# North East suicide risk about 40% higher than London, study finds — calls for targeted funding



A major new analysis of suicide across England has laid bare the stark regional inequality that continues to blight the North East, where researchers found the risk of suicide to be roughly 40% higher than in London. The finding, drawn from an Imperial College London team’s study of two decades of data to 2022, was met with weary recognition by local campaigners. Speaking to ChronicleLive, James Fildes, founder of SPACE North East and chair of Washington Mind, said it was “little surprise” given the area’s history of industrial decline and persistent deprivation.

The Imperial-led analysis, published in a Lancet-affiliated journal, examined registered suicides alongside a range of area-level characteristics and concluded that while England’s overall suicide rate has shown no clear national improvement over the 2002–2022 period, there are pronounced regional differences. The researchers reported a 39.2% lower suicide risk in London compared with the North East and identified several local factors associated with higher risk — notably social deprivation and greater road and rail network density — and other features linked with lower risk, such as higher ethnic diversity, greater population density, light pollution and nearby green space. Dr Connor Gascoigne of Imperial’s School of Public Health described the approach as a tool for tracking how environmental and social factors change over time and how those changes affect suicide risk.

Official statistics underline the scale and shape of the problem. Office for National Statistics figures for deaths registered in 2022 record 5,642 suicides in England and Wales, an age‑standardised rate of 10.7 per 100,000 people; males accounted for about three‑quarters of those deaths. The ONS bulletin also highlights the long-standing association between deprivation and suicide and confirms the persistent geographical pattern in which London has the lowest rates and the North East is among the highest, while noting that registration delays and definitional issues can complicate short‑term comparisons.

Local services and lived experience add texture to the numbers. Mr Fildes told ChronicleLive that growing up in Sunderland after the closure of mines and shipyards had exposed him to the long tail of deindustrialisation: lost jobs, frayed community infrastructure and a generation left struggling for purpose and opportunity. His organisation, SPACE North East, which began after Fildes openly recounted his own struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts, runs peer‑support projects such as “Space to Talk” and community walking groups designed to reduce isolation and normalise conversations about mental health — practical responses to problems the data illuminates.

Community projects have become important fixtures in the region’s response. Bereaved families and local charities pioneered the Speak Their Name North East suicide memorial quilt, a touring artwork of stitched panels that the BBC reported has provided therapeutic spaces for families and helped open public dialogue about suicide across Darlington, County Durham, Newcastle, Sunderland and Teesside. Organisers say the quilt’s workshops and public displays have created opportunities for collective remembrance and for communities to talk more openly about loss.

Experts who commented on the study urged caution about simple explanations while stressing the need for broader action. Professor Sir Louis Appleby, who chairs the National Suicide Prevention Strategic Advisory Group, noted that suicide trends have shifted over the past two decades — with a long fall to 2007, rises after the 2008 recession, a complex picture through the pandemic and continuing high risk among middle‑aged men — and warned that changing definitions and recording practices complicate comparisons. The wider Lancet Public Health literature on suicide also emphasises that social, economic and commercial determinants — including alcohol, gambling, domestic abuse and bereavement — shape risk and that prevention requires whole‑of‑government policies, sustained investment and meaningful involvement of people with lived experience.

Those calls have already found expression in policy. The government’s Suicide Prevention Strategy for England (2023–28) commits to a cross‑sector programme of work — from improved surveillance, research and workforce development to bolstered crisis and bereavement services — and explicitly recognises the need to tackle social determinants and regional inequalities. Researchers and campaigners say, however, that national commitments must be matched by targeted resource allocation and monitoring to ensure the regions most affected receive sustained support.

