



**HUCC**

SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE

**CONNECTION  
AND HOPE –  
TRANSFORMING  
LIVES TOGETHER**

Strategic Plan 2025-2029

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## 1. Joint Foreword

At HUGG, we are driven by a singular vision— where those bereaved by suicide find support, hope and are free from stigma. The journey of suicide bereavement is deeply personal, profoundly challenging, and often isolating. Through this Strategic Plan 2025-2029, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that no one walks this path alone.

This strategy represents an ambitious and forward-thinking roadmap for the next five years, focusing on strengthening and expanding our support services, advancing research, and amplifying the voices of those with lived experience. It has been shaped by the invaluable contributions of our members, individuals who have experienced suicide loss, our dedicated staff, Board members, and key stakeholders. Their insights and experiences have been at the heart of this process, ensuring that our direction remains both compassionate and impactful.

We are especially grateful to our Board for their leadership and dedication in developing this strategy. Their commitment has helped to shape a vision that not only honours the needs of those bereaved by suicide but also sets a foundation for sustainable growth and innovation.

As we move forward, we do so with a deep passion for improving services and strengthening connections within our community. We recognise the growing demand for support, and this plan sets out our commitment to expanding our reach—particularly through digital services and targeted outreach to underrepresented groups. We are determined to create new, inclusive ways for people to access the help they need, when they need it most.

The road ahead requires collaboration, compassion, and unwavering dedication. We look forward to working with everyone bereaved by suicide, ensuring that we can bring connection and hope, transforming lives together.

**Tom Rourke**  
Chairperson

**Fiona Tuomey**  
CEO

## 2. About HUGG

### Background

Fiona Tuomey founded our organisation following the devastating death by suicide of her 11-year old daughter Milly in 2016. Experiencing a deep need to speak to people who truly understood what she was going through, Fiona searched for a support group that was led by people who had direct lived experience of suicide – but none existed. Driven by a desire to fill this gap she coordinated the first Healing Untold Grief Group (HUGG) in Leopardstown, Dublin in 2017. The demand for more groups, and other unmet needs, quickly became clear. In 2018, HUGG was established as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status <sup>1</sup>.

“The impact of suicide is devastating. Everyone deserves accurate, timely information and signposting to appropriate supports to help navigate this unique grief.”

Fiona Tuomey, Founder and  
Chief Executive Officer of HUGG

### Current Services

- » Information & Resources on HUGG.ie
- » Signposting to Additional Services
- » A Telephone Support Service
- » Suicide Bereavement Support Groups (in person and virtual)
- » Public Events & Webinars
- » Research & Advocacy
- » Information sessions for companies, clubs & community groups
- » Co-production through the lived voice of suicide loss

### Our Why

Each year in Ireland, more than 500 people take their own lives <sup>2</sup>. Each suicide has a profound and lasting effect on the families, friends, colleagues and communities of those who have died. For every one person who dies by suicide, it has been calculated that around 135 people are affected by the death <sup>3</sup>. This means that **between 60,000 and 70,000 individuals are affected by suicide in Ireland every year**. Indeed, two-thirds of the population knows someone who died by suicide, and 13% have lost someone by suicide who was very close to them <sup>4</sup>.

**Suicide-bereaved people are at high risk** of severe mental ill-health, suicidal ideation and self-harm, including the harmful use of alcohol and other substances. They may also experience perceived stigma, social isolation, family breakdown, employment loss, and suffer other negative consequences <sup>5</sup>.

### Our solution

HUGG is the only organisation specifically founded to offer **postvention**, which is one form of suicide prevention <sup>6</sup>. It refers to activities that take place after a suicide has occurred that promote hope and healing, and thus reduce the heightened risk of suicide-bereaved people taking their own lives. HUGG therefore truly acts as a lifeline.

Our work is delivered by our staff and volunteers, many of whom have been bereaved by suicide and can provide that unique understanding to anyone seeking support. Together with those who use our services, we **co-create** supports that work for people who have been bereaved by suicide.

HUGG believes in **post-traumatic growth**; meaning that with compassion, understanding and appropriate support, people bereaved by suicide can grow around their grief and focus on resilience, positive mental health and wellbeing.

## Our Vision

- » An Ireland where those bereaved by suicide find support, hope and are free from stigma.

