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# Suicide Prevention in Prisons

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# Who we are.

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- ❑ The Centre for Mental Health is an independent national mental health charity.
- ❑ 30 years old.
- ❑ Bridges research, policy and service provision.
- ❑ Areas of work: children, criminal justice, economics, employment, mental and physical health, recovery.

# About the project.

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- ❑ In partnership with Howard League for Penal Reform.
- ❑ Funded by Monument Trust.
- ❑ Following on from the Harris Review.
- ❑ Two year project (currently in year one).
- ❑ Involved focus groups and interviews with a range of stakeholders (people with experience of being in prison, clinic reviewers, prison officers).

# Context: The Harris Review

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- ❑ Harris et al (2015)
- ❑ What lessons have been learned from the suicides in custody of 18-24 year olds that occurred after ACCT was fully rolled out in April 2007?
- ❑ What actions should be taken to prevent further deaths?
- ❑ **Methodology:**
  - Literature review.
  - Analysis of 40 year data set.
  - Analysis of clinical reviews.
  - Stakeholder and staff interviews.
  - Surveys with prisoners.
  - Prison visits.
  - MQPL data sets.
  - Case material of 87 suicides.

# Context: The Harris Review

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- Recommendations: 108 covering all aspects of the prison system and Criminal Justice process.
- **Fundamental Recommendation:** there should be cross-organisational cultural change in the approach towards rehabilitation and management of people in custody.

# Prison Today: Prison Population

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- ❑ January 2016: **85,242** people in prison in the UK (Howard League 2016).
- ❑ The prison population is **ageing** (Prison Reform Trust 2015).
- ❑ One in four prisoners are from a **minority group**, compared with one in ten in the general population (Prison Reform Trust 2015).
- ❑ Facing **complex and multiple vulnerabilities**.

# Prison Today: The Prison Environment

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## **Overcrowding and resource cuts**

- ❑ Greater proportion of prisons are overcrowded.
- ❑ Prisoner to staff ratio has increased.
- ❑ Purposeful activity lowest ever recorded.

## **Sentencing lengths and licence recall**

- ❑ Sentence lengths are increasing.
- ❑ Mandatory supervision in the community.

## **Assaults and self-harm**

- ❑ Assaults highest ever recorded.
- ❑ Rates of self-harm have increased.