For campaigners on the ground, the new study provides both validation and urgency. Mr Fildes welcomed the empirical reinforcement of long‑held local observations but urged that evidence be followed by action: “there needs to be more channelling of resources and focus paid to those organisations and communities that are furthest from Westminster,” he told ChronicleLive. The study team hopes their spatial approach can help policy makers and services monitor and respond to environmental risk factors over time; experts argue that combining that kind of surveillance with community‑led prevention, adequate funding and cross‑sector policies offers the clearest path to narrowing the gap between the North East and the capital.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/little-surprise-north-east-suicide-32276268), [[2]](https://www.miragenews.com/deprivation-transit-density-tied-to-higher-1515422/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.miragenews.com/deprivation-transit-density-tied-to-higher-1515422/), [[1]](https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/little-surprise-north-east-suicide-32276268)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2022registrations)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/little-surprise-north-east-suicide-32276268), [[6]](https://www.livingnorth.com/article/how-james-fildes-changing-lives-space-north-east)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-64928617)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/little-surprise-north-east-suicide-32276268), [[4]](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(24)00149-X/fulltext)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028), [[4]](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(24)00149-X/fulltext), [[2]](https://www.miragenews.com/deprivation-transit-density-tied-to-higher-1515422/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/little-surprise-north-east-suicide-32276268), [[2]](https://www.miragenews.com/deprivation-transit-density-tied-to-higher-1515422/), [[4]](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(24)00149-X/fulltext)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/little-surprise-north-east-suicide-32276268> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.miragenews.com/deprivation-transit-density-tied-to-higher-1515422/> - Mirage News reports on a study in The Lancet Regional Health – Europe led by Imperial College London researchers. It summarises the paper’s analysis of suicide trends in England from 2002 to 2022, noting no significant national change but clear regional variation. The article notes the North East had the highest relative suicide risk while London had the lowest, with a 39.2% difference. It identifies area-level factors linked to higher risk such as deprivation and road and rail network density, and factors linked to lower risk including ethnic diversity, density, light pollution and greenspace. It quotes Dr Connor Gascoigne directly.
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2022registrations> - The Office for National Statistics bulletin on suicides in England and Wales (2022 registrations) provides official, coroner-verified figures and analysis. It records 5,642 suicides registered in 2022, an age-standardised rate of 10.7 deaths per 100,000, and notes that males accounted for about three-quarters of deaths. Regional breakdown shows London with the lowest rate and the North East among the highest, underlining persistent geographic inequality. The release explains registration delays and methodological points, and presents age and method breakdowns. It highlights the continued association between deprivation and suicide and advises journalists to follow Samaritans’ reporting guidance for context.
4. <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(24)00149-X/fulltext> - This Lancet Public Health series paper argues for treating suicide as a public‑health problem and emphasises the role of social determinants. It reviews evidence linking economic, social and commercial factors to suicide and advocates universal, selective and indicated interventions. The authors highlight the importance of high-quality data, rigorous evaluation and cross‑sector policies addressing alcohol, gambling, domestic abuse and bereavement as means to reduce suicide at population level. The paper urges whole‑of‑government approaches, long‑term commitment and involvement of communities and people with lived experience. It provides a conceptual framework to guide policies that target upstream causes of suicide and practice change.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-64928617> - The BBC report describes the creation and tour of the North East 'Speak Their Name' suicide memorial quilt, led by bereaved parents and local charity Quinn’s Retreat. The quilt comprises multiple fabric squares made by people who have lost loved ones to suicide, each square honouring an individual life. Workshops across Darlington, County Durham, Newcastle, Sunderland and Teesside brought communities together to craft the panels, which are displayed publicly to provoke conversation and raise awareness. The article highlights the quilt’s therapeutic role for bereaved families, its function as a catalyst for dialogue about suicide and its touring schedule across venues.
6. <https://www.livingnorth.com/article/how-james-fildes-changing-lives-space-north-east> - Living North profiles James Fildes, founder of SPACE North East, describing his experience of depression and suicidal thoughts which prompted him to establish peer support groups in Sunderland. The article explains SPACE North East’s 'Space to Talk' groups, 'Space to Walk' and educational events designed to reduce isolation among men and normalise talking about mental health. It notes partnerships with Beacon of Light, status as a community interest company and ambitions to expand. The feature presents SPACE North East as an example of grassroots action responding to high suicide rates in the North East and urgent need for accessible support.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028> - The UK Government’s 'Suicide prevention strategy for England: 2023 to 2028' sets out a five-year cross‑sector plan to reduce suicide, improve support for people who have self‑harmed and those bereaved by suicide. Published by the Department of Health and Social Care, the strategy emphasises whole‑of‑government actions, prevention, early intervention, improved data and research, and tailored support for priority groups. It lists an action plan covering improvements in surveillance, research commissioning, bereavement support, crisis services and workforce development. The document underlines the need to address social determinants and inequalities, and to coordinate national and local partners for sustained prevention efforts effectively.