## Our Mission

- » To provide information, telephone support, peer support groups and other supports to those who have been bereaved by suicide.
- » To collaborate with professionals and organisations in the bereavement sector to advance best practice.
- » To engage in, and be guided by, rigorous research and evaluation.
- » To raise public understanding of suicide grief, reduce stigma, and advocate for systemic change in suicide prevention.
- » To be a modern, innovative organisation with a strong workplace culture and a supported, protected and valued volunteer base.

## Our Values

- » **Empathy through lived/living experience:** Our work is guided by the experience of those who have been bereaved by suicide.
- » **Equality:** We support any adult who has experienced loss through suicide, and seek new ways to reach those who find it difficult to ask for help.
- » **Passion:** We are passionate, excited and forward-looking in our work.
- » **Boldness:** We show boldness in how we advocate for change, and in challenging ourselves to provide the best support we can.
- » **Collaboration:** We collaborate with those who share our passion for addressing suicide. HUGG believes that by working together we can achieve more.
- » **Evidence Based:** We are guided by rigorous and on-going research and evaluation and are proactive in contributing to building a strong evidence base on suicide bereavement and support.

### 3. Development of the Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan was developed over a period of six months between 2024 and 2025. The development was led by a sub-committee of the HUGG Board and the CEO and included extensive engagement both internally and externally.

The process included:

#### External Stakeholder Consultation

There were a number of confidential online and face-to-face meetings held with key external stakeholders, facilitators and staff, focussed on a range of questions covering the strengths and weaknesses of HUGG, as well as identifying future opportunities and threats.

These included HUGG Volunteers, National Office for Suicide Prevention, HSE Regional Officers for Suicide Prevention, Irish Hospice Foundation, National Suicide Research Foundation, The Care Trust, Anam Cara and Pieta Suicide Bereavement Liaison Service.

#### Review of Peer Organisation Strategies

A review was done of strategy documents from other organisations of a similar nature to HUGG, including organisations based in Ireland and overseas.

#### Workshops

The process included two key workshop sessions with staff. In addition, a workshop was held in January 2025 which included the Board members, staff and external stakeholders.

These included:

**Mary O'Sullivan**, HSE, Suicide Prevention Officer, CHO2;

**Mary O'Kennedy**, CEO, OKC Consulting;

**Orla Keegan**, Director, Bereavement & Education, Irish Hospice Foundation;

**Professor Ella Arensman**, UCC, NRSF Director and Prof UCC Epidemiology, WHO;

**Nicola Byrne** CEO, Shine;

**Norma Rohan**, Manager, Embrace Farm;

**Ian O'Brien**, Manager, Global Response, META, HUGG Board;

**Laura McDonnell**, Lived Experience Expert, Marketing Director, Cluid Housing, HUGG Board;

**Helen McGrath**, Garda Training, Templemore;

**Adam Grennan**, Former HUGG Chair;

**Brian Doyle**, RCSI (research);

**Michael Greaney**, Lived experience expert, Finance, HUGG Board;

**Dr Una Moore**, Lived Experience expert, HUGG Board;

**Brenda Dwyer**, Lived Experience expert, Facilitator HUGG Tallaght;

**Catherine Brogan**, CEO, Suicide or Survive, HUGG Board;

**David Varian**, Chartered Accountant, HUGG Board;

**Jeffrey Horahan**, Lived Experience Expert and HUGG Champion;

**Philip Watt**, Interim CEO, Mental Health Reform;

**Diane Clabby**, Lived Experience Expert, Facilitator HUGG Parents, Group & Trauma Psychotherapist;

**Dr Ronnie O'Toole**, Economist, Indecon, HUGG Board.



A top-down photograph showing a group of approximately ten hands of various skin tones and ages, reaching from the edges of the frame towards the center. The hands are cupped together, holding a small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves. The background is a soft-focus green lawn. The overall mood is one of unity, growth, and collective care.

# 1,539

people found connection  
and hope through our  
support groups\*

## 4. Strategic Objectives

### Objective 1:



Continue to Develop and Enhance Support Groups

#### Rationale

HUGG support groups are an important means of meeting the needs of those bereaved by suicide, and HUGG should continue to develop and enhance these groups.

#### Outcome

**People bereaved by suicide throughout Ireland have access to support that meets their needs.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
1.1 Expand both in-person and online support groups based on geographical, demographic, and accessibility needs.	Ongoing to 2029
1.2 Review the role of hybrid supports groups.	2025 Q2
1.3 Review the role for closed support groups through collaboration with other organisations.	2026



## Objective 2:



### Expand Engagement

#### Rationale

There is an opportunity to engage people from particular groups that are currently under-represented. To do this, we need to understand the challenges that they may face in engaging with HUGG, and develop new and innovative ways to provide suicide bereavement support.

