



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON, SW1A 0AA

Jackie Doyle-Price MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health  
Department of Health

By email

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Dear Jackie,

**Re: Preventing Suicides in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities**

We are writing to you as co-chairs of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma. We are pleased to see that you have been appointed as Minister for Suicide Prevention and want to welcome you to your new responsibilities. We are deeply concerned about the increases in levels of mental health issues and incidences of suicide in our country and are glad that the urgency of these issues have been recognised by your appointment to this role.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are known to experience disproportionately high levels of mental health issues, including but not limited to, high instances of anxiety and depression. Whilst currently there is no robust body of data collected by the government which could shed light on the extent of this issue or the reasons behind it, we know that research from the All Ireland Traveller Study found that the suicide rate for Traveller women is six times higher than settled women and is seven times higher for Traveller men.

We are extremely concerned that the lack of centrally collected data available on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller mental health issues and suicides has the potential to render the mental health crisis which is occurring in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities invisible to health services and commissioners. To give an example of the extent of this crisis, we would like to draw your attention to a poster presented by researchers from Liverpool John Moores University to the 2018 Public Health England conference, which shared the story of just one Irish Traveller woman called Kathleen who said has lost 17 family members to suicide.

Promising work has begun through the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance which highlights how suicide, and its prevention, is an inequality issue and is beginning to draw upon what can be done for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to ensure that action is embedded into local plans, national guidance and the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health. However, it is vital that this is

backed up and supported by funding and targeted service provision to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Without this, it is unlikely that this important work will have a real impact on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

We were informed about the Department of Health 'Delivering Race Equality in 2005' programme, which led to the creation of 500 BME Community Development Worker posts. As we understand it the programme ran for 5 years and then government withdrew funding for these posts following austerity cuts. Has the Department considered introducing a similar programme specifically relating to mental health work, which acknowledges how BME people are disadvantaged in and around mental health support?

In recognition of the severity of the mental health issues and high incidences of suicides in Traveller communities, The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy developed and published in the Republic of Ireland in 2017 made ten commitments to ensure that measurable improvements are made around mental health in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. However the absence of any such commitments to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK mean that progress in this area is likely to be much slower.

It is vital that work to address health inequalities in suicide prevention takes a 'proportionate universalism' approach, otherwise groups such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities who experience the most extreme health inequalities will continue to be left behind in progress made. The term 'proportionate universalism' is borrowed from Marmot who said that to reduce the steepness of the social gradient in health, actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage.

We would be very keen to hear how, in your new role as Suicide Prevention Minister, you plan to ensure GRT communities are included in your work around suicide prevention so as to address the high rates of suicide in these communities.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely



Kate Green MP and Baroness Janet Whitaker

Co-chairs, Gypsies Roma and Travellers all party parliamentary group