

Vacancy: Chairperson of the Suicide Reduction Policy Lived Experience Reference Group

June 2025

Position Title: Chairperson - Suicide Reduction Policy Lived Experience Reference Group

Background

The Irish Government's approach to suicide prevention, intervention and postvention (support after a tragedy has occurred) is set out in the Connecting for Life policy. It provides a comprehensive plan, based on the best international evidence, for how we can reduce levels of suicide in our country. Connecting for Life was launched in 2015 and came to an end in 2024. Connecting for Life is currently being evaluated to assess how well the different parts of the plan have worked. A final report is due in June 2025. At the same time, the Department of Health Mental Health Unit has begun working on a successor policy, which builds on the successes of the current one and takes account of new evidence. This policy is due to be completed by the end of 2025. The new policy will set out Government's approach to suicide reduction from 2026 onwards.

A public consultation process to inform the development of the next suicide reduction strategy was launched at the start of March and concluded at the end of May. This process has included 1,890 submissions from members of the public, seven in-person/online sessions with over 200 people and many more consultation meetings with specific interest groups. A thematic report from this process will be produced by the National Suicide Research Foundation before the end of June 2025.

The next stage of the process is the establishment of an Expert Policy Advisory Group and a Lived Experience Reference Group to make recommendations for the next policy. The role of the Lived Experience Reference Group is to provide expert advice from a lived experience perspective to the Department of Health on the development of the new Suicide Reduction policy. The Reference Group will run from July 2025 until March 2026 and will have at least eight members with a range of lived experience, including, experience of suicidal behaviour (i.e. thought about ending your life or attempted to do so), experience of suicide bereavement or experience of supporting a friend or family loved member through suicidal behaviour.

The Reference Group will be chaired by a facilitator with relevant expertise as well as lived experience of suicide. The Chair will also sit on the Expert Policy Advisory Group.

Position purpose

The Chairperson of the Lived Experience Reference Group provides leadership to ensure the effective functioning of the group and serves as the primary liaison between the group and the Department of Health Mental Health Unit and the Expert Policy Advisory Group. They will also be a member of the Expert Policy Advisory Group and should represent the views of the Reference Group at these meetings. This role requires someone with direct lived experience of suicide who can advocate for and represent diverse perspectives while facilitating meaningful conversation and collaboration amongst group members.

Position responsibilities

Leadership & Governance

- Chair all Lived Experience Reference Group meetings, ensuring they are conducted in an accessible, inclusive, and trauma-informed manner
- Work with the Department of Health Mental Health Unit to develop meeting agendas that reflect priorities of both the Reference Group and the Health Mental Health Unit
- Ensure all members have equal opportunity to contribute in ways that respect their lived experience and capabilities
- Guide the Lived Experience Advisory Group in establishing ground rules/ways of working
- Together with the Chair of the Expert Policy Advisory Group, develop a report of recommendations for the Department of Health
- Maintain confidentiality and establish appropriate boundaries regarding personal and sensitive information

Representation & Advocacy

- Sit on the Expert Policy Advisory Group and represent the views of the Lived Experience Reference Group
- Represent diverse lived experiences beyond personal perspective
- Advocate for the meaningful integration of lived experience perspectives in the development of the new policy
- Challenge organisational thinking and practices, when necessary, while maintaining constructive relationships

Relationship Building

- Develop strong working relationships with the Minister for Mental Health (as appropriate), the Department of Health Mental Health Unit and the National Suicide Research Foundation
- Create a supportive environment for Lived Experience Reference Group members to share their experiences
- Foster mutual respect and understanding between the Lived Experience Reference Group and all stakeholders
- Support Lived Experience Reference Group members in understanding their role and contribution

Communication

- Facilitate open, transparent communication within the Lived Experience Reference Group
- Ensure Lived Experience Reference Group feedback is communicated effectively
- Translate any policy priorities and constraints to the Lived Experience Reference Group
- Mediate different perspectives to find common ground when possible, and when differing views remain, articulate all perspectives such that diverse views are respected and embedded in advice to the Department of Health Mental Health Unit

Working Conditions

- This is a remunerated role requiring approximately 12 days' work in total. It is envisaged that most of the work will take place between July and mid-October 2025.
- Subsistence will be paid at Civil Service Rates
- Term of appointment: July 2025-March 2026
- Support provided: training, wellbeing support and access to Employee Assistance Programme service
- Accessibility accommodations will be provided as needed
- Meetings will be a mix of in-person and online, with some travel to the Department of Health in Dublin expected

Term of appointment/Timeframe

The Lived Experience Reference Group will meet at least six times over the period July to March 2026, with more regular meetings between July and October, which is when the report with recommendations for the next policy will be developed. The group will remain in place until March 2026 to provide advice on final policy development and implementation plan development.

Reporting structure

The Chair will report to Sarah Woods (Department of Health Mental Health Unit) and to Dr Aileen Callanan (National Suicide Research Foundation). The Chair will work closely with the Chairperson of the Policy Expert Advisory Group and members of the Lived Experience Reference Group.

Remuneration

This will be a remunerated position, with a maximum daily fee of €500. It is expected that the Chair's time commitment will be 12 full days in total - 8 full days to cover the meetings of the Lived Experience Reference Group and the Expert Policy Advisory Group plus an additional four full days' work to cover preparatory work, any further additional meetings with stakeholders as required to fulfil the Terms of Reference and the development of the final report. Any travel and subsistence paid will be based on Civil and Public Service Rates.

Position requirements

** Please note that the responsibilities outlined in this position description are not exhaustive, and only an indication of the work of the role.*

Essential Experience

- Lived experience of suicide
- Experience of participating in committees, advisory groups, or similar fora
- Experience of facilitation and chairing meetings
- Demonstrated ability to represent perspectives beyond personal experience
- Understanding of trauma-informed approaches and accessible communication

Knowledge & Skills

- Strong leadership and facilitation skills
- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills
- Ability to navigate organisational structures and systems
- Capacity to translate lived experience into constructive feedback and recommendations
- Ability to manage meetings effectively and ensure all voices are heard
- Excellent report writing skills

Personal Attributes

- Commitment to improving services/policies for people with similar lived experiences

- Resilience and emotional readiness to discuss potentially impactful topics
- Ability to balance personal experience with broader perspective
- Empathy and respect for diverse experiences and perspectives
- Confidence to challenge organisational thinking constructively
- Willingness to acknowledge the limits of personal perspective

Application process

Candidates should send a CV and covering letter setting out their suitability for the role to Dr Aileen Callanan, NSRF Lived Experience Panel Co-ordinator (aileen.callanan@ucc.ie) by **12pm on Thursday 26th June 2025**.

It is expected that interviews will take place online on 30th June or 1st July 2025.

Informal enquiries can be made to Sarah Woods, Department of Health Mental Health Unit (sarah_woods@health.gov.ie).

About the National Suicide Research Foundation

The National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) is a research unit, founded in 1994, and produces research and evidence for policy development and intervention in the prevention of self-harm, suicide and related mental health and social problems. The NSRF has been designated as a WHO Collaborating Centre in Surveillance and Research in Suicide Prevention. The NSRF is constituted as a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. More information about the organisation can be found here: www.nsrfl.ie.

The National Suicide Research Foundation is an equal opportunities employer.