#### Outcome

**Wider cohorts of people have access to HUGG, whether through peer-supported groups, or through other ways where people feel included and supported.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
2.1 Grow engagement with bereaved people from specific cohorts such as LGBTQ+, men, young adults, members of the Travelling Community, and older adults.	2026-2028
2.2 Explore innovative solutions to address barriers to support services through sports, arts, cultural, and educational events and programmes.	2025-2026
2.3 Maximise collaboration and co-production opportunities with organisations that already serve these communities to build trust and engagement.	Ongoing to 2029
2.4 Develop opportunities for education and training with those bereaved by suicide.	2027

### Objective 3:



#### Expand and Strengthen Telephone & Digital Support Services

##### Rationale

HUGG will expand telephone and digital services to better reach groups of bereaved people who might otherwise not engage with support.

##### Outcome

**A range of digital services are provided, with clear measures to track impact and social return on investment.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
3.1 Explore the development of a peer support telephone service to further extend support for individuals bereaved by suicide.	2025
3.2 Increase staffing for telephone support to meet growing demand and services.	2026
3.3 Explore the feasibility of digital services to reach different demographics, such as young adults.	2026 Q2

A close-up, over-the-shoulder shot of a person with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue denim shirt. They are holding a silver smartphone to their right ear with their right hand. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a plant and some furniture.

# 1,798

**moments of connection via our  
telephone support line. Each  
one a lifeline for someone  
impacted by suicide\***



## Objective 4:



### Enhance Operations

#### Rationale

HUGG continues to examine all aspects of its operational effectiveness as the organisation grows, with a particular focus on optimising the use of digital technologies.

#### Outcome

**HUGG is an effective organisation which can meet the challenges of a growing reach and ambition with finite resources.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
4.1 Complete a digital transformation project to address reliability and scalability, technical support workload, and our digital engagement strategies.	2026 Q2
4.2 Complete the integration of the CRM system to optimise the collation of data and insights across the organisation.	Ongoing to 2026
4.3 Review our organisational structure and operations plan, and develop a succession and organisation sustainability plan.	2026 Q1
4.4 Foster a supportive, inclusive, and rewarding workplace culture that inspires and empowers our team to thrive.	Ongoing to 2029

## Objective 5:



### Strengthen Volunteer Recruitment, Training and Retention

#### Rationale

Volunteers play a critical role for HUGG. HUGG should build on its annual recruitment, training and retention cycle over the lifetime of the new strategy.

#### Outcome

**HUGG has sufficient trained and supported volunteers to meet its strategic ambitions.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
5.1 Invest and implement a regular recruitment cycle to maintain and grow a strong, sustainable volunteer base.	Ongoing to 2029
5.2 Identify HUGG volunteers who may be willing to consider a different type of volunteering including mentorship and individual peer support initiatives.	2026 Q1
5.3 Maintain structured and ongoing training programmes and supervision to support volunteer retention.	Ongoing to 2029

## Objective 6:



### Develop a Marketing and PR Strategy

#### Rationale

HUGG will develop a comprehensive marketing and PR plan to broaden the organisation's presence and explore new avenues for connecting with the public, using innovative communication strategies.

#### Outcome

**People who have been bereaved by suicide know and understand HUGG, through regular messaging aimed at policymakers, other stakeholders and the wider public.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
6.1 Raise awareness of HUGG and the positive impact that postvention can have in the lives of people bereaved by suicide, including prevention of suicide.	2027
6.2 Strengthen HUGG's presence on traditional and digital media.	Ongoing to 2029
6.3 Strengthen partnerships with frontline services to educate on suicide grief and develop pathways for inward referrals.	2027



## Objective 7:



### Co-Produce a Research Strategy

#### Rationale

A cornerstone of all HUGG's activity is that it will be guided by rigorous and on-going research and evaluation.

