



10 December 2020

### **Suicide prevention in the Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities**

Dear Baroness Whittaker,

It was a pleasure to meet with you, GATEHerts and the authors of the report, Professor Margaret Greenfields and Dr Carol Rogers on 19 November to discuss the important issue of suicide prevention in Gypsy, Traveller and Roma (GTR) communities. The GTR Community APPG does great work on raising awareness on issues facing these communities.

We are determined to address the long-standing inequalities that exist in society, be they in access, outcomes or people's experience of their local health service. We want to level up people's opportunity to have a long, healthy and happy life, whoever they are, wherever they live and whatever their background or social circumstances. To do this, we must integrate good health into housing, transport, education, welfare and the economy because we all know preventing ill health – mental and physical – is about more than just healthcare. I am therefore supportive of any measures taken to help society achieve this, and I will continue to support the work of the APPG in encouraging this specifically for GTR communities.

I recognise your particular concerns, as set out in the report, that people from Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities in England are at increased risk of suicide, and the importance of ensuring that the specific needs of GTR communities are taken into account. NHS England and Improvement have now set up an Advancing Mental Health Equalities Taskforce to consider these very issues. I have directed officials to link in with the Taskforce, specifically on the matter of suicide in GTR communities.

On the 22 October the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch MP, published her first quarterly report to the Prime Minister and Health Secretary on progress to tackle COVID-19 disparities experienced by individuals from an ethnic minority background, making 13 recommendations. All of which the Prime Minister has accepted. These measures apply to BAME populations, including GTR communities, and will help to address disparities in health.

It is important that we make sure we have accurate and substantial data and evidence on the issues within the GTR community. Officials have met with Public Health England (PHE) and members of Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) to discuss how to link in with work on a national real-time suicide surveillance system which will, for the first time, allow identification of patterns of risk and causal factors to inform national and local responses. PHE are working to ensure that all local areas meet high quality data standards and will collaborate with relevant stakeholders to ensure that accurate and substantial data is collected on protected characteristics including ethnicity, and that this captures all of the groups which fall under the GTR category.

I would also like to reassure you that work is underway to ensure local work on suicide prevention takes into account the specific needs of GTR communities. Local authorities are working with local NHS, Public Health and voluntary services to develop multi agency suicide prevention plans, ensuring they are tailored to the needs of the demographics of their local area, including GTR communities where they are present.

As part of the national cross-government suicide prevention workplan, there is a focus on tailoring approaches to improve mental health in specific groups. Groups facing discrimination, including GTR communities, will be referenced in the upcoming National Suicide Prevention Strategy progress report and updated cross- government suicide prevention workplan to be published in early 2021.

Thank you again for carrying out this important research which will have a positive impact on the GTR community. I am pleased to set out my support and hope that this letter reassures you that the government is taking action on improving suicide prevention for this community.

Yours sincerely,



**NADINE DORRIES**

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR PATIENT SAFETY, SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MENTAL HEALTH**