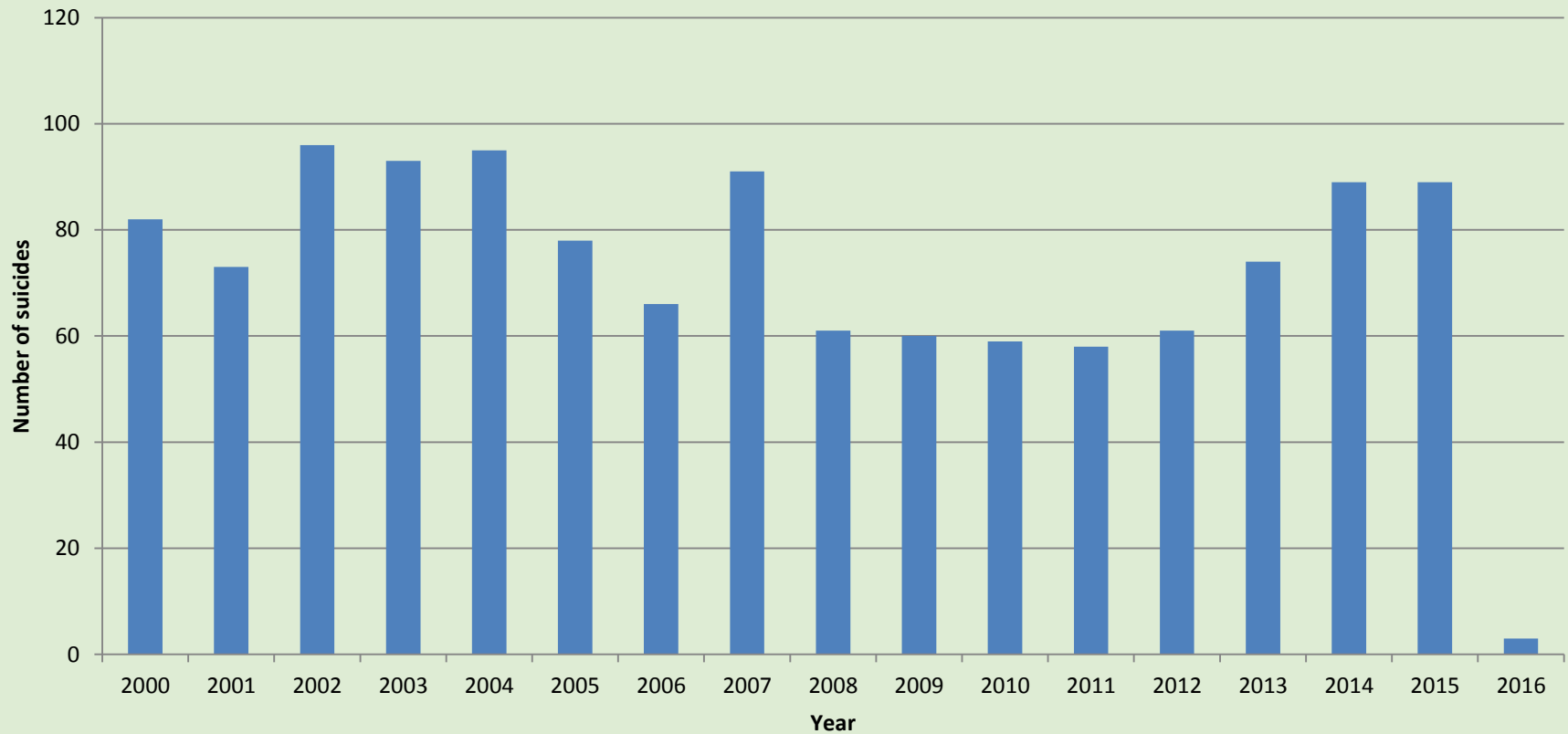
(Prison Reform Trust 2015, Ministry of Justice 2015)

# Prison Today: Suicide

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## Number of suicides in prison







## Common themes in the cases of suicide in custody (PPO 2014):

- ❑ Age.
- ❑ Offence type: sexual and violent, against a family member.
- ❑ Sentence length.
- ❑ Recalled on licence.
- ❑ Remand.
- ❑ Timing: first days in prison and prior to release.

# Service User Views

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- ❑ **What contributes to vulnerability?**
- ❑ Historic and contextual risk factors, exacerbated by prison.
- ❑ Isolation.
- ❑ Not being able to show vulnerability.
- ❑ Experiences of mental and physical distress being ignored / not recognised.
- ❑ Experiences of prison and healthcare staff.
- ❑ Resource cuts.
- ❑ Mental health intervention (eg safer cells, therapeutic communities).



- ❑ **Communication between teams:**
  - ❑ Between community and prison staff.
  - ❑ Between prison officers and healthcare.
  - ❑ ACCT
- ❑ **The initial assessment:**
  - ❑ Template driven V clinical judgement.
  - ❑ Emphasis on current presentation rather than risk factors and context.
- ❑ **Staffing, quality and training**

# Recommendations from the research so far...

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- ❑ Peer mentoring (people with shared experiences in mentoring roles in the prison).
- ❑ The initial and follow-up assessment: clinical skills required by the assessor.
- ❑ Work force training.
- ❑ Communication between teams.
- ❑ Involvement of healthcare on the ACCT.
- ❑ Appropriateness of prison as an intervention?
- ❑ Prisons as enabling environments.

# Discussion points

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- Where do we go next with this?
  - Achieving change with a challenging population?
  - Achieving change when so much is out of the control of the prison (i.e. sentencing)?
  - Achieving change in the current climate?
  - Are their lessons from elsewhere that could be adapted for prison settings?

# References

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**Thank you**