

RESEARCH

SUICIDE PREVENTION IN SPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**ROYAL
FOUNDATION**
OF THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS
OF WALES

THE POTENTIAL IS CLEAR

***SPORT CAN HELP
PREVENT SUICIDE***

***BUT NO ORGANISATION CAN
DELIVER THIS CHANGE ALONE***



1.1

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

In October 2025, The Royal Foundation launched the National Suicide Prevention Network with the aim to make suicide prevention support more accessible across the four nations. Following the launch, several sports organisations reached out to see how they could use their influence to help drive suicide prevention initiatives within their sports.

To better understand the current experiences, views and needs across the sports sector in relation to suicide prevention, the Foundation commissioned independent research, led by Thinks Insight and Strategy. Twenty in-depth, anonymous interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders representing the breadth of the sports ecosystem, from sporting bodies to national organisations and charities – to understand how, if at all, the Foundation could support suicide prevention efforts in this space.

As part of its ongoing work to extend reach and impact, this year will see a strategic expansion of The Royal Foundation's work in suicide prevention into the UK sports sector. The findings from this research help to ensure that any guidance or resources developed by the Foundation to address suicide in sport are aligned with the sector, can be implemented practically, and effectively address its needs while helping to overcome the challenges identified.

Given the wide-reaching nature of sport across communities and demographics, the sports sector is a powerful vehicle for change which can support suicide prevention efforts locally and nationally.

KEY FINDINGS

1 **SPORT IS FELT TO BE A POWERFUL BUT UNDER-UTILISED PLATFORM FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION.**

- Stakeholders agree that the community-focused, wide-reaching nature of sport makes it uniquely placed to contribute to suicide prevention – among athletes, staff, volunteers and the wider public. Sport is felt to provide a sense of belonging, strong social networks and influential role models, creating opportunities to normalise conversations around suicide and encourage mental health support-seeking at scale.
- However, despite this potential, suicide prevention is not yet felt to be widely embedded as an explicit priority within the sector. Instead, existing efforts are typically framed through broader mental health, wellbeing or early intervention initiatives, with suicide prevention often assumed as an implicit outcome rather than a clearly articulated goal.

2 **WHILE THERE IS STRONG GOODWILL AND EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE ACROSS SPORT, FRAGMENTATION IN THE SECTOR, STIGMA, AND A LACK OF SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND RESOURCES ARE FELT TO LIMIT THE OVERALL IMPACT OF SUICIDE PREVENTION EFFORTS.**

- Stakeholders acknowledge that high-quality suicide prevention initiatives and pockets of good practice do exist within sport. However, the scale and diversity of the sector means that activity is often siloed, inconsistently delivered and unevenly resourced across sports and levels of participation. Limited sector collaboration, combined with competition for funding, is felt to restrict knowledge sharing and hinder the scaling of effective approaches beyond individual organisations.
- Additionally, stigma and entrenched aspects of sports culture are felt to act as barriers to early support-seeking, particularly among men and elite athletes who may fear being perceived as 'weak' or risking deselection if they disclose mental health struggles.
- At an organisational level, knowledge, resources and skills gaps – especially within smaller or charitable organisations – contribute to hesitation, inaction and reliance on reactive responses. This further limits the sector's ability to deliver coordinated suicide prevention activities.

3 **STAKEHOLDERS STRONGLY SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOLKIT FOR SPORT BUT EMPHASISE THAT IT MUST BE DELIVERED IN A WAY THAT IS EMBEDDED, CREDIBLE AND SUSTAINED TO ACHIEVE MEANINGFUL IMPACT.**

- Stakeholders highlight the importance of co-creating the toolkit with suicide prevention experts, people with lived experience, and the full breadth of the sports sector (including grassroots and disability sport) to ensure credibility and relevance to different sporting contexts.
- There is a strong feeling that the toolkit must be evidence-based, responsibly delivered and sustained over time, supported by monitoring, evaluation and learning to show impact.
- Signposting to immediate support is viewed as crucial, given that greater visibility of suicide can drive support-seeking, and NHS services are deemed to be overstretched.

4 **IN THIS CONTEXT, THERE IS A STRONG DEMAND FOR BOTH A TRUSTED CONVENER AND ADAPTABLE GUIDANCE. STAKEHOLDERS SEE MEETING THIS NEED AS AN APPROPRIATE ROLE FOR THE ROYAL FOUNDATION TO PLAY.**

- The Foundation is seen as high-profile and credible, making it well-placed to bring stakeholders together to tackle suicide.
- Stakeholders feel this convening role would not only strengthen consistency and quality of suicide prevention work within the sector but also help shift suicide prevention from reactive to proactive – enabling it to become more of an embedded core priority within sport.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on stakeholder insights, there is a clear opportunity for the Foundation to use its profile, credibility and convening power to drive a more coordinated, effective approach to suicide prevention across the sports sector. This includes bringing together organisations to align efforts, share knowledge and reduce duplication, while addressing gaps in confidence and capability.

Stakeholders are strongly supportive of the development of a practical, accessible suicide prevention toolkit – as long as it is co-created, adaptable and supported by senior buy-in to ensure it can be embedded across different sporting contexts.

Underpinning all of this is the desire to see the Foundation show sustained leadership and long-term commitment to the sector, with visible action over time to build credibility, shift culture and ensure meaningful, lasting impact.

CONTACT

REBECCA BURSLAM

Associate Director,
Thinks Insight & Strategy

rburslam@thinksinsight.com

royalfoundation.com

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