

Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody

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Maria Caulfield MP
Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy
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Monday 5 June 2023

Dear Minister Caulfield,

Thank you for chairing the recent meeting of the Ministerial Board on Deaths in Custody (MBDC). As you know, it was the first MBDC meeting I have attended and I was impressed by members' commitment to reducing, and ultimately preventing, deaths across the custodial landscape. I would now like to request a meeting with you to discuss how the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAPDC) can support you and your officials to safeguard the lives of people detained under the state's care.

As set out during the MBDC meeting, I have identified several areas to take forward as IAPDC Chair. These include a greater focus on deaths in detention under the Mental Health Act and facilitating closer collaboration between healthcare partners and custodial services, particularly regarding mental health care. I am keen to work with you to drive these priorities forward.

An important area of focus for the IAPDC is the concerning number of police-related deaths involving people in mental health crisis. In 2021/22, six of the 11 individuals who died in or following police contact and over three quarters of the 56 apparent post-custody suicides had mental health concerns. The Panel is keen to work with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to ensure there is a sustained focus on mental health-related deaths in all places of detention.

Last December the Panel published a report with recommendations on preventing deaths at the point of, during, and after arrest. A prominent theme in the report is the need for greater

collaboration across all services, particularly with healthcare, to support people experiencing a mental health crisis.

To take forward recommendations from the report, we are working with the Policing Minister and the Home Office to organise an event, initially planned for this summer, to be held in the autumn. While I understand you were previously unable to commit to attending this event, the Panel's secretariat intends to engage with your Private Office as we organise an alternative date, and I hope you will consider attending to demonstrate your department's commitment to resolving these challenges.

I welcome the engagement between the IAPDC and DHSC over the past year. The rapid review on mental health inpatient settings, to which we submitted evidence, touches on an area of key concern for the IAPDC: the significant gaps in the collection, collation, and publication of data on deaths of people detained under the Mental Health Act.

Robust and high-quality data is necessary to inform effective interventions and avoid repeat incidents, such as the tragic cases which promoted the review. The Panel's research shows that people detained under the Mental Health Act have the highest mortality rate of any detained population, making this all the more important. We are keen to ensure that concrete steps to improve this data feature prominently among the actions being taken in response the Panel's research and the rapid review.

The IAPDC is also continuing to engage with DHSC as part of the new Suicide Prevention Strategy currently under development. The rate of suicide in places of detention remain tragically high and requires focused and targeted action, and it is vital that the strategy identifies those in all forms of custody as a priority group.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you over the coming weeks to discuss the work of the IAPDC, and how I and the Panel can support you, the MBDC, and Ministers to prevent deaths in all places of detention. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'L. Emslie'.

Lynn Emslie, Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody
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