#### Outcome

**HUGG has a research strategy, with established partnerships with academics and other bodies, and clear metrics tracking HUGGs social impact.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
7.1 Co-produce a Research Strategy, including the development of partnerships with academic institutions, to help identify gaps in postvention services.	2026
7.2 Complete an external evaluation on HUGG services to inform HUGG's ongoing development and improve service delivery.	2026
7.3 Develop a lived experience panel to help guide and advise HUGG, champion its services and participate in research and advocacy.	2025



96%

of those surveyed  
would suggest a  
HUGG support group\*

## Objective 8:



### Define and Strengthen HUGG's Advocacy Role

#### Rationale

HUGG will strengthen its focus on advocating for those who have been bereaved, while ensuring the impact of its advocacy work is measured.

#### Outcome

**There is a clear understanding of the importance of postvention supports for those who have been bereaved by suicide. A change in the way Irish inquests determine whether a death is given a verdict of suicide.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
8.1 Explore potential for the appointment of a research and advocacy officer.	2025
8.2 Coproduce a HUGG advocacy policy and define HUGG's role in suicide prevention / postvention, identifying statutory agencies and others that HUGG should engage with.	2026
8.3 Advocate for change in the burden of proof in the Coroner's Court to a civil standard.	Ongoing to 2029



## Objective 9:



### Increase Fundraising and Financial Sustainability

#### Rationale

Implementation of HUGG's first Funding Strategy will help diversify funding sources and enhance financial sustainability.

#### Outcome

**HUGG has greater overall level of financial resources to meet the unmet needs for bereavement support, and a better balance of funding sources to ensure stability and long-run sustainability.**

Actions	Timeframe for Completion
9.1 Implement HUGG's Funding Strategy to diversify funding sources, including public donations, corporate partnerships, and government support.	Ongoing to 2027
9.2 A second Funding Strategy will be developed, built upon the learnings from the current strategy.	2027
9.3 Continued CRM implementation to garner more donor insights leading to informed decision making and fundraising planning.	Ongoing to 2029

## 5. Monitoring and Reviewing

This strategy will be monitored and reviewed annually against HUGG's operational plan which will consider outputs and outcomes. A set of key indicators will help inform the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy against the priorities, objectives, and actions identified.

On the basis of reports against the operational plan, the Board will review progress to ensure that HUGG is on track to meeting the strategic aims and objectives.

When reviewing progress towards achieving the strategic aims and objectives, the Board will:

- » **ensure that activities are kept within the parameters of the agreed strategic aims and objectives**
- » **ensure that activities are consistent with the organisation's vision, mission and values**
- » **keep under review internal and external changes which may require adjustments to the organisation's strategy or affect HUGG's ability to achieve its objectives**

### References

- 1 Charities Regulator, 2025, HUGG Healing Untold Grief Groups Company Limited by Guarantee <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/en/information-for-the-public/search-the-register-of-charities/sonraí-carthanachta/?srchstr=HUGG&regid=20204480>
  - 2 Central Statistics Office, 2025, Suicide Statistics <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/birthsdeathsandmarriages/suicidestatistics>
  - 3 Cerel, J. et al, 2018, How Many People Are Exposed to Suicide? Not Six, Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior, DOI: 10.1111/sltb.12450 [https://losscs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Cerel\\_et\\_al-2018-Suicide\\_and\\_Life-Threatening\\_Behavior.pdf](https://losscs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Cerel_et_al-2018-Suicide_and_Life-Threatening_Behavior.pdf)
  - 4 Department of Health & IPSOS MRBI, 2021, Healthy Ireland Summary Report [https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/630778/206555\\_260f3b84-bf78-41a2-91d7-f14c7c03d99f.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/630778/206555_260f3b84-bf78-41a2-91d7-f14c7c03d99f.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
  - 5 Erlangsen, A., & Pitman, A. (2017). Effects of suicide bereavement on mental and physical health. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-19566-002>
  - 6 International Association for Suicide Prevention, 2022, Suicide Bereavement and Postvention <https://www.iasp.info/suicide-bereavement-and-postvention>
- \* HUGG 2024 statistics

## Support

If you have been bereaved by suicide and would like information on support please contact us.

01 513 4048

[support@HUGG.ie](mailto:support@HUGG.ie)

[www.HUGG.ie](http://www.HUGG.ie)

For general enquiries, email  
[info@HUGG.ie](mailto:info@HUGG.ie)



## Partner with us to bring hope to those bereaved by suicide

To learn how you can support HUGG,  
contact Mary Anne Stokes  
Donor Development & Partnerships Manager  
[maryanne@HUGG.ie](mailto:maryanne@HUGG.ie) 083 166 2869



**HUGG**  
SUPPORT AFTER SUICIDE

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