerted effort from all groups in society: - health and social services, other professionals, communities and community leaders, voluntary and statutory agencies and organisations, parents, friends and neighbours.



It also requires fostering the development of a culture in which people in psychological distress do not hesitate to seek help - and a culture that recognises the signs and signals of distress and is willing to help. In working towards that goal, the role of organisations like the **Waterford Area Partnership** and the **Suicide Prevention Task Group** cannot be underestimated. By working with community groups and organisations to alleviate social disadvantage and supporting those in crisis you are helping to reduce the isolation and despair which can occur when people are faced with difficult circumstances.

We should be encouraged by the progress that has been made to date in the area of suicide prevention, in particular the launch of two important strategy documents; **"Reach Out"** - A National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention which was launched by the Government in September 2005 and **"A Vision for Change"** the Report of the Expert Group on Mental Health Policy in January 2006.

A fundamental aim of **"Reach Out"** is to prevent suicidal behaviour, including deliberate self-harm, and to increase awareness of the importance of good mental health among the general population. The establishment of the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), which is responsible for the implementation of **"Reach Out"**, also plays a vital part in developing and progressing suicide prevention initiatives.

**"A Vision for Change"** considers mental health as a resource that needs to be promoted and protected. The Report views mental health awareness and promotion as relevant to the whole population, regardless of age, social status or either physical health or mental health status. I am pleased to see that the



planned actions of your **Action Plan** are framed within the context of the "**Reach Out**" and "**A Vision for Change**".

The level of discussion and openness on mental health issues, including deliberate self harm and suicide has increased significantly in recent years. This is a very welcome development.

Mental health awareness campaigns launched by the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) and the National Disability Authority (NDA) in 2007 further highlight the importance of taking care of your mental health. They also help to reduce the stigma that is often associated with mental health issues.

The National Office has also developed a **webpage** entitled yourmentalhealth.ie. This webpage highlights things we can do to look after our mental health, and encourages us to look out for the people around us.

In conclusion, I wish to say that this **Government** - and in particular of course my colleague, **Dr Jimmy Devins TD** (Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children with responsibility for Disability and Mental Health), - shares the public concern about the levels of suicide in this country and is committed to the continued development of our mental health services in order to prevent the further tragic loss of life.

I would like to thank everyone involved with this **Integrated Action Plan for the Prevention of Suicide and Self-Harm in Waterford City**. The hard work, effort and dedication of all those involved is to be commended. Initiatives such as these are testament to your commitment to creating awareness of suicide and suicide prevention in this country and I am confident that you will



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provide a most worthwhile service to people in Waterford City. I wish you every success with all your future endeavours.

Thank you all very much.

Ends.

SPEECH ENDS